



Parental perceptions of child labour and human rights: A comparative study of rural and urban Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Considering the inherently hazardous nature of some artisanal fishing and farm work in Ghana, there is sometimes a thin line between what is considered child work and child labour. I drew on literature exploring cultural relativism and human rights and the concept of the margin of appreciation in considering whether child labour violates human rights. I aimed to establish parental perceptions of child labour and human rights in rural and urban Ghana amongst 60 government officials, NGO representatives, and both parents whose children were/were not involved in child labour. The average age of participants was 31 years. Semistructured interviews were conducted with parents (10), stakeholders (10), focus groups (30); and participant observation techniques (10) utilised to gather the needed data and purposively sampled across rural areas (Ankaase, Anwiankwanta and Kensere), and urban areas (Jamestown, Korle Gonno and Chorkor) in Ghana. Interviews were recorded, transcribed utilising a framework approach as the main data analysis method. The paper finds that children are engaged in work to teach them work ethics as most parents consider work socialisation as beneficial for children and society. The paper also finds that knowledge of human rights makes parents more committed to children's welfare. Overall, the paper finds that sensitivity to the economic and cultural context is important in understanding the issue of child labour and, more generally, in applying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and working out the parenting policies and practices that are in the best interests of the child.

1. Introduction

In view of the inherently hazardous nature of some artisanal fishing and farm work in Ghana, there is sometimes a thin line between what is child work and child labour. In practice, it may be difficult to distinguish between “child work” and “child labour” (UNICEF, 2003). The distinction differs from nation to nation and among sectors within nations. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) draws a distinction between child labour and child work in line with the child's age, intensity of work and the nature of industry in which the child is engaged (Das & Mukherjee, 2011). In defining child labour, ILO has instituted a 14 h per week cut-off point for light work for 10 years upwards (ILO/IPEC/SIMPOC, 2002). Child labour constitutes all tasks performed by children that are hazardous to their health and development. Hence, “child labour” as defined by ILO comprises all children between 5–9 years of age engaged in economic activities and older children between 10–14 years who engage in economic activities for more than 14 h per week. On the other hand, ILO defines child work as all productive activities carried out by children lasting up to 1-hour duration per day. A more generic idea of child work can either be performed in the family enterprise or common market; remunerated or non-remunerated; part-time or full-time (Fyfe, 1989). Child work may be carried out on a casual or regular basis as well as in the formal or

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informal sector. Child work does not include domestic work performed by children since these are non-productive activities. This generic definition admits that many children engage in legitimate work, remunerated or non-remunerated, that is suitable for their age and stage of maturity. What this means is that child work performed by children aged 10–14 is not hazardous in nature and does not exceed 14 h per week. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has renewed its commitment to eradicating all forms of child labour by 2025 (ILO, 2017). This is because the international community views both child labour and child work as serious problems. However, many scholars are not quite sure whether child labour is always an abuse particularly when it is put in the same category of other forms of physical abuse in the world today (Sharp, 1996). School enrolment is a key explanatory element of child labour being viewed as children's rights violation. Nevertheless, there is fluidity in the interaction between child labour and school enrolment to a certain degree as some children combine work with schooling (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018).

“Work socialisation” is considered a normal part of life in the Ghanaian context where small families depend on all members to contribute labour for family upkeep. Children are engaged in carrying out household chores, fishing, maintaining livestock and other activities. This accepted practice has been in existence for generations and children aged 5–17 years old form an essential part of the labour force. Many Ghanaians see this as contributing positively to the overall development of children as they acquire essential skills: they learn to work, cooperate with others, become contributing citizens, and help build communities and societies. The development of the child is grounded on interactions with others, and is moulded particularly by the child's parents. This paper examines how parents in rural and urban Ghana understand the relationship between child labour and human rights. Examining parents' perceptions of child labour and human rights is an important topic of study, since parents play a crucial role in the development of the child, and parents largely determine whether a given child will be engaged in work, and what kind of work that child will perform (Bowlby, 2008).

The justification for comparison between rural and urban areas was underpinned by the fact that both areas provide interesting contexts for exploring human rights and child labour in terms of parental perceptions. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana introduced special provisions intended to guarantee the rights of children as a unique group. This included an expansive set of rights designed to foster children's welfare and development. These constitutional provisions impose obligations on Parliament to legislate to safeguard the welfare and development of children. The legal regime on the protection of children was consolidated in 1998 through the passage of the Children's Act (Act 560) 1998 (Twum-Danso, 2009). Ghana reached another major milestone in the protection of children's rights on 5 December 2005, when legislation was passed to outlaw human trafficking within, to, from, and through Ghana (“Human Trafficking Act 694, 2005”). Despite the passage of new laws and policies to curb child labour, parents still engage their children in work. The demands on children to support family income in both rural and urban Ghana are such that a projected 21.8% of 5–17 year-olds are engaged in economic activities (GSS, 2014). Children involved in economic activities comprise 22.7% of boys and 20.8% of girls in rural and urban Ghana and the percentage of urban children in child labour was 12.4% compared to 30.2% of children in rural areas (GSS, 2014). Hence, it is critical to answer the research question below:

1.1. Do parents in rural and urban communities in Ghana view child labour as a violation of human rights?

This research question is critical in directing the analysis of the study owing to the need to develop a scientific understanding of “parental perceptions of child labour and human rights” and formulate policies and programmes to prevent child abuse. The study reveals the following: Children are engaged in work as part of socialisation. In the rural areas, most of the parents who engage children in hazardous work are parents who are deeply rooted in their culture. In the urban areas on the other hand, most of the parents who put children in hazardous work are those parents who are extremely poor. Additionally, most of the children engaged in child labour in the rural areas, do so on family farms. In contrast, most children involved in child labour in the urban areas do so as hired labourers engaged in artisanal fishing. Furthermore, most children in the rural areas combine schooling and work. However, most children engaged in child labour in the urban areas are not in school. There are limits to the nature and amount of work that children should be expected to perform since some tasks by children are clearly hazardous to their health. The general population has appreciable level of knowledge of human rights in both areas under study because of the proliferation of the electronic and print media. There are differences between the local and international (western) understandings of the relationship between human rights and child labour. Furthermore, participants suggest that parental perceptions of child labour and human rights should be considered from a cultural and economic point of view.

The paper is presented in 7 sections, and sets out to explore parental perceptions of human rights and child labour. In the first section, the aim and research question driving the paper are introduced. Section 2 discusses cultural relativism and human rights, and the concept of the margin of appreciation. Section 3 presents the concept of cultural politics of childhood, which provides a conceptual framework for the paper. Section 4 presents the methods and research design of the study, detailing what was done, how it was done, and why it was done and describes the study context. Section 5 presents the main findings that emerged from the study. Section 6 discusses the findings of the study. This paper is concluded in Section 7. Here, the research is assessed for what it has revealed about parental perceptions of human rights and child labour.

2. Cultural relativism and human rights

Cultural relativism is the “recognition that societies differ in their cultural attitudes towards social phenomena and therefore no universal criteria can be applied to compare one cultural view with another” (James & James, 2012, p. 35). In addition, cultural relativism means that our understandings of rights evolve; they are vibrant and dynamic rather than fixed for all time (Pityana, 2002). Some scholars of cultural relativism are against accounts of human rights that they believe are built on Western ideas

expressed in Western language (Van der Vyver, 2001). They oppose the universality of human rights norms (Donnelly, 1984), and reject the existence of universal moral standards because moral norms are culturally based and thus limited in scope (Renteln, 2013). In other words, they believe that there is no such thing as universal human rights as all moral standards including children's rights are limited to a particular cultural tradition.

2.1. The concept of the margin of appreciation

The concept of the margin of appreciation within the jurisprudence developed under the European Convention on Human Rights can best explain how culture should bear on this issue. Broadly speaking, the margin of appreciation means that the authorities of each State Party to the European Convention ought to be permitted a certain measure of discretion in meeting the human rights standards protected by the Convention. A similar approach to the margin of appreciation should be taken in dealing with the provisions of the UNCRC. An assessment of the conflict between these cultural values and the injunction to act in the best interests of the child needs to be made and the conflict reconciled. This is because people make important choices based on cultural norms (MDA Freeman & Alen, 2007). Cultural discussion of the *rights of the child* is not peculiar to the developing world but international human rights law recognises the importance of cultural diversity.

3. The cultural politics of childhood

Although anthropological perspectives are widely criticised by scholars and activists promoting universal human rights, Tilley (2000) establishes that different cultures have different views about what constitutes a good childhood. Children's social and cultural milieux have a significant influence on the extent of their involvement in work and their educational prospects. The tasks carried out by children, especially in the developing world, have for a long time been explained in terms of "socialisation, education, training and play" (Nieuwenhuys, 1996, p. 237). Therefore, child labour might be understood as reflecting cultural differences among countries. There may be differences in what different countries consider to be a violation of children's rights because they have different understandings of what constitutes a good child and a good childhood. African history, religion, myths and traditions define childhood differently to Euro-American societies. African societies expect African children to act in accordance with their parents' wishes and family needs (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). Therefore, African children are not accorded an identity of their own (Boakyee-Boaten, 2009). In many African societies, the dominant view is that allowing children to exercise autonomy and agency is spoiling them. It also threatens the authority and control that parents and other adult figures exercise over children (Blanchet, 1996). In contrast, children in the "Western world" are often considered to be competent agents who should be allowed to exercise a degree of control over their lives (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). This provides them with a sense of equality with other members of their society and some citizenship rights (Marshall, 1997). This development is the culmination of change brought about by the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Therefore, a Western concept of childhood may not be applicable in non-Western societies where there are different historical, cultural and economic conditions (Forehand & Kotchick, 2016). In the present day, it is often assumed that Euro-American values are correct, and they have come to define all that is moral, right and factual (Kagiticbasi, 2017). This even shapes our understanding of childhood and the nature of children. However, there is the need to respect different ways of understanding childhood, and recognise that children around the world face very different social, cultural, historical and economic environments (Garbarino, 2017).

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

The research is designed in qualitative research format by specifically utilising in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation techniques to collect the needed data for the study in Ghana from 1 st April 2015 to 30th June 2015. Qualitative research transforms the world into a range of representations, encompassing field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, a semi-structured interview schedule was applied to get information in the participants' own words, to provide a narration of situations and to produce detailed information. Our research question: "Do parents in rural and urban communities in Ghana view child labour as a violation of human rights?" is supposed to offer varied accounts and consequently, language and content was made simple to comprehend by both professionals and parents alike. This informed the choice of semi-structured interview schedule which creates a more flexible approach than more technical. The detailed and complex data produced by semi-structure interviews is suitable to produce explanations (Draper & Swift, 2011).

4.2. Contextualisation

The rural farming communities under study are Ankaase, Anwiankwanta and Kensere, which are all in the Asante Bekwai Municipality. According to the 2010 *Population and Housing Census*, the populations of the communities are: Ankaase (20,451), Anwiankwanta (29,748) and Kensere (15,637) (GSS, 2012). Jamestown, Korle Gonno and Chorkor are the three urban fishing communities under study in the Accra Metropolis. According to the 2010 *Population and Housing Census*, their population are Jamestown (16,221), Korle Gonno (27,826) and Chorkor (23,853) (GSS, 2012).

4.3. Participants

Considering my focus on parental perception of human rights and child labour, I recruited 60 participants in this study and they included government officials, representatives from NGOs, and both parents whose children were/were not involved in child labour. The inclusion criterion for selecting participants for this study was being a parent or stakeholder in child welfare with expert knowledge. I conducted a total of 10 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from government agencies, departments and non-governmental organisations (5 stakeholders in each of the two areas under study). I moderated 1 focus group discussion with 15 participants in each area under study. Additionally, a total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants whose children were/were not involved in child labour. Finally, participant observations were also conducted to investigate children's natural working environment and to contextualise the empirical findings, helping to illuminate parental perceptions of human rights and child labour. A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in the participant observations (5 parents in each of the two areas under study). The inclusion criterion for selecting participants for the participant observation was being a parent who was a farm/canoe owner with child labourers in the two areas under study. Purposive sampling was utilised for the selection of all the participants purposely identified to offer specific information about the study population. Purposive sampling methods include selecting particular participants based on a particular purpose rather than randomly (Mason, 2017).

4.4. Data generation activities

I conducted interviews after undergoing training in qualitative research methods and qualitative interview techniques. No relationship was established between me and participants prior to the study. The interviews were conducted in different settings including the offices of the professionals and parents' own homes. Most of these interview settings were selected at each participant's convenience. The focus groups' interview schedule contained 13 questions. Additionally, the parental interview schedule comprised of 14 questions; stakeholders' interview schedule was made up of 20 questions; participants' observation interview schedule comprised of 12 questions and each interview lasted between 30 and 90 min.

4.5. Data analysis

I utilised a framework approach as the main qualitative data analysis method in this study. A framework approach is usually utilised in applied policy research and it is a qualitative data analysis technique (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The framework technique clearly states the research objectives upfront, based on the research (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). It therefore begins with deduction but ends with the generation of inductive data as it attempts to correctly reflect original accounts and observations. In view of this, framework analysis is greatly structured, comprised of the construction of themes that methodically analyse data with a view to higher levels of abstraction being reached. Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, and Dillon (2003) put forward the five stages of framework analysis as identified in the literature. I applied the stages of the framework in the conduct of this research. I began the analysis with the verbatim transcripts, and a process of familiarisation. Through a close reading of the original accounts and listing the knowledge and themes that repeated themselves, I became immersed in the data. The identification of a thematic framework was the second stage of the data analysis. This included drawing on *a priori* knowledge about parental perceptions of human rights and child labour and the emergent themes, to list general analytical classifications that could be used to label the data. The analytical classifications recognised in the themes were then utilised in the data through a process of indexing. This included coding the transcripts statistically for each theme and identifying the data that were confirmation for a specific theme or sub-theme. During the fourth stage of the analysis, the indexed framework was then charted in a spreadsheet, which involved separating the data that act as confirmation for each theme. Mapping and interpretation of the data is the final stage. Comparing the charted data, searching out the patterns and connections that offered explanation are done at this stage. The themes identified *a priori* and to emerge from the original accounts during the framework analysis resulted in the substantive theme: "relationship between parental perceptions of child labour and human rights" being identified in the data and accounted for it.

4.6. Trustworthiness

The background, qualifications, experience and credibility of the researcher is particularly crucial in qualitative research as it is the investigator who is the main instrument of data gathering and analysis (Eisner, 2017). Hence, I became the data collection instrument to help deal with the question of validity and reliability. Therefore, my competence and interviewing skills and capability became the basis of reliability of the data collected. Truthfully, my interview techniques were improved, and the quality of data enhanced as the research progressed. Further, I enhanced interviewer reliability by executing two pre-pilot interviews to gain experience and the important skills. Additionally, I addressed the subject of reliability in the context of equipment used in the interview. I utilised a tape recorder to record all interviews, subsequently, enhancing reliability. Therefore, I reported the findings in a manner that aimed at expressing their tentative nature. Further, I have clearly applied auditability in this paper unfolding each phase of the research process, amplifying and justifying what was done. I made effort to overcome research bias by taking a neutral position and refusing to offer my own views during the data gathering process. Thus, I made checks and referred the data and the tentative interpretations to the study participants to confirm its credibility and accuracy at the end of the data analysis. I triangulated my data by using varied sources to confirm the developing findings. I considered relevant literature which made me confident that child labour and human rights in rural and urban areas of Ghana as perceived by the participants in this study was accurately conveyed as

possible.

4.7. Ethics

I obtained ethics approval from the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee to conduct the focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and to observe and interact with participants whilst they worked with their children in the farming and fishing communities. In adhering to the principles of the University Ethics Committee, I respected cultural differences and guaranteed the rights of children before, during and after the research. I asked participants to sign consent forms and gave them participant information statements before engaging in work with their children. All steps taken by me before, during and after the research conformed to the highest ethical standards.

5. Results

In this section, I include an analysis of parental perceptions of human rights and child labour in rural and urban Ghana.

5.1. Rural area: different perceptions of human rights and child labour

Stakeholders explained that the proliferation of the electronic and print media has helped improve the general population's knowledge of human rights, particularly because many media houses have programmes that directly discuss human rights issues. Perceptions of the relationship between human rights and child labour differed from one parental participant to another, however, the dominant view was that there are differences between the local and western understandings of this relationship. This was largely because of the cultural and economic significance of child work in the Ghanaian context.

In focus groups and participant observation, many parents said child labour is an important means of socialising children, helping them learn important skills and values. For this reason, many consider a certain amount of child labour to be in the best interests of the child. This view was held by many participants, but was expressed most strongly by those who were deeply rooted in their culture. Some participants also expressed the view that child labour is necessary because of economic circumstances. Nonetheless, most participants believed that there are limits to the nature and amount of work that children should be expected to perform. Some tasks, such as felling trees, working with chemicals, and carrying heavy loads, are unsuitable for children, and not justified by appeals to culture. One focus group participant whose children were not involved in child labour said:

I was returning from my farm some time ago when I saw a child crying because he was carrying heavy load that was too much for him. I helped the boy carry his load home by adding his load to mine. I think this was an abuse of the socialisation process. I disagree that carrying heavy load on the head is part of the socialisation process.

Many participants suggested that parents use children as a source of labour for fetching water for domestic use. Children carry buckets of water which are too heavy considering their age. Another participant whose children were not involved in child labour explained:

I don't think carrying heavy loads by children is part of our culture. Culture in this area is related to issues like puberty rites for girls that have their maiden menstruation to usher them into adulthood and not carrying heavy loads. Carrying heavy load is simply child abuse.

Many participants suggested that there is a limit to the number of hours children should be expected to work and that it should not prevent them from attending school. A parent whose children were engaged in child labour said:

Parents can engage their children in some form of work, but I don't think work should stop children from attending school.

Some schools also use farm work as a form of corporal punishment for children who violate school rules, and many parents were opposed to this practice. As one parent whose children were not involved in child labour explained:

Children could be punished but work shouldn't be used as means of punishment. I don't think this kind of things should be encouraged.

Thus, for most participants, whether child work is a violation of the rights of the child depends on the nature, amount and purpose of the work they are expected to perform. Some participants also pointed out that the idea of socialisation can also be misused to try to defend archaic or WFCL. The nature of work assigned to children and society has changed, and respecting cultural traditions does not mean parents need to be beholden to past practices. As one parent whose children were not engaged in child labour said:

It won't make sense if parents decide to raise their children strictly per the cultural practices of yester years. Parents will be abusing children if they decide to raise them under the agrarian culture.

Although participants believed that child labour is important for socialisation, they were also aware of the ways in which this argument could be abused. Although not all participants explicitly used the language of children's rights, referring instead to children's welfare, well-being, or the good of the child what they are describing is the idea of children's rights. Another key aim of the paper is to explore the extent to which participants are explicitly aware of human rights as a concept, and whether this has a bearing on their attitudes towards child labour. Awareness of the concept of human rights seems to be greater among more educated parents, although there are exceptions. The strong human rights knowledge of some participants showed in their responses to questions. One focus group participant whose children were not engaged in child labour said:

I think I'm educated enough to know the rights of my children. I don't violate the rights of any of my children. Children should have access to participation, provision and protection in all situations.

A Director of the CHRAJ explained:

Educated parents are usually knowledgeable in human rights. However, some well-educated parents prove that they have no knowledge of human rights during mediations. We therefore take our time to educate such parents on children's rights.

Some participants also thought that those in rural areas generally had less awareness of the concept of human rights. As one focus group participant whose children were involved in child labour indicated:

I think parents' knowledge of children's rights is limited in the countryside where many parents are farmers. If a child decides to go to school in all the 5 days in the week, some parents may punish such children for disobedience. I believe parents in the rural areas need to be educated that it is the right of every child to be in school in all the 5 days of the school going week.

Stakeholders also suggested that parents who are deeply rooted in their culture are more likely to be unaware of, or to reject outright, human rights. This is often linked to the idea that children are not mature enough to make important decisions that potentially have high costs. As one focus group participant whose children are engaged in child labour said:

In Kensesre, there are many children who're only 13 years yet they're mothers because they didn't allow themselves to be guided by their parents. The physical appearances of those children made them feel they're adults.

Stakeholders suggested that this attitude towards children's rights was often linked to a strong emphasis on the importance of tradition and maintaining long-standing cultural practices that were threatened by Western ideas of human rights. However, the stakeholders also noted that other parents challenged this view and tended to view an excessive emphasis on bringing up children the traditional way, as an infraction of children's rights. Linked to this, some participants in the focus groups argued that it is important for the development of children to be involved in making important decisions. Many stakeholders suggested that parental knowledge of contemporary human rights is likely to improve the welfare of children and levels of school attendance. A focus group participant whose children were involved in child labour explained:

I think many educated parents with knowledge of human rights respect the rights of their children and treat them differently. It's a fact that educated parents don't engage their children in work for many hours.

Conversely, parents who lack knowledge of children's rights are more likely to engage their children in child labour. For example, a Director of the Department of Social Welfare observed that some parents in Kensesre beat children for insisting on going to school instead of working. Many of these children end up weaving "kente" cloth to get money to go to school because their parents will not pay their fees. Parents at the focus group also knew of similar experiences. One participant whose children were not engaged in child labour said:

I know that many children who don't weave cloth don't get money for school. When children begin to cater for themselves, their parents lose control over them.

Stakeholders also recounted cases where parents and guardians had refused to give food and shelter to children who refused to work. A Director of the Social Welfare Department said:

A matter was reported to the Social Welfare Department relating to child labour. A child insisted on going to school instead of working and the guardian of the child refused to provide shelter to that child. We had to go there and plead for the child to go back home. This created a strained relationship between the parent and the child. Some of these kids are suffering. The department could remove some of these children from their parents and subsequently give them back to other relations who can take care of the children.

The experiences of participants suggest that knowledge of human rights varies among parents, and this tends to have implications for the well-being of their children, and their participation in child work and education.

5.2. Urban areas: different perceptions of human rights and child labour

As in the rural areas, some participants suggested that work forms part of the socialisation process. Stakeholders explained that society perceives children who do not work as individuals who are going to fail in life. Many parents want their children to have both western and cultural orientations to be able to integrate well into the Ghanaian society. A parent whose children were engaged in child labour said:

Every society on this globe has their own conception of the calibre of people they want their children to grow up to become.

Many parents train their children in their trade to prepare them for the future. Hence, many parents perceive children who do not work as lazy and uncultured. Societal conceptions of childhood influence the way parents bring up their children. A Principal Labour Officer suggested:

Child labour has some form of relationship with the culture of the people that is why you see many parents in this community putting their children to work.

Many parents in this study reported instances of children's rights violations. For example, a parent whose children were not engaged in child labour recounted child abuse as:

I don't like the way my next-door neighbour treats her children. She puts her children to both domestic and economic activities which I believe it's too much for them considering their age. Another neighbour complained about the workload of her children and she got very angry.

Another parent whose children were engaged in child labour in one of the focus group discussion said:

I don't think the rights of children are recognised in this community. Many parents send their children to fishing because of poverty and societal conception about childhood.

Government officials and NGOs provided varied perceptions of the relationship between human rights and child labour. Many parents believe fishing work expresses the way of life of the people. Additionally, child labour is the traditional system for teaching children to be responsible and acquire important skills. Many African societies believe that children should learn certain cultural norms before they grow up. A Labour Officer said:

You see many parents in these communities have different orientations about childhood, child labour and human rights. It's quite hard to tell a parent not to put his/her children to work because that's the norm here. Some of the children also understand the orientation of their parents so I think we also have a duty to explain the difference between work socialisation and hazardous work to the outside world. We don't support hazardous work, but work socialisation is necessary for the child's development.

Parents communicate to their children from infancy about the values and behaviours expected from them. Parents expect children to use the experiences of child labour to be able to function well in the future. For example, many participants suggested that they allow their children to fetch water for domestic use which is considered as part of work socialisation and it is widespread in many homes where there are not water taps. They consider this practice as part of work socialisation. Key informants also explained that many children are enthusiastic about engaging in work to meet societal expectations. Furthermore, some parents do not consider basic education to be a right for all children. A parent whose children are involved in child labour explained:

I know you believe all children should have the right to education but in my opinion, I don't believe in that. Putting stubborn children in school is a waste of resources.

However, the Labour Department suggests that later in life parents who put their children to work realise that they were wrong in not allowing their children to go to school. Although adulthood begins at the age of 18 under Ghanaian law, it is often thought to begin at a younger age. Several participants revealed that children in the communities under study were often considered to become adults through childbirth. Another parent whose children are engaged in child labour explained:

I have a 15-year-old niece who is a mother and I can't consider her to be a child. Such children have elevated themselves to adulthood and so society allows them to work like adults. I don't think child labour in that context violates any law.

Social norms place expectations on mothers to take responsibility for the upkeep of their children. Therefore, a significant number of parents suggested that teenage mothers should work to look after their children even though they are below the legal age. For example, a parent whose children were engaged in child labour explained:

I can't take responsibility for my teenage daughter who's a mother herself. Why should that be my burden? I think that'll be too much for me to handle. Once my teenage daughter has given birth, I believe she must work to care for her child.

However, a Labour Officer who is a parent herself argued that anybody who is below the age of 18 years is a child. Children should therefore be in school or undergoing some training to acquire some skills. Behaving like an adult does not change a child's status. Moreover, many parents do not understand the concept of human rights. A Headmaster of a school said:

I don't think parents in this community understand what is meant by children's rights. Some parents think that children can't do anything right by themselves without parental control. Again, when children demand for monies in relation to education the parents refuse to provide it.

This explains the kind of relationship that exists between many parents and their children. The traditional idea of childhood in which children take instructions from parents without any input has influenced relationships between parents and children. Stakeholders explained that there are guidelines regulating the relationship between parents and children under the (UNCRC). Parents do not adhere to guidelines regulating the relationship between parents and children. A parent in the focus group discussion whose children were engaged in child labour explained:

Many parents raise their children according to the traditional idea of childhood. I don't think the traditional idea of childhood conflicts with the law. Parents need their children to work to be able to provide for their needs and children must also obey their parents. Do you think a parent in a deprived community like ours would be able to raise his/her children according to the Western standards?

The above assertion suggests that socialisation and poverty are the reasons children are engaged in child labour. Some parental participants in the interviews and focus group thought that parents should allow children to express their opinions on matters affecting their well-being. A Coordinator of the Children Resource Institute explained:

Children won't rebel if they are involved in decisions.

However, it was thought that parents should not grant all the power of decision making to children since they may become wayward. A Director of the CHRAJ said:

Parents have the responsibility to provide children with the likely consequence of all options in decision-making.

There should be a dialogue between parents and children whenever there are differences in views between the child and the parent. A Director of the CHRAJ explained:

I believe parents should learn to dialogue with their children whenever there are disagreements and not impose decisions on children. When there is an imposition, the child is likely to resist. However, if the parent can have a dialogue with the child, I believe, the child will see reason in what the parent is talking about.

When parents can explain matters well to children, children support the process, no matter how young the children may be. Stakeholders further suggested that parents should assess the level of maturity of their children to always determine their level of involvement. Many parents thought that there may be a link between parental knowledge of human rights and children's welfare. A parent whose children were not engaged in child labour said:

Some ignorant parents take their children to sea until they are 15 years old before thinking of enrolling them in school. Other parents don't even consider enrolling their children in school.

These children have not attained the permissible working age as stipulated by the ILO Convention No. 188 (Work in Fishing) which was adopted in 2007. It states that the minimum age for employment on board a fishing vessel is 16 years. An exception is given to 15 year olds who have completed compulsory education, yet most of those children engaged in fishing work in these urban communities have not completed compulsory education. Most children engaged in child labour have lost interest in schooling and they have rather developed a greater level of interest in fishing. Some stakeholders suggested many parents fail to enrol their children of school going age in school because of illiteracy and ignorance. A Director of the Social Welfare Department explained:

If a parent is well-educated, he/she is likely to adhere to modern trends in child rearing as well integrating the traditional way of childrearing.

This position was reiterated by a parent whose children were not involved in child labour who said:

I think parents need proper education so that they'll get the right knowledge that'll prompt them to enrol their children in school in addition to going to sea.

Lack of knowledge means that many other parents may not know that taking children who are 5, 6 or 7 years to sea is an infringement on their rights. A Coordinator of the Children Resource Institute suggested:

There are things that one may believe are right but might prove otherwise since the society is dynamic.

This assertion of parental lack of knowledge being sometimes the cause of violation of human rights was echoed by a Headmaster of a school who said:

I don't think parents adequately understand human rights. If they understood children's rights very well that will have enhanced the promotion of children's welfare in this area and they'll have known that fishing at a young age, don't promote the well-being of these children.

Although the law does not provide an outright ban on children supporting their parents in their trade, the law forbids child labour that is detrimental to the education and health of the child. Stakeholders suggested that the principles of human rights have the potential of improving the welfare of children. A Principal Labour Officer explained:

The principles of human rights are good and they are not likely to harm any child.

Additionally, stakeholders suggested that children are limited in exploring their potentials if parents have no knowledge of human rights and children are engaged in child labour. However, some parents have knowledge of human rights, yet they engage in child abuse. Another parent whose children were not engaged in child labour reinforced this claim:

Some parents have knowledge of human rights, yet they subject their children to strenuous fishing work at an early age.

This means that parental knowledge of human rights does not necessarily improve the welfare of children because some parents' knowledge of human rights does not stop them from engaging their children in child labour.

6. Discussion

The proliferation of electronic and print media in Ghana accounts for the reasonable level of knowledge that parents have about the relationship between human rights and child labour. This reflects the fact that many media outlets run educational programmes on human rights and child labour (Freeman, 2017). Most participants believed that there are limits to the nature and amount of work that children should be expected to perform since some tasks by children are clearly hazardous, and not justified by appeals to

socialisation. When work becomes exploitive and compromises the development of children, it should be considered as child abuse and must be eliminated (Martin, 2013). In the rural areas, most of the parents who violate the rights of children by engaging them in hazardous work are parents who are deeply rooted in their culture. In contrast, most of the parents in the urban areas who violate the rights of children by putting them in hazardous work are those parents who are in abject poverty. In the rural areas, most of the children engaged in child labour do so on family farms. About 90% of child labourers are in the developing countries and 70% of this are in the farming sector (UNICEF, 2012). In contrast, most children involved in child labour in the urban areas under study do so as hired labourers in the artisanal fishing sector. In the urban artisanal fishing sector, most child labourers are invisible because they work away from towns and cities in the high seas (UNICEF, 2003). This study suggests that most children in the rural areas combine schooling and work. Several studies show that many children who attend school also work on the farm as part of the socialisation process (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). However, this study indicates that most children who engaged in child labour in the urban areas are not in school. The Global Estimates indicate that child labour and exclusion from school are closely connected (ILO, 2017; Quattri & Watkins, 2016).

Participants in this study suggest that children are engaged in work as part of work socialisation. African culture emphasises on values such as respect and communal interdependence (Boakye-Boaten, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that children's behaviour would be in the best interest and welfare of the whole family (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). This increases our understanding of how childhood is constructed within various cultures. Working and human capital investment are not mutually exclusive (Akabayashi & Psacharopoulos, 1999).

"Child labour" is also part of the human development process and leads to many general assumptions about the nature of socialisation as a basic need to assure the child's social survival (Ofosu-Kusi, 2017). Generally, socialisation comprises the patterns that create and maintain relations for children and also guarantees the integration and self-esteem of children as members within a culture that controls behaviours according to societal norms (Damon, 1983). Intimacy or the social function of socialisation focuses on the need for and procedures which promote belongingness, connectedness, and association with others (Adams & Marshall, 1996). Children need a sense of uniqueness and a sense of belonging. Therefore, in various ways, the child and social functions of socialisation serve psychological and social welfare system through feelings that the self is significant (Rosenberg, 1985). The social function of socialisation enhances the child's sense of belonging to a culture and caring about significant others. In the context of intrapersonal relationship, this involves the selection and organisation of aspects of the social context which are personally meaningful (Adams & Marshall, 1996). The function of socialisation is paralleled in themes of integration and relatedness in the identity literature (Adams & Marshall, 1996). Major socialisation factors of child labour involve gender norms, age subordination and the cultural significance of evading idleness.

Additionally, many parents believe that the significant role that children play in the domestic and work environment provides them with other characteristics that are important in the labour market, for example a strong work ethic (Zelizer, 1985). Child labour in the domestic context include household chores and extra domestic livelihood activities that provide girls with typical vocational and entrepreneurial skills (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). In Ghana, the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes through cultural lifetime learning procedure has been with the people for centuries. This study suggests girls begin to take work responsibilities at a young age in life. They are usually engaged in supporting their mothers in domestic work of different types. In rural communities, boys are engaged in farm work, fetching firewood from nearby bushes and looking after domestic animals such as goats, sheep and cattle. In the urban area, boys are engaged in fishing and fetching water from the tap. This practice of child labour and early training of children shows strong consciousness of the inborn abilities in children to develop into a self-sufficient and competent adult.

A cross-cultural analysis of child labour and the rights of the child reveals diverse conceptualisations of childhood rather than a single or universal phenomenon (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). The concept of a "child" is broadly relational and implies that one person may be the child of another. This in turn suggests that there is a type of mutual support and care throughout life. Therefore, parental perceptions of child labour can be extended to comprise historical changes in cultural, socioeconomic and demographic settings. Any distinction between children and adults is conceptual and developmental in nature. Western values dominate meanings and ideas of "right" as well as scientific and practical understanding of the nature of children in many areas. The rights of the child developed from the Western world are usually regarded as "universal". The definition of a "child" based on one's age is mainly political. In most Western countries, the age at which a person may fully pursue civil, political and economic rights is 18 years.

Evidence from my data also established that parents who are deeply rooted in their culture are likely to engage their children in work to inculcate a work ethic in them. Child labour is determined by social status or worth that children have within varied cultures. Some children have been socialised to believe that they must work to support themselves and family income. If children are expelled from school for their inability to pay for school and other related fees such as text books and examination fees, children feel they can work to support their education. The study indicates that parental perceptions of child labour and human rights are likely to be influenced by cultural as well as economic factors. Parents who are deeply rooted in the indigenous culture are more likely to engage their children in child labour. Those parenting styles and social norms are transferred to the larger society. Therefore, children develop resourcefully accepting and adopting the norms of their culture.

It needs to be emphasised that not all work that children do is harmful for them or would meet the requirements of work to be eliminated under the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138 or Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) Convention No. 182. The ILO does not intend to prohibit all farming or fishing work by children under age as set by law. Tasks that are appropriate for a specific age and are less hazardous and do not interfere with a child's education and right to leisure time are not the issue here. Many types of work experience for children can certainly be constructive, offering them the opportunity to develop the work ethic and social skills that they will need as adults.

There is disagreement between international and domestic instruments (Martin, 2013). Forms of child labour that would often be

regarded as human rights abuses in Western countries are viewed as an important part of the socialisation process in Ghana, although most parents also recognised limits to the kinds of work that children should be expected to perform. This has implications for the debates over human rights and cultural relativism outlined in Section 2. It suggests that a margin of appreciation - like that used in the European Convention of Human Rights - needs to be applied when considering whether child labour violates human rights in a country like Ghana, as conceptions of childhood differ, and this cultural difference should be considered in relation to human rights issues. However, there is also some evidence here to support the idea that there is an overlapping consensus between different cultures around the world for a core set of universal human rights.

7. Conclusion and policy implications

This paper recommends the adoption of policies that would deal with the type of work identified as child abuse (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). WFCL is clearly child abuse and freedom from it should be regarded as a universal right for all children in Ghana. There is the need to look for a core set of universal rights that have cross-cultural appeal to prevent child abuse. I directly solicited the views of parents and a broad range of child welfare professionals who agreed with Renteln (1998) suggestion that the existence of cultural variations in different societies should give rise to dialogue in relation to these value conflicts aimed at addressing child abuse. This paper finds that sensitivity to the economic and cultural context is important in understanding the issue of child labour and, more generally, in applying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and working out the parenting policies and practices that are needed to prevent child abuse. Concerns of child abuse usually become less significant than the immediate needs of children who engage in work and their status in their respective families.

There is the need to enforce the minimum age for child work stipulated in the UNCRC and other local legal documents to prevent child abuse and therefore safeguarding the rights of the child (Arts, 2014). Nevertheless, such documents ought to sometimes permit engagement of children in work when it is needed to help them survive adverse economic conditions. They must also recognise the importance of local traditions, which in Ghana often require children to have some degree of involvement in work for the purposes of socialisation (Morrow, 2013). In addition, the UN's attempts to establish a universal human rights framework have been challenged by the cultural relativist claim that there are no universal norms to evaluate all cultures.

Furthermore, to prevent child abuse, work socialisation should be acknowledged as a human development issue that should be complementing a cross-cultural education of the child as well as the best interests of the child. This result show that many Ghanaians see child labour as contributing positively to the overall development of children as they acquire essential skills: they learn to work, cooperate with others, become contributing citizens, and help build communities and societies. These are some of the difficulties encountered by the development of international human rights norms. However, culture should not be repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience (Alston, 1994). The best interests of the child under Article 3(1) of the UNCRC should be culturally specific in its interpretation; otherwise it will encounter difficulties in its enforcement in Ghana and other developing countries.

Improving wages and working conditions for children and adults would be a way of preventing child abuse. This is because improved wages for adults would reduce the economic pressures driving parents to put their children to work. In addition, in cases where children still must work for economic or cultural reasons, better labour market regulations would help prevent child abuse, and therefore more consistent with human rights. Permitting light work by children will certainly embrace improved working conditions which can prevent child abuse and offer them with the prospect of attending school (Bartlett, Hart, Satterthwaite, de la Barra, & Missair, 2016).

Understanding cultural practices would assist in the design of realistic policies and programmes to address child abuse, balancing the human rights demands of the UNCRC with the cultural significance of work (Gamlin & Pastor, 2009). Therefore, the government, international organisations and NGOs need a better understanding of cultural practices and factors such as economic status which play a significant role in the engagement of children in work (Keck & Sikkink, 2014). Culture is relevant to people and therefore cultural norms with respect to the rights of the child should be taken into consideration in as much as it does not lead to child abuse (Rogoff, 2003). More importantly, cultural variations should constitute the basis for deciding what is in the best interests of the child. However, cultural traditions will sometimes trump the demands of international conventions and agreements. Some core rights such as the right to life are universal whereas other rights such as the right to freedom from child labour are culturally relative. Nevertheless, some Ghanaian cultural practices continue to set huge limitations on international and constitutional human rights guarantees. Thus, they make it difficult to fully realise the rights protected in these guarantees.

Furthermore, NGOs involved in child welfare programmes should direct their efforts towards conducting research on the work socialisation (Hart, 2013). This would contribute to greater cultural knowledge which could be used to inform the design and application of NGOs' policies and programmes to prevent child abuse. Additionally, existing laws relating to the rights of the child in Ghana should be reviewed to ensure they achieve an adequate balance between culture and international human rights law (Smith, 2018). This is because many of the national laws regarding children's rights gives too much value to international laws at the expense of local culture.

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