



Responding to children's work

Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam

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Responding to children's work

Most children in low- and middle-income countries do some work as part of their daily lives, often from a young age. Such work can be benign and beneficial, for example if children are working outside school hours on light domestic chores, or accompanying mothers, fathers or older siblings on family farms or businesses. Other work, however, can be harmful – often in difficult conditions with the risk of injury and exhaustion, involving long hours that cause children to miss school and underachieve.¹ Such work has frequently been categorised as 'child labour'.

There are numerous definitions of child labour, based variously on hours worked, remuneration, age and types of work, or the specific industries or hazards involved.² Young Lives has a different emphasis. Instead of 'child labour', the study uses the term 'children's work' and sees work as part of children's everyday lives within a continuum of regular activities. While highlighting potential risks, it also indicates benefits. Children may be earning essential income for the family, or may be carrying out activities that free up adults to do other work.³ In this way, children can actively participate in the work of households while learning vital and relevant skills that may pay off in later life.⁴ This report therefore considers children within their working households and communities, focusing also on the fundamental relationship between work and school education.

Young Lives has not specifically collected evidence on the most harmful forms of work. Such work has been addressed by many national governments, civil society organisations and international agencies. Most recently, Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for action to:

Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

Achieving Target 8.7 will not be easy. Most countries have legal norms, but these often align poorly with children's everyday realities. Production, services and commerce that rely on low-skilled and inexpensive labour have a considerable demand for young workers and, in poor communities where children and their families need employment or income, employers are likely to find a continuous supply of child workers.

Efforts to ban children's work are frequently ineffective if they are badly enforced or do not seem appropriate for local circumstances. They may even leave children worse off if they are driven to other workplaces that are more dangerous but out of sight. Improving children's prospects will mean addressing the underlying reasons why children work – recognising the priorities and needs of poor children and their families, while also creating opportunities that enable them to learn important life skills and find ways out of poverty.



Principles for policy and programming

Below, we highlight principles for child-sensitive programming that will help minimise the risk of burdensome work for children, while maximising children's wellbeing – always acting in the best interests of children.

1. Focus on the most harmful work – National and global efforts should aim to eliminate the worst forms of work. Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals and the ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour provides a framework for this, protecting children at the greatest risk of harm while recognising that not all work is harmful. Some forms of work can be beneficial to children including teaching them necessary skills for the future.

2. Child labour legislation needs to be implemented sensitively – Governments should engage with communities and families so that children who work and their families are neither stigmatised nor penalised. Rather than simply imposing solutions, it is important to talk with children and families about the pressures on their lives and evaluate the impacts of potential interventions. Child protection systems can address children's work effectively by shifting the focus beyond the use of the law to making community and social relationships the centre of protective efforts.

3. Address family poverty – Child-sensitive social protection should be expanded to better support children and their families living in poverty and reduce their reliance on children's work.

4. Help children who work to access schooling that is fit for purpose – Authorities should support the education of those children who need to work. This means ensuring that education is more beneficial and attractive by improving the quality and flexibility of schooling, as well as making schools safer by addressing corporal punishment and bullying. For example, half-time schooling could be offered, along with allowing more flexibility in attendance, while enabling children to re-enrol after an absence. For hard-pressed families, schools need to demonstrate potential pay-offs in better life chances. As such, equipping children with skills relevant to local opportunities can ensure children will stay at school for longer.

5. Address care work in the home – Prioritise interventions which aim to reduce pressures associated with care work within households, such as improved access to childcare or decreased domestic work, so relieving the burden most often experienced by girls.

An evidence base for child-sensitive policies

Led by the University of Oxford in partnership with national research institutions, Young Lives is a major international study of childhood poverty. Young Lives has followed 12,000 children from Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam over 15 years (2002-2016). Since 2002, the study has tracked children of the 'Millennium Generation' from two age groups: 4,000 born in 1994 (the Older Cohort); and 8,000 born in 2001 (the Younger Cohort) through to the present. The study interviewed these children at three-year intervals – in 2002 (Round 1), 2006 (Round 2), 2009 (Round 3), 2013 (Round 4), and 2016 (Round 5), and gathered further, qualitative information from a 'nested' sample – talking to a smaller group of children and their caregivers, as well as to other key figures in the community – in 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2014.⁵ However, the children in Young Lives are not representative of the national population, since the study intentionally selected poor rural and urban sites so as to obtain a sample with a high proportion of poor children among a wider range of experiences, to most fully explore the causes and consequences of childhood poverty.⁶

Young Lives highlights the pressures on children and their families – and the options available to them. The study has gathered data (quantitative and qualitative) on how children spend their time, at school, work, rest and play. It has also collected information on children's education, physical growth, and on psychosocial outcomes, interviewing children to understand their psychological and emotional wellbeing, and their hopes for the future. In addition, it carried out sub-studies related to work in India and in Ethiopia, collecting qualitative information on children's understandings of the risks and benefits of work, and on the impact of social protection programmes.⁷ In this way, the research has built up a rich picture of the changing nature of work during childhood, seen from the perspectives of parents and children.

While Young Lives did not research hazardous or exploitative forms of child labour, its results are useful in designing programmes to prevent children from becoming involved in such work. It draws attention to the reasons why children work and what is at stake for children and their families. By identifying the issues that child labour programmes need to take into account, this evidence can help policy-makers approach children's work in a more child-sensitive way.





The relationship between work and schooling

The dominant policy consensus is that children between the ages of five and 18 should not be working but attending school and training – learning the skills needed to lead productive and fulfilling lives and contribute effectively to society. Work is seen as a risk, interfering with school attendance and performance, and commonly causing children to leave education too early. Typical solutions therefore ban children below certain ages from working and enforce compulsory education.

Overall, efforts to boost education around the world have had considerable success. Enrolment at primary level is now near universal and is rising fast at secondary level. But this does not mean that children no longer work. Many work part-time outside of school hours, while some children in the worst forms of work do not go to school at all. On the other hand, a proportion of children from poor families do not work. Therefore, policy-makers may regard children's work as a matter of parental choice and hold families responsible if they prioritise household income over the longer-term benefits of schooling. This is one of the motivations underpinning policies focused on compulsory education and a minimum age for work. Young Lives has investigated the education aspirations of parents and children to see whether this assumption holds true.

High aspirations for the future

Young Lives found that most caregivers and children had increasingly high aspirations for their futures and placed a great value on education. In all four countries, there was a marked rise in school enrolment after 2000, especially at primary level.⁸ And many more families were also aiming for higher education. This can be seen in Table 1, which shows that, in 2013, when the Younger Cohort children were aged 12, a large percentage of caregivers aspired for their children to go to university. Such ambitions were highest in Peru, where 81% of caregivers (taken as total average) wanted their children to attend university, followed by Ethiopia (77%), Vietnam (75%) and India (73%). The persistence of work is therefore unlikely to be the result of parental failure to value schooling.

Table 1: Parents who aspired for their children to achieve a graduate or a post-graduate degree by household wealth tercile and child gender (%)

	Wealth Tercile						Total	
	Bottom		Middle		Top		Female	Male
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male		
Ethiopia	59	63	81	74	93	91	77	76
India	51	74	64	77	81	87	65	80
Peru	68	69	80	80	94	93	81	81
Vietnam	63	51	81	76	94	87	79	71

Source: Boyden, Winter, Crivello, Espinoza Revollo, forthcoming 2018.



Table 1 also shows that parental aspirations reflected household wealth. In India, for example, the highest aspirations were among mothers from wealthier households and mothers who themselves were better educated.⁹ Aspirations also varied widely according to the sex of the child, though not necessarily to the disadvantage of girls.¹⁰ For instance, in India, aspirations were higher for boys by 15 percentage points, while in Vietnam they were higher for girls by 8 percentage points.¹¹ These gender differences increased according to household wealth; typically widest in the poorest households, accentuating the pro-boy bias in India and the pro-girl bias in Vietnam.¹²

Caregiver aspirations can even drive children's actual progress. In India in particular, lower parental aspirations for daughters was associated with lower access to higher education. On the other hand, each additional year of schooling aspired to by mothers translated into a 1.8 lift in the grade achieved by their offspring at age 15.¹³ Likewise, in Peru and Vietnam differences in higher education achieved by 19-year-olds largely corresponded to differences in parental and child aspirations.

Most Young Lives families and children believed that schooling was the primary avenue to social mobility. In this view, school education can not only realize children's individual ambitions but also lift families out of poverty. In Ethiopia, for example, this was illustrated by the experience of one young girl, Miniya.¹⁴ Miniya's parents had died and she lived with her grandmother. Both worked together in a government safety-net programme. Miniya also studied hard, and was doing well at school: "Since my grandmother is working hard to send me to school, I also have to work hard to get a better result". Miniya had a confident and positive outlook: "My life would be better than my parents'. [...] When I complete my education I will have a job to support myself and my grandmother and my life will be better".

Caregiver and children's hopes for schooling are high in both urban and rural areas. In Vietnam, however, parents in urban areas seemed to have more resources than those in rural areas to create a favourable environment for children's learning. For example, many parents in the urban area of Nghia Tan spared their children from household chores and emphasised that they should concentrate on studying at school. The mother of one 17-year-old girl gave up her job to take on her daughter's share of the housework in order that the girl had time to study.¹⁵

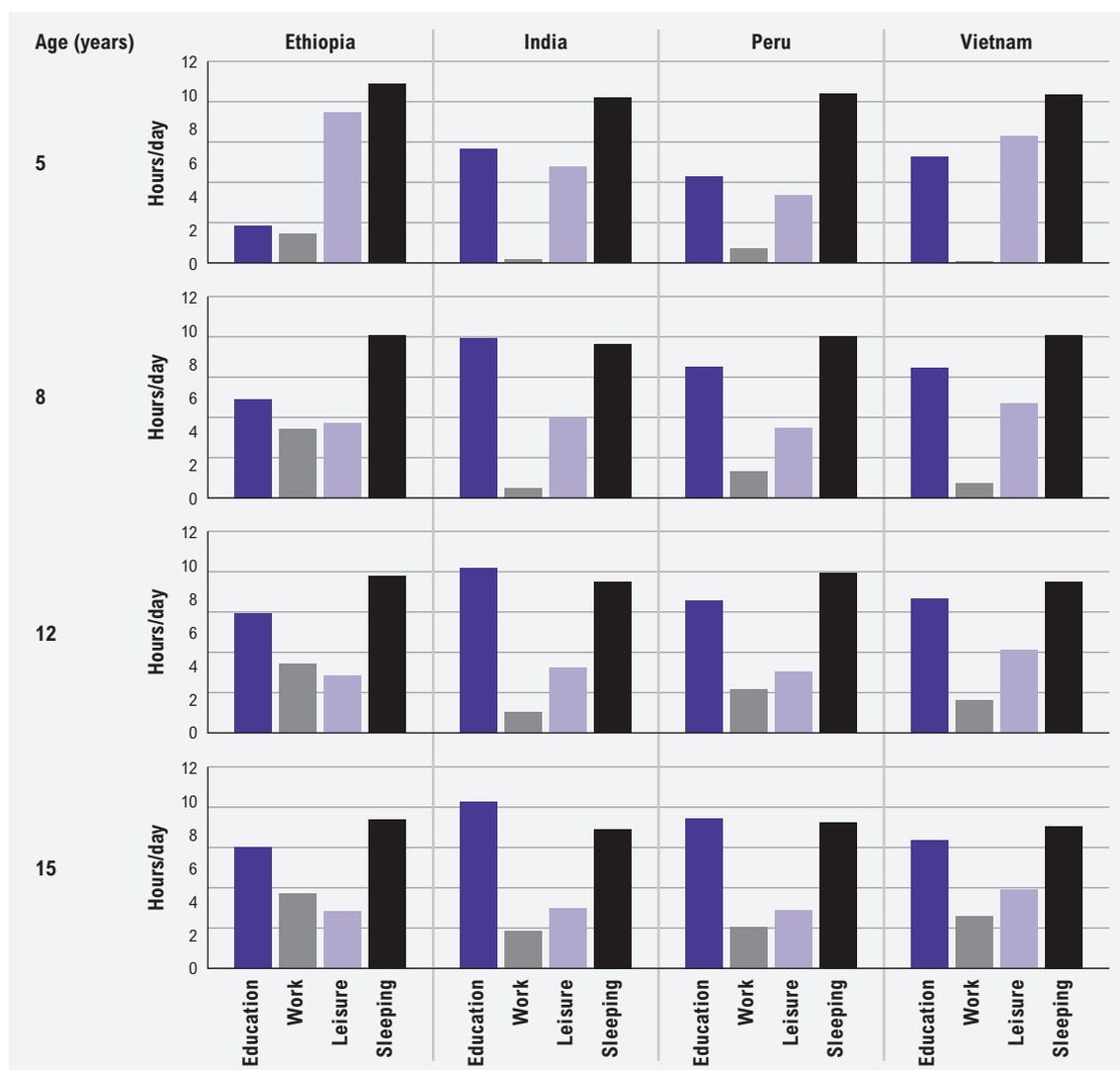
Particularly in rural areas, children may be the first generation in their family to be educated. A common aspiration, captured in the early rounds of our qualitative research, was for these children to move away from agricultural work, which was often described with a language of suffering and hardship.¹⁶ In Peru, one caregiver remarked: "[Children] have to study. I don't want [him] to be like me ...", while another stated: "*Señora*, my daughter is not meant to work in the field". Children in Peru expressed similar views. One girl, whose ambition was to be a nurse, stated her displeasure at having to work on her family's farm, which she found tiring. She told her mother, "We're not going to suffer like this in the mud [...] it's better that I go and study".¹⁷

Nevertheless, despite these ambitions, many parents in rural areas required their children to contribute to household and agricultural work, even if this was difficult.¹⁸ In Ethiopia, for example, boys found it hard to combine farming with schooling. Girls, meanwhile, were more likely to stay in school and to make progress, not least because they seemed better able to integrate family work with education. The same seems to be the case for paid work in urban areas.¹⁹

More time in school than at work

A significant proportion of Young Lives children combined school with work, tending to spend more time in school than at work with this dynamic changing as they grew up (Figure 1). By age five, children in India, Peru and Ethiopia were already blending school and work (although in Ethiopia, many children, especially boys, started school late, around age seven, owing to work commitments). By age eight, children in all four countries had increased the number of hours spent at school. Between age eight and 15, the time they devoted to education remained broadly constant, but as they grew older they tended to do more work – either for pay or in family-based activities such as domestic work or subsistence farming. As indicated in Figure 1, however, at all ages children spent far more hours on leisure and sleep than on work.²⁰ It is also important to note that the Young Lives examination of time use relates to a ‘typical day last week’ (when school was in session), and that this picture may have looked different should it have reflected time use during the weekends and school holidays when the proportion of time spent on work is likely to be significantly greater.

Figure 1: Younger Cohort time use (hours per day)

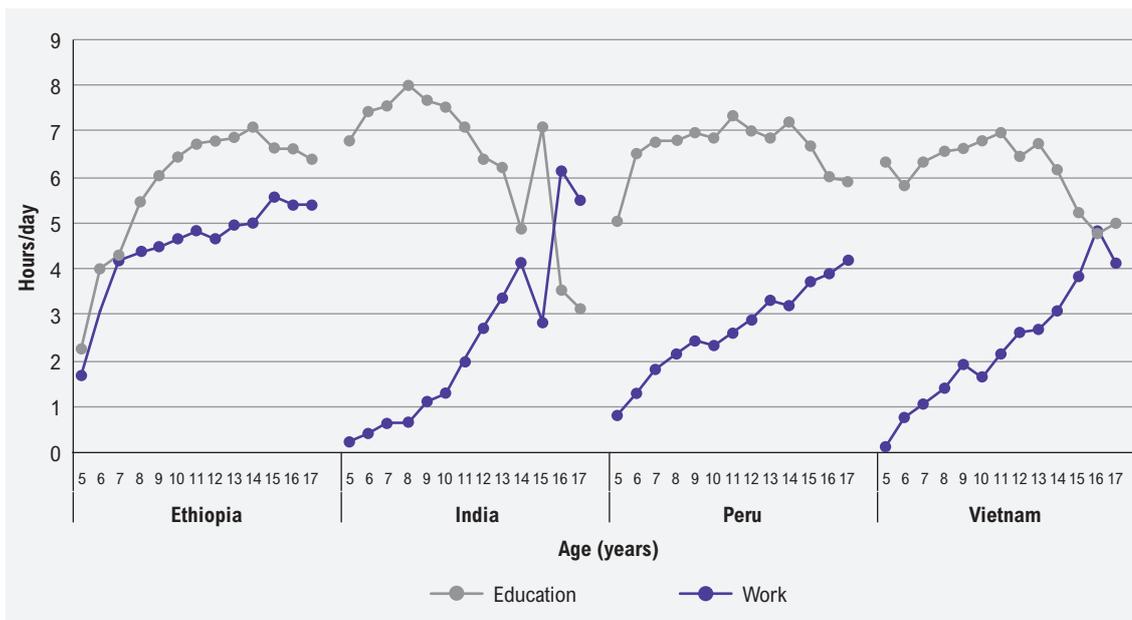


Note: Time use refers to ‘a typical day last week’ (when school was in session). Education = time spent both in school and studying outside school. Work = time spent caring for others, domestic chores, unpaid work in family farm/business, and in paid work outside the household. For ages five and eight, data were from caregivers; for ages 12 and 15, data were from children's reports. Source: Espinoza Revollo & Porter, forthcoming.



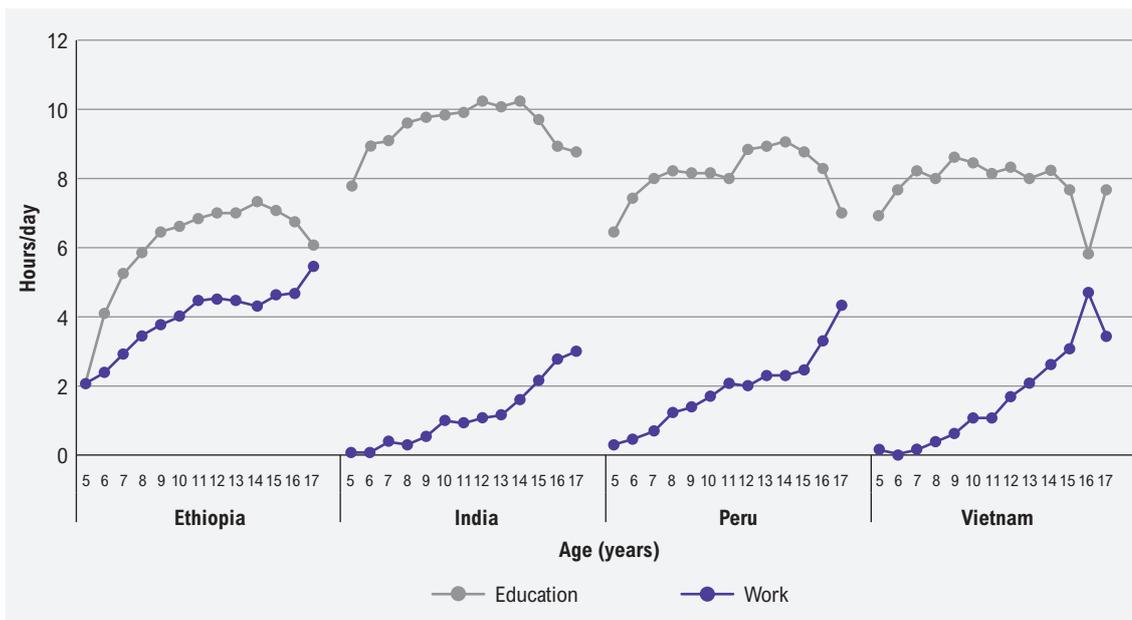
Over the period of Young Lives, in line with international policy priorities, the balance of children’s time use has been shifting from work to education. These changes are evident from comparisons of the experience of the Older and Younger Cohorts. There were marked changes in the allocation of children’s time across all four countries between 2006 (Round 2) and 2016 (Round 4), with fewer hours of work and more of school (Figure 2 and Figure 3 offer cross-sectional snapshots, mapping time allocation for all children in the Younger Cohort households at Round 2 in 2006 and at Round 5 in 2016). However, there were striking differences between countries: these changes were greatest in India, and smallest in Ethiopia, the poorest country in the study where children were more likely to be working.

Figure 2: Time spent by all children in the household on education and work in 2006



Note: Time use refers to ‘a typical day last week’ (when school was in session). Source: Espinoza Revollo & Porter, forthcoming.

Figure 3: Time spent by all children in the household on education and work in 2016



Note: Time use refers to ‘a typical day last week’ (when school was in session). Source: Espinoza Revollo & Porter, forthcoming.

The shift away from work to education was also explored in greater depth in two rural communities, one in Ethiopia, the other in India. In both communities, children were increasing their time in school, though still combining school with work. In India this was due to better school facilities and close monitoring of children's attendance. In rural Ethiopia, regardless of location or household wealth, virtually all children had better access to schools. However, although they were spending more time in school, where families encountered economic difficulty, children were expected to contribute to the domestic economy and were attending school irregularly. Some children, however, said that they would rather attend school and some explicitly refused to work.²¹





Few of the youngest children work for pay

It is generally thought that children find it more difficult to combine work with school if they are involved in paid work, which can entail longer and more continuous hours of work with less flexible schedules. This perception extends to the view that children employed by people to whom they are not related are more likely to be exploited or exposed to hazardous work conditions. For these reasons, the International Labour Organization and other international agencies prioritise the elimination of paid work by young children.

In this respect, there has been progress, since fewer children nowadays are working for pay.²² This is reflected in the Young Lives data. Even in 2002, the proportion of eight-year-olds working for pay was already quite small, and by 2009 had generally fallen still further: in Ethiopia, from 9.4 to 0.5 per cent; in Peru, from 16.8 to 8.5 per cent; and in Vietnam, from 11.5 to 1.6 per cent. Only in India was there a slight increase, from 6.3 to 7.2 per cent, although the change was not statistically significant (Table 2). In Ethiopia, India and Peru the proportion of 15-year-olds in paid work had also generally fallen, though in Vietnam there was an increase (Table 3).²³

Table 2: *Eight-year-olds reporting working for pay over the previous 12 months, 2002 and 2009 (%)*

	Older Cohort (2002)	Younger Cohort (2009)
Ethiopia	9.4	0.5
India	6.3	7.2
Peru	16.8	8.5
Vietnam	11.5	1.6

Table 3: *15-year-olds reporting working for pay over the previous 12 months, 2009 and 2016 (%)*

	Older Cohort (2002)	Younger Cohort (2009)
Ethiopia	12.7	10.2
India	27.6	16.5
Peru	29.5	21.8
Vietnam	10.6	16.0

As indicated in Figure 4 and Figure 5 this trend can also be observed in the proportion of children working for pay at different ages. The percentages are generally smaller for the Younger Cohort, particularly at age eight and 12 years and, with the exception of Vietnam, are also lower at age 15.

It is important to note, though, that the amount of paid work undertaken by children can vary widely across economic and social groups. The most disadvantaged children generally belong to ethnic, language or religious minorities who are typically the poorest groups and live in more remote areas with less access to services. In India, for example, for the Older Cohort the proportion of children working for pay at age 15 was highest amongst the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes which tended to be poor and socially marginalised.²⁴ So, while paid work is generally declining, children in poorer and more socially marginalised households remain under considerable pressure to work for pay.



Figure 4: Older Cohort children reporting working for pay over the previous 12 months in 2002, 2006 and 2009

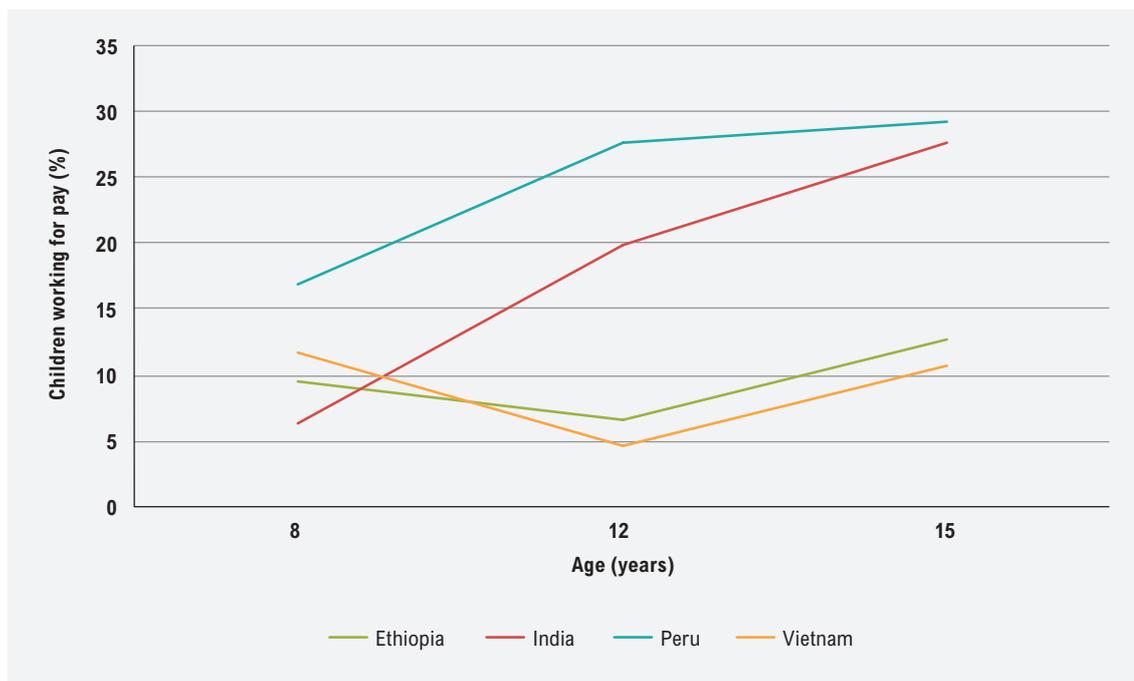
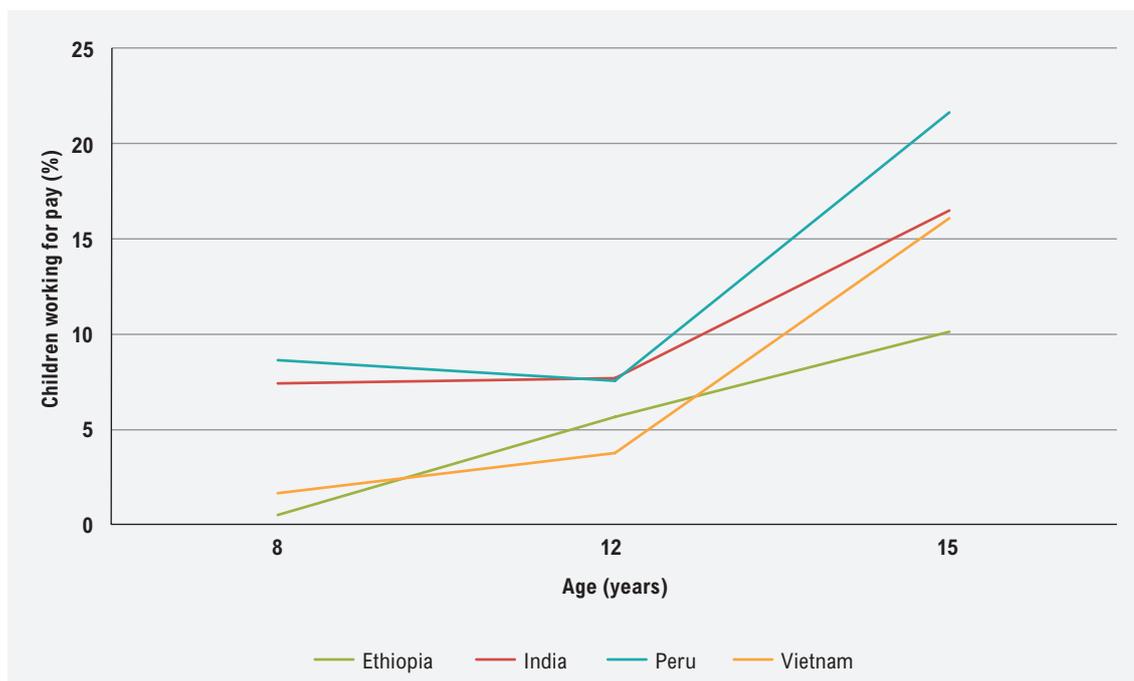


Figure 5: Younger Cohort children reporting working for pay over the previous 12 months in 2009, 2013 and 2016



Note: Working for pay refers to any payment that is in cash, in-kind, both cash and in-kind, debt relief, and pocket money.²⁵



Most work children undertake is unpaid

Across the four countries, strong cultural values emphasise intergenerational dependence, so children were often working unpaid within their families. Policy-makers are generally less concerned about such work, though it can put children under time pressure: if they have to spend many hours on household tasks they are likely to perform less well at school.

Data from the four Young Lives countries consistently show that for children aged eight to 15 years, the more time they spend on unpaid activities the less time they devote to schooling and studying after school. And in all the countries, the more time they spend on schooling and studies, the better their language skills. With the exception of Vietnam, the same is found for mathematics.

Children may benefit from supporting their families through carrying out domestic tasks. But when the demands are too high, this reduces the time available for school work, and affects the development of language and numeracy – which are key to progress during the final school years, and to being able to take advantage of later education, training and work opportunities. So this makes clear that unpaid work undertaken by children within families is not always as benign as policy sometimes assumes.

Ethiopia – In 2009, 90% of eight-year-olds undertook family-based work.²⁶ In rural areas, this was mostly domestic chores, followed by childcare and unpaid family work, usually farming and herding cattle (another example is described in Box 1). Urban children were typically engaged in the informal sector in casual, unskilled manual work where it was thought they could pick up essential life skills. Many 12-year-olds combined work and school.²⁷

Box 1: Work in agriculture and stone crushing in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, between 2006 and 2013, the proportion of children working for pay decreased. In one village, Zeytuni, however, there was an increase in working time among 12-year-old children – from an average of 4.6 hours to 5.6 hours a day. This was particularly evident among boys, who were working 6.3 hours in 2013.

This increase was associated with a rise in off-farm employment opportunities, particularly stone crushing and carving cobble stones. Stone crushing is considered to be more suitable for boys, while cobble carving can be done by both boys and girls. These occupations are seen by caregivers and children alike as an important opportunity for professional training and for obtaining entry into the adult world of work.

One mother said: “In the past, there was nothing called a job. Now all girls and boys do some kind of work; [...] they are hired in farming as daily labourers to do weeding [...] while boys can get a job in crushing stones. Now our village has been changed so it's good for children at any time”. Another mother agreed: “Yes it is a profession. Look at this great stone, he crushes and then shapes it [...] This is a good skill; [...] it may help him for building houses. [...] He is now professional in crushing and shaping stones”.

India – Strong cultural values emphasise intergenerational mutuality and interdependence within families. Children who had older and younger siblings worked more than the oldest children in the household.²⁸ In times of household difficulty, boys were expected to work on family farms and provide financial support, sometimes leaving home to work for pay.

Peru – Children's work mirrored that of adults. In rural areas, all Older Cohort children undertook unpaid agricultural work.²⁹ In urban areas, children were less involved in unpaid family work, and only a few were engaged in family-led economic activities, mostly informal trade.³⁰

Vietnam – For almost all children, the most common forms of work were household chores and agricultural tasks. However, the intensity of work differed according to ethnicity (Box 2). For example, in Van Lam, a mountainous community in the south central coastal area, ethnic minority Cham H'roi children worked from an early age, often on family farms, but also as waged labourers chopping sugar cane. One 16-year-old girl described how she herded cattle, picked vegetables for the pigs, ploughed the fields, cooked, bathed her younger sister, and did grocery shopping. She had left school at age 10, and by age 16 could no longer read or write. Young people from the ethnic majority (Kinh) were less likely to leave school early, but if they did, were able to find waged work with ease.³¹

Box 2: Work among children from different ethnic groups in Vietnam

In Vietnam, intensity and degree of work varied according to ethnicity. The majority Kinh children describe their involvement in rice transplanting and harvest as supplementary. For the minority Hmong and H'Roi children, 'to go to work' (*di lam*) literally means doing agricultural tasks on a regular basis.

A 14-year-old H'Roi girl explained:

"The plot is for growing beans. During harvest, my mother and I worked for three days and brought home seven and a half sacks of beans. I delivered the beans to the factory. It was the first time I drove a motorbike and the bean sacks were so heavy it was hard to balance and drive".

Meanwhile, a 14-year-old Hmong girl explained how:

"Apart from working in our own fields my sisters and I joined together to grow maize in a plot of my uncle. Since his family settled downstream his land was left fallow here in the uphill. We collected a few hundred thousand dong from the sale of the harvest. We went to the market place and hung out. We gave the money to mother in the end".

The difference in children's views of work across ethnic groups is informed by the environmental and technological conditions in which they operate: cattle tending for the minority children entails long hours far from home, whereas pig and poultry feeding fits in with the household chores of the Kinh. Although the work can be just as hard as that of their ethnic minority peers, Kinh children tend to view their jobs as seasonal and subsidiary. In contrast, ethnic minority children see their work as a major resource that they bring to their family.





Girls and boys have differing responsibilities and tasks

Much global policy is based on the premise that girls work longer hours in domestic tasks, are more vulnerable to certain workplace abuses such as sexual exploitation, and are less likely to be at school. Boys, on the other hand, are assumed to be at greater risk of hazardous work for pay in such sectors as mining and construction, and are more likely to be at school.

The Young Lives data confirmed that gender is central to children's work roles and responsibilities as much as to the opportunities and constraints they experience at work and at school. Girls were more likely to be engaged in care work, domestic work and unpaid work, while boys were more likely to be engaged in agricultural activities and paid work.³² These distinctions become more marked as children grow through adolescence and their gendered roles more closely mirror those of adults.

Nevertheless, gender roles in childhood were not necessarily fixed. The decision as to who worked and who stayed at school also depended on birth order and age, and the number of boys and girls in the family. Adults also allocated tasks according to the children's perceived competence and physical strength. In India, for example, girls worked significantly more if they had older sisters living in the same household.³³ There is, however, no cross-gender effect – that is, their workload is not affected by the presence of older siblings of the opposite sex. The largest effect of household composition is felt by children living in households with more than one older sibling and at least one younger sibling.

In all four countries, at age 12, girls tended to spend more time in domestic work and care if they were in poorer rural households with less educated caregivers. In households that had children under age seven, girls spent more time caring for others than boys. One of the main reasons why girls stopped school was to do housework or to care for ill or ageing family members.³⁴

Gendered disparities in children's work are not simply a matter of channelling boys and girls into adult roles. They also reflect gendered ideas around security. Caregivers may fear that letting their daughters work outside the home is a risk to their safety or reputation, particularly when girls reach puberty. In one of Lima's shanty towns, where caregivers were anxious about robbery and assault on the streets, girls worked at home for money, for example, by sewing or making jewellery.³⁵ For boys, parents worried more that they would be drawn into 'bad company'. One mother said, "it's about what he might get himself involved in, because here [...] it's where the gang members smoke [drugs ...] so there are times you can't even let the kids leave [the house]. And if they do, you have to be watching them".

However, if households do not have enough children, customary gender roles could be reversed – sometimes causing embarrassment for the boys and girls concerned.³⁶ In Ethiopia, girls described gradually becoming more competent at various cooking tasks, while in the absence of any females in the household boys resented taking on 'female tasks' such as cooking and cleaning.³⁷ Conversely, in the absence of male children, girls undertook predominantly male-dominated activity such as agricultural work. One girl, Sessen, who had undertaken household work from an early age, said: "I stopped school when my father died and my mother had no one to help her. I decided to help her by doing some work for pay".³⁸



Ethiopia – Generally, girls spent time caring for others and on domestic tasks, while boys spent more time on unpaid work on family farms or businesses (younger boys herded goats while older boys undertook ploughing with oxen). Overall, however, the greatest burdens were carried by the older girls.³⁹ Boys appeared to work less in larger households, while girls worked more if they had sisters, and if they have younger brothers. Boys worked more when the household had more livestock. Both boys and girls were affected by adverse events. Children were acutely aware of their parents' vulnerability: for example, Maralem, aged 11, explained: "I don't want to complain about working because I don't want to see my mother work when she is sick".⁴⁰ The most common reason for girls not attending school was to look after siblings, followed by the high direct cost of schooling – more commonly a deterrent for girls than for boys.⁴¹

India – From an early age, girls were more likely to undertake domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, as well as certain agricultural tasks, gradually increasing their workload over time.⁴² Tasks done by boys and men tended to be more physically demanding and risky. In paddy operations this included ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, spraying fertilisers and pesticides, watering/irrigating, harvesting, bundling, thrashing, collecting grain, and marketing. Girls and women undertook transplanting, weeding, harvesting, and bundling.⁴³

Peru – In rural areas, children's roles were differentiated by gender, though girls were not always disadvantaged. Boys whose paid labour was required earlier were less likely than girls to have completed secondary education; having spent time on agricultural work they were often a year or two behind the expected grade for their age and finally left school to migrate for work.⁴⁴ Girls generally carried out domestic chores, while boys worked more in agriculture – cultivating fields from the age of seven or eight and working as labourers for others from around the age of 13. By the time they were 15 years old, their labour was highly valued.⁴⁵

Vietnam – For both boys and girls, the most common forms of work were household chores and agricultural tasks. Changing employment opportunities, such as new infrastructure projects and the opening of factories, encouraged boys in particular to leave school to work to support their families. In 2009, for the Older Cohort, poor boys were more likely than poor girls to have stopped school by the age of 15 and this was still the case in 2016.⁴⁶ This could be linked to higher wage-earning potential for boys – who were also doing less well in exams.



Factors influencing children's work

Children's work is the outcome of a complex mix of economic and sociocultural factors. Some children work out of economic necessity, while others work because it brings personal rewards and benefits. If governments wish to influence and monitor children's work and to prevent forced child labour and other detrimental forms of work, they must look more closely at the reasons why children work.

Household poverty and family crises

Table 4: *Younger Cohort time spent on work at different ages by wealth tercile (hours/day) in 2006, 2009, 2013 and 2016*

Country	Wealth Tercile	Age (years)			
		5	8	12	15
Ethiopia	Bottom	2.3	5.5	5.3	5.5
	Top	0.8	2.1	2.5	3.4
India	Bottom	0.3	0.7	1.4	3.1
	Top	0.2	0.4	0.9	1.3
Peru	Bottom	1.4	2.2	3.4	3.0
	Top	0.5	1.0	2.1	2.2
Vietnam	Bottom	0.2	1.3	2.7	4.2
	Top	0.1	0.5	1.3	2.1

Note. Households in the bottom tercile of the wealth distribution are the poorest, and the least poor households are those in the top wealth tercile. Young Lives defines a 'day' as a 24-hour period. Figures for the middle tercile are not reported. Source: Boyden, Winter, Crivello, Espinoza Revollo, forthcoming 2018.

The amount of time children spent working varied substantially across wealth groups (Table 4). At all ages, children in the poorest households (bottom wealth tercile) worked significantly more than their peers in the least poor households (top wealth tercile). The figures also point to large variations across countries. Time spent in work peaked at the age of eight for children living in the poorest households in Ethiopia, reaching 5.5 hours per day (equivalent to a difference of 3.4 hours in relation to children in the least poor households) and remained steady until the age of 15. Meanwhile, for India, Peru and Vietnam, working hours increased with children's age – though at a greater rate for the poorest households – reaching a peak at the age of 15 but not reaching the levels seen in Ethiopia.

Governments in low- and middle-income countries generally assume that the main driver of children's work is poverty. Not all children in poor households work, nevertheless Young Lives data confirm that the children who are most likely to work come from poorer households which have to balance the anticipated future rewards of keeping children in school with the immediate need for survival.⁴⁷ This dilemma is especially acute when they face economic shocks such as family illness.

In poor households, coping with adversity is often a collective responsibility and is typically based on mutual obligations between different generations – grandparents, parents, children and other family members. Boys and girls are expected to contribute to household maintenance in accordance with their age, gender and capacities.⁴⁸

In India, for example, 16-year-old Ranadeep explained that he had stopped school because of his family's need of agricultural labour: "There is nobody to work in the fields. [...] We needed to pay workers 100 rupees [£1.16 GBP] as wages every day, and we were not able to afford it, so they stopped me from going to school". Ranadeep briefly attended junior college, but found studying difficult, and returned to farming the family land.⁴⁹

Similarly, in Vietnam, Long left school because of a series of family difficulties. Her mother had a degenerative disease, a hailstorm destroyed the harvest, and their house was damaged by flooding. Long failed the entrance exam to upper-secondary school, and her mother refused to let her resit it. She was now working six days a week at a leather factory 10 kilometres from home, returning on Sundays to help her mother on their farm. She gave most of her earnings to her mother.⁵⁰

Economic shocks

In Ethiopia, the nature and amount of work done by children was influenced less by general levels of poverty than by economic shocks.⁵¹ Between 2002 and 2006, 87% of households of the Older Cohort experienced at least one shock - food price rises, crime, or illness or death in the family. Among rural households, 68% were affected by environmental hazards such as drought, and 61% by economic-related episodes, for example increases in food prices. In urban areas, environmental hazards were reported by 12% of households and economic episodes by 41% of households.

In both rural and urban areas, the shocks were most varied and frequent for the poorer households. For example, Maregey, who lived in a rural drought-prone area, was eager to attend school and enrolled at age seven. But then his father became ill, and his older brother went to work in a local stone-crushing plant, so Maregey had to take responsibility for herding cattle. Repeated droughts made this difficult and his mother thought of selling the cattle to gain income to feed the family and send the children to school. But then his father died, and by age 10 Maregey had still not started school, saying he preferred to work to support the family.⁵²

Household poverty and shocks affected girls and boys differently. In rural India, for example, the impact tended to be greater on girls. Loss of crops due to pests, fire or theft and natural disasters resulted in, on average, a three-hour increase in work done by girls in rural households per week.⁵³ The girls who worked more tended to be those with a better nutritional status. Similarly, in Ethiopia both boys and girls were affected by adverse events. Boys worked more when the household had more livestock, and when their mothers were ill or absent, girls worked more on domestic tasks. While coping with economic adversity, children also have to consider the future. A 16-year-old girl from a poor neighbourhood in Addis Ababa described how her father had died young, and her mother was often ill. She worried that she might fail the national exam and become a burden to her family. She was not, however, solely relying on her formal education; at the local mosque she was also learning skills such as embroidery and sewing that she could fall back on.⁵⁴

Likewise, in Peru in 2008, several families in Andahuaylas struggled to cope with a drought and the rising cost of living, so both boys and girls sought paid work. 14-year-old Esmeralda, who lived with her mother and grandmother, took a job as a farmhand during weekends and holidays. Earning around \$3.50 [£2.62 GBP] for a full day's work, she could pay for her schooling, clothing and food, so saving her mother these expenses.⁵⁵





Opportunities and benefits of work

Governments generally recognize that many children must work if their families are to avoid destitution. They also accept that work can be benign, for example work undertaken for family in the home or on the farm, and will allow for this in legislation, policies and practice. What is less generally recognized is that work can be beneficial for children's development and wellbeing. Some of these benefits are intrinsic to the process of working and some relate more to the relative merits of working or going to school. Policy-makers therefore also need to take into account the positive aspects of work that influence household decisions.

Earning to pay for school

Sometimes children's work enables them, or their siblings, to go to school as their wages contribute to the purchase of essential material goods.⁵⁶

Children in rural Ethiopia, for example, worked as casual wage labourers, using their income to buy exercise books, stationery and adequate clothes and shoes.⁵⁷ One girl said: "If I didn't have a job, I couldn't have attended class".⁵⁸ In Addis Ababa, an older boy was trying to gain work skills after his father had a car accident. In addition to training as a footballer, he was already working as a taxi driver. He said: "I have convinced myself that if there is no one who is ready to cover my school fees, I will work during the day and learn or train in the evening".⁵⁹ Similarly, in Peru, children were earning cash to cover school expenses, including bus fares, uniforms, school materials, and even the paper on which to print the exams.⁶⁰

Children also worked to support the education of their brothers and sisters. In Ethiopia, for example, Gedion, a 13-year-old migrant boy who sold lottery tickets, explained: "I send 100 to 250 birr [£2.76-6.90 GBP] to my family every month. My parents can buy clothes and school materials for the younger children".⁶¹ Similarly, in Peru, two older children who had left school encouraged their younger brother to stay in school, exclaiming: "Dedicate yourself to your studies. We're working for your stomach".⁶² In Vietnam, one girl stitched shopping bags at home to supplement the family income: "My family was short of money, I lent that money to my sister for her tuition fees".⁶³

Learning skills

Through working, children can develop essential life and social skills. School education is vital, but is only one form of learning and is not necessarily the most effective for building the full range of skills that children need to function productively in adulthood. In all four study countries, children and parents said that, through work, children gained considerable knowledge and learned new practical and social skills.

In Ethiopia, Masreha, a boy who was the third of seven children, was engaged in woodwork and also studying woodwork in a technical school. He said: "I like the work, and I will be competent after finishing my studies as it enables me to put theory into practice". When Masresha was aged 13, his mother said of him: "He is growing physically. His knowledge is improving and his way of speaking shows good progress. [...] He keeps the livestock, cares for his younger siblings and the crops. He is thinking as though he is an adult. He has realised the importance of keeping cattle, caring for children; he is differentiating the bad from the good things".



Parents often believe that a child who works hard is a 'good child' and, by taking responsibility, he or she can develop reasoning skills and empathy. Masresha's mother observed: "He knows that if he becomes careless, we become poor, then we may be forced to have our children in labour. [...] Yes, he is getting mature and he knows how much we are suffering for them".

Working early also offers children a foothold in the labour market. In many low- and middle-income countries there is a shortage of secure, well-paid work for adults. Children who start working early can thus establish themselves in a workplace that they can use as a back-up if education fails to improve their prospects, or if no better jobs are available. A 15-year-old boy in India explained: "We have to take up studies and work simultaneously during holidays. If we depend totally on education alone we will not be able to do any work in case we don't get a job".⁶⁴ This was echoed in Peru, where work was valued because it represented something to fall back on in case children failed to secure professional careers.⁶⁵

For many girls, learning domestic and agricultural tasks is considered essential for marriage prospects. As one mother in India explained: "If we give her away to another's house, they will scold her if she does not do the work, saying: 'Did your mother and father not teach you?'".

In rural Peru, learning through work starts from the age of five or six. Some adults said children might start helping at about two or three years old, but most agreed that at five years old, children "have more knowledge" and "they can understand" and thus they are required to take on more responsibilities at home. By the ages of ten and 12 they were already fully involved in farmwork and competent in a variety of household and agricultural activities.⁶⁶

Children in India considered anywhere between 17 to 20 years a suitable age to start working full-time, but suggested that they should begin occasional work earlier than that, as training for full-time work: "Learning work should start early, or else the learning will never take place, because it is difficult to learn as adults".⁶⁷

Children themselves use a broad definition of learning to include useful skills that extend beyond formal educational qualifications.

Taking pride in work

Children are not simply helpless victims of circumstances beyond their control. Many are extremely concerned about the hardships endured by their families and express a desire to prevent or mitigate risk to them. Children who feel compelled to work may also feel proud of their contribution. In all four study countries, children felt it was important to support their families – part of what is considered being a 'good child', especially for sons to support their mothers.⁶⁸ For example, in Ethiopia, many children mentioned praises and blessings from their caregivers, from God, or from both, for working well. Some were proud that, after they started to work, other family members began to respect and consult them. Children from richer households, however, were less understanding and could insult and ridicule working children who did not attend school.⁶⁹

In Peru, young people did not consider family work to be a job, but a way of supporting their families and part of 'becoming an adult'. For example, one boy explained that work "Made me see that earning a living is not so easy. The future that awaits you requires a bit of hard work, right?". Many said that they had been working in the family fields since they were young, and this had allowed them "to learn how to grow and harvest crops, pull out weeds, fertilise and spray land, and care for their animals".⁷⁰

In India, one boy recounted how his mother had been told by others in the community: “Look, you are a blessed one. You are being looked after by your son and there is no need for you to work. He is not only earning but also taking care of you”. The boy said, “I felt very happy. I want to get a good name, still want to work hard and do better things”.⁷¹

Working also affords children a degree of self-sufficiency. When asked what he had learned by working from an early age, one boy in India commented: “I can do things on my own. I need not depend on others”. In Peru, children who did paid work on other people's land gave money to their mothers but also kept some for personal use. Even children working with their families may be given the occasional ‘tip’. A widely cited benefit of paid work was “not having to ask my mother for money”.⁷²

Caregivers and children, especially boys, believe that an early entry into work will secure a job for the future. However, such work can also erode educational ambitions. As working children pass through their early teens, they and their parents may question the value of continuing at school and its relevance for the adult work they are likely to do. This is particularly the case for boys, who are more likely than girls to be expected to have paid work as adults and are therefore under greater pressure to secure a good job as early as possible.

The rates and intensity of work for children therefore depend very much on the intersection between economic circumstances and gendered work opportunities. Family members are interdependent and, in the absence of adequate social protection, children make a valuable contribution to subsistence survival. Children also feel good about being part of, and contributing to, family enterprises.





The difficulty of combining school and work

As noted above, parents and children have embraced messages about the value of formal schooling and qualifications.⁷³ Consequently, this generation of children has extra responsibilities. While contributing to the household through work, they must also manage their own and their parents' hopes for education as a route out of poverty.⁷⁴

Given the competing demands on their time, children and their families continuously weigh the short- and long-term benefits of both school and work. In some cases, particularly in rural areas, expectations of schooling may be unrealistic, especially if adults themselves have little experience of education. This puts even more pressure on the children, especially when they enter their teenage years, and are expected to do well both at work and at school. Senayit, for example, was due to start Grade 5 in the 2008/9 school year. Her parents were both seriously ill. She worked on vegetable farms at weekends and sometimes before or after school in order to buy pens, exercise books, coffee and food for her family. She said, "I think about my parents while I am in class or studying: this definitely affects my learning".⁷⁵

Some forms of work are clearly incompatible with school – especially the more exploitative forms of child labour. Ravi, a Scheduled Caste boy from rural Andhra Pradesh, stopped going to school at age nine to work as a bonded labourer to pay off family debt. But he was treated badly and beaten by his employer. By age 13 he had left the village and found other work, having seen little chance of returning to school.

However, many more children can now attend school regularly while also working. In all four study countries, children and their caregivers aimed to strike a balance. In Ethiopia, for example, Bereket, an orphan who lived with his grandmother in Addis Ababa, described missing school from five to seven days a month when he worked washing cars. His grandmother got angry when he missed school, but Bereket said: "Learning enables you to have a vast knowledge and it helps you to think good things, and that makes me happy. But I hate sitting in a classroom where there are many students. It is hard for me to sit in a classroom for long hours". He added: "When the students come wearing better clothes, I don't like to feel inferior to them, so it is a must for me to work hard [earning money] to change my situation".⁷⁶

The most direct clash between work and education is over time use for even if children can allocate the time for schooling, they may not have the energy. Long in Vietnam explained: "I had to go to school in the morning and work in the afternoon: I was so tired when returning home in the evening [...] I could only study for a while, and then I was so sleepy [...] With my learning capacity, I think it was difficult for me to pass the exam, but I wanted to try [...] However, the higher the education, the more expensive it will be. So I decided to stop there".⁷⁷ In rural India, some boys were responsible for operating irrigation pumps, but the intermittent electricity supply (which was only on for a couple of hours at night) meant that they had to interrupt their sleep, which left them drowsy during the day.⁷⁸

In some contexts, school is seen as relevant only up to a certain level. In Ethiopia, the introduction of irrigation in some areas has made farming more productive, so it has now become an attractive occupation for boys. For example, 12-year-old Kebenga was assisting his father on the farm before and after school. In his view, irrigated farming does not require an



advanced education: "I want to complete Grade 10 and then to start my farm business. I want to become a rich educated farmer, producing vegetables and cereals on the irrigated land using improved inputs such as fertiliser to increase the farm production".⁷⁹

Children do not necessarily leave school at a single point in time; many drift away gradually. Children may also interrupt their schooling for significant periods in order to work: several children described working at one point during their childhood, but then later attending school or college. In India, for example, Ramya, at age 13 in 2008, explained: "There is no choice, I have to do all the work that mother and grandmother say. [...] If it is done by too few people, the crop goes to waste. [...] I have to work; we have to clear the loans". By 2014, Ramya was at college, so although her schooling had been interrupted, she had returned to education.⁸⁰

In 2009, few households in Ethiopia reported that children had permanently left school by age 12. Much more common were repeated periods of absence, lagging behind the appropriate school grade for age, the inability to concentrate at school because of worries about the home situation or hunger, and the need for children to take on additional responsibilities at home.⁸¹



Discouraged by poor quality schools

In some countries, education is less attractive if the quality is low or schools are unwelcoming places with poor infrastructure, for example lacking adequate and private toilets which is a major problem for girls especially.

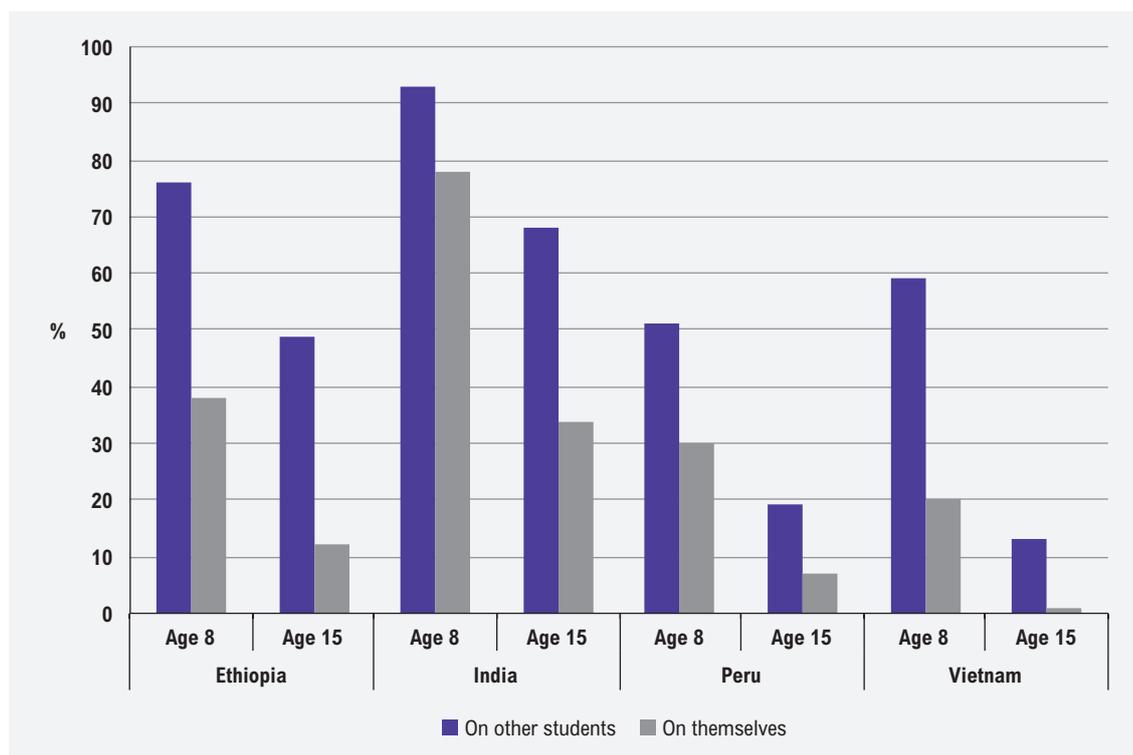
Children are less likely to attend if the teachers themselves are frequently absent, which is common in many countries, particularly in rural areas. And the quality of their instruction may also be poor.⁸² Harika, a rural girl living in Poompuhar in southern Telangana, reflected on the low quality of schooling as one reason why she stopped her education before reaching college: “[The] teachers just go through the subject. They conduct classes for intermediate students from morning till afternoon and in intermediate we were 180 students in one section. The teachers never paid any attention to students. They just take the lesson and leave. We have to study on our own”.

Another issue is the language of instruction. Vietnam generally offers relatively high-quality education and had the highest rate of continued education among the Older Cohort children.⁸³ Nevertheless, schooling is conducted in Vietnamese, and children from ethnic minorities who do not speak this at home may find school difficult or boring. They also described feeling unwelcome at school. For example, one boy who was the family breadwinner and left school at age 15 described being teased by classmates for being from an ethnic minority.⁸⁴ In Vietnam, there is a widening gap between ethnic majority and minority students' outcomes during adolescence – affecting examinations that govern entry to further education and, ultimately inclusion in better-paid occupations.⁸⁵

Similarly in Peru, while the law states that children have the right to learn in their mother language, almost 39 per cent of indigenous children learn in Spanish only. Spanish-speaking students congregate in richer urban schools and have better resources and more pedagogically able teachers, serving to reinforce inequalities of birth, and increasing the likelihood that poorer students will discontinue schooling.⁸⁶

A further disincentive to attending school is pervasive violence. Much of this comes from teachers. In all four study countries teachers regularly used corporal punishment among children aged eight. Over half in Peru and Vietnam, three quarters in Ethiopia and over nine in ten in India reported witnessing a teacher administering corporal punishment in the previous week (Figure 7). Overall, Young Lives has found that corporal punishment and bullying disproportionately affect poorer students and children from socially disadvantaged groups.⁸⁷ In India, for example, Shanmuka Priya reported being beaten by teachers for being late and for not understanding the lessons. She added that teachers also beat children for being dirty. Male teachers were more likely to beat than female teachers.

Figure 7: Children's self-reports of teachers' use of physical punishment in the past week at ages 8 and 15 (2009)



In rural areas, children often need to work at peak seasonal times of the year. They may miss school to work, and many are physically punished when they return.⁸⁸ In India, a 12-year-old girl reported: “If we do not complete our homework, she [teacher] beats us with a stick. I like to be regular to school, do homework, but I cannot do it all”. 13-year-old Ranadeep also explained how he missed school for family-based cotton pollination work, but when he went back to school, he was beaten: “They hit us because I didn’t go to school for one month, and [...] I missed [the lessons]”. His mother added: “When he has been absent teachers shout at him and he is terrified. [...] His father goes there and informs them. [...] They scold us, they say, ‘how will he get on if he is absent for such a long time?’[...] We try to pacify them by telling them about our problems at home”.⁸⁹

Children may be punished when they are unable to cover the costs of schooling, and such a harsh school environment can be a major disincentive to continuing education. One seven-year-old boy in India said: “If we don’t get [buy and bring] notebooks, then teachers will beat us”. Meanwhile, a mother of a seven-year-old girl in India said the only thing her daughter said about school was that her teacher beat her: “She studies well, [...] but when there is no uniform and when we delay the fee payments then she will not go, she refuses to go, and she hides behind that wall [...] and says ‘sir will beat me, they will beat me’”.⁹⁰

Low quality instruction also means that many students have difficulty keeping up with lessons. Some will stop attending regularly and have to repeat grades and gradually lag behind their peers.⁹¹ At the age of 12, about half of the children in Ethiopia and about a quarter of children in Peru failed to reach the low achievement benchmark for fourth-grade children (aged about 10 years) as reported by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*, at which level ‘[s]tudents have some basic mathematical knowledge [and] demonstrate an understanding of whole numbers and can do simple computations with them’.^{92 93}



Children and their families may thus question the value of the schooling on offer if it is expensive, unpleasant, of poor quality, and seems unlikely to lead to better jobs.⁹⁴ They begin to lose confidence in education as a means of escaping poverty. As explained by a woman in urban Ethiopia: "There are many young people who trained in different activities but they do not have job opportunities. There is no spare land in this *kebele* [local administrative unit], even for young people who are trained in different activities to get involved in some kind of business. They are interested in work but they do not have opportunities". In India, 20% of 19-year-olds cited factors such as "no need for schooling for a future job" or an inability to understand the content of the lesson as reasons for discontinuing education.⁹⁵



Unintended consequences of banning children's work

Efforts to enforce compulsory education and remove children from work can have unintended detrimental impacts on children and their families. In India, there have been campaigns against child labour which can be frightening from a child's viewpoint. For example, in Poompuhar, 12-year-old Shanmuka Priya explained: "No one is going to the cotton fields now. [...] All the sirs went around the houses in the villages and told them that the police will come and arrest the fathers. [...] They said I have to go to school every day. If I miss even for one day the police will come and take your father away".

In Ethiopia, Seife had epilepsy and his father had been very ill. The boy worked gathering and selling stones, feeding the cattle and doing household chores. He claimed, "I don't even eat till my cattle eat their food". Community officials intervened and insisted that he go to school which angered him. When asked why, he explained: "Both my father and mother are getting old – nobody helps them with their work except me".

Some schools have tried to be more accommodating towards children who work. In Leki, Ethiopia, boys earned money by catching fish, which was profitable at certain times of the year. Boys rowed boats to the middle of the lake to set their nets, and once there it made sense to stay for the day, so they missed school. For other rural activities, however, there was more flexibility. The Leki school management committee, in consultation with farmers, adjusted the school timetable according to the cycle of subsistence activities. In October, there was a two-week break in order for children to help with the harvesting. When school resumed it was arranged in morning and afternoon shifts that aligned with children's work commitments. In November, school was in the morning. In April, school was in the afternoon because of tilling.⁹⁶ The shift system helped prevent children leaving school altogether, but teachers also needed to support working children by providing extra tutorials for missed classes.⁹⁷

Conclusions: Supporting children who work

Young Lives offers evidence on the trends and motives in children's work over time. Nowadays children are working less and are more likely to be in school, and both parents and children have high expectations of the benefits of education. Nevertheless, in low- and middle-income countries with weak systems of social protection, families and children living in poverty often have very limited choices, and childhood is not a time free from responsibility. Many children, especially those from poorer and socially marginalised households, continue to make important contributions to their households through their work, most while also attending school. Some of these children face grave physical and social risks, and some tolerate unacceptable levels of obligation and time pressure – particularly those in poor rural households.

But not all work is detrimental to children. So long as the work is safe and does not undermine schooling, it can bring important rewards for children and their families. The challenge for policy-makers is to prevent harmful work and enable its more beneficial forms. This means focusing on children who are vulnerable to exploitation, danger and other risks. In many cases, however, the greatest working responsibilities and opportunities are for boys – who are therefore more likely than girls to fall behind or leave school early. Another important determinant is age. Children's work responsibilities generally rise as they get older and there is often a tipping-point when diminished school attendance results in poor progression at school or early departure. In other words, work may be a bigger burden for older children than it is for younger ones.

No child should undertake work that is likely to harm their health, safety, development or wellbeing or to prevent them from attending school. Equally, not all work is detrimental, and some attempts to prevent children working can have unintended consequences. Rather than banning work *per se*, efforts should therefore focus on eliminating the worst forms of child labour. Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7 provides a global commitment to achieve this objective. All four Young Lives countries have ratified the ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour. Such legislation can set benchmarks, create awareness, and identify and bring an end to forms of work that are clearly detrimental to children.

It is important to recognise, however, that work will remain part of the lives of many children for years to come. At the same time as preventing work that is dangerous or exploitative, governments must therefore support children who engage in work that is light, safe and beneficial and which they can combine with attending school. There are four opportunity areas for action: engaging with communities; improving the potential of child protection systems to respond to children's work; improving school systems, and offering child-sensitive social protection.

Engaging with communities

Governments should act thoughtfully, collaborating with communities and families to support children who have no option but to work, and ensure that they are neither penalised, punished nor stigmatised. For these children and their families, policy-makers must also address one of the main underlying drivers of children's work: poverty.



In so doing, it is also important to consider the burden of household care that falls upon women and girls. This will mean taking into account and supporting childcare responsibilities as well as societal norms and perceptions around the fitness of girls to become wives and mothers. Reducing this burden will often require strengthening domestic or community infrastructure to reduce the time taken for domestic work – for example with improved sanitation and access to clean running water.

Improve the potential of child protection systems to respond to children who work

As well as an emphasis on preventing or eliminating the worst forms of child work as provided in law and normative standards, a shift needs to be made towards making community and social relationships the centre of efforts to protect children who work. Child protection systems, and those who work within them, need to approach and understand children's work holistically. This involves engaging directly with children, families, and communities around how they understand children's involvement in work in relation to other aspects of children's lives, what they think needs to be done, and how they assess the effectiveness of existing policies and programmes. Talking to children about their experiences is both ethically important, and helps programmers better understand how to avoid harm when they do intervene, while maximising positive outcomes.

There are two major challenges in developing measures to prevent exploitative and hazardous child work. First, removing children from dangerous work can simply lead to their taking up employment elsewhere that is equally or even more injurious. Second, not all hazards are immediately apparent – for example, though it may seem benign, working on a family farm may, in practice, entail excessive sun and chemical exposure. Priorities for programmes and interventions need to be aligned with evidence concerning the actual risks children face and what can effectively be achieved in contexts where children have no choice but to work. This may mean collaborating with employers to improve workplace health and safety and ensure children can access school, together with providing children with information and support in relation to their workplace rights and systems of referral.

Improving school systems

Schooling should be of good quality and relevant to the adult world of work. This not only fulfils children's rights to education but may also help to draw them away from work. When parents and children are deciding on time spent in school and work, they are more likely to choose the school if it is attractive and can equip children through academic or vocational instruction with skills relevant to local opportunities, with possibility to improve their prospects in the adult labour market.

Schools must be more child-friendly and conducive to learning. During early years, lessons should be in local languages. It is also important to encourage a healthy school culture, for example, by eliminating corporal punishment and bullying, with special efforts to prevent victimisation of poor working children and those from ethnic minorities.

In rural areas especially, school administrations should offer more flexible schedules, such as half-time schooling that enables children to work part of the day. There should also be facilities for re-enrolment and extra tuition for children who have dropped out. Schools can provide incentives for children to enrol and attend school and offer school feeding programmes, such

as India's Midday Meal Scheme, which has a positive impact on both school attendance and concentration in lessons.⁹⁸

Overall, efforts to assist working children should start from the perspectives of poor children and their families. This means accepting that children are likely to work. Such work can carry risks, but children and families usually have strategies for supervision or protection. By working with their families, children can learn vital and relevant skills that may pay off in later life. Moreover, children often express pride in the contributions they make.

To avoid adverse consequences, efforts to reduce harmful work should take into account family reliance on children's work and the ways in which work fits into children's everyday lives and forms part of their plans for the future. Work and education need therefore to be considered not as separate activities, but in combination, with each having bearing on a child's future job prospects.

Child-sensitive social protection

An important way of reducing the need for children to work is to offer various forms of social protection, such as cash transfers for poor households. These can help improve children's wellbeing and mitigate the impact of sudden shocks such as family illness which might otherwise oblige children to work. Although there are now many more social protection schemes in low- and middle-income countries, their coverage and spending levels need to be increased.

Such schemes should be carefully designed to benefit children. One way is to link conditional cash transfer schemes to education, as is common in South America, such as the *Juntos* programme in Peru. However, governments need to take local circumstances into account. In many places, parents already have high educational aspirations for their children, so attaching conditions may be unnecessary, indeed they may be counterproductive and deny resources to the poorest and most marginalised families and children who may not be able to meet these.⁹⁹

Other cash-based forms of social protection may be less child-focused. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India and the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia offer work in return for cash or food. Such schemes are valuable for reducing household economic vulnerability, but they also pose risks for children's work. Young Lives has evidence of children in India using adult job cards to work in the employment guarantee scheme, for example during parental sickness.^{100 101} Another risk is that offering parents work may then shift the burden of work they would otherwise have accomplished towards children. In Ethiopia, for example, there is evidence that children, particularly girls, undertake domestic tasks while their parents participate in the PSNP.¹⁰² But the picture is mixed: more recent analysis suggests the programme has provided higher incomes for adults that has reduced the need for children to work.¹⁰³





Notes

- 1 Bourdillon et al. 2010: 24-35
- 2 ILO 2013: 17
- 3 Bourdillon et al, 2010 p24
- 4 Montgomery 2009
- 5 Crivello et al. 2013; Morrow and Crivello 2015
- 6 Brock 2011
- 7 In 2009: National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Andhra Pradesh, India, 2009 involved 30 Young Lives households. In 2009: Productive Safety Net Project (PSNP) in Ethiopia, with 48 households.
- 8 Bourdillon and Boyden, 2014, R5 factsheets.
- 9 Serneels and Dercon 2014
- 10 Sánchez and Singh 2016
- 11 Boyden, Winter, Crivello, Espinoza Revollo, forthcoming 2018
- 12 For details on the construction of the Young Lives Wealth Index, see Briones (2017).
- 13 Serneels and Dercon 2014
- 14 All names of people and places are pseudonyms.
- 15 Vu 2011
- 16 Boyden 2013; Crivello and Boyden 2014; Crivello and Van der Gaag 2016; Morrow and Vennam 2010
- 17 Boyden 2013: 586
- 18 Zharkevich et al. 2016: 21
- 19 Tafere and Chuta 2016: 9
- 20 Note that Young Lives defines a 'day' as a 24-hour period.
- 21 Morrow, Tafere, and Vennam 2014: 148
- 22 ILO 2017
- 23 Note: Working for pay refers to any payment that is in cash, in kind, both cash and in kind, debt relief, and pocket money.
- 24 Galab et al. 2011
- 25 The wording of the question to children varied slightly in 2002 and 2009. In 2002 the question asked: 'Have you done anything in the last 12 months to earn money for yourself and for your family?' The figures estimated here are the percentage of children who answered YES to this question. In 2009 the wording was: 'Now I want you to think about the past year. Did you do anything to help your family, or to get money or things for yourself?' For those who answered YES, the five most important activities (in terms of time spent) were recorded, and for each one we ask: 'Do you get any money or things for doing this activity?'. The figures estimated here are the percentage of children who answered YES to the last question (i.e. reported doing at least one paid activity out of the list of five most important activities). The question was slightly re-worded for India: 'do you get any money or things for doing this activity?' and the type of payment was not recorded.
- 26 Woldehanna et al. 2011
- 27 Boyden et al. 2016
- 28 Krutikova 2009
- 29 Cussianovich and Rojas 2014: 167
- 30 Cussianovich and Rojas 2014: 167
- 31 Vu 2011
- 32 Crivello and Espinoza Revollo 2018
- 33 Krutikova 2009
- 34 Frost and Rolleston 2013; Crivello and Espinoza Revollo 2019
- 35 Crivello and Espinoza Revollo 2018
- 36 Heissler and Porter 2013
- 37 Boyden 2009; Boyden et al. 2016; Crivello and Van der Gaag 2016; Crivello and Espinoza Revollo 2018; Heissler and Porter 2013
- 38 Tafere and Chuta 2016: 11
- 39 Crivello and Espinoza Revollo 2018
- 40 Pankhurst, Bourdillon and Crivello 2015
- 41 Frost and Rolleston 2013
- 42 Vennam et al. 2016; Morrow and Vennam 2010
- 43 Morrow and Vennam 2012
- 44 Ames 2013b: 272
- 45 Rojas et al 2016: 25
- 46 Benny et al 2018
- 47 Chuta 2014; Heissler and Porter 2013; Ogando Portela and Pells 2014; Vennam et al. 2010
- 48 Boyden 2009: 127
- 49 Vennam et al. 2016
- 50 Crivello et al. 2014: 103
- 51 Heissler and Porter 2013
- 52 Ogando Portela and Pells 2014: 77
- 53 Krutikova 2009
- 54 Chuta 2014: 14
- 55 Crivello and Boyden 2014: 387
- 56 Pankhurst, Crivello and Tiemelissan 2015: 54
- 57 Orkin 2012: 7
- 58 Morrow, Tafere and Vennam 2014: 146
- 59 Chuta 2014: 14
- 60 Ames 2013a; see also Cussianovich and Rojas 2014
- 61 Pankhurst, Crivello and Tiemelissan 2015: 55
- 62 Crivello and Espinoza Revollo 2018
- 63 Zharkevich et al. 2016
- 64 Morrow 2013b; Rolleston and James 2011
- 65 Crivello 2011: 404; Ames 2013b
- 66 Ames 2013a: 147
- 67 Morrow and Vennam 2012: 554



- 68 Boyden 2009; Crivello et al. 2014; Morrow 2013a; Morrow 2013b
- 69 Pells et al. 2016
- 70 Cussianovich and Rojas 2014: 168
- 71 Morrow and Vennam 2012
- 72 Crivello and Boyden 2014: 386; see also Cuisanovich and Rojas 2014
- 73 Boyden 2009; Morrow 2013a
- 74 Morrow and Vennam 2012
- 75 Orkin 2012: 7-8
- 76 Pells et al. 2013
- 77 Zharkevich et al. 2016: 24
- 78 Morrow and Vennam 2009: 13
- 79 Crivello and Van der Gaag 2016: 28; Boyden et al. 2016: 21
- 80 Vennam et al. 2016
- 81 Orkin 2010; Orkin 2012; Pells 2011
- 82 Bourdillon and Boyden 2014
- 83 Cueto, Singh, Woldehanna, Le Thuc, and Miranda 2016
- 84 Vu 2014
- 85 Rolleston and Iyer, forthcoming
- 86 Cueto, Miranda, Leon, and Vásquez 2016
- 87 Morrow and Singh 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells 2015; Pells et al. 2016a
- 88 Morrow and Singh 2015
- 89 Morrow 2013a
- 90 Morrow and Singh 2014
- 91 Woldehanna and Araya 2016
- 92 The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international assessment of mathematics and science at the fourth and eighth grades that has been conducted every four years since 1995. See: <http://timss2015.org>.
- 93 Singh 2014
- 94 Boyden and Bourdillon 2014; Favara 2016
- 95 Singh and Mukherjee 2017b
- 96 Orkin 2010: 10
- 97 Frost and Rolleston 2013: 14; see also Boyden 2009
- 98 World Food Programme (2013) 'State of School Feeding Worldwide', Rome: WFP.
- 99 Global Coalition to End Child Poverty 2017
- 100 Camfield and Vennam 2012: 19
- 101 Barrientos, A., J. Byrne, J.M. Villa, and P. Peña (2013) 'Social transfers and child protection in the South', Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.
- 102 Camfield 2014
- 103 Porter and Goyal 2016
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Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam over 15 years.

Its aim is to shed light on the drivers and impacts of child poverty, and generate evidence to help policymakers design programmes that make a real difference to poor children and their families.