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Factors Influencing Child Labour Utilisation in Agriculture among Rural Households In Mafeteng District, Lesotho

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Abstract
This study was aimed at assessing the utilization of child labour in agriculture and factors influencing it amongst rural households in Ramoetsane Community Council, Mafeteng District in Lesotho. Multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select 156 household heads as respondents in this study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data which was analysed using descriptive statistics and a binary logistic regression model. The descriptive findings revealed that parents/guardians engaged children in agricultural activities such as herding animals, harvesting and carrying food and fodder, administering veterinary drugs and vaccines to animals, ploughing the fields, sowing seeds, removing weeds, and selling fruits and vegetables in the streets. The majority (60%) of the household heads were married females and mostly aged 70 years and older. A lot of household heads had primary education and earned their living from agriculture with a monthly household income of less than M1000.00 and a mean household size of 7 members. Binary regression analysis revealed access to farm machinery (p=0.017), land size (p=0.028), cost of children's education (p=0.025), education level (p=0.172), household income (p=0.139) and culture (p=0.000) as statistically significant factors that influenced child labour engagement in household agricultural activities in the study area. It was, therefore, recommended that free education should be extended to secondary education and that law enforcement agencies should enforce all legal provisions to protect the rights and welfare of the children.
Keywords: Child labour, Utilisation, Households, Rural Areas, Agriculture

Introduction

There are about 160 million children around the world who are engaged in child labour at an age when they need nurturing and educational support, adequate health, social protection, play, and leisure time (International Labour Organisation & United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2021). Ediger, Prepscius, and Fletcher (2016) define child labour as the employment of children under an age determined by law or custom to produce goods and services to earn a living for themselves or for other people. Ashish (2021) added that child labour refers to the employment of children in any physical work. Child labour is described as the employment of children in any job that deprives them of their childhood, prevents them from attending school, and is mentally, socially morally, and physically hazardous (Tantry and Bhat, 2021).

Ediger, Prepscius, and Fletcher (2016) further indicate that in Myanmar, child labour is socially acceptable, and children work in urban areas

helping in tea shops, construction sites, in domestic chores, and in agriculture. They also work in garment industries where they perform minor work like cutting thread, packaging and sorting. Children in India are engaged in various industries such as the carpet industry, construction, agriculture, tea plantations, and fireworks. In agriculture, about 70% of children assist in cultivation, crop watering, harvesting, weeding, and sowing. Children also work in the construction industry at brick-making sites, stone quarries, and in construction sites building houses and roads, in which they lift and carry heavy loads. Furthermore, children are also engaged in the production of carpets, silk garments, weaving, power looms, firecrackers, brass and metal artifacts, diamond polishing, glass objects and leather making, roadside eateries, vehicle repairs, rag picking, organized begging, and domestic work with more than 40% engaged in child sex work.

Oryoie, Alwang, and Tideman (2017) indicated that although child labour is a universal problem, it is more prevalent in developing countries in the sub-Sahara, with the majority of children being engaged in unpaid family farms. Sana and Jan (2021) indicate that child labour activities include grazing animals, fodder cutting and carrying, weeding, harvesting, threshing, milking, ploughing, agrochemical application, and firewood collection. Simeon (2021) added that 51.1% of Cameroonian children are economically employed in rural areas, primarily in unpaid agriculture work such as fishing, forestry, and hunting and working on their family farms. In Nigeria, children work in agriculture where they are sowing seeds, harvesting, bird scaring, weeding, water control and irrigation, food processing, and transportation (Nwaobiala, Ugboaja and Okafor, 2020**;** Ofuoku, Ovharhe and Agbamu, 2020)**.**

Kimane (2006) and Metsing (2020) concur that the use of children in food production is more prevalent in rural areas where farming is the main source of income. Kimane (2006) and Metsing (2020) further indicate that livestock herding is regarded as a boy's activity while domestic work is mainly performed by girls. Young children in Lesotho are engaged in life-threatening farming activities such as the application of pesticides, planting, harvesting, and herding of large animals such as cattle. Other activities include street vending, domestic work, and trading (DOL, 2013).

Children become labourers especially in agriculture due to the belief of farming parents to disseminate agricultural and societal norms and values to their growing children, training them to acquire skills and knowledge that will promote independence in the future and help them understand the hardships of life (Ofuoku, Ovharhe and Agbamu, 2020). Due to the cultural influence and attitudes of the parents, male children were found to be more engaged in child labour than girls at the household level especially in non-domestic market activities (Abebe and Fikre, 2021). According to Ibupoto, Mirjat, and Dahah (2019), child labour in the agricultural sector is primarily due to the lack of interest of parents in their children's education which emanates from the lack of resources such as farm machinery and high costs of the education system around them, leading to a gradual increase of child labour. Ibupoto, Mirjat, and Dahah (2019) concur that illiteracy contributes to child labour in the agricultural sector.

Ibupoto, Mirjat, and Dahah (2019) state that children are sent to work because of the high cost of farm labour which limits access and affordability of adult labourers among farming households. In some instances, low-earning parents are forced to send their children to work as a result of the inability to pay the expensive childcare services and to increase the family income while some governments authorize child labour to balance the country's economy (Ramos, 2018).

Abebe and Fikre (2021) and Omeje, Okpukpara, and Ihemezie (2020) added that low income and low literacy level of the household head, household size, and holder of agricultural land are major factors influencing child labour in households of Ethiopia. Findings in this study revealed that the lower the literacy and income level of the household head, the higher the family size, and the larger the land tenure, the higher the

likelihood of children being sent or engaged in child labour.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2020) indicate that child labour is more common (about three times more) in rural areas than in urban areas and its prevalence is primarily in agriculture. The involvement of children in agriculture is in family subsistence and smallholder farming, commercial farming, capture fisheries, aquaculture, post-harvest fish processing, and forestry. Kaur and Byard (2021) added that in agriculture, children are often exposed to all types of weather, farm chemicals, and injuries due to the use of complex farm equipment. Azza (2021) revealed that children working in tobacco production, particularly in harvesting it are prone to inhaling the nicotine found in green tobacco which results in adverse effects on their health such as nausea, vomiting, muscle weakness, dizziness, and body rashes.

Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (UNCRC) emphasizes that; all actions in connection with children should be in the best interests of children (MacPherson, 1989). Countries should undertake legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children are protected and taken care of by parents, legal guardians, and any legally responsible individual for their wellbeing. States should also ensure that institutions, services, and facilities concerning child protection and care comply with the standards established by the nation's authority in terms of children's health and safety (UNICEF, 2009).

Convention number 138 requires ILO member states to establish a minimum age for entry into work and employment, as well as to establish national policies for the elimination of child labour. Convention number 182 aims at the elimination of the worst forms of child labour while strengthening the elimination of all forms of child labour. These conventions have been universally adopted and ratified by many countries around the world including Lesotho (International Labour Organization, 2018).

Lesotho's government in 2019 improved the efforts of eliminating child labour in many ways including the following;

a) Ratification of all key international conventions concerning child labour and ILO protocol 19 to the forced labour convention
b) Published Lesotho Violence Against Children 2019 survey
c) Established mechanisms, laws, and regulations about child labour and law enforcement on child labour.

Despite these initiatives, in Lesotho as of 2019, there were more male children aged 10 to 17 years engaged in child labour than female children. Most (80%) of these employed children reside in the rural mountainous areas of Lesotho and most (96.9%) were males with no formal education at all. In Mafeteng district, 96.1% and 3.9% of male and female children respectively, were engaged in child labour as of 2019. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of these children resided in rural areas of this district, engaged mostly in herding animals and household chores (Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The study therefore aims to investigate factors responsible for the high prevalence of child labour utilization in agriculture amongst rural households, in the Mafeteng district, Lesotho.

Objectives of the study

- To identify agricultural activities in which child labour is utilized amongst the rural households in Mafeteng District.
- To identify factors that influence child labour in agriculture amongst the rural households in Mafeteng District.

Methodology

Description of the study area, sampling procedure, and sample size

The study was carried out in the Mafeteng district of Lesotho which is approximately 2,119 square meters with an estimated population of 178, 222 at a population density of 84 square kilometre per person. The district lies at latitude and longitude that are -29.822431 and 27.238816 respectively with 1674.432 meters above the sea level (Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This district borders with the South African town of Wepener in the west and

with the capital city Maseru in the northeast while it borders with Mohale's Hoek district in the southeast. The district is characterized by high child labour as 889 children aged between six and fourteen years were employed in the Mafeteng district in 2019 (Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The target population for the study was about 780 households that engaged in agricultural activities in the district of Mafeteng. A multi-stage sampling was used in the study. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select the Mafeteng district due to its high prevalence of child labour. In the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select the Ramoetsana Community Council. Stage three involved systematic random sampling in the selection of seven (7) out of fourteen (14) electoral divisions with the Ramoetsana Community Council. In stage four, random sampling was employed during the selection of thirty-one (31) out of seventy (70) villages in this community council. In the final stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 156 households involved in the study. Data were collected from these farming households through a structured questionnaire which was pre-tested before the execution of the main survey to ensure content validity and internal consistency, using Cronbach's Alpha formula with a coefficient of 0.8 generated. The study used descriptive techniques to identify agricultural activities in which children were engaged in the Mafeteng district and the employed statistical indicators included frequencies and percentages. Binary logistic regression was used to identify and determine factors influencing child labour utilization in agriculture among households in the district of Mafeteng. Binary logistic regression analysis was used to analyze the identified factors influencing child labour utilization in agriculture among rural households and their effect on the level of child labour use. The aim of utilizing a binary logistic regression analysis is to evaluate the relationship between various factors that lead to child labour and the extent to which these factors affect child labour utilization in agriculture amongst rural households. Ranganathan, Pramesh, and Aggarwal (2017) depict that logistic regression analysis is a statistical technique that assesses the relationship between various predictor (independent) variables which can be continuous or categorical, and a binary or dichotomous dependent variable. Children may or may not be engaged in agricultural activities, therefore the dependent variable is nominal and takes the value of 1 (involved children) and 0 (not involved children). The use of binary logistic regression was influenced by Ejiogu and Amanze (2013) who indicated that binary regression analysis is used when the dependent variable is dichotomous and independent variables are of any type. The relationship between child labour and the influencing factors was specified as follows:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1, \beta_2X_2, \beta_3X_3, \ldots\ldots, \beta_{15}X_{15}, e_i$

Where Y: dependent variable (child labour use/non-use of child labour))

β_0 = intercept

β_1, β_2, … β_{15} = coefficients of the independent variables

X_1, X_2,…. X_{15} …. = independent variables (Table 2 below)

e_i = error term

The principles of voluntary, informed consent for research participation were applied. All participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study and their requested participation. Participation was therefore voluntary, and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer all or questions and to opt out of the interview at any time. Only participants who gave their verbal consent were included in this study.

Results and Discussion

The results in Table 3 revealed that there were 62 males and 94 females who participated in this study which amounted to 40% and 60% respectively. In terms of age, there were 39% of respondents aged 70 years and older, 29% were aged between 56 and 70 years, 19% were between 41 and 55 years old and only 13% were aged between 26 and 40 years. These results imply that the majority of household heads are old, and this could lead to high engagement of children (more energetic) in agricultural activities. Many (71%) of the respondents have attained primary education, 29% have attained secondary

education and none of them had a tertiary education. These results imply that many household heads in the study area had a lower level of education (primary education). The majority (71%) of the respondents were married, 25% were widowed, and 3% were single while only 1% were divorced. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the household heads live off agriculture and the remaining 8% of the household heads live off non-agricultural activities such as hawkers, old age grants, village midwife, and spouse's salaries. These results imply that many household heads in this study area earn a living from farming. The findings also revealed that 67% of the households had 4 to 7 members, 17% of the households had 8 to 11 members, 16% of the households had 3 members and below and only 1% of the households had 12 members and above. The mean household size is 7 members which implies a relatively large family size. The results reveal that 58% of the households earn a monthly income that is below M1000.00, 24% of the households earn between M1100.00 and M1500.00 and 12% of the households earn M1600.00 to M2000.00 while 6% of the households earn M2100.00 and above. These results imply that the majority of household heads earn little and are poor, which might force them to rely more on agriculture and engage children in agricultural activities for survival (Table 3). The results revealed that about 61.5% of the respondents had no access to farm machinery while only 38.5% had access and this means that more households lack access to farm machinery, which could increase the need for farm labour. The majority (81%) of the respondents had a farming land size between 1 and 5 acres while 19% owned and farmed 6 to 10 acres of land. The majority of the households have small lands for farming which makes it easier for parents to involve children in agricultural activities because a small land is worked easier with human labour. Many respondents (66%) indicated that the cost of adult labour was high while 34% indicated that it was low. The results imply that most households are faced with high labour costs that are unaffordable for many. Many of the respondents (58%) indicated that the educational costs of their children were high and unaffordable while 42% indicated that it was low. This finding means that most households are faced with high and mostly unaffordable costs of schooling their children. The results revealed that 90% and 91% of the household heads involved children in agricultural activities to impart farming skills and knowledge and train them into adulthood respectively. These findings imply that cultural practices could lead to high participation of children in agricultural activities in the study area. The majority (95%) of the respondents indicated that the death of the parents (especially both parents) leaves children susceptible to involvement in agricultural activities at the household level while only 5% indicated that the death of parents does not result in child labour utilization in agriculture. The implication is that the death of parents or adult household members leaves children in a vulnerable position. In discussion with the household heads, they indicated that children were engaged in livestock sector herding livestock (86.5%) within their households and outside their households (27.6), administration of veterinary medicines (71.2%) as well as fodder harvesting (85.9%) which is usually performed in winter. In the crop sector, children plough fields and sow seeds (85.3%), remove weeds by hoeing (84.6%), apply chemicals to control pests and diseases (67.9%) as well as harvest and carry the produce from the fields (84.6%). It was further found that in some households about 39.1% of children are sent to sell farm produce such as vegetables on the streets to meet family financial obligations. These results imply that child labour is highly practiced in agriculture amongst rural households in the study area.

Factors that influence the use of child labour among farming households in the area

Access to farm machinery: **t**he results in Table 4 revealed that access to farm machinery negatively influenced child participation in household farming with a correlation coefficient of -2.320 and a p-value of 0.017. This implies that a unit increase in access to farm machinery resulted in a decrease of 2.320 units of child participation in household farming. The probable explanation for this scenario is that an individual who has access

to farm machinery needs less human labour since the use of machinery reduces dependency on human labour. This agrees with Vos and Takeshima (2022) who indicated that children belonging to households that use tractors and other machinery are less likely to be engaged in household farming than those who belong to households that do not use such equipment.

Land size: this variable recorded a coefficient of 0.731 and a p-value of 0.028 which indicates that the size of the farming land positively and significantly influenced the involvement of children in household agricultural activities. This implies that an increase of an acre of land resulted in an increase of 0.731 units in children's participation in agriculture amongst households in the study area. The probable explanation is that farming a large land requires more labour which the poor household head may not financially afford due to high costs. This is in agreement with Idowu, Amos, and Olabisi (2013) who indicate that the larger the land size, the more the farming activities to be performed, and that predisposes children to heavy farm work, particularly in poor settings.

Household income: monthly household income had a negative and statistically significant influence on children's involvement in farming activities among rural households with a coefficient of -0.001 and a p-value of 0.139. These results imply that a unit increase in household income led to a decrease of 0.001 units of children's involvement in farming activities. The possible explanation is that, when household income is enough to support the needs of the household, there may be no need for children to engage in agriculture since the head can finance farm activities and needs such as labour and farm machinery. These results are supported by Mahmod Nik Kamal Ahmad Nik, and Salleh Mohd Che Marhanum (2016) who indicate that children from households with low income are likely to work to supplement their family's income and standard of living.

Cost of children's education: the cost of educating children had a positive and statistically significant influence on children's involvement in farming activities amongst rural households with a coefficient of 2.047 and a p-value of 0.025. These results imply that a unit increase in the cost of education led to an increase of 2.047 units of children's involvement in household farming activities. This could mean that, when educational costs become higher, poor parents may not afford to send their children to school, instead of letting them idle they engage them in household activities including farming. This is in agreement with Osment (2014) who indicated that parents consider having their children work instead of going to school when the costs of education are high.

Educational level of the household head: the results indicated that the educational level of the household head negatively influenced the participation of children in household agricultural activities with a coefficient of -1.997 and a p-value of 0.172. This implies that a unit increase in the education of household heads resulted in a decrease of 1.997 units of child participation in household farming. The probable explanation is that highly educated parents have more economic and employment opportunities and can financially support household activities including farming. Therefore, they are less likely to engage their children in activities that will compromise their children's well-being. The results are in agreement with Sajid and Ahmad (2018) who indicated that educated parents are less likely to send their children to work because they understand the importance of child schooling.

Culture: this variable recorded a coefficient of 4.420 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a positive and statistically significant influence of culture on child participation in agricultural activities. This result implies that a unit increase in cultural beliefs and values of the household head resulted in an increase of 4.420 units in child engagement in household farming activities**.** The possible explanation for the situation could be that some cultures encourage child labour as parents believe that engaging children in farming activities helps transmit farming skills and knowledge to train them into adulthood. This is supported by

Abdullah, Huynh, Emery, and Jordan (2022) when indicating that the tasks that children perform are usually associated with a traditional way of developing their skills and knowledge in agriculture.

Conclusion

Farming households engaged children in various agricultural activities such as herding livestock (86.5%) within their households and outside their households (27.6), administration of veterinary medicines (71.2%) as well as fodder harvesting (85.9%). In the crop sector, children we engaged in the ploughing of the fields and sowing of seeds (85.3%). In addition, children were involved in the removal of weeds by hoeing (84.6%), application of chemicals to control pests and diseases (67.9%) as well as harvesting and carrying the produce from the fields (84.6%). Furthermore, households engaged children in the selling of farm produce such as vegetables in the streets and other public places (39.1%). Little household income and the high cost of children's education have rendered the environment conducive to the use of child labour in agricultural activities among farming households in the district of Mafeteng. In addition, the situation has been exacerbated by the lack of access to agricultural machinery and small sizes of arable land that are better worked with labour rather than machinery. Furthermore, low educational attainment among households which limits economic and financial opportunities has enhanced child labour utilization in farming activities among households in the study area. Moreover, the environment was rendered conducive for child labour use in agricultural activities among households by the deep rooting in a culture that encourages the engagement of children in farming activities to prepare them for parenthood. To address the challenge of high engagement of children in agricultural activities, the National Free Primary Education Policy (NFPEP) should be extended to the secondary level to enable children to continue with their studies hence, reduction of their vulnerability to exploitation through engagement in agricultural activities. Moreover, law enforcement agencies should enforce all existing legal provisions and instruments to protect the rights and welfare of children.

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Table 1: Distribution of respondents per village in the study

Selected Electoral Divisions (EDs)	Total number of villages in each selected ED	Number of selected villages per ED	Total number of households in selected villages	Number of selected households
E 0302	9	4	109	15
E 0304	10	4	261	38
E0306	4	2	49	07
E0308	9	4	174	25
E 0310	7	3	160	24
E 0312	12	6	120	18
E0314	19	8	206	29
TOTAL	**70**	**31**	**1,079**	**156**

Table 2: Description of explanatory (predictors) variables used in the binary logistic model

Variable name	coding a variable	Expected relationship
Age of household head	in years	+
Marital Status	0 single, 1 married, 2 otherwise	**+ / -**
Gender of household head	0 male, 1 female	+
Distance from home to school	0 short, 1 long	+ / -
The educational level of HH	primary, secondary, tertiary	-
Cost of education	0 high, 1 otherwise	+
Cost of adult labour	0 high, 1 otherwise	+
Household size	number of members	+ / -
Household income	Actual amount (LSL)	+ / -
Access to farm resources (machinery)	0 no access, 1 otherwise	+
Land size	Actual size (Hectares)	+ / -
Culture	0 yes, 1 otherwise	+
Primary occupation	0 agriculture, 1 otherwise	+
Death of the parents	0 deceased 1 otherwise	+

Table 3: Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents in the study area

Gender	**Female**		**Male**	
	60%		40%	
	26 - 40	**41- 55**	**56 – 70**	**Above 70**
Age (Years)	13%	19%	29%	39%
	Primary		**Secondary**	
Education	71%		29%	
Marital Status	**Single**	**Widowed**	**Divorced**	**Married**
	3%	25%	1%	71%
Household Size	**3 or less**	**4-7**	**8-11**	**12 or more**
(Members)	16%	67%	17%	1%
Monthly Income (Maloti (M))	**Below M 1000.00**	**M1001.00 – M1500.00**	**M1600.00-M200.00**	**M2100.00 or more**
	58%	24%	12%	6%
Access to Machinery	**Have access**		**Lack access**	
	38.5%		61.5%	
Farmland Size	**1-5**		**6-10**	
(acres)	81%		19%	

Table 4: Binary logistic regression model for the factors influencing child labour utilization in agriculture amongst rural households

Variable	(β) Coefficient	Standard error	P-value	Odds ratio	VIF
Marital status	0.576	0.772	0.456	1.778	1.230
Cost of education	2.094**	0.906	0.021	8.116	1.314
Distance to school	-1.582	1.405	0.260	4.865	1.358
Educational level	-1.997*	1.461	0.172	0.136	1.658
Household size	0.215	0.225	0.341	1.239	1.255
Land size	0.731**	0.332	0.028	2.078	1.254
Culture	4.420***	1.192	0.000	83.072	1.166
Primary occupation	-1.554	1.570	0.322	0.211	1.327
Gender of HH	-1.051	0.820	0.200	0.350	1.203
Age of HH	-0.017	0.030	0.580	0.983	1.644
Household income	-0.001*	0.001	0.139	0.999	1.203
Gender of a child	17.408	18902.811	0.999	0.000	1.079
Access to	-2.320***	0.970	0.017	0.098	1.190
machinery	-1.664	0.887	0.261	0.189	1.213
Cost of adult	-18.850	12322.871	0.999	0.000	1.069
labour	0.579	0.759	0.446	1.785	1.335
Death of parents					
-2 Log-likelihood:	53.527				
Chi-Square:	53.915				
Nagelkerke R^2:	0.587				
Accuracy of prediction:	93.6%				

Source: data analysis 2023

Significance: *** if p < 0.01; ** if p < 0.05; * if p < 0.1