



MGA BATA SA KAPIT-OS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY ON THE TRAVAILS OF CHILDREN WORKING FOR A LIVING

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aimed to elucidate the daily experiences and underlying motivations for early child labor engagement among children in Sta. Maria Public Market. Utilizing in-depth face-to-face interviews with seven informants, the research employed thematic content analysis, encompassing data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis revealed two primary motivators for child labor: familial love and the necessity for survival. Additionally, the study uncovered significant challenges faced by these child laborers, including diminished self-esteem and morale, the burden of family sustenance, and individual physical and emotional struggles. These children confront the dual challenges of fulfilling their roles as laborers and as learners in school, navigating complex social and familial expectations. The findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of child labor and underscore the need for targeted interventions. The study advocates for comprehensive measures to address, and potentially eradicate, child labor within the community, emphasizing the importance of holistic support systems for child laborers in balancing their educational needs and familial responsibilities.

Keywords: social sciences, child labor, narrative experiences, poverty, phenomenology, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Labor, intrinsically linked to sweat, physical power, and suffering, is an essential endeavor necessary to sustain family existence and advance society. Historically, adults have traditionally borne this obligation. Nevertheless, a concerning change has arisen in recent times, particularly in emerging nations such as the Philippines. Children are increasingly forced to labor instead of focusing on their education, often out of extreme necessity (Latif et al., 2020).



The occurrence of child labor, also referred to as the employment of children, is not solely caused by poverty. It is also influenced by intricate socio-economic issues such as familial neglect, handicap, or the elderly status of parents (e.g., Berliana et al., 2019; Deb et al., 2020). These children, who come from underprivileged households, are forced to enter the workforce, which is a serious societal problem that requires immediate attention and help.

The global concern of child labor arises from the employment of children in a manner that deprives them of their youth, hinders their education, and negatively impacts their physical, mental, and social well-being. According to a survey by the International Labor Organization (1996), over 120 million youngsters, ranging in age from 5 to 14 years, were employed in full-time paid labor in 1995. The number of children aged 5-17 years reached a concerning 168 million by 2013, a significant increase that can be linked to globalization, population expansion, and rising poverty levels (Edralin, 2002; Ullén & Eck, 2011). In the Philippines, the situation is very dire. According to the 2011 National Survey on Children, more than 3.21 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 were engaged in dangerous work, primarily in the field of agriculture. However, the problem goes beyond just agriculture, affecting a substantial portion of the services and industry sectors as well (Castro & Hunting, 2013).

Despite national efforts to eradicate the worst forms of child labor, millions of Filipino children continue to work in hazardous conditions. They are exposed to physical dangers, harmful chemicals, and psychological abuse, often working long hours with minimal breaks, severely impacting their health and development. The prevalence of child labor is notably higher among boys, constituting nearly 67 percent of child workers, with regions such as Central Luzon, Bicol, Northern Mindanao, and Western Visayan Islands being the most affected (Albert, Quimba, Ramos & Almeda, 2012; Okusa, 2008; Orbeta, 2005). Locally, in municipalities like Sta. Maria of Davao Occidental, the contribution of child laborers to economic progress is visibly evident. From agricultural fields to urban enterprises, children engage in various forms of labor, such as carrying goods, operating transport services, and participating in agricultural and fishing activities.

While several local studies have highlighted the prevalence of child labor, a thematic exploration of the lived experiences of these young laborers remains unexplored. This gap in research underlines the necessity of this study, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of child labor in the Philippines, with a specific focus on the narratives of these children, who are not just workers but also bearers of stories that reveal the



complexities and hardships of their lives in support of their families. Hence, the aim of this research is to determine the underlying themes depicting child labor among children in Sta. Maria in Davao Occidental, Philippines. Specifically, the research questions are thus focused in addressing the following questions: (1) What are the life experiences that led the children to work at early age? and (2) What are the problems encountered by child laborers?

FRAMEWORK

The Social Ecological Model, proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex and interrelated effects of individual and environmental factors on child labor in the Philippines. This model demonstrates the interaction between individual characteristics, such as age and level of education, and social factors, such as family poverty and parental well-being, in influencing a child's involvement in labor. It evaluates the impact of local perspectives on child labor and its prevalence at the community level. At the societal level, it examines overarching variables such as economic policy and cultural values. By employing this paradigm, this study may assess and explore the complex layers of effect on child labor, recognizing that children's experiences are shaped not just by their local circumstances but also by broader societal structures.

Giddens' (1984) Theory of Structuration offers a distinctive perspective that emphasizes the dualistic character of social structures and human behavior. This concept suggests that societal institutions, such as economic systems and education programs, are both impacted by and have an impact on individual behaviors and decisions. This approach enables an analysis of how children and their families navigate and potentially alter their situations within the confines of existing social norms and economic institutions, specifically in the context of child labor. This statement acknowledges that children are not solely shaped by the social environment in which they live, but they also actively participate in the creation and advancement of those systems by their actions and choices.

By amalgamating these two theories, the study may formulate a complete and efficacious approach to understanding the multifaceted nature of child labor in the Philippines. The Social Ecological Model offers a comprehensive structure for comprehending the diverse levels of impact on child labor, encompassing aspects that range from individual to social influences. This model provides useful insights for identifying the optimal points to undertake treatments. The Theory of Structuration explicates the dynamic interplay between individual agency and societal structures,



highlighting the potential for alteration instigated at the individual level. These theories work in conjunction to facilitate a comprehensive examination of child labor, acknowledging the interdependence between individual choices and systemic factors. Through the utilization of a dual-theoretical approach, this study aims to not only ascertain the fundamental elements that contribute to child labor but also propose complete strategies to address this issue. This technique aligns with the research's purpose to uncover and address the complex nature of child labor.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research methodology to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of child labor. The study utilized phenomenological methodology, which is well-suited for investigating the subjective experiences and viewpoints of individuals. Phenomenological research, as elucidated by Groenewald (2004), emphasizes the intrinsic difficulty faced by researchers in achieving complete objectivity and detachment from their own preconceived ideas. Hammersley (2003) endorses this viewpoint, affirming that researchers invariably integrate their own concepts and biases into the process of conducting a study. This approach aligns with the study undertaken by Marais (1988), which posits that researchers inherently acquire and are impacted by explicit perspectives.

The primary aim of this study is to examine and document the subjective encounters and viewpoints of those affected by child labor. The objective of this study is to uncover the underlying causes, challenges, and outcomes of child labor through the use of a qualitative approach. Its primary objective is to collect valuable information from individuals who are directly involved in child labor. By choosing this approach, a deeper and more nuanced understanding is attained compared to quantitative methods, which may overlook the complexities inherent in individual experiences.

The phenomenological method is particularly pertinent to this study as it allows for a comprehensive examination of the subjective experiences of child laborers. This methodology will enhance the identification of recurring themes and patterns within these instances, resulting in valuable insights into the issue of child labor. The crux of this study resides not alone in the gathering of data, but also in the analysis and understanding of the societal and cultural factors that impact the prevalence of child labor. The use of this strategy is crucial for developing comprehensive solutions to effectively address this complex social issue, in line with the objectives of the study.



Participants

This study focuses on individuals between the ages of 9 and 16 who are currently engaged in labor activities at the public market of Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental. This group encompasses both those of school-age and those who

have terminated their formal education. The participant selection criteria were explicitly delineated to uphold the study's focus and ethical requirements. The key requirements for inclusion were the specific age range of 9 to 16 years, current involvement in work activities at the selected market, and the child's informed agreement and parental or guardian consent to participate. Conversely, the exclusion criteria included individuals under the legal age who were not employed at the Sta. Maria public market, those who did not fall within the designated age range, and those who were incapable or unwilling to provide informed agreement or consent.

Table 1. *Children Working in Sta. Maria Public Market*

Name*	Age	Grade/Year	Field of Work
Jaypee	9 years old	Grade 7	catching crabs
Sunny	15 years old	None	selling slippers
Rona	14 years old	Grade 7	selling seaweeds
Ariel	14 years old	Grade 6	pedicab driver
Jerwin	12 years old	Grade 5	selling vegetables
Renald	16 years old	None	selling <i>ukay-ukay</i> **
Mary Jane	11 years old	Grade 6	Selling vegetables and fruits

* *Pseudonyms*

** *Ukay-ukay refers to second-hand bargained clothes.*

Rigorous measures were put in place to uphold ethical norms and protect the privacy of these young individuals. Each child-informant was assigned a pseudonym, meticulously chosen to prevent any possible link to their true identity. Furthermore, to ensure confidentiality, the names of the schools attended by the child laborers, if relevant, were deliberately omitted. This methodology follows the ethical guidelines for conducting research with minors, with a particular focus on safeguarding participant confidentiality and respecting their rights and welfare (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

The study was designed to provide participants with the option to exit at any point, while also respecting the independence and decision-making power of both the children and their guardians, as clearly indicated in the informed consent and assent forms. The protocol for withdrawal was well presented and rigorously adhered to throughout the research process. By prioritizing these ethical issues, the study adhered to rigorous academic standards while also



protecting the dignity, rights, and well-being of the vulnerable child participants at its core.

Sources of Data

The primary method of data collecting in this study was the use of semi-structured interviews, which were chosen to match with the phenomenological approach. The purpose of this strategy is to gain a comprehensive understanding of human experiences. Semi-structured interviews possess a combination of flexibility and structure, enabling researchers to investigate preset subjects while also affording participants the chance to elaborate on their perspectives (Gillham, 2008; Pearce, 2012). The approach is highly advantageous for phenomenological investigations as it enables the extraction of comprehensive and intricate accounts of participants' personal encounters (Wengraf, 2001).

The choice to employ semi-structured interviews was motivated by the necessity to capture the intricate viewpoints of child laborers regarding their day-to-day encounters. This methodological approach allows participants to express their thoughts and emotions without any restrictions, concentrating on the topics they consider important. Within this particular framework, a total of seven in-person semi-structured interviews were carried out with children engaged in child labor. Throughout these interviews, one of the researchers actively interacted with the participants, directing the discussion using an interview guide that included both predefined subjects and open-ended inquiries. Simultaneously, another member of the research team was tasked with audiotaping of these interviews. Audio recordings are essential in phenomenological research as they guarantee a thorough study of the data. Replaying the audio enables several instances of listening, which aids in comprehending the participants' stories on a profound level. Additionally, it offers a verifiable documentation that can be examined by other researchers, thereby strengthening the dependability and meticulousness of the study (Rowley, 2012).

Regarding the standards of phenomenological research, it is important to highlight that the interviews were carried out with a focus on ensuring the participants' comfort and autonomy. The interview location was selected to guarantee a feeling of safety and privacy for the child laborers, and the interview procedure was tailored to be attentive to their requirements and communications. This approach is in line with the ethical considerations that are crucial in research involving populations that are vulnerable. It guarantees that the participants' views are acknowledged and treated with respect, correctly representing their real-life experiences.



Procedure of the Study

The study utilized a systematic and ethically responsible strategy to conduct interviews with child laborers in their specific work environments. Consistent with phenomenological research methodologies that value understanding individuals' genuine experiences (Hiller & Di Luzio, 2004), the interviews were designed to observe and engage with participants in their natural settings. The utilization of this approach is essential in phenomenological research since it provides a deeper comprehension of the day-to-day experiences of the individuals.

Each interview, lasting around 20 minutes, was carefully arranged to allow participants to carefully reflect upon and articulate their experiences. The use of semi-structured questions enabled a fair exchange of ideas, allowing the researcher to guide the conversation while giving participants the freedom to express their perspectives in a thorough manner. This approach aligns with the recommendation put forward by Cassell and Symon (2006), who note that phenomenological interviews often necessitate a blend of adaptability and organization to effectively capture the wide array of participants' experiences.

To ensure the accuracy and dependability of the data, the researchers personally conducted all interviews, recorded them in audio format, and subsequently transcribed them. Ensuring the genuineness of participants' responses and permitting thorough content analysis are vital features of phenomenological research. During the interview process, it was observed that several young individuals faced challenges in comprehending particular inquiries, particularly those related to their length of employment and schedules. In order to tackle this issue, the interview questions were meticulously adjusted to enhance lucidity and comprehension, hence upholding the interviews' genuineness and dependability. This study's commitment to ethical and responsive research methods is demonstrated by its adaptive approach, particularly when working with vulnerable populations like child laborers. The modifications implemented in the interview procedure exemplify an unwavering commitment to a participant-centered approach, which is a distinctive feature of rigorous and compassionate phenomenological research.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure in this study was systematically structured and conducted in accordance with the principles of phenomenological research, utilizing a three-step methodology: data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation and verification. This approach is in line with the investigative character of analyzing qualitative data and employs a continuous comparison strategy, as suggested by Lichtman (2012).



In the initial stage, referred to as data reduction, the researchers diligently transcribed and translated the audio recordings of interviews conducted with child laborers. The technique involved a careful and detailed classification of the responses, which were subsequently organized and arranged in a systematic manner. This stage is vital in phenomenological research since it enables the extraction of the essential essence of the participants' experiences into manageable and interpretable units of information.

The second stage, data display, involved presenting the organized data in a cohesive design. The themes were derived directly from the children's narrations, ensuring that the analysis remained firmly grounded in the participants' own words and experiences. This stage aligns with the phenomenological focus on precisely and meaningfully gathering and portraying the authentic experiences of individuals.

Ultimately, in the final stage of the investigation, the researchers developed first interpretations for the patterns observed in the data and verified their accuracy. This involved a rigorous process of carefully analyzing the transcripts, creating detailed notes, and identifying overarching themes and concepts. The researchers categorized the themes into sub-categories, allowing them to integrate these findings into the broader narrative. The aim of this research was two-fold: to reveal prevailing themes and patterns, and to provide a thorough and detailed portrayal of the topic of child labor. The utilization of this approach is crucial in phenomenological studies as it aims to offer a deep and comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation, namely, the direct experiences of child laborers.

During this process, the analysis was continuously revised and updated, as the researchers consistently compared fresh data with current conclusions to enhance and expand their comprehension of the phenomenon. This approach guarantees a comprehensive and detailed examination of the intricate problem of child labor, offering unique perspectives that are based on the real-life encounters of the individuals involved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This presents the results of the interview the researchers have conducted: cause of child labor at early age, problems and coping mechanism of children. After conducting in-depth interview with our informants which results of several pages of transcribe text, formal analysis and we have concluded.



Principal Causes Why Children Work at Early Age

The thematic analysis of the first research question, "What are the life experiences that led the children to work at an early age?" reveals two primary organizing themes: *family support and affection* and *survival and economic necessity*. The following table outlines the basic themes under each organizing theme and includes sample statements from the participants:

Table 2. *Thematic analysis results for RQ1: What are the life experiences that led the children to work at an early age?*

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes	Sample Statements (Quotes)
Family Support and Affection	- Desire to assist parents and grandparents in their daily needs.	To help my mother and father – Mary Jane
	- Contributing to family expenses and schooling needs.	To have allowance at school and to help my grandmother – Ariel
	- Feeling of responsibility as a family member.	My grandmother asked me to accompany her in peddling to help her. – Jerwin
Survival and Economic Necessity	- Working for personal survival, especially in the absence of parents.	To gain money, it's my own choice to work. – Sany
	- Contributing to family income as a necessity.	So that when I ask something from my mother she will give me. – Rona
	- Engaging in labor due to family economic challenges.	Papa asks me to catch it because I am good at it, I am with them in doing it. – Jaypee

The first theme identified from the study, *family support and affection*, delves into the intricate and emotionally charged motivations driving children to work at an early age. This theme is multifaceted, encompassing children's deep-rooted sense of duty towards their family, their desire to alleviate familial financial burdens, and the inherent affection that compels them to contribute to household needs. In essence, theme uncovers the poignant reality that child labor, at its core, is intertwined with love, responsibility, and the desire to support loved ones. This realization challenges the conventional perception of child labor, revealing the nuanced and deeply personal reasons behind why children choose to work at an early age.

A predominant aspect of this theme is the children's desire to assist their parents and grandparents in daily needs and expenses. As evidenced by the narratives of the participants, such as Mary Jane (###Archive 201), who stated, "*Para tabangan naku sila mama ug papa* (To help my mother and father)," there is a clear expression of love and responsibility towards family



members. This sentiment is echoed in Jerwin's account (##Archive 103), where he mentions accompanying his grandmother in peddling to provide her assistance. These expressions are not mere acts of labor but are imbued with deep familial affection and a sense of duty.

Another critical aspect within this theme is the contribution of child laborers to their family's income, which is often directed towards schooling and other personal needs. As Ariel (##Archive 406) shared, "*Para naa koy pambalon sa eskwelahan ug para pud makatabang sa ako lola* (To have allowance at school and to help my grandmother)," it becomes evident that the children perceive their labor not only as a means of survival but as a crucial contribution to their educational expenses and support of their families. Moreover, this theme demonstrates a deeply rooted feeling of obligation that children experience as participants in their family unit. The responsibility is not forced upon them, but rather seen as a duty that children like Mary Jane, Jerwin, and Ariel express by being willing to labor and provide for their family.

The subject of familial assistance and fondness corresponds with the findings of Baland and Robinson (2000) as well as the reports provided by UNICEF. These studies emphasize the idea that children frequently participate in labor due to their belief that it is their duty to contribute to their family's financial resources, a feeling that is strongly influenced by their love and care for their family. The tales of the children demonstrate an intricate interaction between the need for financial stability and the emotional connections, emphasizing that child labor is not solely a financial exchange but is profoundly ingrained in the social and familial structure.

The study second theme focuses on the life events that compel children to engage in early labor due to the *need for survival and economic reasons*. This theme explores the stark economic realities and the necessity for youngsters to enter the workforce in order to survive. The text underscores the intricate relationship between poverty, parental responsibilities, and the lack of sufficient adult assistance, which influences the children's choice to engage in labor. This subject emphasizes the necessity of implementing comprehensive policies that specifically target the economic vulnerabilities of families in order to prevent the occurrence of child labor. It also requires initiatives that provide safety measures for children, guaranteeing that their fundamental needs are fulfilled without jeopardizing their entitlement to a labor-free childhood.

An essential element of this issue is the imperative for children to engage in labor in order to ensure their own existence, especially in circumstances when they lack or do not have parental assistance. As an



illustration, Sany (##Archive 308) asserts, "*Para naay kwarta, ako rang kabubut-on nga magtrabaho.* (To gain money, it's my own choice to work)."

This remark acknowledges a harsh truth in which the act of working is not merely a voluntary decision, but a necessary method of staying alive. Children like Sany regularly face situations where they are compelled to take care of themselves, frequently residing with relatives or employers who may not offer adequate assistance.

The theme also encompasses the portrayal of children engaging in labor to supplement their family's financial resources. This is seen in the experiences of Rona and Jaypee, who have a strong sense of obligation to provide financial support for their families. Rona's statement, "*Para kung naa koy pangayuon sa ako mama hatagan ko nya.* (So that when I ask something from my mother she will give me)" (##Archive 508), and Jaypee's, "*Ipadakop ni papa kay maayo man ko mudakop, kauban pud nako sila kuya sa pangdakop.* (Papa ask me to catch it because I am good at it, I am with them in doing it)" (##Archive 702), illustrate a situation in which the financial contributions made by children are essential for the survival of the household.

This theme aligns with the findings of Canagarajah and Nielsen (2001), who noted that poor households often use child labor as a means to augment family income for survival. Furthermore, Hesketh et al. (2012) highlight that the benefits to the household of sending a child to work include the child's wages and reduced education expenditures. Zarif and Aziz-un-Nisa (2013) also emphasize that children in impoverished families often work due to the inability of their parents, who may be illiterate or have insufficient income, to provide for basic needs.

Problems Experienced by Children Laborers

The thematic analysis of the second research question, "What are the problems encountered by child laborers?" reveals three organizing themes: '*self-esteem and morale challenges*,' '*family sustenance struggles*,' and '*individual physical and emotional struggles*.' Table 3 below is the detailed thematic analysis:

Table 3. *Thematic analysis results for RQ2: What are the problems encountered by child laborers?*

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes	Sample Statements (Quotes)
Self-Esteem and Morale Challenges	- Embarrassment and shame in working.	Sometimes I feel embarrassed, it's just embarrassing" – Rona
	- Feeling sorry for not experiencing a normal childhood.	I feel ashamed because I am not doing what other children do." – Mary Jane



Family Sustenance Struggles	- Balancing work with school and family responsibilities.	I use to pedal when I have no class, I can still play whenever I want.” – Ariel
	- Engaging in farming and other labor activities to support family income.	It is still vacation time that’s why I’m working for us to buy insecticide for our crops” – Sany
Individual Physical and Emotional Struggles	- Physical and emotional exhaustion from labor activities.	It is tiresome to wake up early adding the fact that we need to travel” – Jerwin
	- Multiple demanding tasks and responsibilities beyond their age.	I feel so tired because I just don’t work here in the <i>ukay-ukay</i> , sometimes fixing things that needed to be fixed.” – Renald

The first theme that emerged from the study, addressing the problems encountered by child laborers, is '*self-esteem and morale challenges*'. This theme encapsulates the psychological and emotional struggles these children face due to their involvement in labor at a young age. The narratives of the child laborers reveal a profound sense of embarrassment and shame, not only about the nature of their work but also about the divergence of their lives from what is perceived as a normal childhood.

A significant aspect of this theme is the feeling of embarrassment or shame experienced by the children while working. For example, Rona (##Archive 527) expresses, “*Maulaw ko usahay, ulaw man gud*. (Sometimes I feel embarrassed, it's just embarrassing).” This sentiment indicates a deep-seated awareness among these children of societal norms and expectations about childhood, which typically do not include labor. The feeling of unease when observed by others, especially peers, underscores the internal conflict these children face between the necessity of work and the desire for a conventional childhood.

Mary Jane's statement, “*Maulaw ko sa ako kaugalingun kay ang uban kay naglaag-laag lang dili pareha naku*. (I feel ashamed because I am not doing what other children do.)” (##Archive 236), further illustrates this theme. This sense of sorrow and loss reflects not just the physical burden of work but also the emotional toll of missing out on key aspects of childhood. The awareness of their different realities compared to their non-working peers contributes to a sense of alienation and self-pity.

This theme resonates with the findings of Admassie and Bedi (2008) and Edmonds (2007), who have noted that engagement in child labor can lead to trade-offs in school performance and social life. While some argue that schooling and child labor might be complementary, especially when the labor is necessary to pay for school, the types of work and the hours involved often make it challenging to balance both effectively. Moreover, as Edmonds (2007)



points out, the sacrifice of play and leisure time, which are vital for social development, is a significant cost borne by child laborers.

The second theme identified from the study is '*family sustenance struggles*.' This theme delves into the complexities that child laborers face in balancing their work with educational and family responsibilities, particularly in the context of contributing to their family's income. This theme is multifaceted, reflecting the economic pressures on families that often lead to children working, even at the cost of their education and typical childhood experiences.

A key aspect of this theme is the challenge child laborers face in juggling their work with school and family duties. For instance, Ariel (##Archive 424) shares, "*Magtrisikad ra man ko kung way klase, makadula man pud ko kung gusto nako*. (I use to pedal when I have no class, I can still play whenever I want.)" This statement highlights the delicate balance child laborers attempt to maintain between their work, schooling, and the limited leisure time they have. Their need to contribute financially often comes at the expense of their education and personal development.

Another dimension of this theme is the involvement of children in various forms of labor, such as farming, to support their family's income. Sany's statement, "*Wala pamay klase maong manarbaho sa ko para naa mi pampalit ug medisina sa uma*. (It is still vacation time that's why I'm working for us to buy insecticide for our crops)" (##Archive 311), exemplifies the economic realities that drive children into labor. Children like Sany work not only to contribute to their immediate family needs but also to support broader aspects of family survival, such as farming.

The findings reflect the assertions of Debebe (2010), who noted that children are engaged in family farm activities even at an early age to contribute to the family's income. While some aspects of child work can be seen as beneficial in teaching responsibility and self-reliance, the primary reason for children's involvement in such activities often boils down to the cost of adult labor and the economic necessities of the family.

Furthermore, the theme aligns with the observations made by Reyes, Asis, and Mondez (2014), who highlighted that child laborers are often deprived of the simple joys of childhood, relegated instead to a life of hard work and responsibility. This deprivation goes beyond the physical labor; it encompasses the loss of leisure, play, and the freedom to engage in activities typical for their age.

Finally, the third theme emerging from the study, focusing on the problems encountered by child laborers, is '*individual physical and emotional struggles*.'



This theme captures the personal struggles and hardships that child laborers experience as a result of their engagement in work activities. It encompasses both physical and emotional aspects, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the challenges they face. The theme calls for a reconsideration of the conditions under which children work and advocates for a more child-centric approach that prioritizes their health, safety, and development.

A significant aspect of this theme is the physical and emotional exhaustion that comes with child labor. The statement by Jerwin (##Archive 124), “*Kapoy ug mata ug sayo pagkahuman mubyahe pajud*. (It is tiresome to wake up early adding the fact that we need to travel),” vividly illustrates the physical toll of labor. Waking up early and engaging in demanding physical work, often in conjunction with long commutes, leaves these children fatigued and stressed. This exhaustion is not just a physical condition; it deeply affects their emotional and mental well-being.

The theme also highlights the issue of children undertaking multiple and often heavy tasks that are inappropriate for their age. Renald's account (##Archive 611), “*Kapoy kaayo kay all around ako trabaho, dili lang diri sa ukay-ukayan, usahay mag-ayo ug ayohunon ug unsa pay ipabuhat ni Kuya*. (I feel so tired because I just don't work here in the *ukay-ukay*, sometimes fixing things that needed to be fixed),” reflects the overburdening nature of the work that child laborers are subjected to. This not only poses a risk to their physical health but also to their psychological development, as they are forced to take on adult responsibilities prematurely.

The findings of the study resonate with the broader literature on child labor. For instance, Tungpalan (2016) found that children working in sugarcane farms experienced physical injuries and other health issues due to their work conditions. Similarly, Siddiqi and Patrinos (1995) observed that child labor often leads to abuse of children's rights, including the right to education, and subjects them to work conditions that are detrimental to their physical and mental development. This is in stark contrast to the protections outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 32(1), which emphasizes the right of children to be shielded from economic exploitation and hazardous work.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of narratives given by child laborers in Sta. Maria has yielded important insights into the complexities of child labor, highlighting significant challenges in implementing legislation and the societal repercussions. The theme analysis revealed that there are two primary causes



that drive youngsters to participate in labor: *family support and affection and survival and economic necessity*. The findings underscore the inherent duality of child work, which is deeply rooted in both familial bonds and economic imperatives.

However, this research has also uncovered the significant adverse effects of child labor on the psychological and emotional well-being of children. A significant concern that has been identified is the declining self-esteem and morale among child laborers, which can be attributed to the sentiments of humiliation and embarrassment they suffer, as well as the sense of deprivation from not having a typical childhood. The emotional weight, together with the physical and mental exhaustion stemming from balancing work, education, and household duties, might impede the holistic development of young children. The repercussions last beyond their childhood, potentially leading to individuals who are plagued by feelings of insecurity and emotional distress.

Furthermore, the daily struggle to acquire fundamental requirements underscores the precarious economic conditions that these children and their families face. This reality not only compels children to engage in labor but also hinders their ability to obtain sufficient education and leisure, both of which are crucial for their comprehensive development.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this inquiry require prompt and targeted interventions. Improving basic education is crucial to decrease the prevalence of child labor. This involves improving formal education institutions and providing comprehensive non-formal education alternatives specifically tailored to satisfy the needs of child laborers. Moreover, it is imperative to provide parents and communities with comprehensive knowledge regarding the detrimental consequences of child labor. This may involve community-based initiatives that offer educational programs to families addressing the long-term impacts of child labor on the developmental welfare of children.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for social interventions targeted at alleviating the economic difficulties experienced by families. These may include welfare aid, provision of tuition-free education, and essential social services. Enforcing these regulations can mitigate the economic hardships that compel adolescents to engage in labor and empower them to prioritize their education and personal development.



In light of these findings, it is crucial for local authorities, particularly in the Province of Davao Occidental and the Municipality of Sta. Maria, to promptly establish and enforce comprehensive legislation aimed specifically at

combating child labor and safeguarding the welfare of children. These laws should give greater importance not only to preventing child labor but also to establishing support programs for children with prior job experience. It is imperative that these interventions consider several aspects, addressing the immediate and long-term needs of child laborers and their families.

In conclusion, this study highlights the necessity for a collaborative and all-encompassing approach to tackle the issue of child labor. To create a secure environment for children, where their rights are protected and their future is guaranteed, it is essential for government bodies, educational institutions, community organizations, and families to work together.

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How to cite this article:

Taña, K., Autor, D.C., Malon, B.M., Agbun, N., Montejo, R., Murcia, J.V., (2024). Mga bata sa kapit-os: a phenomenological inquiry on the travails of children working for a living. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6 (1), 1-19