Child domestic work

Summary framing paper

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Contents

1. Situating child domestic work

Internationally, 'child domestic workers' have been broadly understood to be children and young people under the age of 18 who "work in other people's households, doing domestic chores, caring for children and running errands, among other tasks" (UNICEF, 1999: 2).[1] As the definition indicates, the situation of children living and working in the households of others has tended to be positioned in the policy literature as primarily a **labour** concern – whether as 'employment' or 'exploitation' (see section 4).

Child domestic workers may be paid for their work in cash or in kind and, while some live independently of their employers, many typically 'live in'. The situation of those who live with their employers is of particular concern. Those who live-in are often discriminated against based on ethnicity, social status, poverty and position as non-family members, as well as experiencing social isolation, limited access to education, and dependence on adults whose primary concern is not their welfare (ILO, 2013a).

A definition of child domestic workers which emphasises the work that they do or their relationship to their employer tends to be preferred in academic studies on the topic (see, for example Jensen, 2014; Klocker, 2014). At the same time, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) continues to utilise economic/labour market terminology to refer to child domestic work as "children's work in the domestic work sector in the home of a third party or employer", a concept which "encapsulates both *permissible* as well as *non permissible* situations" (ILO, 2020; author's emphasis).

Evidence indicates that the extent and nature of the work that children do depends on the households they enter, how they get there, and whether they work alongside others (including employers and the children of their employers), as well as on their gender, physical strength and cognitive capacity (Thorsen, 2012). The lack of set working hours and the absence of boundaries between what is work and what is not has led some researchers and activists to declare that a defining feature of child domestic workers' situation is that they are on-call 24 hours a day (ILO, 2004).

1.1 Global prevalence

The ILO has indicated that domestic work is the most common type of work for teenage girls worldwide (ILO, 2004). Of the estimated 17.2 million child domestic workers globally, almost 70% are girls and over two-thirds (11.5 million) are, from the perspective of international standards, considered to be in unacceptable conditions, either because they are below the legal minimum working age (usually around 14 years); are working in situations defined as hazardous; or are in servitude or debt bondage (ILO, 2013a). While there are no figures for the numbers in slavery, the ILO has estimated that 3.7 million of all child domestic workers are in hazardous work situations (2.6 million girls and 1.1 million boys), a quarter of whom are under 12 years of age (ILO, 2013a).

These global estimates, the only ones that exist and dating back to 2012, are based on samples of national household survey data gathered by the ILO. There are several limitations to these estimates: they are reliant on the quality of the surveys and the reliability of householders' responses when asked about children living in their households who are not their own; there is ambiguity surrounding which children to include (with a tendency to only include children described as in an 'employment relationship'); and there is a lack of data regarding the

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[1] The types of tasks performed by child domestic workers appear to be similar across countries and contexts; they include care of children and the elderly, fetching water and wood, tending to animals, cleaning, cooking, and purchasing daily household essentials.

numbers of children in servitude, debt bondage and other extreme situations. All of these limitations point to a significant **underestimate** in the global prevalence figures. (Annex 1 contains a snapshot of national-level data from African contexts and the challenges to accurately counting this group.)

1.2   Causes and drivers

The large majority of child domestic workers come from poor families and, particularly in societies lacking social protection safety nets, are sent to work to supplement their family's income or simply to lessen the financial strain at home (UNICEF, 1999). Other 'push' factors include the desire to escape from domestic violence, to flee an early marriage, or the cultural motivations of parents to send their girls into 'safe' and suitable situations in advance of married life (Black, 2011). A study of the psychosocial impact of domestic work on children found that the level of cultural and social acceptability of child domestic work in a society impacts upon the age at which children enter the sector and how they are subsequently treated – with children in societies where the practice is widely accepted found to be starting work at a younger age and subject to greater exploitation than those places where the practice is less tolerated (ASI, 2013).

Children are also 'pulled' into domestic work as a result of the widespread belief that the move will offer better opportunities and living conditions, and by siblings and friends already working in households. For prospective employers, balancing the demands of work with childcare has meant a considerable demand for domestic help – with many employers opting for younger workers because they are cheaper and considered to be more acquiescent to employers' requirements (ILO, 2011). In some countries, significant numbers of older children report that they themselves make the decision to leave home and seek work in order to be able to continue with their education (Blagbrough, 2008).

"Domestic work in most countries is strongly gendered, with girls socialised from an early age to take responsibility for domestic and reproductive spheres"

At the same time, domestic work in most countries is strongly gendered, with girls socialised from an early age to take responsibility for domestic and reproductive spheres. In this sense, domestic work can be seen as an age-based and gendered continuum, with young girls socialised to take on the domestic work burden at home, then moving to neighbouring towns or cities to work with their extended families and for strangers as their age and experience increases – and even, perhaps, transnationally where these migration patterns have developed (YOUR World Research, 2019; see also section 4.3).

2. Positive and negative impacts of child domestic work

2.1 Child domestic work as a survival strategy, and a stepping-stone to a better life

For some girls and young women, domestic work represents an opportunity to expand their future options. In focus group discussions with former child domestic workers in Brazil, Maia and Cal (2014) noted a belief in their ability to progress through a combination of personal effort and the 'luck' of having a good employer. Dependence on the assistance of their employers also plays a major part in the potential progression of young domestic workers in Uganda. Namuggala (2015) indicates that, in cases where employers had proved trustworthy, girls were able to save money to help realise their hopes for future economic improvement, whether by buying animals or investing in training; or perhaps through a substantial gift at the end of their service to aid income-generation back home (Jacquemin, 2004, in reference to Cote d'Ivoire).

At the same time, as Pankhurst et al (2016) indicate in relation to Ethiopia, girls may also choose to leave home in the hope of acquiring skills, accessing schooling and gaining non-materially in terms of increased recognition, social acceptance and respect. Research from the Young Lives longitudinal study into children and youth around the world has shown that schooling has a dramatic impact on young people's ambitions; formal education is understood by caregivers and children alike as the prime route out of poverty (Hardgrove et al, 2014). Gamlin et al (2013) report that in the Philippines and Peruvian contexts many children "manage to combine education with work, appear to share good relations with their employers and are proud of what they do", concurring with earlier research in the Philippines which concludes that child domestic work "is a 'coping strategy' where a child assumes some of the responsibility for family [i.e. the child's own family] well-being and survival" (Gamlin et al, 2013: 221).

It is likely that anecdotal evidence of the potential advantages of child domestic work for the future lives of girls and young women plays a part in decision-making around whether to migrate, with some truth in the understanding that moving to the homes of others can improve livelihood security for children and may present an opportunity to move out of poverty, as well as being one of few chances for travel (Thorsen, 2007). Children considering migration certainly perceive a range of benefits from doing so, including by helping to financially support their families, whether by earning income or fulfilling their own basic needs. Indeed, Bourdillon (2009) notes the satisfaction and pride of children who are able to contribute to the family coffers (see also Punch, 2007, re Bolivia).

2.2 Child domestic work as a danger to health, well-being and future prospects

Despite the hopes of these young women and their families, the precarity of their situation as young, poor and female workers who are largely dependent on the support of employers and others to improve their situation can also bring disadvantages. Pankhurst et al (2016) indicate that being live-in workers in unfamiliar urban areas can increase their social isolation and result in their separation from social networks that could protect them from emotional harm and other threats to their wellbeing.

For child domestic workers across a range of contexts the daily experience of discrimination and isolation in the employer's household can be a heavy burden (Blagbrough, 2008; Bourdillon, 2009). A study in Bangladesh found that the discrimination, exclusion, disrespect, ingratitude, and other assaults on their emotional needs negatively affected children in domestic work situations above all else (Baum, 2011). A large health study in Ethiopia established that child domestic workers aged 8-15 suffered more psychosocial disorders (such as phobia and separation anxiety) than other working and non-working children (Alem et al, 2000). Another large study from Brazil found that children in domestic work were particularly at risk of developing behavioural problems. The researchers concluded that this was due to them being under the control of employers; their excessive working hours; their lack of personal freedom; and their experience of physical, verbal and emotional abuse (Benvegnú et al, 2005). A more recent psychosocial assessment study of *restavèks* (child domestic workers[2]) in Haiti indicated that the behavioural and psychological symptoms they exhibited "may create subsequent difficulties in their reintegration into their families and other contexts" (Kennedy, 2015: 12).

> **"For child domestic workers across a range of contexts the daily experience of discrimination and isolation in the employer's household can be a heavy burden"**

Some studies have also noted that, while child domestic workers commonly attach great importance to the opportunity for a formal education and see becoming a domestic worker as a way of continuing their schooling, the demands of their daily work or employer prohibition directly impedes their chances (Blagbrough, 2008). Research in Lesotho and Malawi by Ansell and van Blerk (2004) noted the conflicting demands for children and young people of work and attending school; although Hashim's (2007) research indicates that children's movement for work in Ghana doesn't necessarily deny the possibility of educational opportunities. In some contexts higher drop-out rates, a poorer perception of their own achievement and the increased likelihood of repeating school years are common features of child domestic workers' educational experience (ASI, 2013).

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[2] In Haiti *restavèk* is the term used in Creole to refer to child domestic workers and means 'to stay with'.

3. Links to other issues of concern

Improving the lives of children and young people in domestic work situations requires a broader consideration by policymakers and practitioners of their circumstances. This means considering and responding to the practice in close association with a number of other children's rights concerns, including sexual exploitation and child marriage.

3.1 Child domestic work as a pathway to sexual exploitation and the street

Girls and young women in domestic work are excessively vulnerable to street connectedness and sexual exploitation, pushed by physical and sexual abuse in the households where they are working. Erulkar (2018b) highlights the emergence of studies indicating that domestic workers are at higher risk of 'non-consensual sex' compared to those not working as a domestic worker.

Bourdillon's (2009) review of child domestic work notes the vulnerability of these young workers to physical, psychological and sexual violence, especially those that live in their employers' homes. A common response to sexual violence in particular is for child domestic workers to leave their employer's home to the street, a context in which they may already be quite familiar (Ansell and van Blerk, 2004). Evidence across parts of West Africa has shown that child domestic workers may spend a significant amount of time each day working on the street as part of their duties; girls working as market porters or selling their employer's produce on the street are a particular example of this (Jacquemin, 2006). Kennedy (2014) highlights the 'domestic work to street' trajectory of *restavèk* children in Haiti, which she notes is consistent with prior research in Haiti and other contexts in which family violence and abuse are causes of children moving to the street.

A study in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) established that more than a quarter of young women being commercially sexually exploited on the street were former child domestic workers – many of whom had previously been sexually abused by members of the family they were working for (Mwakitwange, 2002); a later study noted similar trajectories for those girls and young women mistreated by relatives or kin for whom they are working (Olsson et al, 2017). Ingabire et al (2012) noted that a substantial minority of the 70 female sex workers they interviewed in Rwanda had become sex workers through working as 'house-girls', with similar results also cited in Cote d'Ivoire (Muriuki et al, 2018). Describing domestic work as a feeder profession for sex work, Erulkar (2018b) notes that, of interviews with more than 2,000 adult commercial sex workers in five Ethiopian towns, some 42% had previously been domestic workers, almost all of whom said that they entered sex work to escape abuse as domestic workers. Similar trajectories have been reported in El Salvador (Godoy, 2002) and in Paraguay, where estimates of the proportion of sex workers who were previously domestic workers range from 50% to 90% (Stanford et al, 2018).

3.2 Domestic work as a pathway towards, and an alternative to, marriage

In many contexts the root causes of child domestic work and early marriage are similar, stemming from economic hardship and shocks, as well as traditions and beliefs relating to gendered roles. Child domestic work and marriage may also be seen by families as alternatives to 'harder' and less 'appropriate' work for girls who may be viewed as an economic burden, and whose earning power is limited. Both practices are also viewed by many communities as traditional protective mechanisms for girls, including to reduce the likelihood of pre-marital pregnancy.

In some societies child domestic work is considered a stop-gap or even a rite of passage for girls and young women who have left school and are preparing for their adult lives. Critchlow (2007) notes the transitional nature of being a house-girl as an occupation between school or childhood and marriage in Vanuatu. In this respect child domestic work is seen as preparation for marriage; a protected environment for girls where household reproductive skills can be learned and money and/or material goods accumulated. In Uganda, Namuggala (2015) also notes the strong trajectory towards marriage of girls in domestic work, while also providing an opportunity to improve their economic situation.

For some girls, in this case in Ethiopia, the move to urban areas not only serves a familial socio-economic purpose but can also be an opportunity to delay marriage (van Blerk, 2016). This may also be a factor in why some girls and young women have stated, in Morocco for example, that they would rather stay in a less-than-perfect domestic work situation than return back home (Sommerfelt, 2001). In a study in Nepal, some girls being reintegrated back to their family home following a period as a child domestic worker in Kathmandu were fearful of doing so because of concerns that they may face early marriage (Banos Smith, 2014). And in relation to adolescent migration, in Ethiopia Jones et al (2018) indicate that restrictive gender norms, particularly those surrounding girls' sexuality and marriage, are prominent drivers of girls' migration. Buchbinder (2013) discusses the conflicted feelings of young Togolese women who had been working as child domestic workers in Nigeria about whether they should fulfil their families' expectations to return to their rural homes for marriage, as against staying in a foreign city with greater financial security and opportunities, but with the associated stigma of being an unattached female in town.

4. Conceptualising child domestic work

Consideration of the different ways in which child domestic work can be conceptualised is critical to a broad understanding of the practice and to responding appropriately. Each 'world view' places emphasis on different dimensions of the issue, leading to markedly differing interventions – none of which, by themselves, offer a holistic response. (The implications for interventions are covered in section 5.)

The most widespread way that child domestic work is conceived of is as a form of **(child) labour**, with its connotations of exploitation. But child domestic work can also be conceptualised as part of a **relational covenant between kin** to maintain family bonds and support each other. The practice can also be understood in gender terms, as a **gender-based continuum** which sees girls groomed for life in the domestic sphere, including as wives and mothers. Finally, child domestic work can be linked to notions of **slavery** through the way in which some children are placed by their families in the households of others.

Whichever way child domestic work is conceived, a broader conception of the situation and needs of child domestic workers – particularly beyond the more commonplace labour and slavery perspectives – is critical to ensuring a more rounded insight into their lives, motivations and perspectives. Acting on such wider understandings can enhance the effectiveness of efforts to improve their situation.

4.1 Child domestic work as 'labour'

Most commonly, conceptions of children in domestic work centre around their working conditions and their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Child domestic workers are seen as vulnerable to abuse and exploitation not only because they are children (and especially girls) but also because they are working in people's homes without being recognised as workers.

However, while it does reflect the harms experienced by many children in their role as employees, defining the practice as 'child labour' alone has its shortcomings. As with other forms of work undertaken by children, categorising child domestic work as essentially an exploitative labour issue has resulted in a narrow understanding of the diversity of children and young people's lived experience and of its impacts into adulthood (Jacquemin, 2006). By emphasising the harms done to children, it has also frustrated responses to their situations – in particular by blighting employers (and by extension their families) as 'the problem' without understanding their perspectives (Klocker, 2014).

The 'labour' approach makes a somewhat arbitrary distinction between children and young people in paid work situations and those engaged in reproductive care in the homes of their parents, or in the households of other relatives (Bourdillon, 2009). In practice, limiting the definitional focus to those 'in employment' potentially conceals similar situations from view and from scrutiny; Jacquemin (2006: 389), for example, contends that development programmes targeting 'economically exploited' child domestic workers in Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) mask the exploitation of child domestic workers under the cover of kinship ties and "risk obscuring situations where children are put to work and actually exploited".

The ILO's international normative framework relating to child domestic work has gradually shifted from blunt age-based prohibition (as in the ILO's Minimum Age Convention, C.138, 1973) towards a more nuanced conception of the key features of child domestic work which can transform it into a 'worst form' of child labour (ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour

Convention, C.182, 1999).[3] However, the widespread prioritisation of child domestic work as 'hazardous' (and therefore to be prohibited in a blanket way for under-18s) in a number of country contexts continues to act as a barrier to more culturally-appropriate responses and those which take account of economic push-factors.

The sector-specific approach taken by the ILO's Convention and Recommendation concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C.189, 2011) testifies to a further shift in policy thinking. These standards are based on the conviction that domestic workers are workers and therefore are entitled to respect of their rights and dignity (ILO, 2012). Specific provisions relating to young workers are an acknowledgment of the particular situation of those who are over the minimum age for admission to employment but who are not yet 18, and who require special protection and attention to continuing their education. This more pragmatic approach holds the promise of ensuring visibility and respect for domestic workers of all ages.

4.2   Understanding child domestic work as a relational practice

While labour perspectives draw attention to the working conditions faced by children in domestic work, there is a need to understand their circumstances in the wider context of age, gender and class-based inequalities both within employing homes and at a broader societal level. While gender is reviewed in the next section, the focus here is on understanding the practice in relational terms. This understanding of family and kinship structures is important, not least because it most closely resembles societal views of the practice, as well as the perceptions of families of origin and employing families.

A focus on the relationship between children and young people living and working with kin and non-kin is important across much of sub-Saharan Africa in particular. These 'child fostering' arrangements – an age-old practice of parents sending their children to live with other families – are commonplace. Indeed, demographic and health survey data across 16 African countries indicate that the number of households with a 'foster' child can be as high as 30% or more (Akresh, 2009; see also Annex 1).

When child domestic work is considered from social and cultural perspectives, relationality emerges as a major theme. Research from a range of settings shows the significance of social relations in assumptions surrounding the why, who, when and where of child domestic work – in particular in younger people honouring the 'inter-generational contract' of caring for older kin (van Blerk and Ansell, 2007a; Evans et al, 2019). In these contexts child domestic work represents the embodiment of these interdependent familial and community relations, characterised by mutual expectation and obligation between families and individuals (Evans, 2014).

Employers across diverse contexts routinely characterise their relationship with child domestic workers – regardless of their actual blood ties – as close to a familial one (Blagbrough, 2010; Jensen, 2014). However, working children and young people's lives are distinctively characterised by complex and ambiguous relationships with employing families (who may also be relatives): child domestic workers are both working, but not considered workers (with rights); and living in a family setting, but not treated like family members (Blagbrough, 2010).

There is also a need to explore potential differences in treatment between those staying with family out of kinship obligation and those in which children and young people have been more involved in negotiating their move. Those placed with relatives or family friends through a social obligation (such as a kinship fostering arrangement) are usually under greater social pressure to endure hardship in order to avoid shaming their family or upsetting the social order. For example, Roby et al (2014) note (in relation to Uganda) that children in kinship care can experience disparity compared to the family's biological children in the amount of household work they are asked to perform and in school attendance, which could have negative implications for their long-term wellbeing.

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[3]   For example, paragraph 3(e) of Recommendation 190 which accompanies the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C.182), 1999, states that in determining hazardous work situations, consideration should be given to "work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer."

4.3 Child domestic work as part of a gendered continuum

In countries across the world, domestic work is a strongly gendered issue with a close association to, and continuity between, unpaid female household reproductive labour and paid work options for girls and women beyond the home (see for example Anderson, 2000).

Almost two-thirds of the 781 million people over the age of 15 in the world who cannot read and write are female, an indication of the continuing lack of value placed on girls' education in many places.[4] The popular view of girls' education as being of lesser importance stems from the assumption that educated boys will have better labour market opportunities, while girls' time is better spent taking care of domestic chores in preparation for marriage and motherhood.

While girls and boys face similar challenges in early childhood, gender disparities become more pronounced in adolescence (10-19 years of age). Often, puberty is a signal for constraining girls' movement, schooling, sexuality and life exposure. Worldwide, girls often face a disproportionate burden of domestic work in their own homes, with those aged 5-9 and 10-14 spending 30% and 50% more of their time, respectively, on household chores than boys of the same age.[5]

Although research and action largely distinguishes between the situation of adult and child domestic workers, realities are far less distinct. Indeed, the situation and trajectories of girls and young women in domestic work requires an understanding of the practice as part of a gendered continuum which sees girls groomed for household reproductive tasks from an early age, and which affects their options and pathways throughout their lives. Domestic work's gendered nature means that, although boys can also be found working in the households of others, their work is more often focused beyond the confines of the dwelling-place itself and is conceived of differently, for example as agricultural work or street vending (Abebe and Skovdal, 2010).

> **"Girls and young women are structurally groomed for the role of domestic worker: domestic work is the expected and accepted trajectory for those seeking paid work beyond the home"**

Erulkar (2018a) argues that most girls leaving their families to become domestic workers is in part because the nature of domestic work is already familiar, as well as because of upbringing traditions in many societies which support children's movement to live with relatives and others (see previous section 4.2). Thus, in essence, girls and young women are structurally groomed for the role of domestic worker: in the context of limited options and societal norms, domestic work is the expected and accepted trajectory for those seeking, or required to seek, paid work beyond the home – whether in a neighbouring town, a capital city, or another country.

4.4 Child domestic work and the link to slavery[6]

Experts on slavery have been concerned about child domestic work in various guises for the past 100 years. In 1925, for instance, the Temporary Slavery Commission of the League of Nations condemned the transfer of children for domestic service under the pretext of adoption as slave dealing (Miers, 2003). The findings of this Commission formed the basis of the League of Nations' 1926 Slavery Convention. This international standard broadened the definition of slavery beyond that of chattel slavery to encompass practices that are similar in nature and effect – which have been taken to include issues such as forced labour, servitude and trafficking. Building on this bedrock, subsequent international human rights standards and concepts have, both in their definition and interpretation, recognised a range of child domestic work situations as a contemporary form of slavery.

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[4] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/oct/20/two-thirds-of-worlds-illiterate-adults-are-women-report-finds (accessed on 29 March 2021).

[5] UNICEF, 2018: https://data.unicef.org/topic/gender/overview/ (accessed on 29 March 2021).

[6] For further discussion about the conception of child domestic work as slavery see Blagbrough, 2011.

Child domestic work as servitude

The UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) considered a range of practices, including 'child servitude'. Article 1(d) of the convention states that "institutions and practices similar to slavery" include:

> Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years is delivered by either or both his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour.

The implications of this article are enormous, addressing as it does issues relating to a child who is living away from home to work, whether or not the child is paid. As such its interpretation clashes with age-old cultural norms around kinship and upbringing, particularly in sub-Saharan African contexts (see section 4.2). Submissions to the UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and responses over the years indicate three central aspects in considering the practice as servitude:

- The child's parent or guardian has 'handed over' control of the child to another person. The child is therefore under the control of adults whose first concern is not necessarily her well-being.

- The 'live-in' child is living as well as working away from family and home, limiting the ability of parents to monitor the child's welfare and increasing the child's dependence on her employer. The child typically has limited freedom of movement.

- The child is often not compensated directly for the work done. Wages may be paid directly to the child's parents, or the child's wage may be deducted at source in repayment of a debt to the employer or trafficker. Or there may be no payment for the child's services at all, with meals and lodging being considered as adequate remuneration. By withholding or deferring payment, employers make it difficult for the child to leave.

Child domestic work as forced labour and a worst form of child labour[7]

For many years the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of the Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) has discussed various manifestations of child domestic work as forced labour, and more recently as a worst form of child labour. This includes children who are obliged to work long hours without pay and who experience restricted freedom of movement, children who are sold into domestic work by their parents, those who are trafficked for the purpose of domestic labour (see below), as well as children in various traditional systems of domestic servitude.

For example, in 2011, concerning ILO C.182, the CEACR observed that

> …the Committee has been commenting for many years on the situation of hundreds of thousands of *restavèk* children who are often exploited under conditions that qualify as forced labour. It noted that in practice many of these children, some of them only 4 or 5 years old, are the victims of exploitation, are obliged to work long hours without pay, face all kinds of discrimination and bullying, receive poor lodging and food and are often subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse. In addition, very few of them attend school.

In relation to this observation the CEACR requested the Government of Haiti to take

> … immediate and effective measures to ensure, in law and in practice, that children under 18 years of age may not be employed as domestic servants under conditions equivalent to slavery or under hazardous conditions, taking account of the special situation of girls.

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[7] The following is an extract from ILO (2013a), *Ending child labour in domestic work and protecting young workers from abusive working conditions*, Geneva.

Child domestic work and trafficking

At its simplest, child trafficking can be described as the process of recruiting and moving a child for the purpose of exploitation.[8] While prospective employers may approach the prospective child domestic worker or her family directly, more often than not it is intermediaries who broker the deals between parents and employers, and who transport the children to their employing families. Intermediaries tend to be known in the communities from where they recruit children for domestic service. They are often local vendors or business people, with connections in both the source and destination areas, but they may also be recruiters from job placement agencies, friends, or even family members. In West Africa, for example, 'aunties' (who may or may not be actual relatives) are frequently involved in recruiting children from rural areas for domestic work in urban centres both within the country or in neighbouring nations.

Commonly, intermediaries deceive the child or her parents/guardians, who are fed false promises about the working conditions, opportunities for education and about what life for the child will be like. Typically, therefore, the way in which significant numbers of children enter domestic service can legitimately be described as trafficking. Invariably, the trafficked child is totally dependent on the trafficker for her or his well-being – particularly during the transportation process. Additional vulnerabilities arise when national borders are crossed, for example, in situations where the child is undocumented, located in a place where she or he doesn't speak the local language, and/or is cut off from family and community (ILO, 2009).

4.5 Discussion

In conclusion, according to evolving conceptions of slavery in a range of international instruments, many child domestic work situations can accurately be categorised as 'modern slavery'. At the same time, experience has shown that great care must be taken in the use of such labels due to their potential to encourage knee-jerk political and social reactions, as well as inappropriate and sometimes harmful responses. Thorsen (2012: 6), in her review of evidence on child domestic workers in West and Central Africa, has argued that:

> … explanations of child domestic workers' suffering may easily become inscribed in the relocation itself. It is believed that they suffer because they do not live with their birth parents in a nuclear family, despite the fact that this family form is not the norm…

Whatever the favoured ideological standpoint, it is important to recognise the limitations that a narrow focus can bring to understanding and responding on the issue. Experience has shown that context-specific approaches emphasising a localised comprehension of the drivers and motivations at play, as well as in-depth engagement with the children and adults involved, is critical to a sustainable response.

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8   This paraphrases the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000) which defines child trafficking as: "The action of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt [of a child] for the purposes of exploitation, which includes exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or similar practices, and the removal of organs." The trafficking of children is considered to be a worst form of child labour, under Article 3(a) of ILO C.182.

5. What we have learned: implications for interventions

This section considers the implications of what we know and what we have learned for interventions that support the needs of child domestic workers and prevent harm. However, it should be noted that, in discussing what works and what hasn't, independent data on the impact of interventions in this arena is very limited indeed. Where assessments of interventions exist, they tend to focus more on project or programme processes and less on the outcomes for children (Kyegombe et al, 2021).

Reflecting wider sector trends, evaluations of interventions (where they exist) tend to focus on snapshot situation analyses, without revisiting longer-term effects and impacts. In the case of some organisations (such as the ILO), a series of reports detailing actions on child domestic work are routinely published as 'good practice' long before the impact of the work has properly been assessed.

5.1 Meaningful participation of girls and young women is essential

Most policies and approaches on child domestic work remain chiefly based on a deficit model which emphasises potential risks while ignoring or diminishing children's competencies – resulting in policy and practice which is neither realistic nor relevant to their lives. Thus, when it comes to interventions there is a critical need for child domestic workers, as well as their parents, recruiters and employing families, to be closely involved in the appropriate components of integrated programme work, alongside efforts to support the creation of participatory mutual assistance groups of women, girls and children to develop and sustain programme gains.

In particular, it has been found that the direct participation of child domestic workers themselves in interventions continues to have a major positive impact on their situation (including on their self-esteem, improved protection and participation in education) as well as for wider policy action (which has brought visibility and action from governments and employers, as well as creating a platform for the emergence of new social movements focused on child domestic workers). This has been done, for example, through the formation of participatory structures, seed funds to support fledgling participatory groups, training of young leaders, an emphasis on life skills and child rights training, the creation of independent forums specifically for current and former child domestic workers to contribute their views freely, as well as by working with employers and parents to understand and support children's participation and to avoid conflict with and harm to children. Also noteworthy is the experience that participatory advocacy goes hand-in-hand with service provision, the two being indivisible and interdependent. Where service provision is strategic it lends legitimacy for advocacy, helps reach child domestic workers, motivates children and their families by offering alternatives, and provides a route for engaging with employers.

5.2 Child domestic work should not be seen in isolation from other children's rights issues

Interventions relating to child domestic work often come from a single perspective, such as considering the issue as simply a child labour concern, with projects established that target the needs of these girls and young women exclusively. While it can be argued that this has been a useful way to focus attention on complex, extreme and/or prevalent situations and to draw

in resources and specialist support, it is also increasingly recognised that the issue is closely linked to many other forms of neglect, exploitation, abuse and violence against children and young people which share many of the same underlying root causes. This indicates the need for a less siloed approach to children's work, education, and sexual and reproductive health interventions (such as in HIV prevention efforts: Erulkar, 2018a). In particular, strong links exist between child domestic work, street-connectedness, sexual exploitation and child marriage, indicating the need for a broader approach to protecting children (see also section 3).

5.3 Understanding child domestic work in the context of gender, age and class-based norms

While the particular situations of child domestic workers must not be overlooked, there is also a need to understand their circumstances in the wider context of gender and class-based norms. Prevalent perceptions of domestic workers' low social status and their poor working conditions can be linked to notions that domestic work is of low value, isn't 'real work' and is simply an extension of the unpaid housework that girls and women would normally perform in their own households (ILO, 2017). Child domestic work is part of a continuum of age, gender and class inequality over the course of a lifetime, and requires responses as such (see also section 4.3).

5.4 The importance of engaging with employers and their families

Employers and their families are key allies and should be persuaded to act in support of child domestic workers. They need to be engaged with and supported to reach out to other employers. Contextualised responses involving employers can be effective in changing employer attitudes and behaviours, as well as in making child domestic workers more visible, including: working with community and religious leaders to promote dialogue; supporting closer child and employer contact with the child's family; and establishing 'responsible employer' organisations for collective action and advocacy to raise standards and monitor violations. Services such as drop-in centres for child domestic workers are dependent on establishing a relationship with their employers to allow children 'in their care' to participate (see also section 4.2).

5.5 Not all child domestic work situations are the same

Interventions need to be sensitive to the potential differences in treatment between those staying with family out of kinship obligation and those in situations in which children and young people have been more involved in negotiating their move. Those placed with relatives or family friends through a social obligation (such as a kinship fostering arrangement) are usually under greater social pressure to endure hardship in order to avoid shaming their family or upsetting the social order. A powerful but intangible mutuality of obligation between the family of the child and the employing family may result in the child being treated better by the employing family; the arrangement may also result in the child feeling less able to leave in the event of poor treatment (see also section 4.2).

5.6 Restraint is needed around the labelling of child domestic work

Growing policy and practice experience on child domestic work prevention efforts which seek to limit the movement of children as part of 'anti-trafficking' initiatives has shown decidedly mixed results, with activities to prevent all young people from travelling often resulting in indiscriminate interception of children of all ages, including those entitled to work. While recruiter income may have been impacted, many of these efforts look to have increased the risks for some girls who may travel alone as a result. Another problem of such approaches is that they do not address the causes of children working, which requires alternatives (such as adequate school provision or livelihood options) to be identified and made accessible (see also sections 4.4 and 4.5).

5.7   Regulation is a powerful tool, but is not a panacea

When it comes to regulation, there is a growing understanding that international legal instruments which use age alone as the basis for prohibiting such a complex and varied social phenomenon are too blunt and largely ineffective. More nuanced legal approaches (for example the ILO's Domestic Worker Convention, 2011, C.189) are proving helpful in bringing the situation of domestic workers of all ages to the fore, stimulating international and local debate. At the same time, those efforts which appear to have worked most effectively are activities to make child domestic workers more visible and to monitor their situation locally, such as the registration of children in source and receiving communities, and the development of by-laws, ordinances and locally developed and enforced employer codes of conduct (see for example Emberson et al, 2020).

5.8   Caution should be exercised in spotlighting formal education as the principal alternative

The emphasis on school as an alternative to domestic work hinges on the formal education system and its adequacy and capacity, although in many settings the quality, accessibility, relevance and safety of schools remains problematic. YOUR World Research (2019) has noted that young people find that formal education is not relevant or helpful in finding employment or providing skills for earning an income. They want appropriate education and vocational training. However, vocational or skills training – while also frequently touted as a critical way of avoiding exploitation in domestic work – is often not aligned closely enough to the labour market, is of an insufficient standard and offers limited training options.

5.9   Generalised awareness-raising is, by itself, ineffective

Experience from a range of projects with the aim of ending harm demonstrates that general awareness-raising amongst families, employers and in communities at large about the occurrence of exploitation has proven largely ineffective when not backed up by incentives or sanctions (Olayiwola, 2019). As Busza et al (2017) have noted in relation to young women's movement from Ethiopia, while close contacts were often trusted for migration-related planning information these young women were not easily deterred by warnings of migration-related dangers. Instead, and as noted in other studies, stories of success and high incomes largely outweigh other accounts or public information campaigns. As an issue with an economic imperative, alternative livelihood opportunities linked to expertise and the market (not just vocational training) need to be provided for girls and their families to curb children being drawn into exploitative child domestic work situations.

Annex 1: A snapshot of national-level data in African contexts

In **sub-Saharan African contexts in particular**, the ambiguous boundaries between helping out a relative and being an employee make it extremely difficult to obtain reliable information about the exact number of children working as domestics. Girls who are fostered informally to help out in a relative's house are generally younger than girls who are employed: some start at the age of 7 or 8 and most are under 14, whereas employed girls often are in their mid and late teens (Thorsen, 2012).

During the 1990s and 2000s a flurry of national rapid assessment studies were undertaken by the ILO and others to assess the situation and numbers of child domestic workers. In the absence of any more recent data, many of these figures are still quoted. For example, a 2013 ILO briefing note on domestic work in Africa quotes a 2006 study in **Kenya** which estimated around 200,000 children in domestic labour situations (ILO, 2013b). In other example figures, Human Rights Watch issued a report in 2005 indicating that more than 80,000 girls aged under 15 – including some as young as 5 – were working as domestic workers in **Morocco** (reported in HRW, 2012). A third of all children in **West and Central Africa** are estimated to be working full- or part-time, paid or unpaid; between one-third and two-thirds of these children are considered to be in domestic work, and more than 80% of these are girls (Thorsen, 2012).

Case example: Tanzania

According to Census data from 2012 (ILO, 2016), if formal and informal arrangements are considered, there are 1.73 million domestic workers (7% of the total working age population, i.e. workers from 14 years of age). Seventy-five percent of these are female. Further, more than 75% of these domestic workers are below 25, with the majority falling within the age range of 15-19 years old. This does not count those children under the age of 14 who are also working but who are not considered to be 'employed'.

At the same time, over half of all households in Tanzania (i.e. more than 5 million) 'employed' a domestic worker in one way or another. Also, around 20% of all children (from 0-17 years) are not living with either biological parent – more than 90% of these children (especially those under 14 years) live with relatives. Significantly, girls are more likely than boys to be living away from home. The proportion of children in Tanzania living away from one or both parents is similar to, or lower than, the proportion in other East African countries (Blagbrough, 2020).

The massive shortfall between the numbers of domestic workers and the numbers of households employing them indicates that there are large numbers (hundreds of thousands, if not millions) of unaccounted children under 14 years working largely in relatives' households. While it is assumed that their situation is benign, growing evidence indicates that they are often in worse situations than 'employed' girls, as their young age and obligation towards their family effectively traps them in exploitative and sometimes violent situations (ASI, 2013; Blagbrough, 2020).

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