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ABSTRACT

There is nearly universal consensus that child labour is harmful to the development of the child, however, widespread contention exists on whether child labour is cultural or economic necessity. This paper aimed to ascertain parental perceptions of the nature of child labour in rural and urban Ghana. The sample size of this study was 60 participants, all of whom were parents. Participants included: government officials; NGO representatives; and both parents whose children were involved in child labour, and parents whose children were not. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents (10) and stakeholders (10). and Focus groups (30); and participant observations (10) were also utilised. A purposive sampling technique was employed across rural and urban areas in Ghana. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. A framework approach was utilised as the main qualitative data analysis method. Parents in the rural areas indicated that the nature of child labour is cultural because children are not working because of economic necessity but for cultural reasons. On the other hand, children engage in child labour in the urban area for economic necessity since child labour is a very important component of the local economy. Understanding the socio-cultural and economic factors that drive child labour is necessary to design and execute the most suitable mechanisms for intervention and prevention.

Introduction

In a developing country such as Ghana, child labour is widespread as well as being a much-disputed matter and practice. While children may be observed working, their engagement in work is considered in broad diverse ways, leading to numerous constructions of child labour (Ennew, Myers, & Plateau, 2005). Additionally, researchers have contended that the nature of child labour is disputed since a significant number of children illegally engage in work as well as simultaneously contribute in work activities that include inter-dependent practicalities of socialisation, participation, survival, abuse and exploitation (Bequele & Boyden, 1988). Furthermore, there are socio-cultural implications and contexts of the engagement of children in work. The dimension of socio-cultural

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connotation has gotten much acknowledgement in contemporary times in view of the development of childhood studies (Abebe & Bessell, 2011). The "natural" division of the child has been transformed into a "socio-cultural" construction by childhood studies (Holt & Holloway, 2006). This viewpoint indicates that the engagement of children in work is very closely associated with the cultural and social framework within which it occurs. Bourdillon, Levison, and Myers (2010) contend that the engagement of children in work should be understood in light of the varied cultural and material circumstances and viewed as differing phenomenon based on a series of different elements, comprising the order of birth, composition of sibling, age, sex and capability of the said child. This paper offers a critical exploration of parental perceptions of the nature of child labour in the two settings. It is therefore critical to answer the research question below:

> To what extent do parents in rural and urban communities in Ghana view child labour as cultural or economic necessity?

There are many different economic and cultural factors explaining why child labour occurs. The differences in ethnic make-up are linked to differences in the causes of child labour in rural and urban areas (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018b; Hindelang, 1978). While some of the causes of child labour are economic-rapid rural-urban migration, poverty is often considered the major determinant. However, it is also important to examine the role that various socio-cultural factors play in child labour. The extent to which child labour is the result of economic forces or cultural norms and values has become a major area of contention amongst scholars. Much of the research conducted on child labour practice in the developing world to date has pointed to poverty as the major cause (Engle et al., 2007). However, this explanation has often relied on unexamined assumptions about what constitutes normal childhood settings and their daily routines (Morelli, Rogoff, & Angelillo, 2003).

Socio-cultural dimensions of child labour

Zelizer (2005) observes that cultural attitudes towards childhood plays a role in explaining the persistence of child labour. The involvement of children in economic activities, therefore, cannot solely be explained in terms of endemic poverty. Investigating varied cultural arrangements is crucial in understanding the development of children's skills, social interactions, and roles in a culturally structured social and institutional world (Morelli et al., 2003). Studies that have pointed to cultural influences as the cause of child labour are in the minority (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Children acquire the skills significant to their cultures through involvement in the everyday work of the communities they live, and this involvement is facilitated by appropriation of the instruments and objectives that have moulded such child labour over time (Grove & Lancy, 2018; Rogoff et al., 2007). Because child labour serves as a tool to interpret and engage everyday situations, they have implications for the identities of children (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Children negotiate their identities through involvement in child labour practices of multiple communities and the generalisation of knowledge across contexts (Brown, 2004; Lancy, 2017). Child labour is basically positioned in the practices of communities and as such is intrinsically hinges on the ways in which children enact their identities by participating in these child labour practices. Therefore, a perspective on child labour must consider that skill

acquisition is embedded in the child's identity and as a member of a community. The ability to generalise skill acquisition across contexts such as home and farm may be connected to the relationship between learning and identity.

Cultural values and practices contribute to the existence of child labour by shaping intra-family choices (Kabeer, 1994) and mediating the effect of economic forces (Nieuwenhuys, 2005). In particular, family choices about children's participation in economic activities are influenced by cultural attitudes toward school and child labour (Lancy, 2018). In some societies, more value is placed on schooling than child labour and vice versa. Gender norms also play an important role. In certain societies, the dominant view is that educated women are not suited to performing traditional gender roles (Bequele & Boyden, 1988) because they are likely to refuse to marry or bear children. As a result of this attitude, daughters are denied educational opportunities in many families. In some cases, they are also expected to exclusively take over family duties to free the mother to take up paid labour.

Child labour is considered by many societies in the developing world to be essential for forming character and discipline and preparing children to compete for jobs in the future. In some communities, child labour tends to be valued over education, and children attending school instead of working can face social stigma. Existing research suggests that these kinds of cultural attitudes play a particularly important role in the Ghanaian context, particularly in the farming and fishing industries where it is common for children to work as apprentices (Johansen, 2006). Many Ghanaian parents and their children believe that engaging in economic activities from a young age is the route to a fruitful life (Johansen, 2006). Child labour is a crucial part of the socialisation process, helping children learn the importance of a strong work ethic, along with other values.

Child labour in agriculture largely occurs in rural areas, particularly in family ventures, which employ around three quarters of all children engaged in child labour (Fallon & Tzannatos, 1998). Although economic circumstances contribute to child labour in the agricultural sector, they are not the only cause, as there are examples of relatively well-off families engaging their children in forms of child labour. For example, in Tolon-Kumbungu, even farmers who are relatively well-off keeping up to 100 animals use their own sons to herd cattle (Zdunnek et al., 2008). The rationale behind this cultural practice is for children to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for proper husbandry and herd management. This reflects the fact that cattle herding by children are part of the cultural tradition of that community (Zdunnek et al., 2008). This highlights how child labour can be part of the socialisation process for children, helping them acquire the knowledge, skills and character that they need to efficiently take part in group and societal activities as adults, and helping them learn important skills and boost their self-confidence (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Child labour is also believed to help socialise children by enabling them to learn the norms, customs, ideologies, skills and habits they need to take part in social activities. Asuming-Brempong, Sarpong, Asenso-Okyere, and Amoo (2007, p. 6) contend that "traditionally working on family farms and family enterprises is part of the process by which children are trained towards adulthood." By working on family farms, children also significantly enhance the creation of family wealth and better standards of living. In many cultures in Ghana, one is a responsible person if he/she is engaged in an occupation

(Löwe, 2017). The wish of most parents appears to be to instil into their children norms and values relating to the importance of work. Nukunya (2003) suggests that the socialisation process of working children is among the major things parents prepare children for. In essence, the engagement of children in child labour is an avenue for training them to become responsible adults.

In many rural communities in Ghana, household chores and light work on farms are regarded as normal parts of childhood that help nurture children, at least as long as child labour is not hazardous or unambiguous Worst Form of Child Labour (WFCL) (Asuming-Brempong et al., 2007). This is because some degree of involvement in child labour can assist children in their personal development and create an attachment to the labour market at a young age (Blunch & Verner, 1999). Additionally, some level of child labour will instil in children a hardworking spirit and prepare them to take on bigger challenges in adulthood. For example, the people of Talensi in the Northern Region of Ghana have a common small-scale farming society that is organised through a system of patrilineal clans and lineages (Bass, 2005). Certain types of child labour in the farms and mines in the Talensi community may be considered by the outside world to be hazardous. However, those types of child labour are seen by the local people as a traditional way of diversifying livelihoods.

Culture is a major construct that tends to sustain child labour in the coastal communities notwithstanding many efforts to eliminate it (Kufogbe, Awadey, & Appenteng, 2005). Usually, fishing is family business, so parents want their children to continue the family tradition. Cultural socialisation allows children to acquire the knowledge, skills and characters that allow them to be worthy successors to their parents (Löwe, 2017). In the coastal communities, some of the basic adult responsibilities involve taking care of one's family and the capacity to effectively carry on the family business. Hence, it is the desire of many parents in the coastal communities to inculcate a strong work ethic in their children. From the perspective of many Ghanaian parents, this is more an example of child work than child labour.

Economic perspectives of child labour

In the economic field, Nardinelli (1990) is possibly the strongest proponent of the idea that child labour can be explained as purely the result of economically rational behaviour. He contends that the fall in child labour in the last phases of British Industrialisation was the result of alterations in supply and demand. The demand for child labourers fell because there was a growing need for a more skilled workforce. There was also a fall in supply because of growing adult wages, which meant that there was less need for families to send their children into the workforce to bring in more income to support the household. Some families also realised that their children would be able to earn more in the longer term if they sent their children to school instead of work to gain more qualifications. In this context, child labour legislation which many contend was driven by middle-class ideals of childhood (Archard, 1993), played only a minor role. Other studies of child labour in nineteenth-century Europe reach similar conclusions. For example, in his study of French Industrialisation, Heywood (1988) gives "pride of place" to economic forces in elucidating the emergence and decline of child labour. The eventual fall in the percentage of the labour force who were children is credited

to alterations in the nature of production which meant that there was less need for children's unskilled labour. Family decision-makers also came to understand that the growing demand for skilled labour meant that participating in education had greater value, and that it was accordingly more important for children to be sent to school than to work.

Deprivation and poverty-connected elements have been adduced by many researchers as the cause of child labour (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Phillips, Bhaskaran, Nathan, & Upendranadh, 2014). It is contended that families with insufficient incomes to maintain their households have no option than to engage their children in various forms of economic activities to support their families (Haile & Haile, 2012). The very existence of families without children put that cohort at risk of not being able to survive in such situations. In turn, leading methods of explaining the causes of poverty are entrenched in concepts relating to social and socioeconomic discrimination and marginalisation (Hickey & Du Toit, 2013). Therefore, children are integrated into economic operation as workers in view of the poverty of the families to which they are members, and different trends of social marginalisation and discrimination cause poverty. It is understood that the solution can be found in better inclusion in society as well as productive operation if the causes of poverty are implicitly or explicitly explained to be connected to exclusion conditions. This perspective on poverty dynamics is called the "residual" method of explaining the causes of poverty, in which the structure of working labour markets and the better integration of individuals into them is critical to poverty reduction (Phillips et al., 2014). Although different types of social marginalisation and discrimination are indisputably integral to the triggers of poverty, huge difficulties have arisen in the "residual" orthodoxy in the nature of the idea of varied integration (Byrne, 2005; Phillips et al., 2014). The empirical evidence shows that there are conditions in which inclusion via engagement in universal productive operation do not result in a poverty reduction and disadvantage, but rather to a strengthening of these situations in the long-term (Dugan, 2007; McDougall, 2007). These trends are related to the inherent imbalance nature of capitalist expansion, which promotes discriminatory economic advancement for some sectors of the economy and some selected workers, and corresponding kinds of "downgrading" in and for others (Barrientos, Gereffi, & Rossi, 2011; Kaplinsky, 2013; Ponte, 2008; Posthuma & Nathan, 2010). Therefore, the global high incidence of child labour can be explained in terms of factors such as the labour and capital market imperfections and expectations of the family. Thus, economic circumstances play a role in explaining why children engage in fishing activities in the coastal communities of Ghana (Zdunnek et al., 2008) and farming communities in rural Ghana (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a, 2018c).

Methods

Research design

The research was conducted through a qualitative exploratory research technique by using in-depth stakeholder and parental interviews, focus groups, and participant observation methods to collect the needed data for the research in Ghana from 1 April 2015 to 30 June 2015. Combining in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation

methods enhanced the richness of data (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Merging different methods enhances methodological integrity and ensures the epistemological underpinnings of method triangulation such as convergence and implications for methods validity. One advantage of qualitative exploratory research is that the use of open-ended and probing questions provides participants with the opportunity to respond in their own words, particularly if there is limited information on the subject (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Therefore, a semi-structured interview schedule was used to get information in the participants' own words, to produce an account of conditions, and to provide detailed information.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders from government agencies, departments, and non-governmental organisations such as the Labour Department; The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ); The International Child Resource Institute (ICRI); and The Department of Social Welfare. Five stakeholders in each of the two areas under investigation participated. One focus group discussion with 15 parents whose children were engaged in child labour and parents whose children were not engaged in child labour in each area under investigation. Additionally, a total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants whose children were engaged and participants whose children were not engaged in child labour. Finally, participant observations were carried out to explore children's natural working environment and to contextualise the empirical findings, and to help explain the issue. A total of 10 participant observations were conducted and the researcher additionally interviewed 10 parents (5 parents in each area under investigation) who were members of the participant observation group to seek clarifications on why certain things were done in a particular way.

First, the rural area under study comprised these farming communities: Ankaase, Anwiankwanta, and Kensere, which are all in the Asante Bekwai Municipality. The populations of these communities are in Ankaase (20,451), Anwiankwanta (29,748), and Kensere (15,637) (GSS, 2012). Second, the urban area under investigation covered these fishing communities: Jamestown, Korle Gonno, and Chorkor, which are all in the Accra Metropolis. The populations of these communities are in Jamestown (16,221), Korle Gonno (27,826), and Chorkor (23,853) (GSS, 2012). Sixty participants were recruited, some whose children were involved in child labour and some whose children were not. Purposive sampling was applied for selecting all the participants deliberately identified to offer specific information about the study population. The inclusion criterion for choosing participants for this study was being either a parent or a stakeholder in child welfare with expert knowledge.

Data generation activities and data analysis

The focus groups' interview schedule contained 13 questions. Additionally, the parental interview schedule comprised 14 questions; stakeholders' interview schedule was made up of 20 questions; participants' observation interview schedule comprised 12 questions; and each interview lasted between 30 and 90 min. A number of questions differ for different qualitative exploratory approaches because certain participants, such as the stakeholders, were asked additional technical questions in view of their expertise and

qualification in the field. Open-ended questions were asked to get participants' perceptions. Examples of questions asked were:

(1) Why do you engage your children in work?
(2) Can you explain your understanding of child labour?
(3) Does the work you engage your children in, constitute child labour?
(4) Do you think your local culture has implications for engaging children in work?
(5) What does your culture teach you about engaging children in work?
(6) What value do you place on the cultural meaning of engaging children in work?

The framework approach was applied in the analysis process. Data was analysed following a 5-phase process namely familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation (Spencer, Ritchie, & Ormston, 2014). The author went through familiarisation of the transcripts of the gathered data (parental and stakeholder interviews; focus group transcripts, observation or field notes) and understood the outline of the data gathered during the familiarisation process (Spencer et al., 2014). Thus, the author was immersed in the data and listened to audiotapes, studied the field notes or read the transcripts. The thematic framework was identified in the second phase, after acknowledging in the data set the developing themes. These developing themes might have emerged from a priori themes. Nevertheless, the author permitted the data to lead the themes at this phase and utilised the notes that were taken during the familiarisation phase. The major themes that the participants had articulated that constitute the foundation of the thematic framework were applied for filtering and classifying the data (Spencer et al., 2014). The author identified parts of the data that match a theme during the indexing phase. This process is applied to all the textual data that has been gathered (transcripts of parental and stakeholder interviews, focus group transcripts, observation or field notes). The author used numerical system for indexing the references and annotated them in the margin beside the text (Spencer et al., 2014). In the fourth stage known as charting, the author indexed the precise data set in the previous stage, and arranged in charts of the themes. Thus, the data was taken from its original textual context and put it in charts that entailed the themes and sub-themes that the author drew during the thematic framework or from a priori study investigations or in the way that was viewed as the most effective way to report the study (Spencer et al., 2014). While the data set was removed from their context, the researcher acknowledged the data were evidently identified from the specific transcript it was taken. Furthermore, transcripts were in the same order in each chart for clarity (Spencer et al., 2014). Using NVIVO, analysis of the major features as placed in the charts during the mapping and interpretation was the final stage. The analysis offered a schematic diagram of the event which guided me in my interpretation of the data set.

Trustworthiness

In view of the fact that the author is the major instrument of data collection and analysis, the author's background, qualifications, experience, and credibility are critical in this qualitative research (Eisner, 2017). Therefore, the author's competence and

interviewing skills and capability became the basis of ensuring trustworthiness of the data collected and analysed. The author's interviewing technique evolved during the data gathering as he engaged with participants and refined his approach. Additionally, the author improved interviewer reliability by implementing two pilot interviews to gather experience and the relevant skills. The author utilised a tape recorder to record all interviews, consequently, improving trustworthiness. Furthermore, the author audited the study, explaining each stage of the study process, amplifying and justifying what was done. The author addressed issues of bias by ensuring he took a neutral stance, bracketing out his own views throughout the data collection process. Subsequently, the author checked and referred the data and the tentative interpretations to the study participants to confirm their credibility and authenticity at the end of the data analysis. Largely, the author's results were complementary as well as supplementary to one another. Data were triangulated by employing varied sources (e.g. interviews, focus group data) and relevant literature which made the author confident that the nature of child labour in rural and urban Ghana as perceived by participants was factually conveyed as possible confirming the emerging findings and determining the extent to which saturation had been reached (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee to undertake focus group discussions and key informant interviews, and to observe and interact with participants while they worked with their children in the farming and fishing areas. In abiding by the principles of the University Ethics Committee, cultural differences was respected and the rights of children were protected before, during, and after the study. Participants were requested to sign consent forms and the author provided participant information statements to them before undertaking participatory work with their children. All steps taken by the author before, during, and after the research followed ethical standards.

Results

In this section, an analysis of establishing parental perceptions of the nature of child labour in rural and urban Ghana is presented.

Rural areas—cultural/socialisation perspective

Many parents suggested that the nature of child labour in their area is a cultural necessity. Children follow their parents to the farms because they feel a sense of responsibility to work and not because they are coerced. In some cases, the labour they provide also makes a relatively small difference to the parent's productivity. As one parent said:

> I don't think the total elimination of child labour in this community will affect my output as a person because my children don't add much to my total output.

However, parents in the rural area under study would resist fiercely the complete elimination of the practice. Participants observed that in many of the villages in the area under study, children attend school 2 days in a week and go to the farm 3 days in a week. The Registrar of CHRAJ said:

> Most parents are farmers in these rural communities, and very often they want their children to help them on the farms because they want to socialise their children to take over from them. However, this cultural practice is sometimes abused by some parents. Some parents engage their children in work in times that those children are supposed to be school. Children support their parents on the farms to perform tasks such as weeding, planting of seedling and burning unwanted woods in the farm. Many boys work for 8 hours on the average in a day.

Some peasant farmers in the communities under study are indifferent about the elimination of child labour practice because they do not have adequate land size to engage all their children in farming activities. It has therefore become necessary for some parents to put their children into school. A focus group participant explained:

> The labour input of our children is insignificant. Few kids are involved in full time child labour. I think more children are in school.

The above assertion in the focus group discussion indicates that many children combine schooling with farming activities.

Rural areas—scope of work

In the rural area, many participants suggested that children undertake different agricultural activities in the farm. Director of CHRAJ suggested that:

> Some children are taken to the farm to dig the ground for planting which for me I consider it to be hazardous work. Some parents also allow their children to work in the farm where they encounter dangerous chemicals and dangerous tools, I think they are all hazardous work. Further, some children go to the farm and help their parents and after that go back to school. Other children close from school and go back to the farm to help the parents on the farm. Even though, the child does not spend all his/her time on farm work, the number of hours spent on farm work is not accepted. Children who also spend more than 8 hours on the farm helping their parents during weekends is not accepted.

Participants suggested that although many parents engage their children in work as a cultural necessity, they are aware that working children get cutlass wounds on the farms. Some of the tasks are very hard and cannot meet the socialisation appeal. A Labour Officer said:

> In fact, some children carry heavy loads and work for more than 8 hours in a day and when they come home, they also engage in domestic work such as sweeping, washing and cleaning the house. I view this as abuse of the socialisation appeal for children to work. These children encounter hazardous chemicals while working. Other children carry heavy load on their head.

Most stakeholders agreed that carrying heavy loads by children on their heads constitute an abuse of the socialisation appeal for children to work. Children are required to work for their parents to enable them to cultivate big farms in the communities. Some participants in the focus group indicated that parents who do not engage their children in farming are normally the rich farmers because they can hire the services of labourers

to work for them. Some participants indicated that some schools in the villages use the children to work on the school farms. A stakeholder pointed out that some headmasters sell the services of school children to rich farmers who can pay for their services even though the practice has been banned by the government. Children engage in tasks such as clearing of the land with machete, burning the waste, planting seedlings and carrying firewood from the farm to the house. Many children work on the average 8 h on Saturdays which is farming day in the communities under study. A parent said:

> I've heard most parents saying that children's engagement in farm work is just for socialisation process. Are those parents going to do the work of the children if their children are removed from the farms?

Further, some participants pointed out that many children in Kensesre weave cloth to get money to go to school because if they do not weave cloth, they will not get money to go to school. A parent said:

> I have been in this community long enough to know that many farmers want their children to be socialised and take over from them and therefore they won't agree to total elimination of child labour.

Therefore, child labour will persist in the area under investigation for a long time in view of the cultural necessity. Most participants observed that more boys are heavily involved in farm work in the community under study than girls. Boys help to increase output and family income in the community and therefore many parents become very disappointed if they give birth to girls. Participants suggested that many parents use their boys to do farm work, hence, parents derive some profits/gains from their children in terms of increased farm output.

Urban areas—economic perspective

A large proportion of focus group participants in urban areas suggested that child labour in the area under investigation is economic necessity. Some parents suggested that they could not carry out fishing without the support of their children. A parent said:

> Fishing is a very difficult task and parents need more labour to be able to carry out the task. In my view, government should allow children to support their parents and supplement household income.

Some stakeholders also suggested that the access to cheap, untrained child labour does not motivate parents to invest in machinery and more advanced technological procedures. A Director of Social Welfare Department explained:

> Parents get cheap labour from their children, so they're not interested in investing in technology. Many parents explain that it's quite expensive to mechanise their operations and therefore will want to depend on the services of their children.

Other parents also engage their children in fishing because they genuinely do not have the money to hire the services of adult labourers. A Coordinator of The International Child Resource Institute said:

> Some parents can get free labour from children to help them carry out their fishing task, so this situation promotes WFCL here.

This position was echoed by a parent:

> *Looking at the low income we get from our fishing business, how can we hire only adult labourers? We don't get enough catch because of the unethical mode of fishing by the Chinese using huge vessels. We hire some adults and complement it with our own children. Is that also a problem for anybody?*

Stakeholders suggested that there must be certain structures in place before thinking of eliminating child labour completely. Some deprived parents need the support of their children to make ends meet. A headmaster of a school said:

> *I believe the total elimination of child labour will affect productivity in this community. The parents will even accuse the school authorities of being the cause of their deprivation.*

Some stakeholders suggested that one way of dealing with the economic impact of abolishing child labour within families would be for the government to pursue policies that facilitate the mechanisation of the fishing industry. This would make fishing a less labour-intensive activity and reduce the need for child labour which sometimes leads to WFCL. A parent who is a fisherman said:

> *For me, I think if the government helps us (fishermen) to use technology in our work, WFCL in this part of the country will reduce. I think technology can do the work of children.*

Some stakeholders pointed to how mechanisation was applied during the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and the United States to eliminate child labour. However, child labour also has a cultural connotation. Moreover, many participants believe that the total elimination of children from fishing will affect the local economy. A focus group participant suggested:

> *Our family businesses will collapse if we take our children out of fishing. It is part of our culture for children to get deeply involved in what we (parents) do.*

Some adults can intimidate children in bargaining for their services. However, those adults lose sight of the fact that a well-developed adult can contribute more than a child. It is also common for children in Ghana to be raised by family members or other adults who are not their biological parents, and a number of participants suggested that children in these situations were particularly vulnerable. Thus, many children living with relatives other than their biological parents are especially likely to be involved in child labour and suffer other forms of abuse. As one said:

> *The kind of treatment some children go through in their homes portrays the insensibilities of their guardians. It is also an indication that such children aren't living with their biological parents.*

After returning home from fishing, many are then expected to perform difficult household tasks before going to bed. The perception that such treatment is harsh was reinforced by a focus group participant who said:

> *It's known in this community that most of the children who go through various forms of abuses don't live with their biological parents.*

Foster care is under-regulated in Ghana, and this renders children whose biological parents are not available especially exposed to child labour. There are many teenage mothers in this community who are working hard to look after their kids. Some

participants indicated that teenage mothers working hard in the community are helping to increase productivity. According to some stakeholders, nobody knows who impregnated some of these teenage mothers who are loitering around and selling on the streets. A participant suggested that some of these teenage mothers, bear nicknames such as "area mama", "area queen", "area capo" and they smoke marijuana with impunity.

Urban areas—scope of work

Many participants in the urban area suggested that they engage children in economic activities for economic reasons. Director of CHRAJ said:

> Children are put on the streets to sell and hawking on the streets makes some of the children unhappy.

The Director of CHRAJ highlighted that the working conditions of some of these children are harmful and they are not conducive for the working children. Many children do not use protective gears exposing them to hazards on the high seas.

> Some parents allow children to punch above their weight which means they are working beyond their capacity and you should also know that some of the tasks are very hard that children shouldn't be allowed to perform. Such children sometimes, wake up and break down unable to do anything because they got exhausted the previous day.

Participants suggested that children go to school already exhausted due to supporting their parents in this hard fishing work. In such situations, whatever is being taught in the classroom children cannot concentrate and retain it. Therefore, at the end of the academic year, their performance becomes very unsatisfactory. A Labour Officer said:

> When there is a boom in fishing most of the children move into the fishing harbour for work. Some of the teachers also vacate their posts and go to the fishing harbour to buy fish when there is a high catch because prices are good, and they can buy from some of their students at a cheaper price. Parents of some of these children are fishermen who come to the fishing area to work. Many of these children are between 13–15 years and I believe going to sea is supposed to be adults' task. Some children involved in major fishing work such as carrying the fish loads from the canoes to the market area rather than light work such as mending fishing nets which is supposed to provide with work ethics. The involvement of the children in fishing significantly increase productivity. However, I believe fishing can still go on without the involvement of these children. Some of the children also view fishing activities as a hobby.

Some stakeholders believed there is widespread child labour in the area under investigation. For example, one stakeholder indicated that children as young as 7 years contribute to productivity in the area. Another parent observed that there are many children who are 5–8 years selling around who were sent by their parents to go and sell. Additionally, some stakeholders indicated that many children follow their parents to pursue their economic activities at the expense of their education. Many participants believed that if children engaged in child labour are withdrawn from the productive sector, it is going to affect productivity in the area. The Coordinator of ICR explained:

> Some children go around in search of portable water in these communities. Some children trip and fall when going to fetch water and they get injured. Some children get pains with their spine because of the weight of the water Children from 5 years upwards accompany their

parents to go and fetch water that the children carry on their heads. Children roam in the community sometimes for many hours searching for water. Some of the children also who are in school sleep in class; there are other physical and emotional reactions arising out of child labour. This could affect the health, education and the development of the child. Some of these things also affect the rest hours of children and class activities. In some cases, the parents do not see it as child labour but, this is a form of child labour which needs awareness creation and sensitisation. The government needs to make water available to the doorsteps of the community so that children will not be used as a source of labour for fetching water for parents. In some households, until the child finishes washing the dishes, the child is not going to bed.

In most Ghanaian cultures, it is believed that a woman will get married and go and serve a man. Therefore, the focus of parents is on grooming girls to be responsible wives when it comes to domestic tasks. On the other hand, boys are groomed to be leaders of their family and it is believed that a lady will one day join men in their marital home and manage the home for him. The Coordinator of ICRI indicated that:

I want to use my personal experience as an example. I was the only girl amongst seven boys, so I needed to be familiar with the demands of marriage life as is required of all girls. When I was living with my siblings, I used to wash, clean and sweep for them because I was being prepared for future life. The role of a girl in the household is to provide services to the boys.

Many children in these communities go to the fishing landing sites when they wake up in the morning so that they can go to sea and earn some money. Some fishermen engage these children in their fishing activities just because their parents cannot care for them. Many participants in the focus group suggested that taking children to sea by adult fishermen in the communities under study is widespread. A parent said:

Some children spend all week going to fishing and for me I think they'll become a burden onto our society. It is dangerous to raise up children in this community since they're likely to join one of the violent gangs in the community. Some of the children engage in robbery at night and child labour in the morning, so you'll see them sharing their booties after the day's work.

Many participants in the focus groups indicated that the landing site for the fishermen in the area under study is like a "no man's land" and therefore children do whatever they want with impunity and this problem is widespread in the fishing community. Further, participants in the focus group observed that because there is limited mechanisation in fishing, it makes the activity difficult therefore girls have been traditionally kept out of the work. Fishing has traditionally been the preserve of boys who engage in the physical fishing activities such as pulling the fishing net from the sea which is a difficult work. A participant pointed out that if matured men suffer pains in their bodies as a result of carrying out fishing work then one should imagine what children will go through.

Discussion

The differences in characteristics of rural and urban social structures are the reasons for the differences in child labour in terms of its nature in rural and urban areas even though child labour is widespread in both areas under study. Thus, rural and urban areas differ in the dimensions of social structure which in turn influence the differences in child labour's nature in both areas under study.

Cultural dimension

The results of the study show that an overwhelming proportion of parents in rural areas indicated that child labour in rural communities is for cultural reasons. In the rural setting, cultural elements are the dominant necessities for child labour since the rural area is a form of social group organised according to historically established norms, of households tied to the land (Lefebvre, 1970). There is a strong bond in the rural area driven by common rules and allocate definite category of their individuals to supervise the attainment of the common goals. Furthermore, there is greater homogeneity and stability in the rural area with less formal procedure in their system of operation (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018b; Searles, 2018). Again, there is consistency in rules and ideals, harmony and social agreement and sense of belonging in an rural area driven by a cohesive social system (Crutchfield, Geerken, & Gove, 1982).

Within the Ghanaian culture, it is an obligation of the young to those who ultimately nurtured them, and prepares children for their future social roles (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018c; Langness, 1981). Further, Delap (2001) suggests that the cultural necessity of avoiding inactivity is critical in the engagement of children in work. Cultural discussions have enriched the academic and policy-based deliberations with critical evidence indicating that the engagements of children in work cannot be solely viewed as exploitation, and further suggesting that there is usually fluidity in defining the concept of exploitation itself. However, in many times, there is no acknowledgement of work performed by children as young as 5, 6 or 7 years old in rural Ghana that are permitted or encouraged for reasons of socialisation with its attendant benefits in the local contexts. This clearly suggests that child labour is a universal and legal concept with strong ethical undertones rather than an objective condition explained by different dynamics. Bourdillon (2006) contends that what is at the core of the child labour question is not about outlawing the practice because there are convincing reasons to preserve some forms of work by children. However, the core question should dwell on finding ways of improving the conditions of children by ensuring that their work is acknowledged as decent work and remunerated in social and material terms at all levels. There is the need to analytically focus attention on the changing forms and interactions of engagement of children in work and the greater varied viewpoints on the way its implications express cultural, political and economic alterations and unearth social disparities. Therefore, Kassouf, Dorman, and Almeida (2005) found that children's engagement in child labour is not necessarily intended only to increase productivity but to also provide greater opportunities for personal development and social inclusion which supports the assertions of focus groups, stakeholder and parental interviews.

Economic dimension

Furthermore, the results of the analysis in the urban areas presents clear and consistent evidence that that child labour is economic necessity. In urban Ghana, economic necessities evidently have a part to play in parental choices about the engagement of children in work. Social ecology links the characteristics of urban social structure such as poverty, income inequality, family structure, or ethnic make-up as the cause of child labour in the urban area (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018b). There is interaction between both meagre

family incomes and high percentages of child income creation activities and domestic work. In times of need, many households depend on children's income-creating and spending minimisation operations to survive. Additionally, stable income may influence income-creating activities of children. In households where parents cannot support family income, the inability to regard child labour as economic necessity can result in undesirable decreases in family incomes (Delap, 2001). In the urban area, there is greater heterogeneity and diversity in the ethnic make-up. Moreover, population heterogeneity minimises traits and experiences, connect negatively with social cohesion and informal ways of social control (Angell, 1974). Empirical evidence indicates that the percentage of poor population dwelling in urban areas in Ghana keeps growing at an increasing level owing to urbanisation (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018b). Urbanisation is associated with greater degrees of poverty, higher bureaucratisation, and social control that is formal in approach (Myers & Talarico, 2012). Poverty has a huge impact on the level of child labour and community response. There is a pattern in the urban area towards growing proportion of mother-only headed families (Amato & Zuo, 1992). Further, Kamerman (1984) observes an interaction between a growing percentage of female-headed households with children and relatively high incidence of poverty in these households. Nonetheless, the relationship between child labour and poverty is multifaceted and may be a result of relative poverty and not only low income (Bailey, 1984). Movement to the urban area disrupts social cohesion (Feld, 1991). The urban area is noted for less "mechanical solidarity" and it is not much cohesive and organised as compared to the rural area (Robison & Crenshaw, 2002). Participants reported that child labour constitutes a very important component of the local urban economy, particularly in the fishing sector. Participants in the parental interviews and focus groups suggested that fishing, which is the predominant occupation in urban areas, is a very difficult task. Consequently, parents need more involvement from children to increase productivity and supplement family income. Therefore, the nature of child labour in urban areas is for economic reasons since children work to support family income and child labour also constitute a significant component of the workforce.

Hazan and Berdugo (2002), in their study, found adverse effect of low incomes of families and their dependents, low education and high fertility rate in families that were engaged in child labour. As child labourers are unskilled, the scarce supply of skilled labour would keep the wage levels high at the same time. Different studies relating to the nature of child labour have revealed that child labour cannot be viewed as solely cultural, but rather an economic investment capable of producing substantial advantages, both economic and social, to the nations of the region (ILO, 2015). Undoubtedly, economic necessities could practically surpass cultural benefits in the initial years of child labour analysis. However, the degree of benefits is encouraging for countries because the benefits resulting from the planned investments vastly outweigh the costs to the government and households. Reap flow of benefits and upsurge in revenue for each country in the long run could be promoted by a public policy enhancing human capital investment in the child. Children and adolescents who do not engage in child labour as they grow up will be healthier and would be better able to be employed in decent work (ILO, 2015). Hence, the evidence suggests that child labour exacerbates income disparity in the long-term. In turn, lower income is directly associated with a lower degree of social

development of children. Clearly, child labour has mixed effects on income inequality. Ward (2017) finds that child labour offers deprived households the income they require for survival in the short-term. In view of this, child labour reduces income inequality by increasing the income of those at the bottom end of the distribution. On the other hand, Chaudhuri and Dwibedi (2016) noted that child labour increases the supply of unskilled labour and decreases the wage level of unskilled adults. The disparity in income distribution is widened through this phenomenon.

The study findings suggest that access to inexpensive, unskilled child labour also discourages parents from investing in machinery and advancing in technological procedures. Hartwell (2017) likewise argues that in the long term, child labour curtails technical know-how, labour output and productivity growth. Thus, child labour has the potential to subdue long-term development by decelerating technological advancement. Productive activities occur in small units with simple technologies and minimal capital. This suggests that the introduction of labour-saving technologies would adversely impact market openings for working children. This does not necessarily mean that successful elimination of working children from productive and economic activities by increasing the labour cost would result in increased investment, technological improvements and long-term growth. The reason is that a significant number of the parents who depend on child labour for productive activities are deprived and illiterate. This group of parents utilise the services of children to survive in the relatively low-turnover but extremely competitive farming sector. Working children grow family income considerably and increase the probability of family survival. In view of this situation, family survival hinges on child labour regardless of the terms of engagement and the nature of tasks assigned to children in the local economy. Children engaged in unpaid family work support family income and survival. This category of children supports their parents in paid employment as well as self-employment activities. In this case, children's efforts are critical to grow family output and revenue. Children's support is required to meet the necessary family needs through informal work in the urban area. Therefore, any attempt to eliminate child labour should not lose sight of the fact that incomes of affected families would dwindle, forcing them below the survival level.

Understanding the cultural-economic Dichotomy

There is the need to be aware of the complexity of the relative influence of economic undertones in the urban area and cultural undercurrents in rural area in understanding the nature of child labour in rural and urban Ghana. When attempting to gain a greater insight into the cultural necessities of work, it is crucial to examine both age and gender, and the interaction between these two elements. On the other hand, the economic necessities of labour deployment in urban area involve both regularity and degrees of income flows (Delap, 2001). Additionally, it is significant to explain that both area and country-specific values and norms may mould parental and children's behaviour in Ghana. Apart from attempting to explain this complexity, the cultural and economic necessities of child labour cannot be considered in isolation, since there is usually interaction between the two necessities. For instance, the economic necessity of child labour in mother-only families can be driven by income insecurity of working females in urban Ghana. In turn, the income insecurity can be driven by the cultural constraint of

women to particular sectors of economic operation (Delap, 2001). As with many choices about family work placement, parental choices about the engagement of children in work are complex and cannot be illuminated by theories hinged on single-causal element.

Conclusion and recommendations

Understanding the economic elements such as poverty, low household incomes and high rates of child income generation activities in urban area and socio-cultural factors namely development of children's skills, social interactions, and learning of work ethic in rural areas drive child labour in urban and rural Ghana respectively and other parts of the developing world in general. It is therefore necessary to design and execute the most suitable mechanisms for intervention and prevention. Child welfare professionals need to critically examine possible contentious areas of child rearing among different parents. Ghanaian parents may have parenting styles quite different from those of Western societies owing to factors such as history, economic system, culture, religion and the geography in which they grew up. Thus, professionals must move beyond just applying Western understanding of child labour and rather, design parenting frameworks that fit into the local culture.

There are critical issues that are essential for improving children's welfare. There is a need for parents to support child welfare officers to determine the kind of behaviours that is required from them. Applying Western assumptions of acculturation to assess Ghanaian parents may not provide professionals with the required standards. Professionals need to assess reports by considering varying cultural circumstances. Additionally, child welfare professionals need to educate parents from rural and urban Ghana about the realities of child labour and existing services for families.

The government should institute early intervention that promotes healthy growth and development not only of the individual child but for the entire community. Local communities should be empowered economically with soft loans to enable them to hire the services of mature adults to expand their farming and fishing businesses. A community empowerment model should support parents to provide the best care for their children, setting up and encouraging pre-school enrolment (Bell, 2005).

Additionally, any community empowerment should include local teacher training by developing the teachers to use appropriate teaching and learning procedures to train children (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Such regular workshops should promote cultural change, children taking turns and being helpful to parents, learning to share and care, paying attention to psycho-social skills development of children, doing light work that is child-friendly and not necessarily making economic gains from the child. The central and local governments need to make water available to communities so that children would not be used as a source of labour for fetching water for parents. The community empowerment programme should include follow-ups to find out what goes on in the homes (Howard & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). The programme should also involve parent-teacher workshops where parents and teachers would learn to set up a conducive environment and activity corner in their homes where the children can explore. This would help parents develop an appropriate and stimulating environment for children.

Limitations and directions for future research

One of the limitations of this study was translating participants' views from local languages into English in a way that adequately expresses their views. Translation inevitably involves the translator's own interpretation of what has been said. The author attempted to decrease the challenge of self-reporting by using a consent form and providing explanations at the start of the study. The use of propositions, for example, was a way of minimising emotional language and convincing the reader of the investigator's disconnection from the analysis. There is also a standardisation of interview schedule, the methods, theory, findings, and conclusion format that is planned to reduce rhetorical excess (Eisner, 2017). Scientific language apparently reduced the multiple meaning from words in the interest of precision. This is the reason why common terms were assigned "technical meanings" for scientific purposes.

Future research should examine and explain the contexts that drive the engagement of children in work and the dynamics that can make child work evolve into exploitation. There are few studies that analyse the multifaceted pathways in which exploitation happens and emphasise the significance of cultural context, and the worth of a political economic dimension in unearthing and understanding the nature and scope of exploitation. Future research should be conducted using parents from an increased number of communities in rural and urban Ghana who vary in education, social status, history and culture rather than a few communities. Future research should concentrate on expanding the sampling frame to include a cohort of children. Utilising a sample size that cuts across different cohorts such as rich families, middle class families and poor families is significant. Perceptions of children should also be explored when examining whether parents consider child labour to be an abuse of the rights of the child.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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