Educational aspirations, child labour imperatives and structural inequality in the South African agricultural sector

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Abstract

Despite the widespread condemnation of the practice of child labour, it remains a pervasive phenomenon in developing countries. In such contexts, labour and education often represent competing activities for children. Drawing on a study of child labour located within the critical social science tradition, this article explores insider accounts of the relationship between educational aspirations and labour realities in the agricultural sector in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. We discuss these accounts within the current debates on the place of education and work in post-apartheid childhood.

Keywords: Apartheid; agricultural sector; child labour; childhood; education; South Africa

The second of eight international development goals guiding the global development agenda (United Nations Millenium Project, 2005) is to ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course in primary schooling by 2015. Locally, the Constitution of South Africa (1996) and the South African Schools Act of 1996 guarantee children's right to education. However, as Karlsson

(2006) observes, there is currently a range of obstacles preventing children from exercising this right, including a generally weak education infrastructure in rural areas, poverty and child labour. In low- to middle-income countries such as South Africa, these obstacles are interrelated and often intersect to constrain modern visions of 'healthy' childhood in which formal, institutionalised education equips children with the means to future self and community development.

With the growing acknowledgement internationally of the profoundly negative impact that child labour can exert on the physical and psychological development of the child as well as the latter's education, the phenomenon has become the subject of increasing scrutiny and opprobrium over the last three-odd decades. However, despite the widespread condemnation of the practice of child labour, it remains a pervasive phenomenon, particularly in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region (Human Rights Watch, 2006). By 2006, according to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2006), there were at least 218 million child labourers aged between five and seventeen years globally. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (in Dentlinger, 2006) observes that this represented a significant decrease from the 246 million child labourers recorded globally in 2000. However, it should be noted that while the occurrence of child labour may appear to be on the decline worldwide, for a number of reasons, including forced migration and the HIV&AIDS pandemic, it is on the increase in sub-Saharan Africa (Dentlinger, 2006). Of the 218 million child labourers recorded globally in 2006, 122.3 million were found in the Asia-Pacific region and 49.3 million in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, according to the HRW (2006), 69% of these children work in the agricultural sector, in both commercial and subsistence agriculture (Scanlon, Prior, Lamarao, Lynch & Scanlon, 2002; HRW, 2006).

Defining child labour

Defining *child labour* is difficult. This is partly due to the fact that the usage of, and the connotations attached to the term, depend substantially on the socio-cultural contexts in which it is deployed. Moreover, the shifting meaning of the term over time implies the need for its historical contextualisation. To a certain extent too, the contested nature of the term hints at the difficulties that accompany the examination of child labour as an object of research.

Cognisant of the difficulties associated with defining the term, we tentatively adopt Orkin's (2000, 4) definition of child labour as "[w]*ork* by children under 18 which is exploitative, hazardous or otherwise inappropriate for their age, detrimental to their schooling, or social, physical, mental, spiritual or moral development" as a point of departure for this article.

Orkin's (2000) definition is helpful in many respects. Firstly, it draws attention to the fact that activities that might potentially be harmful to the wellbeing or development of the child do not only occur on the factory floor or in work gangs on farms. There is a potential for children to be involved in harmful activities at home as well (cf. Burman, 2008). Second, the inclusion of scholastic, social, physical, mental, spiritual and moral markers of development alerts us to the fact that child labour impacts on the development and wellbeing of the children in a multiplicity of ways.

However, Orkin's (2000) definition also contains – as do many of the other extant definitions of child labour – various elements that have been firmly contested within the child development literature. First, like most other definitions of child labour, the above-mentioned definition utilises the age of 18 years as the cut-off point for childhood. While 18 years is often assumed to constitute the end of childhood and schooling, differing socio-economic realities demand that this assumption be interrogated. In many high-income contexts the age of 18 years marks the completion of the scholastic career of young people, and their possible entry into the labour market (that is, if they elect not to continue their education beyond the secondary school level). In low-income contexts, however, the end of childhood and children's entry into the labour

market are very often determined by the economic status and needs of their families, as well as available education opportunities, rather than simply by chronological age and legislation (Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002). Second, the notions of "spiritual" and "moral" development contained in Orkin's (2000) definition are notoriously difficult to define, and measuring the impact of work on these facets of development would be even more difficult.

Obviously, the imprecision and contextual contingencies of the above definition can be seen as obstacles to an adequate understanding of child labour. However, this definition was considered as serving at least as a critical point of departure for the study on which this article is based.

The study was conducted – and this article is therefore written – from a critical social science perspective. Thus, ultimately, the study endeavoured to understand child labour not only in terms of its occurrence, but also in terms of extant networks or matrices of unequal social and economic relations of power. Furthermore, in so far as it was conceptualised from within a critical social science perspective, this study was undertaken with the explicit intention of contributing to extant critiques of these asymmetries (Neuman, 1997; Nieuwenhuys, 1994).

Three key assumptions informed the research on which this article is based. The first assumption is that the meanings ascribed to child labour vary from one context to another (Burman, 2008). Thus, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of child labour, a consideration of the contexts and processes (including the discursive processes) that structure the phenomenon's meanings would be required (Nieuwenhuys, 1994).

The second assumption that underlies this article is that work performed by children is never neutral. Increasingly we notice a distinction being made in the literature between intolerable forms of child labour and those forms of child labour not deemed to be intolerable; and more and more too we notice intolerable forms of child labour constituting the focus of anti-child labour initiatives. The unintended consequence of this distinction may be that those forms of child labour that are not deemed intolerable could easily be viewed as innocuous.

Our contention is that no form of child labour is without consequences and that all have the potential to compromise the life possibilities of affected children. Certainly, we take cognisance of, and accept Burman's (2008) argument that opposition to child labour is frequently an attempt to further entrench dominant Western conceptions of 'legitimate' or 'normal' childhoods in which child labour and the agency that accompanies it cannot be countenanced. However, we also believe that no child should be constrained to perform child labour because society cannot provide for her or him; particularly not if it prevents the child from accessing the opportunity of obtaining an education that arguably at least paves the way for alternative modes of identification and living conditions in the future.

The third assumption that informs this article is that children are not passive victims of their circumstances. Rather, they actively engage with their circumstances. Thus, in certain situations, such as situations of abject poverty and social dysfunction, some children may decide to sell their labour. While we might oppose child labour, it is equally important that we do not 'problematise' working children themselves for this eventuality. For this reason, we believe that the target of a critical interrogation of child labour should be the conditions that lead to and sustain this phenomenon.

Structural inequalities and child labour

In an attempt to interrogate the conditions that mark the path to child labour, we focus on three key (related) markers of structural inequality identified as pertinent to the child labour debate. These are globalisation, racism and access to quality education.

Globalisation

If we adopt a critical social science perspective on child labour, then certainly we should examine the role of globalisation in the perpetuation of this problem.

Much of the empirical research in this area has focused on establishing or assessing the nature of the apparent relationship between globalisation and child labour through the correlation of a variety of macro-economic indicators.[1] These analyses have drawn on both multicountry (Basu & Van, 1998; Shelburne, 2001; Cigno, Rosati & Guarcello, 2002; Neumayer & De Soysa, 2004) and local within-country data (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005). The findings of these studies have demonstrated that the globalisation and child labour relationship is complex and that in many instances underexposure to some of the primary drivers of globalisation, such as trade openness and direct foreign investment, are in fact positively related to the prevalence of child labour in selected countries. This is largely attributed to the possible positive net effects of participation by selected countries in a global economy on these countries' gross domestic product (GDP) (Basu & Van, 1998; Edmonds & Pavcnic, 2002).

Although the economic intricacies involved in accounting for these findings lie beyond the scope of this article and while globalisation variables quite obviously intersect with child labour incidence through complex pathways, it is clear that the ever-increasing rates of income disparities (between or within contexts) generated and accentuated by globalisation (Dwibedi & Chaudhuri, 2007; Roach, 2006; Sen, 2001; Worstall, 2008) play a significant role in the globalisation child labour relationship. Thus, while developing countries' overall levels of poverty may not be the only driver of child labour, poverty at a community and individual level remains significantly associated with child labour (Ahmed, 1999). One of the most frequently cited variables involved in shaping the relationship between child labour and the type of unequal income levels and distribution of poverty is access to quality schooling. We therefore turn our attention next to this variable.

Schooling

Selected empirical studies have shown that the degree of access to quality education and the formal labour market are key determinants of child labour practices (Admassie, 2003; Basu & Van, 1998). The impact of child labour on education has attracted increased global interest since the adoption in 2001 of the Millenium Declaration, which, as indicated earlier, is underpinned by eight key objectives (UN Millenium Project, 2005). The achievement of universal primary education represents the second of these objectives. Child labour as it relates to education is therefore of critical concern to the global development agenda.

As schooling and labour represent competing activities for children in contexts in which factors such as poverty levels, quality of education and household labour demands intersect, it is unsurprising that the relationship between education and child labour has been frequently interrogated by the literature (e.g. Karlsson, 2006; Scanlon *et al.*, 2002). Some researchers have argued that each of these activities represent opportunity costs and, as such, selecting labour over schooling will be primarily determined by the perceived value of these competing activities to the welfare of an income unit such as the family. The value imparted to education through schooling has largely been shown to depend primarily on access to schools and the costs of education within contexts where child labour presents the family with a viable (short-term) alternative means of income supplementation (Ersado, 2004).

1. Globalisation has been defined in economic terms as the process by which 1) a greater share of the world's production is traded across nations and 2) the production systems of various countries are becoming increasingly integrated (Cigno, Rosati & Guarcello, 2002).

In contexts where access to quality education and schooling is restricted, a value emphasis on the labour of children could therefore be anticipated. Rural, agrarian economies in many low- to middle-income countries often typify these contexts. A study by Admassie (2003) on child labour practices in rural Ethiopia showed that investigating and intervening in child labour in rural economies requires an appreciation of the specific labour and educational demands on families that depend on subsistence farming and that the implementation of a policy that enforced a combination of work and schooling according to seasonal demands on labour would be necessary to ensure tolerable familial living conditions.

While Admassie (2003) does well to illustrate the specificities involved in understanding child labour within rural contexts, the literature in this area is limited. This is particularly evident in the agricultural sector in South Africa, where only a few studies have examined the relationship between schooling and labour in children (Levine, 1996, 1999; Orkin, 2000; Streak, 2007). Without exception, these studies have found that labour was almost exclusively a daily activity for children of colour, to the detriment of their educational needs.

Racism

Given the highly racialised patterns of poverty internationally, and particularly in South Africa, it is not surprising that child labour is also highly racialised, with children of colour being more likely than others to being involved in the most exploitative forms of child labour (Orkin, 2000). This racialisation of child labour in South Africa has been traced as far back as the colonial and slave eras of the country (Levine, 1996).

Of course the racialised patterns of child labour are not simply a function of the racialised patterns of poverty. It is also a function of a myriad of other intersecting factors, including the fact that under the old apartheid order the state invested very little in the education of children of colour. Indeed, under the old order the implicit aim of the education of children of colour was to prepare them for the unskilled labour market and for as early as possible. For this reason the state supported indigent white children with social grants until they reached the age of 18 years. Indigent Black children were however only eligible for state grants (obviously much lower than those paid out for white children) until the age of 16 years, because unlike white children they were thought to be capable of supporting themselves at this age (Burman, 1989). Arguably, these factors continue to exert a significant influence on the life histories and opportunities of South African children.

Recent research on child labour in South Africa

One of the most comprehensive studies of child labour in South Africa in recent years was a study conducted by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) as part of the ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) (Orkin, 2000). The study was conducted in 1999, with its data and reportage currently contributing to the ILO's international child labour database. A survey involving 26 081 households formed the basis of the study (Orkin, 2000). The study showed that the extent of child labour varied according to which definition of child labour was applied to the data.[2] Under the broadest definition used, 45% of all South African children were projected to be engaged in child labour. Application of the 'high risk' definition of

2. The broad definition constituted at least one hour of economic activity per week, a minimum of five hours school labour and a minimum of seven hours of household chores The 'higher-risk' definition constituted at least three hours of economic activity per week, five hours of school labour (in many rural areas children are expected to assist with the maintenance of their schools), (South African Human Rights Report, 2008) and at least seven hours of household chores per week as parameters (Orkin, 2000).

child labour deflated the figure to 36% of all South African children. Furthermore the study found that within the 'higher-risk' definition, African children constituted the largest population group (41%) involved in child labour and that female children were more likely to be involved in child labour in South Africa. Of particular relevance to this article, Orkin (2000) found that more than half the children participating in child labour in South Africa resided in rural areas.

Drawing on the Survey of Activities of Young People (SAYP), Bosch (2002) provides a detailed and updated description of the prevalence of child labour in the agricultural sector of South Africa. Approximately half a million children between the ages of 5 and 14 years were found to be involved in the broad agricultural sector (including subsistence agriculture) for three hours or more per week (Bosch, 2000). Of the children engaged in commercial farming, 19 000 (28%) were living in formerly 'whites-only' commercial farming areas and 41 000 (62%) in ex-homeland areas (Bosch, 2000). Then too, 158 000 (59.4%) of children engaged in commercial agriculture were found to work for more than 12 hours per week within the sector.

As already indicated, research points to a very strong negative relationship between school attendance and child labour (Streak, 2007). Often the cost of schooling itself leads children to work so that they can obtain the necessary funds to continue with their schooling, or else to allow their siblings to attend school (Karlsson, 2006; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002).

Conversely, very frequently, inadequate, inappropriate or inaccessible educational facilities also contribute significantly to child labour (Eldring, Nakanyane & Tshoaedi, 2000; ILO, 1997, 1998, 2002). Consider here, for example, that by 1997, there were only 500 farm schools to cater for a community of 130 000 farm workers in Mpumalanga and the Limpopo Province (SA Country Report, 1997). Typically, these schools are often overcrowded and most of them consist of under-resourced multigrade classes. Indeed, according to the ILO (1997), there is evidence that in the past farmers were not prepared to allow these schools to operate if their employees' children were not available for work on their farms.

Notwithstanding the significant contribution of the above literature to understanding child labour, it has to be acknowledged that very little critical qualitative research has been undertaken on child labour and this paucity is most pronounced in child labour research in agricultural contexts. As a result, debate in the area is largely informed by theoretical modelling based on national, cross-national and regional survey data that, while identifying key macro-economic trends, risk overlooking the meaning-making and perceptions that underlie child labour practices within specific cultural and material contexts, as well as the impact of these practices on schooling. Given that both education and labour are historical, social and economic constructs that are reified in the lived experiences of everyday practice, a lack of critical social scientific engagement with child labour represents a significant lacuna in our understanding of this phenomenon and its effects on children's access to schooling.

In an attempt to address this gap, this article uses a qualitative study conducted in a rural area notorious for the exploitation of child labour as an exemplar of how child labour can impede access to meaningful education and, by extension, future life opportunities, including career opportunities.

The study

The study on which this article is based had two primary objectives. First, it aimed at obtaining the views of a group of key informants concerning the definition, extent, causes and consequences of child labour in the agricultural sector in the Limpopo Province. This group consisted of educators, activists and specialists in various government departments and non-governmental organisations working towards the eradication of child labour in the Limpopo Province. All the participants had a keen understanding and experience of the reality of child labour in this province. Second, the study endeavoured to obtain the views of children concerning

the definition, extent, causes and consequences of child labour in farming communities in the Limpopo Province. This latter objective was directly motivated by the relative invisibility and silence of children in existing debates and research on child labour. Unfortunately, as we at this point have not yet completed the process of collecting the data required to meet the second objective, we report here only the data collected in pursuit of the first objective.

Data collection

The data aimed at addressing the first objective of this study was obtained by means of focus group discussions. In all, eleven key informants participated in these focus groups. Primarily for logistical reasons they were divided into two focus groups, one consisting of six participants and the second of five participants (See Table 1). The focus group discussions lasted two hours each. The discussions were tape-recorded with the consent of the research participants and subsequently transcribed. The group discussions were co-ordinated by the authors of this article, each assisted by a co-facilitator.

Table 1: Focus group participants

Participants	Gender	Occupation
Group 1		
Participant 1	M	Department of Education Official
Participant 2	M	Theology lecturer
Participant 3	F	Social worker
Participant 4	F	Teacher
Participant 5	M	Consultant: Health & Welfare
Participant 6	M	Consultant: Health & Welfare
Group 2		
Participant 1	F	Counsellor
Participant 2	M	Researcher
Participant 3	F	Department of Labour official
Participant 4	M	Planner: Department of Land Affairs
Participant 5	M	Developmental agency co-ordinator

In order to ensure that the group discussions would generate sufficiently focused data, the facilitators employed a semistructured interviewing schedule, containing questions that pointedly sought to access the research participants' definitions of child labour as well as their views on the causes and consequences of this phenomenon.

Data analysis

A qualitative method of content analysis based on Berg (1995) and Mostyn's (1985) work was employed as the primary means of examining the data collected. However, this analysis was conducted within the framework of Thompson's (1990) *depth-hermeneutics* approach. Thompson's depth hermeneutics approach to analysis is a broad methodological framework that consists of three key interrelated phases or levels of analysis. These are the dimensions of socio-historical analysis, discursive analysis and interpretation.

The level of socio-historical analysis: When analysing texts, an analysis of the social historical conditions in which the texts are produced and received is important, because as Thompson (1990) correctly observes, symbolic productions do not arise and exist in a vacuum. They are produced, transmitted, and received in specific social and historical conditions.

Therefore, if the meanings embedded in symbolic productions are to be adequately apprehended, these conditions have to be taken into consideration.

The level of discursive analysis: Texts that circulate in social fields are not only socially and historically located productions, but also complex linguistic productions which "display an articulated structure ... and are able to, and claim to, say something about something" (Thompson, 1990, 284). It is this feature of texts which calls for this second dimension of analysis. The method of analysis employed at this level obviously depends on the objectives and circumstances of the research project. In view of the objectives of the present study, as noted above, a qualitative content analysis was performed at this level of analysis.

The level of interpretation: The final phase of the depth-hermeneutical approach is what Thompson (1990) refers to as the dimension of interpretation. While this dimension is facilitated by discursive analysis, it also differs fundamentally from the latter. Discursive analysis essentially proceeds by deconstructing the texts studied. Conversely, the process of interpretation proceeds by synthesising the product of the discursive analysis, that is, by a synthetic reconstruction of meaning.

Context

Limpopo Province is the northernmost province of South Africa. It is estimated that more than 80% of the province's population live in rural and peri-urban areas. With agriculture constituting one of its key economic activities, this is also one of the poorest provinces in South Africa (Bradshaw *et al*., 2000).

It is estimated that approximately 11% of rural children aged 10 to 14, and 21% of rural children aged 15 to 17 years work in the agricultural sector. The average age of child labourers in the Limpopo Province is approximately 15 years, ranging from 10 to 18 years. The majority of these child labourers are black (Johnston & Dlamini, 2000). En passant, it is widely acknowledged that very few farmers guilty of employing child labour are prosecuted. This is largely a result of poorly trained labour inspectors, bribery, and the fact that inspectors are routinely denied access to farms where children may be employed (South African Human Rights Report, 2008).

The Limpopo Province has a long history of child labour. Indeed, according to Kirkaldy (2002), child labour in the service of white farmers cannot be fully understood outside the context of the history of the province. Specifically, he argues that current child labour practices in the Limpopo Province are firmly rooted in the nineteenth century Afrikaner *inboekeling* system, an 'apprenticeship' system that enabled white farmers to exact labour from indigenous African children. The children trapped in this system were normally those captured in battles between the Afrikaners and indigenous people during the period of Afrikaner expansion into the north of the country or children surrendered by impoverished indigenous communities in exchange for various favours from the settler community.

A study of working children on commercial farms by Johnston and Dlamini (2000) provides information on some of the current intricate dynamics of child labour in the agricultural sector in the Limpopo Province. The study reveals marked seasonal trends in terms of child labour, with farm labourers' children expected to work particularly during busy harvesting times as well as during school holidays (Johnston & Dlamini, 2000). The threat that families would be evicted from the farms if the children in the family do not work on the farms when they are required to do so, ensures that farm labourers cooperate.

Discussion

A large array of themes was identified in the corpus of texts analysed. For clarity of argument and due to space constraints, however, we will discuss only one of these thematic areas, namely 'the consequences of child labour'. However, by way of providing a discursive contextualisation

of this thematic area, we will provide a very brief description of two other thematic areas, namely, 'definitions of child labour' and 'the causes of child labour'.

Definitions of child labour

Given the documented complexity, it is unsurprising that the participants in the study on which this article is based, experienced considerable difficulty in defining child labour. Salient amongst their discourses was the construction of child labour being a 'bad thing', a morally repugnant practice. This construction was however sporadically tempered by the understanding that such moral judgement must be located within the circumstantial context in which the practice occurs. Key to this circumstantial caveat were arguments that foregrounded that child labour in the South African context may be a necessary rather than elective practice. Contrary to the literature however, child work was generally not constructed as 'good' or 'better' than child labour. Both were constructed as potentially exploitative.

Drawing again on the tension implied in understandings of child labour as morally unacceptable but economically necessary, the participants consequently suggested that in the context of restricted economic resources, child labour itself was a form of currency. The practice was therefore constructed as something that has exchange value that can, and often does ensure the survival of the child's family or household.

Causes of child labour

The research participants identified a range of factors, which according to them, contribute significantly to the high levels of child labour in the Limpopo Province. These perceptions again reflected internal attributions at the level of adults that enforced the practice and a set of contextual drivers that in some ways necessitated it. The former were articulated as being caused by a set of individual 'shortcomings', such as a 'lack of ethical values', being morally 'sick', and ignorance. This attribution highlighted the perceived frequency of conscious collusion between children's guardians and employers exploiting child labour, often compounded by a lack of enforcement of labour and children's rights legislation by authorities. While previous research indicates that coercion from parents may play a significant role in the occurrence of child labour (Syed, Mirza, Sultana & Rana, 1991), in this context it was not identified as the most important factor contributing to the prevalence of the phenomenon. As the available research indicates (e.g. Scanlon *et al.,* 2002; Syed *et al.*, 1991), child labour appears to be more closely related to poverty associated with a number of factors including HIV&AIDS and racist practices than to parental predispositions.

Thus various participants argued that the interrelated sequelae of the HIV&AIDS pandemic, the legacy of apartheid policies and harsh economic conditions all play a significant role in the elevated levels of child labour in the Limpopo Province.

Various recent studies (e.g. Cluver, Bray & Dawes, 2007; Eldring, Nakanyane & Tshoaedi, 2000; ILO, 1997, 2002, 2008) point to the fact that the growing HIV&AIDS pandemic sweeping through Southern Africa is a fairly significant factor in the high levels of child labour in this region. Specifically, these studies attribute this to significant losses in the productive adult workforce due to illness and death; and substantial increases in the number of children who are constrained to seek employment because of the incapacitation or loss of the primary breadwinners in their households due to AIDS (Eldring *et al.*, 2000; ILO, 2008; Squire, 2007). Currently, there are no available statistics on the impact of the HIV&AIDS pandemic on the agricultural sector in Limpopo Province. However, Bradshaw *et al*. (2000) note that by 2000 AIDS was the leading cause of death in the province.

In both focus groups economic factors were presented as constituting one of the most important determinants of child labour. These perceptions coincide significantly with the dominant views contained in the existing child labour literature (Anker, 2000; Bequele, 1992; International Committee of the Fourth International, 2003; Grimsrud & Stokke, 1997; ILO, 1998; Scanlon *et al*., 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002). These include the relative difference in labour costs between children and adults with children being considered a cheaper segment of the agricultural labour force (Bequele, 1992; Grimsrud & Stokke, 1997; ILO, 1998), the potential loss of family income due to possible dismissal if their children do not work for their employers (ILO, 1997), and that children often prefer to work rather than to passively witness how their parents have to battle to make ends meet – a common scenario in many developing contexts (Scanlon *et al*., 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002). Without exception, the disproportionate impacts of both HIV&AIDS and poverty on black families were most emphatically ascribed to result directly from the enduring effects of Apartheid policies.

One of the key effects of this political economy in the regions was perceived to be restricted access to education, which was seen to be a critical cause of child labour. Participants seemed to echo various arguments on this link in the literature (e.g. Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002). Specifically, the belief that the more inaccessible and the more inappropriate the schooling experience for the context of children, the greater the likelihood that they would be drawn into child labour (Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002; Edmonds, 2006) was articulated by several participants.

Having summarised the above themes as a means to establishing the discursive context of child labour, the following focal section addresses the perceived consequences of child labour and their implications for achieving the legislative and rights-based visions of the formally educated child.

Consequences of child labour

According to the research participants, child labour precipitates a range of negative consequences for children involved in the practice, including the negative impacts on their physical development, psychological development and education.

Detrimental impact on the physical well-being of affected children

The literature reflects that child labour and particularly child labour in the agricultural sector can have significantly detrimental effects on the physical well-being and development of the child. As Siddiqi and Patrinos (2002) observe, the working conditions of child labourers do not cater for and stimulate the physical development of children. Indeed, as Levine (1999) and Scanlon *et al.* (2002) report, working increases the chances of children being afflicted by skin infections, poisoning, cancers, amputations and physical deformities. The participants in this study reported similar risks amongst child labourers in the agriculture sector in Limpopo Province:

> It also depends on the type of work that the child is doing. If the … child is … maybe working with dangerous equipment it might lead to a point wherein a child might be disabled … Sometimes, if they are working with chemicals, those chemicals might affect them internally (B26).

> Their physical development [will be affected] … Like doing strenuous work … and in future they have problems. They have to visit physicians because their bones have been [affected] due to the heavy jobs that they were doing (B27).

As indicated by the statements below as well as other statements contained in the corpus of texts analysed, injury is not simply caused by the inappropriate 'adult' work expected of children, but also by the violence and sexual abuse that frequently characterise contexts in which child labour occurs.

> Assault is one thing that I want to point out. There are some cases where children – who are not carrying out the job properly – are being assaulted by farm owners. We also had a case where children who are doing farm work were sexually abused by the farmers (B29).

> The only life they [child labourers on farms] know is that of drugs, drinking, dancing and stabbing one another with knives. The other thing is that they live a dependent life all the way (A21).

It is these descriptions that point precisely towards the manner in which the practices that often accompany or compel child labour fundamentally threaten modern constructions of children in which childhood represents a protected period of human development guaranteed by adult parents or caregivers. Enforced child labour through violence and abuse, both physical and systemic not only deprives children of the assumed benefits of guardianship and protection, but simultaneously also constrains their life prospects and forecloses their vision of themselves. One of the critical conduits to this foreclosure is the practice's negative impact on education.

Negative impact on education of children

One of the key consequences of child labour identified by the research participants is that this practice inevitably compromises the affected child's education. Indeed, if there was one concern that the participants in this study emphasised above all else then it was a concern, not so much about the abject poverty that typically characterises the lives of child labourers in the Limpopo Province, but the adverse impact of the practice of child labour on the education of affected children. This concern or preoccupation, no doubt, in no small measure is due to the received wisdom in many indigent communities in South Africa that education is the only way out of poverty.

> Having children working is depriving them of their rights to education (A13).

> In a learning situation where you have to teach, educate, develop kids on a farm, you have a group of tired kids in the morning … The effect of this child labour on child development is very negative. You find it very difficult to teach and expect anything from the kids. Teaching is not [about] only talking to kids, they should also do homework, they should read in the afternoon and their afternoon is spent in the field working. In the morning they have to come to school, they are tired. They haven't done their homework (A32).

> I think it's a bad thing because it affects the educational process of a child. For example, I am working on a farm around my area whereby there are some other children who go to school during school hours and after school they go to work for the farmer … I found that they are not progressing very well (B38).

As indicated above, and as reflected in the literature, the education of child labourers, particularly in the agricultural sector is generally compromised in a variety of ways. For example, for many children, entry into the world of work is often accompanied by the termination of their schooling. Those children, who work on a 'part-time' basis while continuing their education, ultimately end up neglecting the latter (ILO, 1997, 2002). Given their working conditions, as well as the quality of the education available to them, this is of course not surprising.

Child labourers who continue their schooling most frequently work for several hours before or after school. This results in these children, often through sheer exhaustion, being unable to pay appropriate attention to their schoolwork, as reflected in the second last statement above. It also results in high learner absenteeism rates (ILO, 1997). As indicated earlier, the

schools normally available to these children are often also under-resourced, overcrowded and ill-equipped to offer a quality education (South Africa Country Report, 1997). Additionally, many of the schools catering for children whose parents work in the agricultural sector only cater for primary education. Given that secondary schools are often located far from where these children live, many have to terminate their schooling after completing their primary school education, and as a result, find their way into the child labour market (Eldring *et al.*, 2000).

Once these children find their way into the child labour market a vicious cycle is ineluctably set in motion. As their schooling is compromised, these children, as they grow older, are increasingly pushed towards the ranks of marginal, unskilled workers who are more likely than others to become under- and unemployed. Even if they do come into contention for employment, as Hindman and Smith (1999) point out, they generally are the last to be employed and the first to be retrenched. Thus, as one of the participants in this study observed:

> Many people … will be trapped in the very same situation. It will be very difficult for them to [get] out (A26).

This process is cyclically related to what is perceived to be a pronounced foreclosure of self-possibility in child labourers.

Deleterious impact on psychological development of affected children

According to the participants in this study, child labour in the agriculture sector in Limpopo Province does not only result in negative physical outcomes and poor future employment prospects, but often also leads to a range of negative psychological outcomes for the affected children. The recent study by Streak (2007) confirmed the negative mental health impacts of labour on children. These included higher levels of anxiety and depression in working children, as compared with non-working children. In our study, the perceived effects of child labour included the inability to integrate into contexts beyond farming communities, a lack of assertiveness and feelings of inferiority:

> Children … grow up in a situation where later they feel they are … inferior. When they get out of the farm going to town they feel much inferior. They have not been exposed to other forms of life … The other thing is that they live a dependent life all the way (A21).

> The effect that one can find in these children or these communities is that as one has mentioned, that they do not integrate. One will find that these children are pushed to a certain corner … When they are supposed to interact it becomes difficult because they are already confined to a certain type of life. The effect … is generally negative and not positive (A23).

> Another thing is dependency and lack of self-esteem and lack of assertion … If I grew up on a farm, my children will grow up on that farm and it's a [vicious cycle]. When you go to the society, you cannot find a place. You never had an opportunity to see life in a different dimension (A24).

While cognisant that these anticipated outcomes may not be relevant in all cases of child labour, we nonetheless are aware of the fact that since these suppositions are based on the experiences of people who have dealt for some time with many children caught up in the web of child labour, they may be true for some child labourers. If the psychological outcomes of child labour approximate these predictions, then the adverse future life possibilities for child labourers appear even more dismal.

Synthesis

Despite their difficulty in defining child labour, the participants in this study were unambiguous in their perceptions of the causes and consequences of child labour in the agricultural sector in the Limpopo Province. Specifically, they constructed poverty, South Africa's apartheid history and the current HIV&AIDS pandemic as being key drivers in the persistence of child labour in this province. Furthermore they constructed child labour as impacting decidedly negatively on the physical and psychological well-being of children drawn into this practice. Additionally they perceived the practice as having an adverse effect on the education and future prospects of these children.

In the main, the participants' perceptions of the effects of child labour were consistent with the findings of cognate research conducted in other contexts (e.g. Eldring *et al.*, 2000; Hindman & Smith, 1999; Scanlon *et al*., 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 2002). In addition however, they also emphasised the deleterious psychological consequences of child labour, an issue not dealt with in any great detail in the extant research.

Conclusion

In almost every way the findings of this study stood in strong contrast to South Africa's vision of healthy childhood. From its historical and socio-economic determinants through to unequivocal perceptions that emphasised its profoundly deleterious impacts on the child, the participants constructed child labour as an abhorrent but in some cases also a necessary means to social and economic survival.

Unlike Admassie's (2003, 172) assertion that "rural communities often feel that it is more important to involve children in economic activities and equip them with the basic life skills for their future survival", participants in this study argued that education was a potentially more valuable means to wellbeing and prosperity. Our analysis therefore suggests a juxtaposition of education (as an aspiration, the pursuit of which will catalyse an escape from poverty and adversity) and child labour as a survival strategy (a necessary evil driven by history, poverty and family security under threat). At every turn, aspirations are mediated by reality; the reality of primary needs that cannot be immediately serviced by learning: food, shelter and security. These are structural barriers to aspiration – internalised as fixed and constraining parameters of identity. Our analysis suggests that research on the provision of quality education as one of the viable alternatives to labour in the life choices available to these children and engaging and eliminating wider constraining forces on the developmental paths of children should remain a central task for the social sciences in South Africa.

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