TOWARDS THE EFFECTIVE MEASUREMENT OF CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS: Building estimates using standard household survey instruments

Objectives of the working paper

Domestic work remains one of the most common and traditional forms of work for children, particularly for girls, yet the number of workers worldwide is unknown. Relatively little empirical research has been done on the determinants pushing or pulling children into domestic work.

Child domestic work (CDW) is carried out in private homes, and thus it is hidden from view and eludes public supervision and control. This makes child domestic workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Furthermore, the information gap mentioned above hampers advocacy and policy efforts to respond to the issue.

The UCW paper looks at how standard household surveys for child labour measurement could be used to fill the information gaps on the CDWs phenomenon, with specific reference to household surveys conducted in Paraguay, Uganda and Venezuela.

Child domestic worker

A child domestic worker is a person under 18 years of age performing domestic chores in the home of a third party, with or without remuneration. This is distinct from children performing household chores within their own homes. The types of tasks performed by a child domestic worker appears to be similar across countries; they include fetching water and wood, cleaning, cooking, babysitting, and purchasing daily household essentials. Child domestic workers are prevailently, but not exclusively, girls in most countries. Several studies point to a gender-based task specialization – female child domestic workers typically work inside the home while males often work outside, tending gardens and livestock.

Child protection and other issues

Domestic work remains one of the most common and traditional forms of work for children, particularly for girls. ILO estimates that there are more girls below the age of sixteen exploited in domestic work than in any other category of child labour. CDW is carried out in private homes, hidden from view and public control, making child domestic workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation, including excessively long hours, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Their heavy work burden also often leaves them unable to attend

1 The paper generates estimates of child domestic work on the basis of information from survey questions on industry/occupation and employment status and the relationship to household head. For Paraguay and Uganda, estimates were also generated of child domestic work disguised as fostering arrangements.
or complete schooling. Without any form of social or legal protection the well-being of the child worker is dependent on the whims of their employers.

**Challenges in measuring in child domestic work**

The number of child domestic workers worldwide is unknown. Current estimates of child domestic workers are frequently based on extrapolations from non-representative sample surveys or on assumptions based on the adult workforce. Measuring CDW can be challenging to due to the fact that:

- Child domestic work is hidden from public scrutiny and under a variety of formal and informal work arrangements;
- In worst cases, families and employers actively conceal the presence of child domestic workers in their homes because of the exploitative conditions in which they are kept;
- The household head may not report on a child domestic worker because he or she is not considered a part of the household even if residing there most of the time;
- There is lack of clarity when the child instead of remuneration is provided lodging, food, clothing or schooling for a number of hours of work. This is further blurred when the child is adopted into or fostered in another household.

**Capturing unreported child workers through household surveys**

Standard household survey instruments used in child labour measurement typically contain at least one of three broad categories of questions relevant to estimating children’s involvement in child domestic work.

In the first two question categories, involvement in child domestic work is reported explicitly in response to questions concerning industry/occupation and employment status or concerning relationship with household head. These categories of questions therefore permit the direct measurement of CDW. In the third category of questions, involvement in CDW is inferred through questions on household chores and relationship to the household head. This category of questions yields an indirect measure of CDW, and can be useful for capturing the unreported portion of the CDW population, i.e., those CDW cases disguised as fostering or as involvement household chores.

Using survey datasets from Uganda and Paraguay, it was possible to obtain estimates of children in disguised CDW by measuring children who were a) performing household chores; b) not closely related to the household head; c) working beyond a set of weekly hours.

The study concluded that 12 per cent of 10-17 year-old girls in Uganda are in disguised CDW, when considering all children except close relatives of the household head and without a time threshold and the estimate falls to 3.4 percent of 10-17 year-old girls applying a threshold of 28 hours. In Paraguay, 12 percent of the same group is in disguised CDW when 14-hour per week threshold is applied and the estimate declines to 2.3 per cent with a threshold of 35 hours.
When combining the direct and indirect measurements for CDW in Paraguay the addition of disguised CDW increases the total estimate of CDW by over one-third, even when the relatively stringent threshold of at least 35 hours per week is applied in the measurement of the disguised CDW group – that is, more than twice that of the reported CDW living in the employer household. Making use of this method, almost 44,000 children are in domestic work, corresponding to 4% of children aged 10-17 and with female children representing the bulk of CDW (more than 38,000 girls aged 10-17).

Statistical profiles of CDW

The estimates generated allowed the following conclusions regarding statistical profiles for CDW:

- Domestic work is primarily the domain of girls (Paraguay and Uganda);
- Domestic work is a much more important form of work for girls than boys in relative terms, accounting for 41 per cent of total girls’ employment but only for two per cent of total boys’ employment (Paraguay and Uganda);
- Child domestic workers are frequently migrants from rural areas, sent to the city to help their families of origin to make ends meet (Paraguay & Uganda);
- Children in domestic work typically put in extremely long hours, both in absolute terms and in comparison to other forms of children’s employment, working an average of 49 hours a week (Uganda);
- Child domestic workers are disadvantaged with respect to other working children regarding their ability to attend school, not surprising in light of the time intensity of their work. (Paraguay and Uganda);
- Orphanhood is much more common among CDWs than among children in other forms of employment in the country (Uganda).

Regarding the characteristics of households, the following was concluded:

- Employer households are not overwhelmingly concentrated in the upper income quintiles in both countries;
- Households hosting CDWs in arrangements disguised as fostering are better off than households of children in other forms work, but are much less wealthy than reported employer households;
- The heads of employer households are much more likely to have at least a secondary education than the heads of households falling into other categories (Paraguay).

Conclusion

By making use of survey datasets from Uganda and Paraguay, the UCW working paper suggests that the standard household survey instruments used for child labour measurement can also yield valuable information concerning the subset of child labourers in domestic
Questions on CDW from the standard household survey instruments permit the direct measurement of child domestic workers living with their employers and those living in their households of origin and “commuting” to work in another private household. However, a large number of children in domestic work is not directly captured by these questions and ignoring the number of unreported child domestic workers significantly understates the size of the overall child domestic work population.

This paper demonstrate that these survey instruments also permit the estimation of unreported CDW, children in domestic work disguised as fostering arrangements.

While the reliability of the generated estimates need to be further compared, it is important to highlight that misreporting or information and research gaps can lead to misguided advocacy and policy efforts to address and respond to the issue of child domestic worker. This is particularly the case for child workers disguised as fostering arrangement, considered along with child domestic workers living with their employers, the groups most vulnerable to work-related abuse, in that they live full time away from their families of origin.

2This paper is part of the research carried out within UCW (Understanding Children's Work), a joint ILO, World Bank and UNICEF project. The views expressed here are those of the authors’ and should not be attributed to the ILO, the World Bank, UNICEF or any of these agencies’ member countries.
3Encuesta Permanente de Hogares, 2004
4Uganda National Household Survey, 2005-06
5Encuesta de Hogares por Muestreo, 2005
6ILO reported in 2003 that around 175,000 children under 18 are employed in domestic service in Central America. Most child labourers are between 12 and 17 years of age but some are as young as 5. In South Africa nearly 54,000 children under 15 are working as domestics and in Guatemala around 38,000 children between 5 and 7. It is also estimated that more girls below the age of 16 work in domestic service than in any other category of child labour (available at http://www.wiego.org/publications/FactSheets/WIEGO_Domestic_Workers.pdf). ILO estimates that around 90% of child domestic workers are girls. According to Anti-Slavery, millions of children are engaged in this type of work globally. They estimate that Asia is home to about 60% of child domestic workers with 1.5 million in Indonesia, 1 million in the Philippines and 100,000 in Sri Lanka (available at (http://www.antislavery.org/english/slavery_todat/child_domestic_work.aspx). 7Uganda did not use a threshold of hours of work per week to measure domestic work.
8Paraguay did not measure domestic work below the threshold of 14 hours a week.
9ILO considers the following children to be engaged in child labour: children 5-11 years engaged in an economic activity; children 12-14 years engaged in an economic activity that excludes light work for less than 14 hours per week; and children 15-17 years engaged in hazardous work and in the worst forms of labour other than hazardous work. UNICEF collects data on household chores through MICS surveys currently using an operational definition of child labour that considers 28 or more hours of household chores per week as child labour. According to UNICEF in addition to the definition described above adopted by ILO, the following are engaged in child labour: children 5-14 engaged in household chores for more than 28 hours per week; children 15-17 in household chores for 43 or more per week. UNICEF, UCW and ILO are currently initiating a research project to assess the impact that long hours of household chores have on the child access to education and attainment, among others.
10The reliability of the estimates of CDWs generated from these survey instruments needs to be assessed by comparing them with the results of dedicated based line surveys on the CDW phenomenon. This will be done at a second stage.