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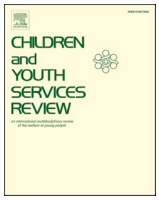

Passing the torch or breaking a cycle of intergenerational transmission of child labour: Reflections from the lived experiences of children

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ABSTRACT

Child labour is theorized to be influenced by social and cultural norms that legitimise child labour activities. While research has documented the nature of child labour, in terms of what activities children are engaged in as well as the impact it could have on children's development, not much is known about the pathways that lead to the normalisation of child labour. In this narrative qualitative study, we explored the pathways to normalising child labour among children in Ghana. The experiences of 18 children interviewed leads to an overall consideration of a case of passing the torch or breaking the cycle of intergenerational transmission of child labour. The study reported, continuing the family business, contributing to family income and reasonable earnings, as part of the debate for passing the torch. However, there is also room to break the potential for the intergenerational transmission of child labour which requires efforts from relevant stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and policy makers. With an understanding of how child labour may be legitimised, we can now move to develop programmes and interventions to de-legitimise child labour norms and contribute to positive outcomes for children.

1. Introduction

Child labour generally denotes the involvement of children (below the threshold of 15 years) in work and hazardous activities that could be detrimental to their physical, psychological and mental health (ILO, 2017). Attention on child labour conditions in the cocoa industry increased in Ghana and West Africa following a discovery of the child labour menace in 2001 (*cf.* Berlan, 2013). Working in cocoa and the agricultural sector constituted over 70 % of child labour cases in sub-Saharan Africa (ILO, 2018). Children involved in cocoa and fishing undertake hazardous activities, such as using machetes and cutlasses for weeding, harvesting cocoa, overnight sea fishing, paddling, pesticide spraying, diving for fish, and draining canoes (Ghana moderate advancement, 2017). These activities have detrimental impacts on the physical development, psychosocial and mental health of children (Akhmetova, 2016; Ghosh et al., 2020; Hilson, 2008). Child labour impedes children's school attendance (Odonkor, 2007), and it is negatively associated with children's objective reading capacity in Ghana (Heady, 2003). Part V (sub-Part I) of the Ghanaian Children's Act (Act 560) 1998, prohibit the involvement of children in any form of work before 13 (for light work) and 15 years (for employment). The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has initiated policies and action plans (such as the National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour (NPA2: 2017–2021) to address the child labour menace in Ghana. Notably, the NPA2 highlight cultural norms among the key barriers to eliminating child labour in the agricultural sector in Ghana.

Arguments about the causes of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa emphasise the role of cultural norms and traditional values that legitimise child labour activities (Abdullah, Emery, Dwumah, & Jordan, 2023; Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). Research on the cultural antecedents of child labour argues that norms that sanction child labour activities (herein child labour norms) are often deep-rooted among community members, and there are defined pathways for transmitting and legitimising the norms among younger generations (Weiner, 1991). However, there is no research on the transmission and normalisation mechanisms

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for which child labour norms are passed onto children in Ghana. Empirical evidence on the pathways for transmitting cultural norms on child labour is limited in sub-Saharan Africa even though over 48 million children (aged 5 to 17 years old) on the continent are estimated to be involved in child labour activities (ILO, 2018). This study explored the pathways to normalising child labour activities among children in Ghana.

1.1. Cultural norms and child labour

Evidence from a recent systematic review documented the cultural importance of inheriting family business, informal apprenticeship training, the asset value of children, and the value of education among the key child labour norms (Abdullah, Huynh, Emery, & Jordan, 2022). Communities legitimised child labour activities because they valued and cherished informal apprenticeship training during childhood as a desirable pathway to ensure that children develop habits for hard work (Lowe, 2017; Owusu-Amankwah, (2009). Working on family farms is an expectation that is perceived to prepare children to acquire basic skills for their future. Johansen (2006) reports that by participating in the farming activity children contribute to their family income through savings on the costs that would have been incurred for hiring extra labour. This suggests that the process of normalising child labour activities is sometimes supported by the economic relevance of the work children do. Hamenoo and colleagues' (2018) study among child street beggars in Ghana revealed that most of the children saw work as avenues to raise money to support their poor parents to meet their basic needs. Thus, they perceived their family poverty as additional justification for their involvement and acceptance of the labour activity (Okyere, 2013). For some children, their basic survival depends on the work they do (Levison, 2009; Myers, 2001; Nimbona and Lieten, 2007). Especially, for those children who have additional responsibilities as breadwinners; work (child labour) was the only means they could satisfy their responsibilities as heads of their families (Okyere, 2013). Essentially, the findings suggest that the causal role of cultural norms/traditional values in child labour and the processes of normalising these labour activities among younger generations may be mediated or moderated by socio-economic factors (such as poverty).

Some empirical findings have however shown that the impacts of poverty on child labour is mediated by cultural norms (Myers, 1999; Nieuwenhuys, 1996). Regardless of the direction of the equation, the extant evidence underscores the need for a two-pronged approach to address the child labour menace; 1) normative change, and 2) family support. Even parents who have the desire to support their children's education may opt for informal skilled training through child labour, when they lack the means to support their children to achieve the highest level of education (Hamenoo et al., 2018). Indeed, some children had to suspend their education to engage in mining activities with the goal of raising money to support their education (Okyere, 2013). Although, the contexts for this study, namely; Wassa Amenfi East, Sekondi, Shama, and Sefwi Wiawso districts, are not classified among the core poor districts in Ghana, individual economic circumstances of families may affect how child labour activities are normalised within the family context.

That said, children and their parents may not identify child labour (work in cocoa, and fishing activities) as a legitimate alternative avenue if there are no normative justifications for involving children in work. The presence of cultural norms regulate activities by positively sanctioning practices (child labour). The absence of norms/values that legitimises/normalises child labour activities would have forced parents to seek for alternative legitimate avenues to meet their needs without necessarily sanctioning their children's involvement in labour. There are more reasons to believe that the children also saw the child labour activities as a suitable alternative because they have legitimised and sanctioned the child labour norms. It therefore suffices to say that a suitable pathway to address the child labour menace in sub-Saharan should begin with efforts to uncover the legitimisation pathways for child labour norms and work towards efforts to de-legitimise the normative underpinnings to break the cycle of transmission.

1.2. Transmission and legitimation pathways of child labour norms: Theory and empirical analysis

Evidence from studies on the causes of child labour identify socialisation as the primary mechanism through which young people and children acquire knowledge and imbibe in themselves the values and norms that normalise child labour activities (*cf*. Adonteng-Kissi, 2018; Hamenoo et al., 2018; Okyere, 2013). While on the surface this may be considered true, analytically it is a reductionist approach for conceptualising the transmission and normalisation process for child labour norms. Socialisation function as a path for learning via social learning (Clément & Dukes, 2022; Grindal & Nieri, 2016). This learning process, via the psychological mechanism of social learning (Bandura, 1973), assume that children will take whatever they have been exposed to, and that they will take on the perspectives of others without due personal analysis.

Analytically, theorising socialisation as the main pathway for transmitting cultural norms eliminate children's agency within the learning and legitimisation process. It considers children as vulnerable to accept, endorse, legitimise and imitate actions to which they have been exposed. Children's capacity to interpret and analyse information and the actions of others—specifically adult community members—is sidelined within this broader social learning-based transmission process. Also, argument about socialisation as the primary pathway for transmitting cultural norms reduces the legitimation processes of cultural norms to only a psychological activity. Although, the psychological process involved in socialisation is essential for transmitting practices and ways of doing to younger generations, the holistic mechanisms that are involved in the transmission and legitimisation of values and norms go beyond psychological (Clément & Dukes, 2022). It entails cultural value processes—how well the agent (child) makes sense of whatever he/she has been exposed to in the community context (Gould, 2018). Being exposed to an activity itself does not guarantee that it will be legitimised or sanctioned by the agent in question, unless that activity is interpreted as sensible by the agent. Thus, a complete understanding of the transmission and normalisation of norms on child labour will yield a fruitful result if it considers the multi-faceted aspects that are involved; psychological, social, cultural sensitivity and the role of the agent (herein the child). The concept of cultural norms by Gould (1993, 2018) theorises the legitimation of norms as a process involving the agency of the agent involved, rationality, and appropriateness of the norm. This study will use Gould's theorisation as a framework to better understand the normalisation and transmission processes that are involved in child labour practice.

Cultural norms are transmitted through a conscious rational effort that has a primary objective of shaping the construal of people regarding societal expectations about legitimate practices. Durkheim (1982) argued that when norms are legitimised, they evoke binding obligations among those committed to the norm, such that deviation and violations of the norm will activate both internal (psychological) and external (physical) sanctions. When people legitimise and commit to a norm they conform to the dictates and expectations of the norm in the form of morally binding responsibility and normal expected duties (Durkheim, 1768). Gould (1976, 2018) argued that the legitimisation processes of norms entail a rational activity, where the agent (or actor concerned) judges the rationality and intelligibility of the norm before ascribing and committing to its dictates. Gould (1976) theorised this process as legitimation of cultural norms. He argued that a sanctioned cultural norm underlies actor's judgement of its dictates and actions as sensible within the community context. This suggests that before child labour activities can be normalised among children (younger generations), both the activity (child labour) and the normative underpinnings must

be judged by the child(ren) as rational and sensible within the community context. This judgement process is crucial in determining whether the actor, the child, will conform to the activity or reject it. Often, those who reject it are labelled as deviants in society. Children's ability to interpret and make decisions about issues that affect their lives is a right which is enshrined in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Imagine a scenario where a father with three children decides that a good way to instill the norms on child labour into his children is to expose them to child labour activities at their early ages. So, he sends all of them to his cocoa farm, five times weekly. However, in the course of the process the following ensued: 1) child #1: asked the father about the rationale for sending them to the farm while their colleagues are in school, 2) child #2: contacted her mother saying that works in the farm are not appropriate for their age as children, 3) child #3: however commended his father for training them on the farm which he think will be useful for them to inherit the farm. Essentially, child #1 and #2 failed to conform and sanction the normative rationale behind the practice, while child #3 appears to accept, legitimise and normalise the act. Even with child #3, it can be observed that he did not just accept the practice *as a given* or through a form of imitation, he interpreted and made sense of the action by the father. Child #3 would more likely introduce his own children to similar activity under the normative rationale of "*inheriting family business*". This scenario demonstrates the argument this paper seeks to highlight within the discussions on normative transmission and normalisation processes involved in child labour activities. It aims to show that normative transmission processes entail psychological, cultural sensitivity and children's agency. It also highlights the possible tension between cultural norms, conceptualisation of childhood and children's rights, specifically children's agency. The expectation that children will imitate actions and adhere to instructions by adults silence childrens voices and their capacity to take decisions within the socialisation process. From the above scenario, actions by child #1 and #2, in terms of contacting their mother and questioning the father, demonstrate children's agency (Abebe, 2019). Our approach is guided by Gould's (2018) theorisation of the logic of cultural norm, which argues that the legitimisation and normalisation processes of norms involve both sense making and rationalisation. By this, we posit that how norms on child labour are transmitted to children entail the active role of the children, who judges both the rationality and intelligibility of the practice and the normative underpinnings, before conforming to its dictates. Hence, the purpose of this study is to unravel how children normalise child labour activities within Ghanaian communities. The study was guided by the question: How is child labour activities transmitted and normalized among children in Ghana?

2. Methods

2.1. Vignette narrative approach

This study was guided by a vignette narrative qualitative approach. Generally, narrative qualitative research focuses on stories about the lived experiences of people or a phenomenon (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) argued that narrative qualitative researchers have a specific focus on the nature of the story being narrated, how they are narrated (chronology and sequence) and the meanings narrators associate with their stories. Compared to a traditional narrative interview, we used vignettes as focal points to invite stories from the participants. Our choice for vignette interviews was to ensure that we guard against the risk of social desirability in disclosing their lived experiences of engaging in child labour activities (Wilks, 2004). Also, by using the vignette approach we change the interview format from the usual interviewer-to-respondent dialogue to one that focuses on a daily story-telling endeavour triggered by a stimulated story/case. The vignette narrative approach enabled us to be child centred in our interviews and ensured that the children were able to tell their stories by relating to the stimulated vignette cases. Wilks (2004) argued that vignettes help to neutralise negative feelings and reduce victim self-blame for disclosing their involvement in violent and deviant behaviours. The interview approach was strengthened through follow-up questioning and paraphrasing techniques.

2.2. Participants and procedure

Participants included 18 children and adolescents from four communities in four districts (Wassa Amenfi East, Sekondi, Shama, and Sefwi Wiawso district) in the Western north and Western region of Ghana. The four communities were identified as the hubs of child labour activities based on evidence obtained from the regional directorate of the Department of Social Welfare. The children were part of a larger study that involved interviews with child labour stakeholders in the cocoa and fishing sector in Ghana. The children were purposively selected after their parents were involved in the study. Specifically, children whose parents have alluded to involving children in their care in the cocoa farming or sea fishing activities were invited to participate in the study. However, children whose parents did not endorse any of the child labour behaviours were excluded. Detailed information about the recruitment procedure for the parent participants has been explained elsewhere (Abdullah, Emery, Dwumah, & Jordan, 2023). Recruitment of the children were facilitated by their parents. Researchers asked the parents to mention the children whom they claimed to have supported them in the cocoa farm or fishing activities. The term "support" was used carefully to ensure that the parents do not perceive the act as undesirable and thereby provide false information about the identity of the children involved. Where parents mentioned more than one child, we interviewed at least two children per parent in line with our objective of enriching diversity in the stories on child labour norms. We interviewed 18 children from 20 parents who were identified to have a record of involving their children in child labour activities.

Before the children were engaged in the interviews, we obtained formal written and verbal consent from all parents, and assent from the children who were unable to provide consent. Two of the child participants who were 18 years and above were asked to provide consent. Although parents had to provide consent for children under 18 years, the final decision to participate rested on the children who were required to give assent to participate. The children provided assent/consent after the letters were read and explained to them in the presence of their parents. The consent letter underscored their rights to wilfully participate, withdraw and terminate the interview process without any consequences. The letter also detailed how their information will be used, potential risk to them, and the benefits of the project to children in Ghana. Formal approval for the project was obtained from the University of Hong Kong.

2.3. In-depth narrative interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with the children using semi-structured interview guide and was facilitated by vignettes. The interviews were opened using the vignette stimulants. Examples of some stimulated vignette stories have been provided below:

> *"Engaging in [fishing or cocoa farming] is simply a traditional system of schooling which doesn't violate the rights of children. It will ensure that children have the necessary training to become hard workers"*
> *"For me, I believe it will make more sense to participate in farming to acquire some skills that will help me in the future. That is better than to enroll in school if I am going to be unemployed after completing school."*

The vignettes were developed after interviews with the parents and were used to open discussions about the desirability and undesirability of child labour related activities. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were designed systematically to build on this open discussion to explore the kind of activities children undertook in the farm or at sea as well as

their perspectives about the legitimacy of these activities. Key questions on the interview guide included: Can you narrate how you came to know about children working in the cocoa farm (or at sea)? In what ways do you think most children are introduced to this type of work? Can you tell me your position or what you think about children working in cocoa farms/ or at sea? Can you tell me one of your worst moments in the farm/at sea? Several open-ended follow-up questions were asked to explore the legitimacy of the child labour activity and how they are normalised among children.

Interviews with the children were conducted in private spaces within their residence. Researchers ensured that the interview location was child friendly and free from interferences from other adults. Interviews were conducted in the Twi language, the common lingua franca in Ghana. Interviews averaged 50 min, were recorded using mobile phone recorders, and held between February to April 2022. Each child was given a honoraria of 30 cedis (USD 6.00 at the time of data collection) as compensation for their time.

2.4. Coding and analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed to facilitate data analysis. The analysis was conducted thematically to arrive at global themes for reporting. It begun by first reading through the interview transcripts several times for familiarisation with the data. Initial codes were generated separately by two authors and were later compared on a continuous basis to achieve consensus (Saldana, 2015). During this process, the researchers kept analytical memos which enabled a deeper reflection of the quotes that were coded. The codes were then compared and later refined to develop initial themes. Common codes were selected based on their similarity in meaning and frequency. Codes that share similar ideas were merged to form themes. The initial themes were then conceptualised to form global themes as main points for analysis. Two global themes, path to normalising child labor and arduous yet rewarding, were developed for reporting.

2.5. Trustworthiness

Two key measures were taken to enhance rigour and trustworthiness in the findings. First, transcripts were initially coded by two independent researchers (herein authors). Codes generated by the two researchers were compared and minor disagreements were discussed among the researchers. This process minimized researcher biases and ensured that verbatim quotes from the participants and meanings associated with them are consistent. Shenton (2004) described this collaborative data analysis approach as data triangulation. Second, the entire research process was led by the lead author under the supervision of the last author (Lucy Jordan), who is an astute research professor. Insights and guidance provided by the last author through weekly project meetings has helped to enrich the data collection and analysis process.

3. Findings

The study involved 18 participants aged 14 to 19 years from fishing and farming communities (see Table 1). Ten of the children were from a fishing community while eight came from a farming community specialised in cocoa farming. From Table 1, it can be seen that many of the children were involved in the respective activities at young ages, with the youngest age at first labour activity being six years. Eleven of the participants had dropped out of school, which means they were either involved in farming or fishing as a full-time venture. This may be problematic considering that the oldest is 19 – many of the participants stopped school at a relatively young age, not even completing basic school.

Table 1
. Demography of participants.

Item	Classification	Number (*N*)
Age	5–10	2
	11–15	7
	16–20	9
Sex	Male	15
	Female	3
Highest level of education	No formal education	1
	Dropped out at basic school	11
	Completed basic school	6
Living arrangement	Living with single parent	6
	Living with both parents	3
	Living external family members	7
	Living alone	2
Nature of labour activity	Farming	8
	Fishing	10
Age at first labour activity	6–10	7
	11–15	7
	Cannot remember	4

3.1. Farming and fishing activities performed by the children

We gathered data on the activities engaged in by the children. This helps to consider the scope of work being done by the children and could add to our understanding of what activities qualify as child labour. For both farming and fishing groups, the children are often engaged in activities that could cause physical strain. Such strenuous activities include weeding, cutting bamboo, carrying cocoa beans, harvesting cocoa, pulling fishnet from sea, throwing nets into the sea and draining water from the canoe (see supplementary data for details).

3.2. Paths to normalising child labour

Within the global theme related to the path to normalising child labour, three sub-themes of preferring family trade to school, saving family income through child labour and continuing family business, were developed. The analysis presented here investigates how activities of child labour could potentially be perpetuated among children. Fig. 1 puts together the themes developed for the study. While the figure may suggest a simplification of the paths to normalising child labour, the analysis shows that there are several nuances involved. For instance, it is not a given that preferring family trade over school would result in child labour. This is dependent on several child factors like their age, their ability to endure a physically demanding work over a long period, and the options that formal education could provide.

3.2.1. Preferring family trade to school

Most of the participants (11 of 18) stated that they would rather concentrate on fishing or farming than school. Of the 10 participants from the fishing community, nine preferred fishing to schooling while

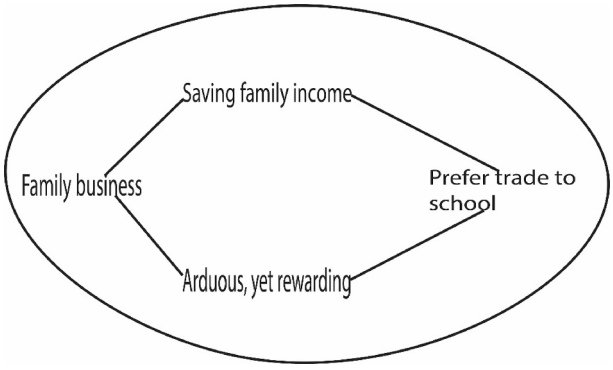

Fig. 1. Pathway to normalising/legitimising child labour.

only one of the eight participants from those in the farming community preferred farming to schooling. However, among those seven participants who indicated their preference for school, three of them indicated that it depended on the strength of the child, as one clarified.

"Attending school is mostly dependent on the child. If the child is brilliant and their parents have the financial capabilities, they must send the child to school. However, if the child is not brilliant and there is no money to take the child to school, then I believe the child must be taken to the farm to learn a skill which will be useful when they grow up" (P7, 18 years)

It may not be surprising that these children have nurtured their future aspirations around their families' trade as they live in a community that is socialised within that particular trade. It could be thought of as a given that they will become farmers or fishing folks because that is what they have seen their parents and other adults do to survive and even thrive. However, some of the participants further indicated that their future would be uncertain if they focused entirely on school. This was attributed to the lack of job opportunities.

"The money earned from this work can be used for the upkeep of the family. There are no available jobs after finishing school. So, you have to start learning fishing early to acquire skills and get your future job" (P14, 14 years)
"*After finishing school, you will be unemployed"* (P10, 14 years)

One of the participants narrated the fact that he has an elderly brother who is unemployed after focusing on school. The participant has been fishing for a while now and earning some income that he uses to support his unemployed brother.

"I have an elderly brother who has completed his secondary school with no job. He is interested in furthering his education. I sometimes give him money to support" (P12, 13 years)

While the participant makes a valid point about the brother's unemployment status, the challenge with finding a job in this case may have to do with the relatively low education level of his brother. Nonetheless, the matter remains that many of these children think they are better off focusing on fishing or farming than school due to lack of employment opportunities after studying.

3.2.2. Saving family income through child labour

Majority of the participants (14 of 18) indicated that working with parents or other relatives on their farming or fishing activity enabled the family to reduce their expenditure. Essentially, when parents ask their child to accompany them to work on the farm or at sea, the parent do not have to pay the children. However, parents would have to pay for labour when they hire workers from outside the family. The children were willing to help their parents so that money that was to be used to pay for external labourers would rather go into supporting the needs of the family. Two of the children from the farming group had this to say about the fact that working with their parents help them save money in the family.

"The money that would be used to hire labour to assist in farming activities can be used to support the family. We can even buy food with that money and forget about hiring extra labour for them to charge us" (P1, 14 years).
"I have been taught a lot in the farm and I can work for my parents when they travel without the need to engage the services of labourers" (P6, 16 years).

Similarly, the children in the fishing group emphasised the need to ensure that money generated from their work comes from family members not strangers who get hired. The children were of the view that their families did not have money so there was no need to hire people for farming or fishing and pay them. Doing so could reduce the profit they could make from their sales. Involving family members including children in farming or fishing ensures that there is an equitable share of income among family members.

"No monies go out to strangers. All beneficiaries are members of the family and that brings steady development in the family" (P14, 14 years)

Moreover, some of the children said they had to work on the farms of some of their neighbours to support themselves and even their families. These children were of the view that their current farm and work with the parent was not earning enough income to support the whole family. Therefore, it is equally essential to work on neighbours or even strangers' farms where they get paid.

"In a house where there is no money, the child can engage in work on other peoples' farms to support the family. The child can earn like 5 cedis to assist the parents in finding something to eat" (P3, 14 years).

However, there were a few participants who were of the view that it was inappropriate to have children work on other peoples' farms just because there was not enough money at home. Not surprising, it was usually the participants in this group who were also in favour of education over fishing or farming. According to them, it is important for children to focus on their education since that is how they could develop a better future to support their parents. For them, in order to do better than their parents, it is essential that they did not engage in the same farming or fishing that their parents dedicated their lives to.

"The father should use the little money they acquire to hire labour to assist him in the farm. It's important to allow the children to concentrate on education so that they can take care of their parents when they grow" (P4, 9 years).

3.2.3. Continuing family business

Most of the participants (15 of 18) indicated that they had to learn the fishing or farming to be able to take over the business from their parents. They considered it a family business that would be handed over to them. According to the children, it would be impossible to take over if they did not learn how to farm or fish. That is why they often went to the farm or sea with their parents or other neighbours.

"Going to fishing with your parents helps to learn the skills and you may be asked to take over the business when your father becomes old" (P18, 17 years)
"Of course. It is important that every child learns their parents' trade so that they can continue the business when the parents are no more" (P13, 20 years)

It appears that growing up in the fishing or farming communities shaped the children's future aspirations and career choices. As children, they often see adults they look up to waking up each day working on their farms or at sea. They see the venture as a major source of livelihood for families in the community. As a result of this, they perceive they have an obligation to continue the progress of this source of livelihood.

"That is what we have seen our parents and most community members do. My parents told me that fishing is the legacy and identity of the community. So, we have to make sure we continue with the trade to keep this identity" (P18, 17 years)

Meanwhile for those children who held the view that it's better to be in school than farming or fishing, they threaded lightly on this topic. For them, it may be a little unfair to think that children should be expected to take over their family's farming or fishing business instead of concentrating on school. There was the belief among this group that going through school could allow the children the opportunity to explore a range of career paths without necessarily being limited to the family's occupation. One of the children stated.

"This would be good for someone who doesn't go to school. For those who go to school, it would be difficult for them to accept this task. None wants

to be a farmer these days. It's only those who don't go to school that desire to be in that field of work" (P8, 16 years)

Therefore, it is not set in stone that children living in farming or fishing communities whose parents have spent their entire lives on the trade are going to take over their parent's trade. Sometimes, it would depend on how the child's education is progressing. One participant summarised the nuances involved with the children's future pathways in line with family patterns this way:

"It depends. If the child is academically good, then they continue the school or if there is money too. Other times the child is just not good in school or even not interested. Also, some children they start going to the farm at very young age so it becomes part of them" (P1, 14 years).

As a result of this, it is important that the individual situation of each child is considered along with the family context to be able to better understand the rationale for involving children's active participation in respective trades.

3.3. Arduous yet rewarding

Another important theme that emerged centred on the participants describing the tiring nature of the activities in which they were involved while farming or at sea. Majority of the children indicated that the activities caused them physical strain.

"Cocoa farming is a very tedious work. I sometimes feel very tired as a result of weeding. Also, it is very difficult planting. When it comes to harvesting cocoa, I face a lot of challenges. I would have to look up all the time to harvest the cocoa from the tree, my neck hurts. After that I gather them to one location" (P1, 14 years)

"You can be bitten by insects that leave you in so much pain." (P2, 8 years)

It seems to be a common occurrence that these children experienced a range of adverse situations when engaged in farming or fishing. The particular physical strain that the children experienced seemed to be different based on the type of occupation, farming or fishing. For the farming group, as seen in the quote above, it often had to do with strain from long periods of weeding, carrying heavy firewood/cocoa harvest from farm to home, and facing-off with insects. For those involved in fishing, it had to do with adverse weather conditions at sea (particularly for those who spent the night at sea), fear of falling into the sea, maltreatments by adults at sea and some unexpected losses.

"Sometimes we [children] get cheated by the adults we work with on the sea. You can return to shore with about 10 full boxes of fishes, but they will tell you they had five and give you only few to sell. You can't challenge the adults because they're older and it was their decision to bring you the child" (P12, 13 years)

"Heavy storms and rainfall. You may have nothing to cover yourself with. The bad weather can carry your net out in the sea. The net can also be full with grasses and other animals in the sea which can break the net, it is a great loss" (P18, 17 years)

Therefore, it is not a particularly pleasant experience for most of these children. Although the children had significant struggles in their farming and fishing activities, there were moments they enjoyed. These are times when they count their earnings and reflect on the fact that they are able to provide financial support to their family. The income from their work makes them temporarily forget the physical strain they experience. Also, it makes them aware that they deserved the income for their efforts. Some of the participants had this to say when asked what motivated them to be in fishing.

"It is the money I earn because I can now afford my basic needs, so this is what motivates me to go fishing despite the negative experiences" (P18, 17 years)

"I also wanted to help my parents in taking care of our siblings. All my siblings are in school, so it was just my father who was going to the sea. I realised it was difficult for him alone, so I decided to help him" (P9, 17 years)

The money they earn as well as being able to provide financial supports to others in the family were key reasons why the children took part in the trade. The participant felt that their income contribution is something that is worthwhile, which has only been possible because of their work in fishing.

4. Discussion and implications

This study is the first attempt to explore how child labour activities are normalised and/or legitimised among children in Ghana, potentially leading to an intergenerational transmission of child labour. The findings above underscored diverse interpretations and nuances that children consider before conforming to the child labour activities and the normative underpinnings.

Unique to this study and consistent across the narratives from the children are critical issues of *rationality* and *intelligibility of the act*. These notions underlined how the children perceived child labour activities and were integral to whether or not the children will sanction the child labour activities and legitimise the normative underpinnings. Commenting about whether they preferred working on the cocoa farm/fishing to education, majority of the children supported the practice of working on cocoa farm and fishing because it offers them a secure employment pathway. These notions were supported by empirical realities, such as children observing their peers who are unemployed after school. On the surface, the findings corroborate the evidence that economic realities may force parents to de-value education, instead opt for informal apprenticeship training for their children through child labour (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018; Akilova, 2017; Bahar, 2014; Baker & Hinton, 2001). Adonteng-Kissi (2021) reports that parents involved their children in cocoa farming because it offered smooth and secure pathway to employment. This study shows that children also held similar notion, which supported their conformity to the norms and normalisation of the child labour activity.

Analytically, the findings suggest that children are not passive agents in the process of sanctioning societal norms and/or normalising practices (Gould, 1993; 2018). Children interpret the rationality and intelligibility of cultural norms and the associated activities before they sanction them. Whether a child will accept child labour as a legitimate activity heavily relies on how well they make sense of engaging in such activity, via *rationality* and *intelligibility* of the normative underpinnings. However, children's interpretation of the rationality may be impacted by the available options and choices. Future studies may explore children's views on normalising child labour activities within contexts where there are more than two career options or pathways. Such studies could unravel children's voices and their ability to opt for different career paths if they find child labour path undesirable.

The evidence from this study suggests that the process of normative interpretation is sometimes fueled by empirical realities. For example, in the context of this study, children who have been exposed to child labour by their parents and have seen their siblings (or members of the community) unemployed after school, may likely substantiate their interpretation that engaging in the labour activity is the best pathway for them. It is these interpretations and realities that undergird their normalisation of child labour activity and promote their conformity to the child labour norms. As a result, a suitable normative change intervention should target re-specifying these justifications, by promoting intensive early childhood education on the hazards of engaging in child labour, and the prospects of education. Similarly, the development of strategic vocational and technical schools within the child labour hotspot communities will be useful to change the empirical realities, such as unemployment, that support the normalisation processes of child labour.

The findings also identified the potential income benefit to families among the intelligibility mechanisms that support the normalisation of child labour activities. The children who were exposed to child labour activities sanctioned the activities because it had benefits of bringing income to their families. Their involvement will save their parents money, especially monies that would have been used to hire labourers. Indeed, some empirical findings from interviews with parents revealed that children's involvement in farming activities enable them to generate income through savings on the costs that would have been used to hire additional workers (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018; Hamenoo et al., 2018; Johansen, 2006). In addition to the rationality aspect of the normalisation process, the findings suggest that the process of legitimising child labour is supported by children's notion of the economic relevance of the activity.

Evidence from Okyere's (2013) interview with children working in the mining sector in Ghana revealed that children justified their involvement in the hazardous activity with the claim that it enabled them to raise money to support themselves and their families. It can be argued, from the narratives in this study, that children from poor backgrounds are more likely to consider socioeconomic status of their families, and familial conditions as key catalyst within their normalisation processes of child labour activities. This claim was partially supported by some children in this study, as they argued that their parents are poor and engaging in the work will help alleviate the burden of meeting their basic needs. That notwithstanding, narratives provided by those participants who were against the use of children as economic assets to increase family income suggest that intensive education would be a fruitful measure to curb the intergenerational transmission of child labour activities. Peer education and the use of children (especially those against the practice) as agents of change will contribute significantly to address the transmission and normalisation of child labour in the communities.

The belief of inheriting family business and occupations of parents appear to influence the normalisation processes of child labour activities. The dominant theme from interviews with parents on child labour suggest that most parents involve their children in child labour activities as part of the preparation for them to succeed their family businesses (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018, 2021; Akilova, 2017; Busquet et al., 2021; Krauss, 2017). Adonteng-Kissi (2018) revealed that fishing and cocoa farming are conceived as family businesses with unique identity, hence parents feel obliged to maintain this identity by making sure that their children inherit their farming or fishing business. Evidence from the narratives by children in this study support this notion, as it was revealed among the integral justifications for normalising child labour activities in Ghana. However, it is possible that children may have learned this justification through their daily interactions with their parents and members of the community. Thereby signifying the role of socialisation within the process of normalising child labour activities. It was not surprising therefore, when some of the children argued that exposure to child labour facilitates the sanctioning and normalisation of child labour among children. For children who have been exposed to the notion of inheriting family business and the practice of child labour at their early ages, it will be difficult to change such notion. Nonetheless, other children believe that intensive education maybe a gamechanger in this process. They believe that educating children on the numerous career pathways that education offers may help to de-normalise these notions and force children to abolish child labour activities.

A potential setback to a normative change intervention targeting at breaking the intergenerational cycle of child labour is the joy found in these activities, despite the life-threatening challenges they encounter. Despite facing challenges such as, neck pains, severe fatigue, cheating from adults, and insect bites from overnight sea fishing, children in this study expressed their delight of making money to support their families. They argued that income they make from the fishing makes them forget the pains they have experienced. This evidence highlights the intersection between economic forces and cultural norms within child labour activities (Abdullah, Emery, Dwumah, & Jordan, 2023; Weiner, 1991). As a result, a good child labour intervention program should target at addressing the economic causes (such as poverty) and normative causes (cultural norms on child labour).

5. Further practice recommendations

NGOs working in these communities should intensify their educational campaigns to address the increase in child labour. The importance of formal education, at least to high school, should be emphasised as the foundation for being successful in many businesses. It is also important to introduce programmes in schools that create awareness about the physical and emotional health problems associated with fishing and farming activities. Such programmes should also question cultural practices that perpetuate child labour. The Ministry of Education should ensure and monitor students' attendance in schools with subsidised fees.

6. Conclusion and limitation

The study's findings highlight a potential pathway for passing of the torch or the intergenerational transmission of child labour. There is evidence to suggest that children involved in child labour could take over from their families' work as a result of their involvement in the trade during childhood. Key justifications provided by the children, including commitment to save family income, and continue with family business, provide common grounds for children to normalise child labour activities and pass it on to their own children. For example, the justification of continuing family business supports a case of passing the torch where the children learn their parents' trade and possibly take over from the parents when they grow up. On the other hand, there are also those children who may not be tied to their families' trade whether or not they were involved in the work during childhood. This scenario facilitates a breaking of a potential cycle of intergenerational transmission of child labour. The study has provided some justifications for both pathways. The important point to note is that child labour can lead to poor outcomes for the children's development. With a better understanding of the pathways to the normalisation of child labour, we can now move forward to exploring measures for breaking the potential for intergenerational transmission of child labour, especially for farming and fishing communities.

Breaking the intergenerational transmission of child labour would require the perspectives of not only the children but other stakeholders like parents, teachers, policy makers and other professionals who would work with these children to promote positive outcomes. However, this study was limited in scope by drawing on children's experiences alone to understand the pathways to normalising child labour. A holistic view on the issue may be needed from relevant stakeholders, such as parents, community leaders, and policy makers, to drive comprehensive programmes and policies. For example, how do we shape teaching and training in secondary schools to ensure that students gain employability skills or they are able to pursue further education. These are questions that could be answered by engaging the education sector.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107430.

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