‘Changing expectations of children and childhood in four developing countries: challenges for intergenerational relations’

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I: YOUNG LIVES STUDY - METHODOLOGY

II: GLOBAL POLICY DISCOURSE

III: EVIDENCE FROM THE RESEARCH

IV: SOME PERVERSE EFFECTS OF POLICY
• Inter/multi-disciplinary, mixed methods, comparative, panel study of a dual birth cohort which is researching:
  - the causes & consequences of childhood poverty
  - providing evidence for policy

• Following roughly 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru, Vietnam, over 15 years.

• Two cohorts in each country:
  - 2,000 children born in 2000-01
  - 1,000 children born in 1994-95

• Pro-poor sample; 80 sites across 4 countries selected to reflect country diversity, rural-urban, livelihoods, ethnicity etc.; roughly equal numbers of boys and girls - selected randomly
METHODS

- **5 survey rounds** - full sample of children, caregivers, and selected siblings and community representatives:
  - Community, household and child questionnaires
  - Child questionnaires integrated with measures to assess physical growth, cognition, school performance, psychosocial well-being etc.

- **4 rounds of qualitative research** - sub-sample of around 200 children (100 from each cohort), caregivers and peers:
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Drawing (e.g. community mapping, life-course, ‘draw-and-tell’)
  - Writing (daily activity diary)
  - Photo elicitation.

- **Nested school surveys** - schools attended by sub-sample of children
  - Mixed methods - structured observations, interviews, tests
  - Data on the school, principal, class, teacher and pupils.
CONCEPTUALISATION AND ANALYSIS

• Poverty duration and dynamics: causal relations and pathways, as well as children’s outcomes as they vary over time

• Multidimensional view of poverty: (caregiver background, consumption, expenditure and assets, livelihood stability, infrastructure and services)

• Holistic view of child development: encompassing diverse developmental domains & emphasising synergies between domains

• Children’s experiences and perspectives: responsibilities, time use, friendships, sources of support, aspirations for the future, etc.

• Lines of enquiry:
  - Life-course analysis: what shapes children’s development and well-being at which ages
  - What inequality means for children: implications of disparities in risk exposure and deprivation by social group and locality
  - The changing influences in children’s lives: family/household adversity, livelihoods, access to services, infrastructure, changing norms, values and practices etc.
The CRC is the most influential formulation of the global protective care regime for children; the bedrock upon which virtually all international child-focused initiatives build.

- ‘Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community...’

- ‘Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness love and understanding’

- The child’s right to be cared for by his or her parents is enshrined in Article 7
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

- Children are inherently vulnerable
- Unique psychological and emotional attachments are laid down through the mother-infant bond
- Children are household dependents, and parental proximity/secure, nucleated, family structures are essential to children’s wellbeing and development
- Children’s departure from the parental home, an involuntary act that stems from adult negligence, ‘poverty, harmful social practices, or the breakdown of societal values’ (Heissler 2013)
- By leaving the protective domestic sphere, crucial familial ties are severed and children become locked into exploitative relations with strangers
- Hence, independent child migration is conflated with trafficking - (ILO: ‘a global problem’ that ‘strips children of their childhood’)
- This rhetoric is intuitive rather than evidential
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY: HARMFUL ‘TRADITIONAL’ PRACTICES

• Strong pressure on developing countries to reform ‘detrimental’ parenting practices & outlaw specific customs involving children:
  - early female marriage, female circumcision, child work, child trafficking, etc.

• African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) commits governments to:
  ‘...take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child’

• The National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia has determined that over 140 local customs fall within this category:
  - e.g. female circumcision is proscribed in law - a risk to health and a violation of girls’ rights - punishment involves fines and imprisonment of parents
    (Boyden et al 2012)
Modern economies require schooled, not working, childhoods:

- An international push for universal access, via CRC Article 28: (right to education), Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- Dramatic expansion of education systems over the past few decades;
- Primary school participation stands at near universal level in many countries, including Young Lives countries;
- Educational advancement appears centre-stage among potential policy-levers for poverty-reduction and national economic growth;
- Expectations and experiences of schooling are a key reference point for children’s well-being and development, with raised educational aspirations linked strongly to ambitions for future livelihoods.
Article 31: Responsibility of the Child:

- Every child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society, the State and other legally recognized communities ... The child, subject to his age and ability, and such limitations as may be contained in the present Charter, shall have the duty;

  (a) to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need.
LOCAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- Childhood is envisioned, structured and experienced in divergent ways across the globe.
- Children often assume important reproductive and productive roles well before reaching the globalised chronological threshold for adulthood.
- Therefore child protection involves:
  - Interdependence of children and adults
  - Spatially dispersed family structures with close familial ties across households
  - Kinship care is central to child protection.
• Hard work is an indicator of a ‘good child’ and central to children’s social integration

• “Ladder of life”: children indicate their current and future positions on a continuum from the best to the worst possible life. In Ethiopia “education” and “work harder” = prime reasons for moving up the ladder and poor health, for moving down, especially among poorest children.

• Seife (Aksum, Ethiopia) has epilepsy and his father is very ill. He gathers stones, feeds the cattle and does household chores. He claimed, “I don’t even eat till my cattle eat their food,” and resents being made to go to school.

  Seife: They [officials] told me to go to school because I’m old enough. They insisted I go to school, so I did.

  Interviewer: But you didn’t want to?

  Seife: No, I didn’t want to go.

  Interviewer: Why not?

  Seife: Both my father and mother are getting old - nobody helps them with their work except me.
CHILD PROTECTION AND INTERDEPENDENCE OF HOUSEHOLDS

- Kinship care and non-parental residence is normative and reflects/reinforces ties across extended families;
  - Kebegna, (Oromiya, Ethiopia) at age 6 was given into the care of a widowed aunt when her son left home to join the military. He assumed his aunt’s dead husband’s name and in return for food and lodging and support for schooling, herded her cattle, fetched water and firewood and cleaned the floor.

- Children relocate because of orphanhood, divorce, for work, their care, schooling and wider learning, as well as to provide labour and/or social assistance in host households.

- Child relocation is fundamental to social reproduction and not a sign of family rupture or dysfunction.

- Child development outcomes of kinship care and relocation: ‘the diffusion of affect’ and ‘attachment to community’ (Mann 2001).
THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

- Enrolment near universal (except in Ethiopia)
- Rural life is strongly associated with suffering and hardship and schooling is the escape: Harika (India):
  ‘You get better jobs if you study and you have a better life and can marry an educated husband. If your husband is in agriculture, you have to go to the fields and work. If he is educated, you can be happy. We see our parents working and we feel that we do not want to be like them. They work in the fields and work hard every day.

- Schooling is the prime vector for collective social mobility: Fanus (Ethiopia): ‘I have to learn, be in a better position and improve my family’s life.’ She hopes to become a doctor and has moved to a nearby town, to live in rented accommodation with her sister, to continue her schooling.

- Caregivers struggle to give their children the best chances in education: Esmeralda’s mother (Peru) works hard and had to sell her cows to pay for her children’s education (husband drinks). She said: ‘I feel proud mami, I suffer... I brought my children into this world, I will ensure they study’
SOME PERVERSE EFFECTS OF POLICY
Classes in children’s rights in Ethiopian schools - rights concept has now entered popular discourse

A growing tension between children’s individual rights and their collective familial responsibilities - e.g. following ban on early female marriage and circumcision

By tradition:

- **early arranged marriages** secure the family’s heritage and a girl’s future - protecting her from abduction, STIs, pregnancy outside wedlock and rejection by family

- **female circumcision** is a crucial marker of femininity and domestic competence - fundamental to adult female roles and to the transition to adulthood
The ban has triggered serious discord within families in Oromia.

Uncircumcised girls are labelled *lumbutam*, ‘a very harassing kind of term and a big insult. If one girl insults another girl saying that she is *lumbutam*, the insulted girl can easily feel embarrassed.’

Girls organize clandestine operations:
- ‘when girls are ready for marriage, they are more willing to carry out circumcision. … This is because of the fear of insult or bullying from others who have already undergone circumcision....girls are conducting not only illegal circumcision but they are also violating the traditional norms by carrying out circumcision at any time and under any circumstance. Most of the time circumcision [today] is conducted during the night time. This kind of secret practice is totally dangerous for the life of the girls.’

In situations where most girls and women are circumcised, ‘*not* to be circumcised may be the more traumatic condition’ (Boddy 1998: 86)
PERVERSE EFFECTS OF SCHOOLING

- The direct, indirect and opportunity costs can exacerbate family poverty

- Pupils cannot learn traditional life skills and may also get very little out of school. In Ethiopia 89.6% of the older children was still enrolled at age 15 to 16 years, but only 18% had completed primary education by then (Woldehanna et al. 2011).

- Schools marginalise uneducated parents. A mother from Peru said: ... there in the state school... I told him, ‘I haven’t studied, if I had studied I would look at his school books, everything...[but the teacher] would shout at me, so I was afraid to go to that school’

- Some children humiliate uneducated caregivers: ‘Yes sometimes [he’ll say], ‘Mum why don’t you help me? But anyway why are you going to go over my homework if you don’t understand anything, you should have studied something at least, and now you don’t know [anything]’

- School results in new ‘social risks’
  - for girls, increased mobility, fraternising with boys;
  - for boys, uncontrolled access to internet (a bad influence)
SOME DILEMMAS FOR CHILDREN

- Children’s familial contributions have instrumental value: fulfil immediate domestic requirements;
- Formal education has given their contributions great symbolic value: serving collective ambitions for the future;

Children struggle to meet competing demands - school failure leads to stigma, discrimination.
SELECTED SOURCES


