

PROFILE OF CHILD LABOUR IN KUMASI, GHANA

Ernestine A. Gyebi-Ofosu

B.A MSc Dip Diet Dip MCH
Department of Community Health, School of Medical Sciences
University of Science and Technology, Kumasi

ABSTRACT

Three hundred and twenty five children, aged 5 to 14 years, working in various occupations in Kumasi, Ghana, were interviewed to determine their work activities, income, family characteristics and schooling. About 95% of girls and 47% of boys were involved in trading. Other male work activities included carrying loads, shoe shining and various marginal apprenticeship work. All the children lived with an adult guardian, usually a parent or other relative who had employed them in 42% of cases. About 44% of the children worked for no cash payment, however, 18% of them earned more than 6 days minimum wage in Ghana. One-third of the children worked more than 7 hours per day and 82% worked between 5 and 7 hours per week. Sixty two per cent of the children were still attending school, 29% had stopped school.

Stopping school was significantly related to economic and social reasons. Education, health and social welfare professionals should be concerned about the educational and economic future of working children in urban areas in a developing country such as Ghana.

KEYWORDS

Child Labour, Kumasi, education

INTRODUCTION

Kumasi is the second largest city in Ghana with a population of about 488,991 (1984 census) and it is the capital of Ashanti Region. It is the centre for commerce, industry, education, administration and other services.

The people of Kumasi are Ashantis with their king, the Asantehene. Traditionally, the Asantehene exercises political and administrative control of the city and the indigenous people practise extended family system. With modernisation and Ghana's attainment of independence, however, the central government has taken over the political and administrative control of the city.

A lot of people have migrated from towns and villages into Kumasi for employment, trade or to learn skills. The residents in Kumasi live in their own houses or in rented rooms. Married couples either live together or separately and the extended family system is gradually giving way to nuclear family where the husband is the head of the family and the wife assists him in home management and rearing of their children. Usually, the couples are income earners and they leave home in the morning for work and ask their children of six years or more to go to school. The younger children may accompany the mother to her work site or are left in the care of a home attendant or a relative in the house.

In Kumasi a child can have formal education by attending a government primary school, a mission-primary school, a private enterprise school or Arabic school.

The government primary schools are tuition - free and staffed by trained and untrained teachers. Education officers from the inspectorate division of Ghana Education Service in Kumasi supervise the work of the teachers.

Some churches have set up primary schools which are popularly known as mission schools. Until quite recently, the mission schools were run by the churches, but now the Ghana government has a great influence in the affairs of these schools. Pupils in the mission schools enjoy the same rights and privileges as those in government schools.

Some individuals take part in educating the children in Kumasi by setting up their own schools and run them on commercial basis. Pupils in these private schools pay for tuition, books and other services. The proprietors employ and supervise teachers.

Some Moslems have special schools known as Arabic schools where reading and writing are taught in Arabic.

Children, as younger members of the family, are expected to be obedient to their parents, teachers and

older members in society. As a result of harsh economic conditions in the country some parents find it difficult to satisfy the basic needs of their children. These children do not spend much time with their parents at home since the parents work from morning to evening outside their home. The responsibility of child rearing tends to be shifted to teachers. Since teachers handle many children at a time, more often than not, the teachers do not give much attention to individual child's needs. As a result children tend to become frustrated both at home and school, and are, therefore, compelled to take to any means that can support them financially and satisfy their needs. Hence, they do all kinds of work to meet their needs.

The employment of children as labour is as old as the history of man. Children constitute a human resource for the family and the community when they undertake tasks which relieve adult members of chores and when their labours augment family food production and the generation of income. Child labour can, therefore, be seen as a means of developing skills and responsibilities in the young and also it is a means of exploiting the labour of young ones, who are under age according to labour laws and work specifications.

Ghana has a policy of universal compulsory fee-free primary education embracing the first ten years of schooling (5 - 14 years of age). Economic and demographic constraints have made it difficult for educational authorities to meet the requirement for school places and enforce compliance. A system of two class cycles has been introduced in the cities and big towns whereby some children attend morning classes only, while other children have afternoon classes only. The author has observed an increasing number of school - aged children working throughout the day in various kinds of jobs in the major towns and cities. The purpose of this study was to explore the socio-demographic profile of working children in Kumasi and to determine the effect their work life has on their schooling.

METHODS

The study population comprised children who were "persons under the apparent age of 15 years" (NLC Labour Decree 1967), (5) engaged in various types of labour in Kumasi.

In June 1986, outdoor markets, department and retail stores, food vending stand, chop-bars and restaurants, a railway station and home-based industries were visited throughout the city to identify working children. Children who were willing to be interviewed were asked closed and open-ended questions about their work activities, income, family situation and schooling. If

a relation of the child was present, he or she was also interviewed to supplement and verify the answers given by the child.

Data were analysed using the chi-square, student's t-test and Pearson's product moment correlation statistical tests with the level of significance set at P.05.

RESULTS

A total of 325 children were interviewed. Children who refused to respond did so because they thought the information was being collected for income tax purposes, because they felt that the questionnaire was an attempt to identify and detain truant children or because the questions were perceived to be waste of their time.

Table I presents the age-sex classification of the study population. The children ranged from 5 to 14 years of age with mean age of 11.7 years and median age of 12 years. There were 154 males (47.4%) and 171 (52.6%) females. Although girls were over represented in the youngest age group, there was no significant difference in the mean ages by sex.

WORK ACTIVITIES

The types of work activity engaged in by the children varied by sex. While 95.3% of the girls were involved in trading, only 48% of boys were engaged in trading (Fig.1). Other female work activities related mainly to food. The other activities of the boys included shoe shining, carrying of loads (head loads or with wheeled carriages), the hiring out of bicycles, and farming. Trading included the sale of foodstuffs, water and cooked foods mainly by girls; of processed foods, toiletries, sewing materials, and assorted goods by both sexes, and of fuel oil, newspapers and polythene bags mainly by boys.

Approximately half of the children had been working for less than 6 months with 62 per cent working for less than 1 year. Fourteen per cent (14%) had been in employment for more than 3 years (Table II)

Table III presents the number of hours worked per day by the children. 67.7 worked from 1 to 6 hours per day with an additional third working for 7 or more hours per day. 81.5 per cent of the children stated that they worked 5 to 7 days a week.

INCOME

One-fifth of the children were self-employed, 30.2

TABLE 1 : AGE AND SEX CLASSIFICATION OF STUDY POPULATION

AGE (YEARS)	M A L E S		F E M A L E S		T O T A L	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5 - 6	0	0.0	4	2.3	4	1.2
7 - 8	8	5.2	18	10.5	26	8.0
9 - 10	23	14.9	32	18.7	55	16.9
11 - 12	49	31.8	55	32.2	104	32.0
13 - 14	74	48.1	62	36.3	136	41.8
TOTAL	154	100.0	171	100.0	325	99.9

TABLE II : DURATION OF CHILDREN IN WORK ACTIVITY :

DURATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
< 6 MONTHS	167	51.4
6 - 11 MONTHS	33	10.2
1 - 2 YEARS	79	24.3
3 - 4 YEARS	37	11.4
> 4 YEARS	9	2.8
	325	100.1

TABLE III : NUMBER OF WORKING HOURS/DAY

No. OF HRS	FREQUENCY	%
< 1	2	0.62
1 - 2	16	4.92
3 - 4	121	37.23
5 - 6	81	24.92
7 - 8	38	11.69
> 9	67	20.62
TOTAL	324	100.00

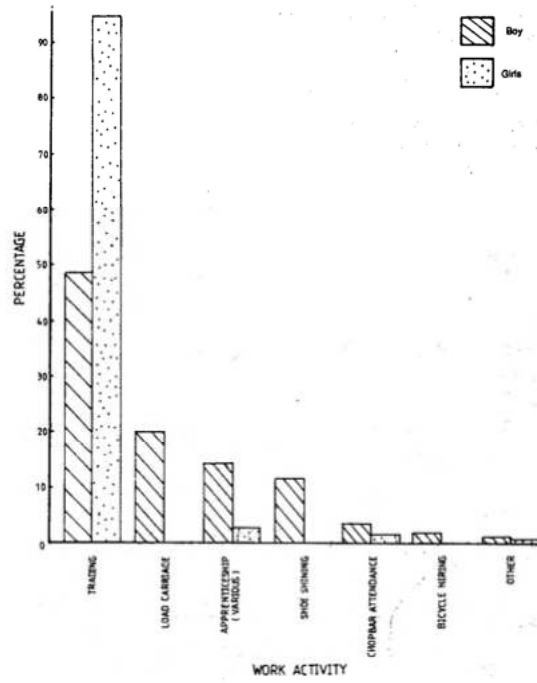


Figure 1 Work Activities of the Children

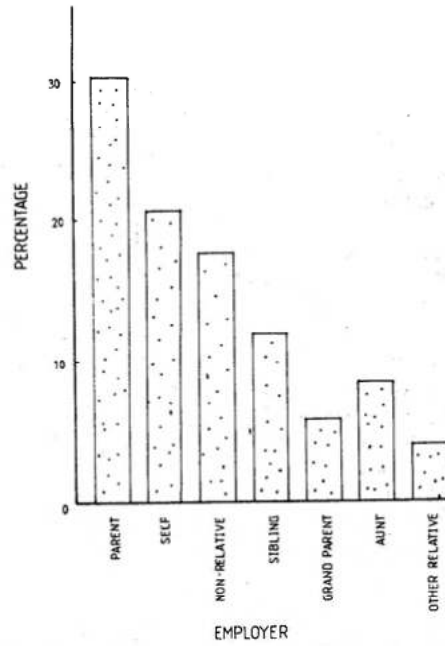


Figure 2 Type of Person Employing the children

per cent were employed by parents and 12.0 per cent were employed by siblings. Non-relatives employed less than one-fifth of the children (fig.2).

The cash income was used by 53.5 per cent of the children to meet their personal needs such as food, clothing or for savings. Only 2.8 per cent gave their income to relatives (for keeping or use).

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

The Majority of the children were of Akan origin (82.8%), the main ethnic group resident in the Ashanti region. 9.5 per cent were from the Upper and Northern regions and 5.9 per cent were non-Ghanaians. All the children in the study lived with an older guardian; 60% with a relative and the remaining 40.0% lived with a non-relative.

In 92.0% of cases both parents were alive, 5.2% of the fathers and 2.5% of the mothers had died. Only one child had lost both parents. In 45.0% of cases, the parents were living together.

The majority of the children had from two to five siblings (60.0%), 26.0% had from six to nine siblings and 4.0% had ten or more. In 2 children, the number of siblings were unknown.

Mothers of these children were either traders (58.2%) or farmers (17.5%), 6.0% were full-time home makers. The occupations of 17 mothers (5.2%) were unknown, and nine had died.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS

Sixty-two per cent of the children were still attending school, 29.0 per cent had stopped school and 9.0 per cent had never been to school (Table IV a). About 38.0 per cent of the mothers and 17.0 per cent of the fathers had never attended school. On the other hand, 5.0 per cent of mothers and 11.0 per cent of fathers had more than secondary education. (Table IV b).

The mean (and standard deviation) of years of schooling (excluding Arabic schools) was 6.1 (2.7) years for the children still at school, 4.2 (2.3) for children who had stopped school, 8.2 (2.8) years for mothers who had ever attended school and 9.3 (2.9) years for fathers who had ever attended school. The difference between the groups of school children was significantly ($P > .01$) different. Furthermore, children attending school surpassed the education attainment of children who had stopped school, independent of their age. Stopping school was significantly correlated with higher weekly income, longer duration of working, maternal lack of formal education, and living with a guardian other than the parent.

TABLE IV(a)

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF STUDY CHILDREN		
Level	Children Currently At School (Percent)	Children Who Have Left School (Percent)
Preparatory	8.9	2.2
Primary:	1-3	14.8
	4-6	46.8
Middle	24.6	10.8
Secondary	1.0	0.0
Arabic	3.9	0.0
100.0		n=93
		100.0

TABLE IV(b)

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL ATTAINED BY PARENTS OF STUDY CHILDREN		
Level	Mother	Father
Primary	8.3	5.2
Middle	31.1	36.9
Vocational	0.6	4.0
Secondary	4.6	8.9
Post-Secondary	0.3	2.2
Arabic	1.5	1/5
Unknown	15.4	24.0
No. Schooling	38.2	17.2
Total		100.0 n=325
		99.9

TABLE V
INTERVAL SINCE CESSATION OF SCHOOL

Duration	Frequency	Percentage
1	21	22.58
1 - 2	39	41.94
3 - 4	23	24.73
5 - 6	6	6.45
6	4	4.30
Total		93
		100.00

The interval between the period the children left school ranged from under one year to over six years, with 64.5 per cent having left school in two years or less (Table V).

The reasons for stopping school varied from financial problems (30 per cent), change of residence (11.8 per cent) to loss of interest in school (14 per cent), death of parent or guardian (10 per cent), decision by parent (10 per cent), or ill-treatment by teachers (8. per cent).

DISCUSSION

Recent data collected by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in connection with the International Year of the Child and quoted by Pitt and Shah (3) has highlighted the magnitude of the problem of child labour, involving school age children in various parts of the world. These authors comment on the probable ill effect on the health of children of such practices in developing countries by analogy with their known effect on children in Europe and North America during the Industrial Revolution. These effects include the stunting of development, a life of poverty resulting from poor school performances, a denial of normal psychological development, a high rate of accidents and increased risk of disease as a result of exhaustion or exposure to infections, dust, fibres, chemicals and other substances.

The types of work done by the children in the study are considered to be relatively safe. The exceptions are, probably, load carriage and working in chop bars. The types of load indicated were shopping bags for shoppers or luggage for travellers. Heavy loads were usually carried on trolleys, pulled or pushed by at least two children. Although the types of activity at chop bars did not involve heavy manual work, there is always a danger of burns from the many open flames used for cooking.

Family ties are strong in Ghana and a child is usually taken in by some relation if his own parents are not in a position to do so through death, illness or disability. In this context almost all the children lived with some sort of a relation; mostly a close relative and most children had their parents living. In traditional marriages, married couples live separately in a family home so the fact that most parents lived apart does not imply family unit disintegration. Thus family deprivation is not a significant cause for child labour.

The reasons for entering the labour market are of interest. Since more than sixty per cent of the children were still at school, it is unlikely that school phobia or truancy may be an important factor. The reason for starting work must, therefore, be economic - to meet their personal need for clothing, food, or school or to start saving which provide a security for their future. Children who received no income for their work, served as a source

of unpaid labour for their guardians. Economic strain on the families have also resulted from the large number of sibling the working children had.

This study has been exploratory in nature. No attempt has been made to determine the proportion of school-aged children in the community who work or the specific harmful effects of their work activities on their physical or mental development. These and related issues could be subjects for subsequent studies.

The generalization of these findings to all working children in Kumasi is likely affected by the response bias of children who refused to co-operate or who were at school when their work sites were visited. The attendance rate for children who had not stopped school, their performance and school failures were not elicited. Given that most of the children had relatively recently given up school, it was not known whether they would return to school when another sibling became old enough to replace them.

No study has been made of the relation of school attendance with the duration of labour, per day or per week. It seems financial problems at home and lack of interest in school were the main reasons why the children worked. More than 60 per cent of the children attended school; since 94 per cent of the children worked between 3 and 9 hours a day, and 82 per cent from 5 to 7 days a week, the effect of this on the children's school performance should be of concern. Although the type of work engaged in by the children are considered to be safe, they can have adverse effects on their academic performance. It is, therefore, suggested that exploitation of child labour should be discouraged. Education, health and social welfare professionals should be concerned with the findings of this study and the probable negative impact of the working lives of these children on their personal academic lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Professor H.A Addy of the Department of Community Health, School of Medical Sciences, U.S.T., gave useful advice in the preparation, analysis and writing up of this study. Messrs. S.K. Tweneboah, K. Tano-Debrah, and S. Obeng, all of the Department of Community Health, U.S.T., helped in the collection of data for this study.

I would like to thank Mr. J. Badu, Technical Assistant, and Mr. P.A. Kyei, for typing the study.

REFERENCES

1. Opong, C. Growing up in Dagbon. Ghana Publishing Corporation, Accra, 1973.

2. Fortes, M. The web of kinship among the Tallensi. Oxford University Press, 1949.
 3. Pitt, D.C. and Shah, P.M. Child labour and health. Advances in International Maternal and Child Health. Vol. 3, eds. Jelliffe, D.B. and Jelliffe, E.F.P., 1983.
 4. Chesterton, G.K. Charles Dickens. Burns and Oates, 1975.
 5. Philips, A.S. Report on Laws affecting Children. Ghana National Commission on Children (unpublished document), 1971.
 6. Egbvonu, L. Starfield BS; Child Health and Social status. Paediatrics, 1982; 69: 550 -557.
-