

5 Children combining school and work in Ethiopian communities

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Introduction

In a context of rapidly expanding access to school in Ethiopia, alongside investment and development which are providing incentives for children to work, this chapter considers how children living in conditions of relative poverty experience both work and schooling, and how these are inter-related in selected urban and rural communities. We begin by reviewing relevant literature and introducing the methods used in the Young Lives research. This is followed by a presentation of the findings from both survey and qualitative data demonstrating the prevalence of work as an integral part of children's upbringing, which increases with age and has gender dimensions. We discuss the challenges that children face in combining schools and work, and the perceived risks and benefits involved.

We then consider the implications of the findings, and suggest that changes in the nature of child work make it more difficult for children to succeed in combining work and school. In some sites employers, schools and parents all facilitate children's efforts to combine education with schooling. However, some children, particularly in families under stress, feel that they need to become more involved in paid work in order to assist their families, while others, believing that school does not offer them relevant skills, are attracted by work opportunities. As they find it harder to concentrate on school and make time to study while working, children tend to miss school and repeat grades. School and work then become increasingly competitive and ultimately incompatible; as they grow older, many drop out and proceed into work or (in the case of some girls) into marriage. However, some manage to persevere with school attendance, and income from their work contributes not only to their household's survival but also to meeting their own needs and school expenses, and a few learn skills and use savings to establish small businesses.

We conclude by raising questions about the quality and value of the education available to children living in poverty, the risks associated with the expansion of paid work, and the strains on children who are trying to combine school and work. We suggest the need for social-protection measures for children living in households facing shocks, and the need for more flexible working opportunities for children who need to work.

Literature review

In the debate about the use of the terms 'child labour' and 'child work', some authors tend to use both interchangeably. However, 'child labour' tends to be used by economists to denote economic activities outside the household, even though most child work takes place within the household (Bourdillon et al. 2010: 25). In much of the policy-related literature, 'child labour' is assumed to be inappropriate and dangerous. Some researchers therefore prefer to use the concept 'children's work' rather than 'child labour', given the negative connotations of the latter. Work is often seen as an integral part of children's everyday roles, responsibilities and development. As long as it is not excessive and does not pose serious health risks, it may be considered as innocuous and sometimes beneficial to children's development and well-being. Thus, the dichotomy between child 'work' and 'labour' seems an unhelpful framework which may lead to confusion. Bourdillon et al. (2010: 11) suggest avoiding the term 'labour' and prefixing to the term 'work' qualifiers such as harmful, illegal, paid, economic, or light. Likewise, in this chapter, we use the term 'children's work' because, first, it allows us to investigate all the activities that children do and, secondly, such a broader approach is useful for an examination of the relationship between work and schooling.

Throughout Ethiopia child work is prevalent among boys and girls in both urban and rural areas, as evidenced by both surveys and qualitative studies. The first and only national survey of child labour, conducted in 2001, estimated that 85 per cent of children aged 5 to 17 were engaged in some form of work (CSA 2002). In terms of broad types of work, 52 per cent were involved in productive activities and 78 per cent in domestic activities, with greater proportions of boys and rural children involved in the former, and double the proportion of girls and urban children involved in the latter (Woldehanna and Jones 2009). On average, children worked 33 hours per week in productive activities, and one-third of the children worked more than 40 hours. The number of hours worked was higher for boys in rural areas and for girls in urban areas. More than one third of children were involved in domestic activities for three to four hours per day. Of the working children, 8 per cent were involved in 'elementary' occupations, namely street-vending, shoe-shining, messenger services, agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, and transport, with a greater involvement of younger than older children (CSA 2002).

The 2005 National Labour Force Survey data are used by Woldehanna and Jones (2009) to suggest that among children aged 5 to 14 about 41 per cent of boys and 31 per cent of girls were involved exclusively in economic activities, and a further 17 per cent of boys and 11 per cent of girls were engaged in school and an economic activity. The proportions were found to be considerably higher in urban areas. The survey suggested that 60 per cent of boys and 46 per cent of girls were involved in what it termed 'child labour.'

The most recent nationally representative data come from the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey (CSA 2012). The data suggest a figure for child labour¹ of 27 per cent for children under 15. Most of these children were engaged in household chores, followed by family businesses, and paid work was very limited. In gender terms, child labour was higher among boys (31 per cent) than girls (24 per cent), and much higher in rural areas (30 per cent) than urban areas (13 per cent). Child labour was found to be much less prevalent among children with educated mothers (6 per cent) and to decrease with increasing wealth quintiles.

Qualitative studies have indicated that the incidence of children combining work with schooling is commonplace in Ethiopia. Drawing on her ethnographic work with children in Addis Ababa in 2000/01, Poluha documented that work was part of life for children. She stated that children under-reported work in their diaries because ‘children surrounded by poverty ... took it for granted’ (Poluha 2004: 45). Working at home or outside the home to generate income was a normal routine for children. Similarly, drawing on his fieldwork among Ethiopian children from coffee-growing communities in Ethiopia, Tatek Abebe noted the invaluable contribution of children to household economy. Although their work activities overlap with their schooling, work often provided traditional apprenticeship and skills development, in addition to socialisation (Abebe 2011: 167).

Drawing on Young Lives data using mixed methods, Kate Orkin (2012) found that children combine work with schooling in a rural area. Citing Young Lives qualitative data generated from one rural site (24 children, aged 13–14 years), together with the testimonies of a selection of care givers and community members, she found six features of rural schools and work which made the time children spent in school and work competitive: high schooling costs, less flexibility to respond to local work patterns and the effects of illness, work that is scarce, work that cannot be divided into small chunks, more tiring work, and the fact that chores and study are both done in the home. Drawing on exploratory analysis of survey data from 2006 (625 older-cohort children, aged 12 years, from rural sites only), she found some correlation between proxies for four characteristics—high schooling costs, flexibility to the effects of illness, scarcity of work opportunities, and less divisible work—and decisions about children’s schooling and work. She suggests that further research is warranted in order to understand children’s negotiation power vis-à-vis decisions about school and work within the household, and in order to explore school characteristics that enable children to attend school, or combine work with school.

Another study based on Young Lives data suggests that children combine work and schooling depending on different circumstances (Morrow et al. 2014). The study found that children’s time-use remained relatively ‘flexible’ over time, in the sense that the shift system in schools enabled children to continue herding cattle or doing other tasks outside school hours, and the expectation that children should contribute

to their households also persisted. In some cases, children temporarily left school because their labour was needed for other reasons, or because they relocated to a different household. Young Lives studies in Ethiopia also indicate that children have been engaged in some type of work from an early age and became engaged in paid work as young as 9. Children's work ranges from family chores to paid activities, including working in the government-run productive safety-net programme (Tafere and Woldehanna 2012).

Young Lives studies suggest that children work for a variety of reasons. They are needed to help their family in domestic or farm work in rural areas, and may be required or may wish to generate income by becoming involved in wage labour; some are also involved in their own income-generating activities; or they may be learning skills, or seek to earn income for their future. For many young people, work is a marker of a key life transition through which they have to pass. Moreover, working is an integral part of family life in which children are expected to participate (Tafere and Camfield 2009). Many children from poor households had to do paid work to subsidise their families and contribute to meeting their own needs. As they grew older, their economic role in helping their families to move out of poverty increased (Tafere 2014). Children living in different economic situations demonstrated their agency by helping their families and meeting their own needs through paid work (Chuta 2014). For many, it has helped to make their schooling possible; but for some it comes at the expense of their education: some quit school to work; or girls, having worked for many years, get married before finishing school (Tafere 2012).

The literature review thus suggests that combining work and school from an early age is commonplace in Ethiopia, and that working (at least within the family) is the norm rather than the exception, with wage work still limited but on the rise.

Data source and methods

Since this chapter explores children's experiences of combining schooling and work over the years, it draws on all three rounds of both the survey and qualitative studies. We focus on data from the older-cohort children (born in 1994/95), since their involvement in work and schooling is more apparent than among the younger cohort. The survey data were collected from nearly 1,000 children in 20 sites, and the qualitative data were obtained from five qualitative sub-study sites involving 30 older-cohort children (equal number of boys and girls, with 18 children from rural sites and 12 from urban sites).

Households in the qualitative study areas are generally poor. In urban areas, including Betukan in Addis Ababa and Leku in Hawassa, households earn their living through petty trade, street vending, and casual labour, and children are much involved. In the rural areas of Leki in Oromia, Tach-meret in Amhara, and Zeytuni

in Tigray, agriculture is the main source of livelihood. The majority of the households are poor, and many rely on the government-run productive safety-net programme (Tafere and Woldehanna 2012). Over the years, however, there has been increasing diversification of income sources, such as the expansion of private irrigation farms in Leki, haricot-picking businesses in Tach-meret, and stone-crushing plants in Zeytuni. These and other new investments provide better livelihood opportunities to the communities and they also involve children. These activities are located within the communities and sited very close to schools, thus enabling children to combine work with schooling. Although in principle schools are expected to teach for a full day, in the rural areas they are teaching in shifts (half-day). In Tach-meret, full-day schooling was rejected by parents who needed their children to help them with work, at least for half a day. In Leki the school operates in the morning; in the afternoon children are free to work, and teachers travel to the nearby town where they live. In Zeytuni the school operates in a shift system, alternating between mornings and afternoons, and children are only expected to work the other half of the day.

From the survey, we reviewed data on schooling and child work and activities. The data are analysed to show changes in time spent by children on work and in school over the years. Differences based on the location and sex of children are analysed. From the qualitative study, we consider the different work–school relationships among children who combine paid work and schooling, among those who do family or income-generating activities outside of their school time, and among those who quit school because of the need to work. The data were generated through interviews with children, self-reported diaries by children, education timelines, and relevant questions on combining work and schooling. All, except one boy who never enrolled at school, were able to complete their own one-week diary. Diaries given to the children were translated into their respective local languages. The researchers checked them every three days and translated the diary entries from local languages into English, in a table format.

Analysis of results

In presenting the results, we begin with the survey data, focusing on the general incidence and trends of schooling and work. We then present the qualitative evidence to demonstrate the lived experiences of young people in terms of schooling and work.

Quantitative data

Schooling

Children’s school enrolment at the ages of 8, 12, and 15 is presented in Table 1. The evidence suggests that overall the enrolment rate is fairly high. There was a notable

increase in enrolment from Round 1 in 2002, when the children were aged 8, to Round 2 in 2006, when they were aged 12, but there was a small decline in Round 3 in 2009, by which time the children were aged 15. Differences in terms of gender and economic status of the household seem low, but urban–rural differences are significant.

Table 1: Percentage of enrolment, completion and drop-out of older-cohort children in three Rounds of data gathering

	School enrolment			Primary- school completion rate (R3)	Drop-out (R2-R3)
	R1(N=x) Age 8	R2(N=x) Age 12	R3(N=x) age 15		
Average	66	97	90	18	8
Urban	89	98	96	29	4
Rural	51	97	85	10	12
Boys	64	97	88	19	9
Girls	68	98	92	17	7
Poor	-	98	89	15	9
Non-poor	-	95	92	24	6

At the age of 8 in 2002, 34 per cent of the children were not in school. According to the national education policy, children are expected to start school at the age of 7. Their care givers were asked why the children were not enrolled in school. Almost one third of the care givers (30 per cent) responded that the child was needed to help the family in various work activities. Others said that they did not send their children to school because the school was too far away (24 per cent), or school expenses were too great (22 per cent). Other reasons, less frequently reported, included children refusing to go to school, poor quality of education, and disability. There were rural–urban differences, with a greater proportion of rural parents citing school distance as a reason for non-enrolment, whereas for urban households the cost of schooling was more important (Alemu et al. 2003).

Although enrolment had increased between the ages of 8 and 12, the overall rate of completion of primary school (Grades 1–8) at the age of 15 was very low: less than one fifth. There were clear urban–rural and wealth-related differences; only 1 in 10 rural children had completed primary school, urban children were three times more likely to complete primary school at 15, and almost a quarter of children in households classified as non-poor had completed primary education, compared with 15 per cent of those in poor households. In addition to late entry, drop-out was another reason for low levels of completion. Between the Round 2 and Round 3 surveys, about 8 per cent of children dropped out of school. Drop-out rates were three times higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and children from poor families were more likely to drop out of school than those in wealthier households.

Child work

Children usually begin work before the age of school enrolment. As indicated above, more than a third of the children were not in school at the age of 8, and almost a third of parents reported that their children were needed to work for their families. At the age of 12, almost all children (97.6 per cent) were doing some type of work (Woldehanna 2009). This suggests that the children who spend some time in non-school work are not only the small proportions who are not enrolled and/or have dropped out, but also those children who attend school. Examples of children's work activities in a typical day at the age of 12 and 15 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Hours per typical day spent on activities by children at 12 and 15 years old, in 2006 and 2009

	Age 12 (N=955)					Age 15 (N=970)						
	Total	Rural	Urban	Girls	Boys	Total	Rural	Urban	Girls	Boys	Non-poor	poor
In domestic activities (child care and chores)	2.84	2.90	2.76	3.59	2.12	3.30	3.54	2.94	4.40	2.25	2.03	2.69
In unpaid family business outside home	1.62	2.33	0.57	1.03	2.18	1.35	1.93	0.49	0.43	2.21	0.73	1.85
In paid activities	1.47	2.17	0.42	0.90	2.01	0.41	0.45	0.36	0.32	0.51	0.01	0.02
In all kinds of work	4.46	5.23	3.33	4.63	4.31	5.06	5.91	3.79	5.15	4.97	0.88	0.95
In school	5.42	5.12	5.87	5.49	5.36	5.51	5.04	6.22	5.75	5.30	6.10	4.35
In home study	1.73	1.59	1.94	1.71	1.75	1.86	1.64	2.19	1.82	1.89	1.26	0.87

The data suggest that children spend a large proportion of their day in a range of work-related activities and spend almost as much time in work as at school, with notable urban–rural and wealth-related differences, and some gender differences in time use and types of work.

The qualitative evidence

The qualitative data provide evidence on children's schooling and how they combine it with work over the years. The data drawn from case studies illustrate the lived experiences of children with regard to schooling and work.

Schooling and work experience

All 30 children in the sub-sample, except one rural boy, have been in school at some point in their life. All the urban children began primary school at the expected age of 7. However, most rural children began school, as indicated in the survey, at the age when they could travel some distance. Ten out of 18 joined school between the ages of 9 and 12, while the remainder started school before the age of 9.

The disparity in the ages of starting school, together with school interruptions, resulted in diverse school trajectories among the children. At the age of 16/17, at the time of the third round of qualitative research in 2011, only four children (all girls) had finished primary school. The rest were in various grades, ranging between 2 and 8. At the same time, four girls had already dropped out of school, two due to marriage and the other two for economic reasons. The low level of completion rate for these children, as also indicated in the survey data, was due to interruptions and repetition caused mainly by family problems, illness, and the need to work. Before discussing the impact of work on schooling, we present the work situation of the children who are engaged in both work and school.

All 30 children reported being engaged in some type of domestic work, such as house cleaning, cooking, and fetching water and firewood. Their paid work depended on job opportunities available in their respective communities. In rural sites, paid work included transporting stones to feed into the crushing machine in privately owned stone-crushing plants, irrigation on private farms, picking haricot beans, weeding, fishing, selling stones, collecting and selling fodder, and related activities. In the urban sites, paid work included car washing, shop keeping, taxi attendance, street vending, and other casual work. Fifteen children (10 rural and 5 urban) reported being engaged in some such activities in order to generate income. In addition, three girls in the urban sites reported having helped their mothers to generate income by baking *injera* for sale or washing clothes for cash. Some of the children had begun paid work as young as 8, and by the age of 12/13 many were already working for pay.

The challenges of combining schooling and work

Most of the children who were involved in paid work tried hard to combine work with school. Although the children and their care givers suggested that their educational performances were affected, most seem to manage to continue with their schooling. Only four of those included in the qualitative study had completely dropped out by the age of 16 and were engaged solely in work.

We documented how children combined work and schooling, as reported in their one-week diaries, which they wrote during the data-gathering periods. Children reported on what they did from waking up early in the morning to bed time. The data focused on how they used their days. An example is presented in Table 3 for Mulatua, a 16-year-old girl who is a paternal orphan living with her mother in the rural site of Tach-meret.

Mulatua was involved in a wide range of work besides her schooling. She was able to combine this with her schooling and study time because her employers were flexible in her time management. They agreed to pay her on a piece-rate for work which they allowed her to perform at home.

Table 3: Mulatua's self-reported diary for three typical days

Time	15/10/2007 aged 12	17/11/2008 aged 13	20/04/2011 aged 16
6:00–6:30am	Put on my clothes, washed my hands and face	Put on my clothes, used toilet, washed my face	Put on clothes and used toilet
6:30–7:00	Did home work	Cleaned house	Cleaned house alone
7:00–8:00	Cooked <i>wat</i> (stew)	Had breakfast	Fetches water from outside alone
8:00–8:30	Had breakfast	Went to school	Had breakfast
8:30–10:00	Studied	Learned, played at break	Sorted haricot beans (8:30–11:00)
10:00–12:00	Attended make-up class in school	Learned after break and returned from school	Returned from work, washed (11:00–12:00)
12:00–12:30	Had lunch	Had lunch	Had lunch
12:30–1:00	Fetches water outside home	Washed	Went to school
1:00–6:00pm	Sorted haricot beans at employer's house	Sorted haricot (1–3pm), combed my hair (3–3:30), studied (3:30–5), played (5–6pm)	Attended school (1–5pm), did homework (5:30–6pm)
6:00–8:00	Baked <i>injera</i> , cooked <i>wat</i>	boiled coffee, cooked stew (6–8)	Cooked stew and coffee (6–9pm)
8:00–8:30	Ate dinner and slept	Ate dinner, slept	Ate dinner, washed utensils, studied and finish assignment (9:50–12), slept (midnight)

The diary also shows that the hours spent by Mulatua in haricot picking and sorting increased over time, and she had little time for rest or play. At the ages of 12 and 13 she had to do all kinds of activity between 6 am and 8:30pm. She spent 14.5 hours of the day on work and school between waking up in the morning and going to bed in the evening. When she reached the age of 16, she had to work for an extra 3.5 hours, which left only six hours for sleep. When she was younger she slept after dinner, but when she was 16 she had to do more household chores and study after dinner. Her mother, however, complained that Mulatua was becoming increasingly reluctant to do more household chores, as she wanted to give more time to her studies. Nonetheless, Mulatua was determined to continue working and hoped to complete university education and become a medical doctor.

The shift-school system enabled Mulatua to spend half of the day at school and the other half at work. In all rural communities schools teach in shifts, except for Leki, where there is a half-day rather than a shift system. Our data suggest that the resistance to moving away from half-day or shift-day schooling to full-day schooling was a result of pressure from families who want their children to help them in work. The school director at Mulatua's school explained how the shift system was adopted, and his view of its detrimental impact on education.

There is a shift system because the community wants its children to help in herding cattle and doing other activities at home after or before going to school. Due to this reason, it has not been possible to implement the full-day school system. Indeed, the shift system is negatively affecting the children because in the full day, the students would get enough time to revise what they learned and to do their home- as well as classwork with their classmates. In the shift system, they have to go home after school and help their parents; they can't revise what they learned and they can't do homework and can't study. So, with this condition, it is not expected that these students can be educationally successful. Therefore, it will be important to work in sensitising the community about this issue and some activities have already been started.

(School director, Tach-Meret, 2011)

A similar pattern of increasing workloads as children grow can be seen from the following example of a boy in an urban site. We present extracts from the diaries of Bereket, an orphan who lives with his maternal grandmother in Bertukan, in the centre of Addis Ababa, and worked in a garage and washed cars. The extracts come from diaries written when he was 12, 13, and 16 respectively.

Woke up 7am, washed and went to school. Returned from school at noon. In the afternoon, after lunch went back to school and attended afternoon classes until 4:30. Then played with my friends and did homework. I only washed a car for cash for 30 minutes (7:30–8pm). Then I washed, ate dinner, got rest and slept at 9pm. (4/10/2007)

After a year, he had similar time for schooling but longer work hours afterwards.

Woke up at 7:05, prepared myself, ate breakfast, went to school, attending classes, had lunch. At 2pm, returned to school where I continued attending classes and played football during the break. I returned home at about 4pm and ate my snack. Then, I washed cars for nearly three hours (4:15–7:00). I used the remaining time for studying (1 and a half hours), eating dinner, and watching television before I slept at 9:45pm. (7/10/2008)

Three years later his routine was similar, although he was in a new school and had even more work after school.

Woke up at 7 and went to school after having breakfast. Stayed in school until 3:30. I had my lunch after school because I could not come home during the mid-day break as my new school was a bit far. Late in the afternoon, I worked at a garage and car washing place for four hours (4pm–8pm). I used

the remaining one hour for washing and eating dinner before going to bed at 9pm. (8/4/2011)

By the age of 16, he believed that combining work and school was too difficult.

I used to think and hope that education will change my life, but now, I have changed my mind. Now, I am only hoping that having a business will change me. I used to believe in education before but now I prefer to work. I want better things by doing business. I want to become involved in selling cars; we meet people while doing our jobs and they tell us how to do it. So I don't think selling cars will be difficult for me (Bereket, 2011).

Bereket's diary provides interesting insights. He was involved in working and full-day schooling in all three rounds of data gathering. He spent the whole morning getting ready and attending school. The afternoon was divided between further schooling and work. The time spent in school remained the same as he grew older, but the time for work increased. However, all of his diary reports show that Bereket, unlike Mulatwa, was hardly involved in household chores or other family work. This was because his grandmother and his niece, who live with them, took care of all household chores. As a boy he was not expected to do any domestic work.

The diaries of other children reveal a similar trend: considerable and increasing amounts of time spent on work in addition to school-related activities. For those in paid work, this was sometimes very difficult to combine with schooling, as shown in the following conversation between the researcher and Bereket during 2011 fieldwork:

Have you ever been absent from school? If so, why and for how long?

I don't go to school regularly; I might be absent for three days.

Is it this year or last year or are you telling me about the whole three years?

I had many absences in the last year and the year before that.

What was the reason?

I was supposed to go to work if there is one. Sometimes, I can give the job to my friends and would go to school. Otherwise, if it is a must for me to do it I don't go to school.

You didn't attend because you had to go to work?

Yes.

How often are you absent in a week and a month?

In a month, I can be absent from 5 to 7 days.

How many times did you take your parents to school?

I was told to bring my parents because I had many absences.

So it means it has no impact on your results, for example if you don't attend classes regularly you can miss some important things and exams.

Yes but my teachers take and multiply my results if I miss an exam. For example, if I miss an exam which is out of ten, by next time when we have other exams out of 10, mine will be graded out of 20.

In the rural communities there was more flexibility, owing to the shift system and employers' adaptations to facilitate child work; whereas in urban areas children had to work after school or abandon schooling.

In some cases, the combination of work and school seems to involve a difficult arrangement. In the third round of qualitative research in 2011, we conducted a school and classroom observation in Leki. Table 4 indicates that nearly half of the students enrolled in the school were absent during the observation. The school director confirmed that about 10 per cent of the students had dropped out of school.

Table 4: Enrolment, attendance and drop-out at Leki school (2 April 2011)

Grade	Enrolled in school	Attending during observation	Absent during observation	Number of drop-outs
1	117	47	70	9
2	100	39	61	20
3	58	39	19	2
4	54	27	27	6
5	50	36	14	4
6	51	33	18	2
7	53	36	17	10
8	56	32	24	1
Total	539	289	250	54

Source: *Classroom Observation (April 2011)*

During the observation, some were attending school, others were running through the fences to go to work, and a few were coming late to classrooms after doing some work in the irrigation fields. About 30 students were outside the school compound and were late, apparently having been doing some type of work. For example, one girl stated that she was late because she had to do some work in the irrigation fields. They were allowed to enter classrooms after some classes had finished. The director blames the expansion of investment in the community for the poor school attendance. He said:

I came to this school in 1997. This school was famous for its brilliant students in the early 2000s. They were top when they joined secondary schools in other places. Some have become teachers and engineers after finishing a university education.

However, the situation started to change since 2004, when the development work flooded to this *Kebele* (locality). The focus of children shifted to work, and the value given to education declined. Since the introduction of irrigation by investors on farm lands, most children are engaged in daily labour. This has affected education negatively.

The farms are adjacent to the school compound. The students pretend that they go to toilets but they escape through that. They don't want to listen to their teachers. In fact, they tell the teachers that it is their business to learn or not. They tell them that they want money, not education. They have learned working in the vegetable farms since their young age. So they do not bother about education. They prefer money to education.

(School director, 2011, Leki)

Children suggested that they need money for immediate consumption, and some weighed the benefit of poor-quality education against what they could earn from paid work. During the observation, four classes were found to be without teachers. The students were either playing outside or simply sitting in the classrooms. Others were squeezing through or jumping over the fences to go home or to work places. For example, Beletech, who had been involved in paid work for years, ran away during the observation day and explained that she had decided to go to work because there were no teachers in her classroom.

As the school and the irrigation fields are both within the community, children try to combine education and work. The school in Leki teaches half day and is tolerant towards those who miss classes. A teacher interviewed in 2011 said, "Honestly speaking, more than half of the students do not come to school for a day. And the next day, those who are absent will come and others will miss class in turn." The employers also adapted to the situation by offering work quotas against payment. The impact has been apparent. Every year children enrol in school, but many never finish at the end of the year. For example, three of the six study children in this site reported the same grade in all three rounds of data collection. They had neither progressed in classes nor dropped out of school. These experiences suggest that when children attend school and have a large burden of work, this can affect their schooling and they are less likely to succeed. They then become more involved in their work, and less and less inclined to maintain an interest in schooling.

The following cases illustrate experiences of children living in conditions of poverty who combined work and schooling but had to overcome challenges to succeed in school, often due to problems faced by their families.

Denbel, a boy from Leku, worked as a shopkeeper for a monthly wage of 150 birr. In 2011, he said that his happiest experience was when he got the job. He attended school on a half-day basis and worked in the shop the other half. But he increasingly focused on his job. He said, "As there is a problem [economic] in the family, I am less interested in my education. I rather want to work than go to school because I need to earn enough money. I am absent from school at least twice a week." Earlier, Denbel was working as a messenger in a garage for some time to support his poor family and buy school materials. While he believes that the money he earns has helped his family and himself, he says that it did affect his schooling and deterred him from pursuing his aspiration to succeed in school and eventually become an engineer.

Miki, a boy from Bertukan who lives with his paternal grandmother, had been doing all kinds of household chores when he was younger. But as he grew older he began generating income to assist his family. Although he tried to work during the weekends and out of school time, working affected his studies and sometimes his attendance. He said in 2011:

As there is no girl in the family, I was doing all household chores. I prepare food, cook chicken stew Now I am working as a taxi attendant with a monthly wage of 80–90 birr. The work is hard. I buy school materials for myself as well as coffee and sugar for the family with the money I get. ... When the taxi needs repair I am absent from school.

When children become involved in work for a long period and develop some skills, they tend to lose interest in schooling. While some continued to struggle in school, repetitions, interruptions and poor performances, mainly caused by work, led some to drop out of school altogether.

Four cases are presented as illustrations of the constraints that poor children face in their efforts to combine school and work. These relate to the experiences of two boys and two girls who were involved in both family work and paid work which slowed down their schooling and led to their eventual drop-out. Defar, from Tach-Meret, undertook family and paid work from a young age. He was involved in fetching water and firewood, weeding, ploughing, harvesting and other agricultural activities. He did not enrol in school until the late age of 11 years, because he was needed to accomplish family work. At the age of 13, he began combining school with income-generating activities. He was hired to sort haricot beans for 25 birr per quintal. He also collected stones from open areas and sold them in a nearby town with his father. While working in the sun, he suffered from serious headaches. As the family, reliant on agriculture and safety-net transfers, was too poor to afford his schooling, he had to drop out of school at Grade 4. After leaving school, Defar earned his living mainly from daily labour and portering in the nearby town. The impact of leaving school in order to work was described by Defar in 2011 as follows:

Why did you stop going to school from September?

It was because I needed to work and support myself.

What do you feel about leaving school?

I feel that I am below my classmates and my friends as the result of it. I am sad.

Who decided that you must discontinue your education?

It was due to lack of economic capacity.

Tufa, another boy living in Leki, began his schooling at the age of 8. He also did all kinds of family work. Every year he went to school and enrolled, but he reached only Grade 2, due to interruptions. When he was 13 he had to stop going to school when his father, who was a guard, was imprisoned after a water pump was stolen from a store where he was working. Tufa found it difficult to combine school with heavy work. He earns additional income through fishing and paid work in irrigation fields. Initially, he feared that the employers might not hire him because he was too young, but his mother influenced them to employ him. During the 2011 fieldwork he was no longer in school and saw little chance of going back to school. He envisaged his life only in terms of farming. He stated that his happiest moment was when he joined school at the age of 8, and the saddest event was to see his friends attending school when he had to quit.

Two girls, Ayu from Leki, and Haymanot from Zeytuni, have married, interrupting their schooling in Grades 2 and 5, respectively. Both had begun schooling at an early age and tried hard to continue with their education. While Ayu began working at the age of 12 in irrigation fields to support her poor family, Haymanot began working at a stone-crushing plant at the age of 13, following the illness of her poor and single mother. While Ayu enrolled every year but interrupted her schooling after a few weeks of attendance, Haymanot had to drop out to work full time. When both found it impossible to continue with schooling, they married in the same year, when they were aged 16. Haymanot expressed her happiness with her marriage by saying that it “relieved me of the heavy work”.

Work, health and schooling

All the case-study children who participated in paid work reported experiencing some type of injury or other health problems.² Haymanot needed treatment for an injury to her fingers in the stone crusher. Ayu frequently fell ill when working in the irrigation fields in the sun. Defar experienced headaches while carrying stones in the sun, was taken to be sprinkled with holy water and had to stop working for some time. Tufa also complained of headaches when working in the sun. The 2009 survey data from older-cohort children show that 13.8 per cent sustained some injuries, half them work-related (Morrow et al. 2013). The same data suggest that work injuries were

to some extent associated with economic status and residence. Children from poor families and those who live in rural areas, as exemplified by these cases, seemed to be at greatest risk.

Several children mentioned the impacts of work-related health risks and accidents on their schooling. Mulatua had breathing problems and eye infections caused by the dust when working in the haricot-picking business, and the uncomfortable seat gave her pain. Bereket had to go to hospital when he was injured while changing a tyre, and he had to interrupt school for the year and repeat the grade. As the employer assisted him with only a small amount, he had to spend much of his savings. Habtamu slashed his leg with an axe while chopping wood. He had to get treatment for about three months. Although his school allowed him to resume his education after a long absence, he failed the final exam and had to repeat a grade. He said, "Although the teacher allowed me to re-join after three months, I failed in the exam because I did not learn what others have learned. ...I also could not play with my friends due to the injury."

Benefits of work

Despite the potential risks in some of the activities, many children living in conditions of poverty are engaged in hard work, which remains the main means of survival. Some children are able to combine schooling with work, which can have long-term benefits, and for some there may not be any other realistic alternative.

Children work in order to meet their obligations to help their family, to ensure that their basic needs are met, and in some cases to make their schooling possible and invest in their future. Students from poor families feel an obligation to work. At the age of 13, Kassaye from Tach-Meret said:

I herd livestock and do all family work.... I do the work in one shift of the day and go to school the other shift. I do not have time for study. The work is affecting my education. But because we are the children of poor farmers and here things are difficult, we should work to get food. That is why I should work. ... My father told me, "You should do what I do because it helps you for the future if you fail in your schooling. You can be a good farmer like me."

Kassaye continued to be involved in family work and as he grew older he began investing in his future through paid work. He began earning some money to pay for his schooling and support his family and to build up his savings. At the age of 16 he said:

I collect straw and sell it to those who need it as animal fodder. I earn some money which I used to buy school materials, gave some amount for my mother to buy sugar, cooking oil and red pepper. I used the rest to buy chickens for breeding. I sell the eggs and earn more money.

In circumstances where children do not have time and resources to attend school effectively, they often do less well and focus more on their work, which can pave the way for other life options. Bereket, whose case was presented earlier, developed skills and experience of working in car washing and in a garage assisting drivers. He was ready to obtain his driving licence on reaching the required age of 18. He has also developed business skills from working with car brokers and is hopeful that he will succeed in business. Beletech, a girl from Leki, has earned some money to set up a new business. She said, “Through my earnings from my work in irrigation, I set up a small kiosk and bought a goat for breeding. I sell sugarcane, chewing gum and candies in my shop.”

Discussion and conclusions

Both the survey data and qualitative evidence illustrate the reality of children combining work and schooling. All the children had been working from an early age, but later tried to combine work with schooling. The survey results show that at the age of 8 the children were engaged mainly in family work, with few involved in paid work, which increased at the ages of 12 and 15. The qualitative data confirm this finding and demonstrate that children’s work burden increases with age, and that girls face greater pressure to combine domestic tasks with school, as well as work outside the household in rural areas where employment opportunities are available.

While work remains a fundamental part of children’s lives, many children go through an intermittent educational trajectory. This involves for some starting late and not progressing as expected but repeating grades; for others it involves some periods out of school, often related to family poverty and economic shocks (see Pankhurst, Crivello and Tiemelissan, this volume). In some cases, we were surprised by the prevalence of the ambiguity of children’s educational status. While the survey reported children as either in or out of school, the qualitative data presented a more mixed picture. In some sites, children registered as students are actually working, so that combining work and schooling does not necessarily mean that they are ‘regularly attending’ school.

In Ethiopia, children have traditionally been expected to perform work for the household from a young age. Work is a marker of key life transitions and part of children’s expected roles (Tafere and Camfield 2009). However, the nature of children’s work has been changing since the addition of paid work. In the past, children were expected to work for the family before they set up their own independent livelihoods. Very few had the opportunity to go school and even these were required to work and study. However, since the 1990s, widespread expansion of both schooling and economic development has brought new responsibilities for children (see Pankhurst, Crivello and Tiemelissan, this volume). In the rural areas of our study communities, primary schools and businesses attracting child work came to their backyards. This has resulted in changes, because previously children were engaged only in domes-

tic work and only some adults migrated for wage labour, whereas now children are attracted to paid work available close by, and they may be pushed into it by their parents or feel a sense of obligation to earn money to assist their families. Moreover, schooling is imposing new costs on families, many of whom are already struggling economically, and some children feel obliged to contribute to the costs.

Parents, schools and employers seem to have generally responded by making it possible for children to combine work and schooling. Fieldwork revealed high 'flexibility' by all three parties in encouraging children to be involved in 'everything'. The half-day or shift system made child work possible. Employers were accommodating by allowing children to work at piece rates (irrigation work, for example) and do some work (such as sorting haricots) at home; schools were tolerant of those who came late or missed classes; parents were convinced that their children could do family work, outside paid work, and schooling. All this suggests that the main burden and necessity for time adjustment falls on the children.

What does this mean for working-learning children? For some, the type of work they do and hours they work clearly affect their health and schooling. When they go to school after work, they get tired and cannot follow their class attentively; when they work after school, they do not find time for study and doing homework. The survey and the qualitative data revealed that children work before the age of 8, and the case studies provide evidence that some have faced injuries or health problems while working.

Furthermore, concerns over the quality of education meant that in some cases children felt they were not benefitting much from school; teachers were often absent, and the learning on offer was not seen by the children and their parents as relevant to their likely or realistic life options. This was particularly the case when children started school late, repeated grades, or missed years due to family problems and/or work.

Children overburdened by work found it hard to succeed in their schooling, and some found work and school incompatible. Some performed less well and ended up dropping out and moving into other spheres of life. There is a gender dimension to this. While boys such as Tufa and Defar who stopped school focused on their work, girls such as Ayu and Haymanot began a new family life. In general, as children grow older, they are subject to increasing competition between the demands of work and schooling, and eventually the need and desire to work prevails.

However, for a few children work was a means to ensure that they could continue with schooling, a fact which suggests some complementarity of schooling and work, which they see as a necessity. Mulatua is a case in point: she was one of the few working students who were able to perform well and progress beyond primary school.

Work has also helped some children to gain life skills. For example, Bereket and Beletech had already begun establishing their own businesses. Others, like Kassaye, continued to do agricultural activities like their fathers. They are confident that they

would be able to pursue their business or farming if they could not succeed in school. Staying in work while attending school thus opens up other life options.

Children from poor families, like those included in our study, need to work while trying to attend school because their circumstances oblige them to do so. Children may not have the capacity to change the structural impediments that confront them, but they may make the best of the situation (Lieten 2008). Children who are unable to lift their family out of poverty and have the opportunity to work can make use of the opportunity by combining work and school as far as possible.

The case studies presented above illustrate these processes. An additional gender dimension is that girls often found themselves under pressure (or wished) to get married when they felt that the route through school to work was not viable for them; in two of the cases discussed, the girls preferred marriage to the hard manual labour in which they became engaged when they were not succeeding in school. The case studies also showed that some forms of work can affect children's health and that they were at risk of a range of accidents which often affected their schooling, resulting in absences, sometimes leading them to drop out of school altogether.

Nonetheless, despite the risks that children faced, most did not see an alternative to working and viewed it as their duty, and as a natural route to follow in the footsteps of their parents, who sometimes encouraged them to give up school for paid work. Many children considered work not just as a means of survival but also as an obligation for the sake of their families. Some enterprising older children were able to develop skills through working, and a few were able to invest and start small businesses that might grow. However, very few children living in these poor circumstances had the energy, time and perseverance to succeed at school and keep faith in being able to succeed through education.

To conclude, in a context where opportunities for paid child work have expanded, the underlying structural poverty, the poor quality of the school system, limited chances to succeed through education, and the growing pressures for children to combine school with both domestic and paid work can be said to have put a strain on children's ability to manage that combination successfully. This resultant pressure tended to lead children, especially in households that had faced health and livelihood shocks, to miss classes in order to work, and eventually they drop out and become engaged in full-time work.

The findings raise questions about the quality and value of the education available to children living in poor circumstances, the risks associated with the expansion of paid work, and the strains on children who strive to combine school and work. Potential policy implications of the findings include the need for social protection for children living in households facing shocks, to avoid their becoming engaged in excessive or potentially harmful work, and the need to facilitate flexible learning opportunities for children who need or want to work to contribute to their households or earn a living.

Notes

- 1 Child labour was defined as including (a) children aged 5–11 working for someone who is not a household member, with or without pay, or engaged in any family work or household chores for 28 hours or more; and (b) children aged 12–14 working for someone who is not a household member, with or without pay, or engaged in any other family work for 14 hours or more, or doing household chores for 28 hours or more (CSA 2012).
- 2 For a more detailed discussion of risks and harms and benefits from work, see Pankhurst, Crivello and Tiumelissan in this volume.

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