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## **Household Characteristics and Child Labour in Western Region of Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

*The subject of child labour has become an area of growing interest in relation to the achievement of MDGs and Kenya's Vision 2030. Every year about twenty four thousand children die in work related activities in the world. Western region of Kenya has high percentage of children involved in child labour. The study was conducted in four Counties of the Western region; Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega and Vihiga. The study purposed to assess the household characteristics that influence child labour in the region. Descriptive survey design was used to study the population composed of household heads, and other stakeholders in child labour. A sample size of 400 people was obtained using multistage, random, purposive and snowball sampling methods. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation guides, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions Secondary data was obtained from websites, documents from relevant government ministries and departments. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed that some of the household characteristics that promoted child labour in the Western region were; household size, income, head status, parental literacy levels, proximity to business centers and social capitals. There was no significant relationship between religion and child labour. The study recommended concerted effort by all stake holders to fight the malpractice. The study also recommended development of suitable community based strategies for its reduction. Suitable policies, strategies and management centers could be developed at National and County levels to fight the malpractice in the community.*

**Key words:** *Child labour, Households, Characteristics, Reduction.*

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**1.0 Introduction:** The subject of child labour has become an area of growing interest in relation to the achievement of sustainable development goals and Kenya's Vision 2030. Child labour practice infringes child rights and leads to damage of physical and mental development as well as human capital development (Omokhodion and Uchendu 2010). According to Edmonds (2007), although factors influencing child labour may appear common in most societies, unique factors always exist in different households and communities. A report by ILO (2011) corroborates the former by pointing out that

households are the principal participants in supply and demand of child labourers. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the main causes of child labour are: poverty stricken families, lack of proper education, poor material resources, unemployment and low paying jobs, lack of parental love and conflicts between parents and their children (Duryea *et al.*, (2007) and Maul (2007)). Empirical evidence also suggests that child labour is associated with poverty and in cross country analyses gross domestic product (GDP) per capita turns out as a very powerful determinant of child labour (Krisztina et al. 2011). According to ILO (2011) many children work for their survival and parents depend on their children's work even if they know it is wrong. Children are exploited for short term benefits at the expense of future development. In many developing countries, religion and culture give parents/guardians full right and control over exploitation of children as productive resources.

Krisztina et al., (2011) concluded that household characteristics can be associated significantly with child labour and that the value of children to parents/guardians varies substantially with household characteristics that influence the cost-benefit ratio of the malpractice. Child labour tends to be correlated with child gender, birth order, relationships of child to household head, household socioeconomic characteristics, human capital, demographics and community level infrastructure (Bhalotra 2003; ILO 2011). These findings corroborate results of studies conducted in South Africa by Alimi and Micah (2010) who pointed out that poverty is the major cause behind child labour, and it is further influenced by the effects of household characteristics, social inequalities, structural unemployment, vulnerability to shocks and demographic and migratory developments. The proponents of child labour especially the poor households see children as assets for income generation. Often work assigned to children become part of their socialization process. Child labour tends to occur commonly in environments with cheap and unorganized labour. Poor quality, low relevance or absence of formal education, costs of schooling and low levels of parental education are important additional causes of child labour (Getinet and Beliyu 2011). In communities in remote rural areas where access to schools is poor, child labour can be expected to be more common (Anu 2011). Distance and accessibility to schools can cause diversion of children into child labour market.

Cultural practices, such as social attitudes towards child work and labour, also contribute to the prevalence of child labour. In other situations, there is a lack of awareness where children working may be seen as normal and parents do not understand the difference between children's work and child labour (Alimi and Micah 2010). Cultural pressures undermine perception of the long term values of education, especially for girl children. There is perceived value in the particular skills that the children can offer e.g. the girl child is demanded for domestic services. Such services are invisible hence increasing vulnerability to the abuse. Gender role is another factor that leads poor parents' tendency to prefer – if the choice has to be made – a boy child to attend school while girls are kept at home (to help in household chores and family activities).

Moreover, many agricultural economies involve seasonal migration for whole families interfering with schooling and this may increase vulnerability of children to employment.

Many Kenyan children are out of school due to economic crisis in the family, but the situation is further compounded by food crisis, drought, high cost of food commodities and high fuel prices (ILO 2010a). According to Beegle et al. (2007) denial of education to children blocks the escape route from poverty for the next generation of households.

The degree of child labour in any community is the result of the interplay of demand and supply at household level (Krisztina et al. 2011). Supply factors of child labour refer to the macro level and household situations and decisions that make children available for work. Demand factors of child labour are those that contribute to creating employment and labour opportunities for children. According to ILO (2011) demand factors include: cheap labour from children, substitution of adults in household chores and labour when parents are working or sometimes away from home, perception that children are more submissive at work and Perception that certain work is “children’s work.” Economic setbacks arising from recession, disasters, conflicts or family bereavements regenerate the supply side of child labour equation. Supply of child labour is related to demand for cheap and flexible workforce. This is especially in small scale business where children who are family members or relatives are exploited. Some of the supply factors are: Poverty and need to supplement household income, lack of access to adequate schools, ignorance of household heads of impacts of child labour, attitudes, values and norms, need to cope with shocks such as a natural disaster and/or the loss of a household breadwinner, cultural perception of masculinity and feminists.

Previous studies point out that lack of access to adequate schools can divert household head’s attention from sending children to school to engaging them into child labour. Lack of access to adequate schools can arise due to various factors which include; high costs of education, long distance between schools and households, poverty in households and negative attitudes towards school or children. Many variables such as household head’s values and norms, cultural perception of masculinity and feminists, educational attainment and religion, provide indicators of parental attitudes toward their children. Different parents can have different attitudes toward their children or, more specifically, unique preferences with regard to child labor. For example where there is need to cope with shocks such as a natural disaster or the loss of a household breadwinner, the eldest child in a household often becomes the preference for responsibility of household activities at expense of school (Sakamoto 2006). Similarly many cultural perceptions often exhibit gender based preferences in child labour (ILO 2012). Among the purposes of this study was the need to provide empirical evidence of the relationship between household characteristics and the existence of child labour in the study area.

Child labour practice is widespread in developing countries and it has negative consequences on socio-economic development and the quality of the future labour force (KNBS 2010). The child labourers in many communities are unclearly and inadequately reflected in national statistics, giving a false image that child labour and its worst forms does not exist or is negligible (Kaunga. 2008). Ellen *et al.*, (2010) corroborate by asserting

that, most work done by children is not included in employment statistics and therefore leaves a gap in understanding about the children performing such tasks. Although Kenya as a Country has made great effort to reduce cases of child labour, there are still gaps on how handle many forms of the menace (ILO 2015). Western Kenya has the highest percentage (18.7%) of children aged 5 – 7 years, involved in child labour and about 43.9% of the children aged 6 – 17 years fail to attend school due to lack of money for school costs (KNBS 2007).

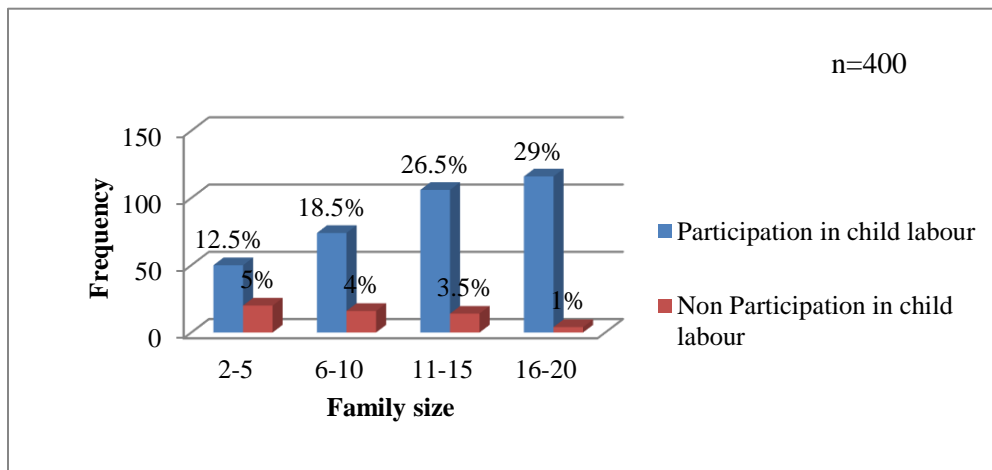
**2.0 Methodology:** The study was conducted in Western region of Kenya, in four counties: Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega and Vihiga. The descriptive survey design was used to determine the household characteristics that promote child labour in the study area. The total population was 4,334,282 (KNBS 2010), however the accessible population however was composed of household heads, child labourers (5 ≤ 17 years), teachers and officers from relevant sectors.

The sample size for proportions was determined using statistical formula for large populations by Krejcie and Daryle (1970). A sample size of 400 respondents was selected from the study population. Quantitative data was mainly collected from a sample of 400 people; household heads/caretakers, child labourers, teachers, officers in charge of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) dealing with child labour, government officers and general public proportionately selected. The sampling methods were random, purposive and snowball. The instruments used were; questionnaires, observation, Interviews and Key Informant Interviews (KII). Data was analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 13 and qualitative analysis using narratives. Results were presented in tables and graphs.

### 3.0 Results of the Study

#### 3.1 Relationship between Household Size and Child labour in Western region of Kenya

Results showing relationship between child labour household sizes are displayed in Figure 1.



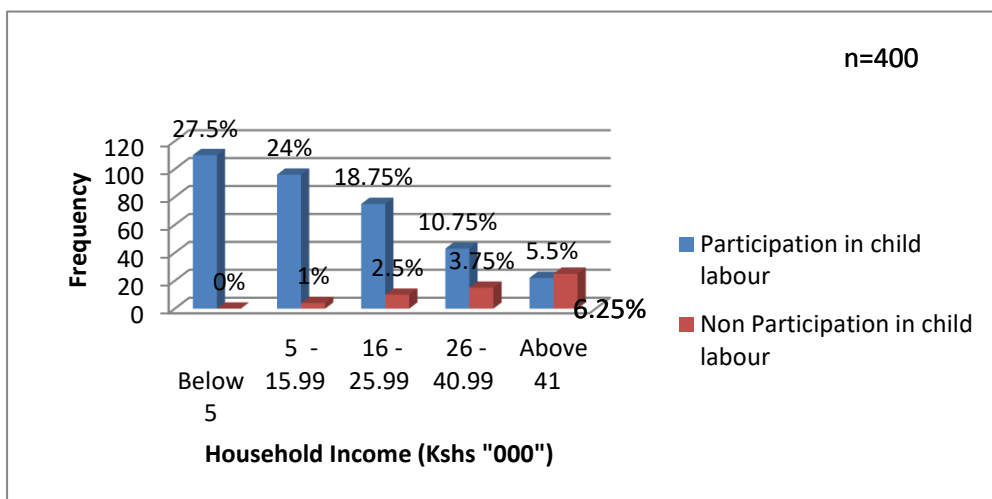
**Figure 1: Relationship between household sizes and child labour in Western region of Kenya**

Many families (55.5%) in the study area had 10 and above household members. According to results summarized in Figure 1 there is indication that the percentage of child labour participation increased positively with the size of household. Over 60% of the households in the study were composed of large size households and had higher participation in child labour. The relationship between household size and child labour was subjected to chi-square test and the results showed a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The extensive existence of child labour could be attributed to the large family sizes that arise because of diverse cultural and religious beliefs and practices that encourage polygamy, early marriage and inheritance which often result into large unmanageable families (ILO, 2010). In earlier studies, it was also reported by Edmonds (2005) that family size as well as the birth order could expose children to labour. Ongoma (2017) further conducted a study in the sugarcane zone in Kenya and observed that most of the large size families were poor and the poverty predisposed children in households to child labour. According to the report (KNBS, 2010), traditions such as polygamy, wife inheritance, high fertility coupled with high unmet needs for family planning over a long period of time, has contributed large size families in Western region of Kenya.

**3.2 Relationship between household income and child labour in Western region of Kenya:**

Results showing household income in relation to child labour were displayed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Relationship between household income and child labour**

According to the results, child labour reduced as the household income increased. Only 26.25% of the household heads in the study earned income that is above ksh. 26 000 and child labour participation was lower in these households. All households whose heads earned the lowest range of income (ksh.1000-4000) had their children involved in child

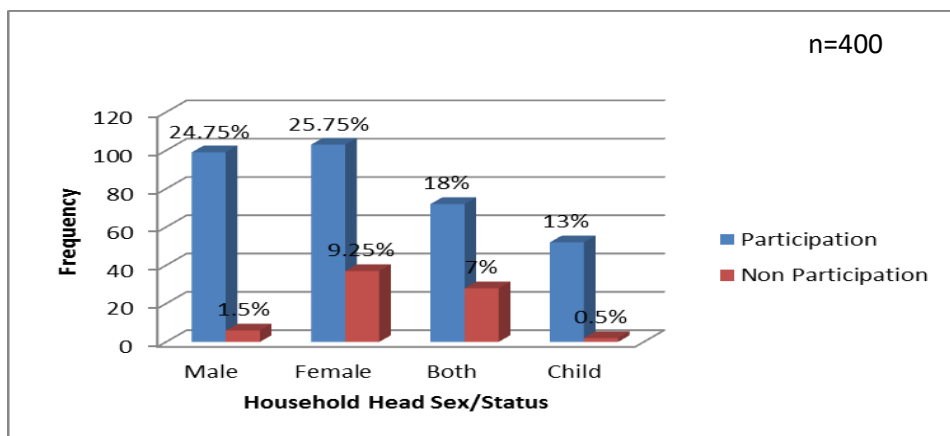
labour. Chi-square tests indicated that there was a significant relationship ( $p < 0.01$ ) between household income and child labour in the study area. It is also important to note that, despite the high income (above ksh. 40 000) in some households, participation in child labour was persistent.

The existence of child labour in households with high income could probably be because of cultural practices and traditional attitudes towards children which are often based on gender and geographical areas. In agreement with the same, Amin *et al.* (2006) observed in their study that cultural beliefs about gender created chances for child labour. Further studies conducted in Ethiopia by Cock-Burma and Dostieb (2007), revealed that the demand for child labour varied in households depending on composition and household income. It is important to note that some of the households in the study were composed of some non biological children some of who engaged in work without pay. In line with this observation, Galaso (2011) pointed out that child labour was more likely to be experienced by children of relatives or non- biological children of households.

Although child labour was portrayed as harmful to children's intellectual and physical development, on the other hand it could be deemed as an economic contributor to low income households, and a way to introduce a child to work activities and survival skills for future work experience. Dammert (2005) concurs with this observation by pointing out that the traditional supply of child labour from households is attributed to poverty and that poor families may have their children work to increase household income or to provide a type of risk diversification against loss of income.

### 3.3 Relationship between Household Head Status on Child Labour

Table 4 displays results showing the relationship between these household head status and child labour in Western region of Kenya. The household head status implied the head of the household during the period of study.



**Figure 4: Relationship between Household head Status and Child Labour in Western Region of Kenya.**

Results of the study indicated that only 25% of the households had both male and female parents. Households headed by single parent or child were 74%. The female headed households were 35% while the male headed ones were 25.3%. The percentage of child headed households was lowest (13.5%). The results showing the relationship between household head status and child labour in the study area were subjected to chi-square test and a significant association ( $p = 0$ ) was noted.

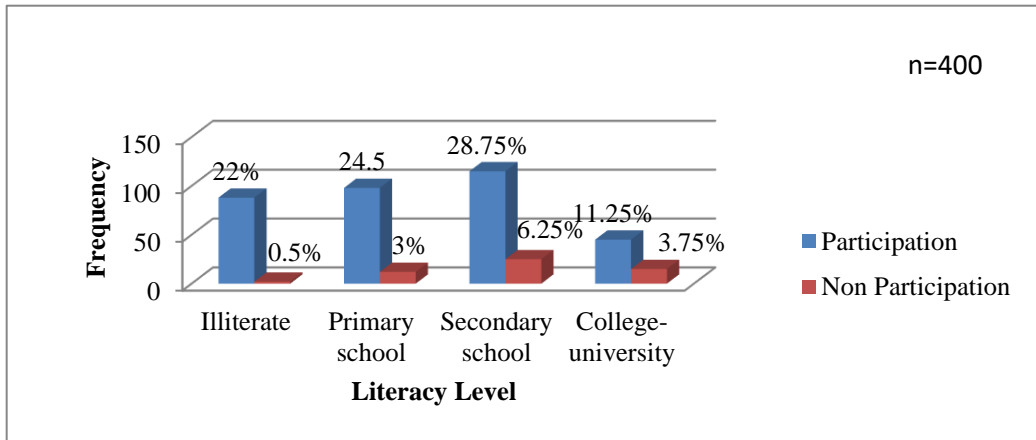
Irrespective of the household head status, child labour was observed in all households. According to ILO (2010) household heads often participate in child labour practice both by supplying and also demanding. Households that were headed by both male and female heads had the lowest ration of child labour (2.5:1). Female households were most prevalent (35%) in the study area however, the ratio of child labour in their households was comparatively lower (2.7:1) than that in male (16.5:1) and child (26:1) headed households. This observation can be attributed to results of the study by Galaso (2011) which postulate that child labour is less likely in households where mothers have greater weight in decision making. The child headed households were portrayed as having the highest ratio of child labour in the region. This observation is in tandem with Prakustra (2015) who conducted studies in Pakistan and concluded that child labour was directly related to parental absence.

### **3.4 Relationship between Household Head Literacy level and child labour:**

The study related the household head literacy level to child labour based on four levels of literacy achievement; illiterate, primary school, secondary school and college/university. Results were displayed in Figure 5.

According to the results the ratio of children involved in child labour to those not involved was highest in households with illiterate heads (44:1). Child labour in households whose heads had primary and secondary level education also had high ratios of children involved in child labour to those not involved (8:1 and 5:1 respectively). Chi-square tests on relationship between household head literacy level and child labour a significant association ( $p = 0.000$ ).

Child labour was recorded as lowest in households where heads had college-university level education. Sakamoto (2006) indicated that low parental education and attitudes towards children in households are crucial determinants of child labour and that educated parents often show greater concern for the education of their children than their less educated counterparts because they recognize the future returns to education. Ellen *et al.*, (2010) also observed a negative relationship between highly educated mothers and child labour at households. These observations agree with findings by Galaso (2011) that child labour is less expected in households where mothers have greater education. The high ratio of child labour in households with illiterate heads could imply socio-economic deficiencies as well as lack of awareness about implications of child labour.

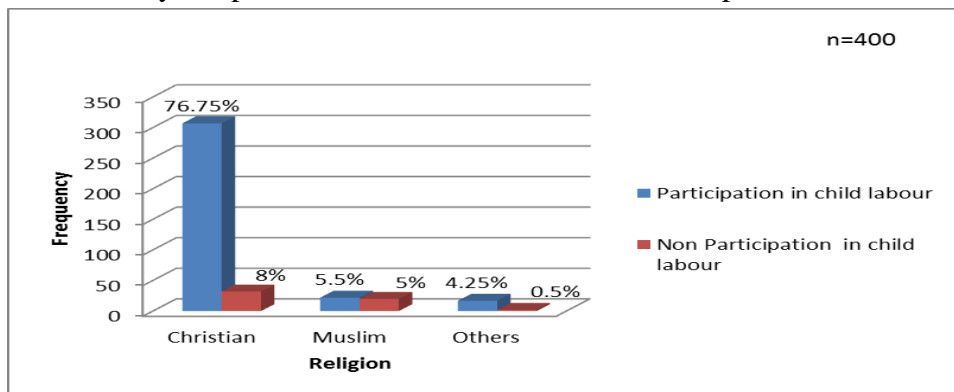


**Figure 5: Relationship between Household Head Literacy level and Child Labour in Western region of Kenya**

**3.5 Relationship between household Head’s religions on child labour:**

The study considered three categories of religion in relation to child labour; Christian, Muslim and Others. Results of the influence of household head religion in relation to child labour are displayed in Figure 6.

Results of the study portrayed the area as dominated by Christianity-affiliated religious faiths (77%), yet this does not present any peculiarity in the trends of child labour. There was no significant relationship between religion and child labour ( $P>0.05$ ). This could have implied that child labour in the communities is driven by factors other than religion and traditions. Although previous empirical studies by Basu (2002) are in tandem with results of the study, Amin et al., (2006) contradict by pointing out that religion and cultural beliefs about children in households expose them to child labour. Further, factors like birth order, child-household head attitudes and relationships can create chance for child labour. Amutabi and Mukhebi (2001) pointed out that usually the children born in first positions in many households are vulnerable to child labour. Kamei (2018) further asserts that children in first positions carry out parental burdens in the absence of the parents.



**Figure 7: Household Head Religion in relation to Child labour**



### **3.5 Relationship between Household Proximity to business centers and child labour**

Chi-square tests showed a significant association between household proximity to business centers and child labour ( $p = 0.00$ ). The households within business centers were shown as having higher percentage (34%) of children involved in child labour. The business centers included markets and towns in the four Counties. These business centers have many economic activities that attract child labour. The forms of child labour observed in these centers were; house hold chores, selling of agricultural products (milk, vegetables, fruits cereals, fish and others), bags, shop keeping, street begging, scavenging for scrap metals, glass and plastics (from streets and dumping sites), brick making, mining ballast and domestic activities Guarcello *et al.*, (2004) and Shafic, (2005) pointed out that lack of basic services and products create higher demand for child labour especially in urban settings. Some of the reasons given for high prevalence in child labour in these centers were; availability of many labour opportunities with better pay, preference of employers for cheaper child labour so as to maximize on profits, increased markets for products e.g. scrap metal and others, increased opportunities to benefit from street begging, peer influence among children and increased commitment of household heads away from households which causes engagement of child labour in domestic chores.

### **3.6 Relationship between Social Capital and Child Labour:**

Social capital at household level was considered in three categories; households with 0-1 social capital, 2-3 social capitals and those with over three social capitals. Social capital was viewed as reliable networks (involving relatives, friends and organizations) other than parents and caretakers that were in position to link the children to sustainable livelihoods through education.

Results of the study indicated that child labour was indirectly proportional to the size of social capital. This can be deduced from the fact that as social capital increased child labour participation in households reduced. Chi-square tests revealed a significant association between social capital and child labour ( $p = 0$ ). According to the results the households who had most (4 and above) social capitals had the lowest (16.5%) child labour participation. On the contrary, households who had low numbers of social capital (0-1 and 2-3) had higher child labour prevalence (42.5% and 27.5%) respectively.

Social capital or network includes a person's family relationships, kinship networks, friendships, acquaintances, civic attachments and institutional ties. The concept of 'social capital' emphasizes not only the structure of social relationships but also their quality. Social capital can be understood as a resource to collective action by the community. For individuals, this can mean access to social connections that help to reduce exploitation. For communities, social capital reflects the ability of community members to participate, cooperate, organize and interact (Baum *et al.* 2000).

There is growing awareness that higher levels of economic wellbeing are not in themselves sufficient to achieve a range of positive community outcomes, but that social relationships are also essential (Barker *et al.* 2000). Many studies have indicated the role of

social capital in assisting individuals and communities to achieve a range of outcomes. At an aggregate level, there is evidence that social capital influences economic and political outcomes (Barbieri 2000). At an individual and family level it has been found that social capital is related to a range of outcomes including health status, educational attainment and child wellbeing (Baum et al. 2000).

**Conclusion:** Household heads' characteristics influence existence and distribution of child labour in the study area. The characteristics also play a big role in the demand and supply chain of child labour. In many households where the heads are in employment, child labour is often used to substitute domestic chores especially rearing young children. Child labour was noted as high in both religious and non-religious households indicating that other factors supersede the religious influence. Social capital was found to relate inversely with child labour. Households with heads that had higher education participated less in child labour menace. Similarly female headed households had less child incidences.

Though it is impossible to completely erase the existence of child labour, the study recommended development of community based programs for awareness creation in each County. Efficient community based monitoring systems should be put in place in all the Counties to track down any households that promote child labour. Copies of records of children in households in every community in the Counties should be kept by the chiefs and County administrators. There is need to expand social networks in the community through partnership, networking and other suitable programs.

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