

Indonesian Children's Views and Experiences of Work and Poverty

Sharon Bessell

Crawford School of Economics and Government, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University
E-mail: sharon.bessell@anu.edu.au

While the causes of child labour are multifaceted and complex, economic disadvantage is generally identified as an important contributing factor. Child labour is also cited as perpetuating poverty. The precise relationship between child labour and poverty is, however, contested. This paper aims to deepen understanding of the relationship between children's work and poverty by focusing on children's views and experiences. Drawing on research with children in Indonesia, this paper examines two questions. First, how do working children define and experience poverty? Second, how do working children view the relationship between their work and poverty?

Introduction

Indonesian children's views and experiences of work and poverty

Children's involvement in work in the global South has long been an issue of (somewhat sporadic) international concern. During the 1990s, concern intensified and debate raged as to the causes and the most appropriate responses (see Bessell, 1999). Much of the discussion, particularly among international agencies, focused on the links between children's work and poverty (ILO, 1996; ICFTU, 1996; Anti-Slavery Society, 2008). Early entry into the workforce is commonly presented as 'a result of poverty and a way of perpetuating it' (ILO, 2006: 2). Yet the precise relationship between children's work and poverty is contested. Studies of children's work in countries around the world have increasingly focused on children's views and lived experiences (White and Tjandraningsih, 1998; Woodhead, 1998, 2001; Montgomery, 2001; Morrow, 1996; IWGCL, 1998, Liebel, 2003). A consistent theme emerged: children's views and experiences must be taken seriously if policy and services are to be children-centred, context appropriate and sustainable (Woodhead, 1999). Focusing on Indonesia, this article seeks to explore working children's views and experience of poverty and how it relates to their work. Two broad questions shape the discussion. First, how do working children define and experience poverty? Second, how do working children view the relationship between their work and poverty?

Methodology

This study draws on field research with working children carried out in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1994, 1995 and 1999. In all 121 children between the ages of around ten and 16¹ participated in the studies outlined here: 22 in 1994, 84 in 1995 and 15 in 1999. All lived in or on the periphery of Jakarta at the time of the research, although almost half

had moved to Jakarta from rural or smaller urban areas, either independently or with their families. Those who had moved to Jakarta overwhelmingly did so in search of economic opportunities that were unavailable at home. The children participating in these studies were engaged in three broad categories of work: girls working in manufacturing in small and medium-sized factories; boys engaged in street vending and the provision of services (shoe shining, providing umbrellas to shoppers and office workers in the wet season,² carrying bags and running errands); girls and boys engaged in rubbish picking and other supplementary and opportunistic informal sector activities.

In each of these studies, initial contact with children was most commonly made through non-government organisations. In the 1994 and 1999 studies, non-government organisations, providing non-formal education or other support services to children, either independently or along with their families, provided an introduction. In the 1995 study, initial contact with 63 of the 84 children was via non-government organisations. Over time, several children introduced me to friends, independently of NGOs, who agreed to participate in the research. Oral informed consent was sought from children and from parents where possible. In a significant number of cases, however, children lived independently from their families and parental consent was not possible. In some cases, children's parents were invited and agreed to take part in semi-structured interviews. Group and individual discussions occurred over a period of one month in 1994, over a period of three months in 1995 and over a period of two weeks in 1999. Research sessions took place at drop-in centres run by NGOs that children frequented, often with NGO staff present, and at other public or semi-public places of the children's choosing. Research sessions took place at times that suited children, generally after work or on days off or, in the case of children working on the streets, during breaks or slow times.

Semi-structured conversations – 'simply talking' – was the most common method used, a method that was increasingly effective over time as children became more familiar and comfortable with me. Drawings were sometimes used as a catalyst for discussion and were a popular method with some children, particularly those who had experienced drawing and painting through their interactions with NGOs. At the invitation of some children (those working in informal sector activities on the streets), I observed them in their workplaces. This was not possible with girls working in factories, as children's work was a sensitive issue at the time. Employers would have been unlikely to have allowed a researcher onto their premises and an effort to observe factories may have placed children at risk of punitive action or even dismissal. The same methods were used in 1994, 1995 and 1999. However, because different groups of children were involved in the three studies, there is no longitudinal dimension; rather the studies can be viewed as snapshots of children's views and experiences at different times across a six-year period. To supplement my own field research, I also draw here on more recent studies of children's work in Indonesia (see UNICEF, 2003; ILO, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

How do working children define and experience poverty?

Most, but not all, the children who participated in my studies defined themselves as poor. However, the depth and nature of 'being poor' varied markedly between children, and between the groups of children. Children were acutely aware of inequality and injustice as a feature of their poverty. When describing their lives and how poverty affected them,

children often used a relative definition. For example, many noted that they were poor compared with children who attended expensive schools (or, for some children, any school) and wore expensive uniforms. But several defined themselves as better off than others. Children who had migrated to Jakarta and had found work tended to describe themselves as being better off financially than they would have been in the village, and better off than their contemporaries who had remained behind.

Not surprisingly, there was no single uniform definition of poverty provided by children and their experiences were diverse. Common features of being poor were, however, lack of money, lack of food, inadequate shelter or difficulties in affording housing, and personal and familial insecurity. Three common themes emerged from children's discussions of their work and lives. First, children's family circumstances were especially important in shaping their experiences of poverty. Second, education featured centrally in children's accounts of poverty in three ways: the high costs of school, the negative way in which school is experienced by many children from poor families and being excluded from formal education. Third, children were aware that their own lives diverged from the officially sanctioned childhood promoted by the (then) authoritarian government.

Poverty, work and family. Children's economic experience was interwoven, often in complex ways, with their relationship with their families. As discussed below, concepts of interdependence and negotiated dependence, developed by Punch (2002) are useful in understanding children's relationships with their families and how this shaped their experience of 'being poor'. This study included children with three broad types of family relationship: interdependence, negotiated independence and disconnection, as set out in Table 1. Poverty was described and experienced differently among these three groups.

Children in group one included those working as rubbish pickers and those providing informal sector services.³ Both boys and girls worked as rubbish pickers and had a close and immediate connection to family. These children lived and worked as part of their family unit. With all family members working and no childcare available, children accompanied parents to work from the time they were babies. As children grew older, usually from around the age of nine or ten, parents expected them to help. Significantly, children saw themselves as making an important contribution to their families' livelihood, rather than 'helping out'.

'I do this [work] with my family. We all work. My parents use the money we make for all of us. But often there is not enough.' (Girl aged 12 years)

'We all have to work – otherwise there is not enough. I do my part.' (Boy aged 12 years)

Children working as rubbish pickers had limited access to their own income and the majority of their earnings went directly to their families. Group one also included boys who provided informal services (such as shining shoes or renting out umbrellas) and lived with their families. While they used a small part of their earnings for themselves, they contributed the majority to their families (usually mothers).

Children in this group valued their families and saw themselves as part of shared livelihood strategies to respond to poverty. It would, however, be misleading to suggest that families were always supportive and harmonious. A number of children talked about

Table 1 Children's work and family contexts

	Connection with family	Children's occupation	Children's living arrangements	Children's contribution to family	Children's sex
Group 1	Inter-dependence	Rubbish pickers	With family	Working as part of the family unit	Female and Male
		Providing informal sector services	With family	Contributing significant portion of wages	Male
Group 2	Negotiated independence	Factory workers	In dormitories or shared accommodation (away from families)	Sending remittances to family	Female
Group 3	Disconnection	Various informal sector activities (vending, shoe-shining)	On the streets	None	Male

family tensions, arguments between parents, what they saw as unfair discipline and sometimes violence, usually under the guise of punishment. Several indicated that they would like to have greater access to their own earnings. In line with Abebe's (2008: 34) findings in Ethiopia, children 'simultaneously supported, identified with, and contested their part in' the family. Family was central to their lives, and when these children spoke of being poor, they did so in the context of their family. These children could not be described as dependent, despite their youth. Rather, their relationships with their families were marked by interdependence (Punch, 2002).

Group 2 was made up of the girls working in factories, aged between 13 and 16 years, who also spoke of strong connection to their families but had negotiated a significant degree of independence. The majority of these girls had migrated from villages elsewhere in Java in order to enter paid work and lived in dormitories or other forms of shared accommodation. These girls were responsible for their own livelihoods. They received low incomes and sometimes struggled to buy food and other necessities. They described themselves as poor, but most had not been driven to work by poverty. Many had migrated to work in order to gain greater independence, as discussed later. Economic hardship was, however, a feature of most of their families and all the girls spoke of sending home remittances on a more or less regular basis. Silvey (2000) observes that not all rural–urban migrants in Indonesia send remittances home, or feel obliged to do so. The girls in my studies did feel obliged to send money home, perhaps because most had migrated relatively recently and still felt a strong attachment to home and family. Most were proud of their contribution, particularly as they felt it assisted their mothers. Several girls spoke of supporting their younger brothers' or sisters' primary school education. While describing themselves as poor and wanting more income in order to make their lives easier and more secure, most of the girls felt a strong obligation to provide some financial support to their families and to maintain close ties.

The third group of children were estranged or disconnected from their families. Mainly boys, this group worked, and often lived, on the streets. Many children in this group had experienced violence in the home (see also Beazley, 2003). Studies elsewhere have suggested that violence is more significant than poverty in driving children onto the streets, where they in turn seek work (Conticini and Hulme, 2007). In my studies, children spoke of family violence as a factor in their decision to leave home, but not as the main factor. The most common reasons for leaving home were the desire to escape economic hardship, to ease the burden on families, to earn their own income and increased independence. Once they had left home, the violence they had experienced was an important factor in their decision not to remain in touch with their families. One consequence of these children's disconnection from family and independent lifestyle was marginalisation from mainstream society. The majority were excluded from accessing public services (such as school and healthcare), usually because they did not hold a residency card. They were subject to suspicion and often viewed as a public nuisance. As they became older and bigger, they were viewed as a threat to public security. Violence continued to shape these children's lives on the streets, and all had been subject to threats, intimidation and assaults from police, security forces and *preman* (gangsters or thugs). Children in this group were not always income poor, but generally had insecure income, periodically faced economic hardship and had little or no access to public services. Nevertheless, many indicated that they preferred a life on the streets, characterised by periodic violence, economic hardship, exclusion from public services and *independence*,

to a life at home, characterised by periodic violence and economic hardship *and a lack of independence* and choice.

Education and being poor. When children spoke of being poor, they often did so in the context of education. Three different sets of issues arose: the cost of education, the experience of education and exclusion from education. The cost of education is a major burden for poor families in Indonesia. *National Socio-economic Survey* data show that among the poorest 20 per cent of households, the cost of education per student accounts for 10 per cent of total household expenditure at primary school level, rising to 18.5 per cent at junior secondary school and 28.4 per cent at senior secondary school (Bappenas, 2005). The cost of education caused many children in my studies to drop out of school, most often at the end of primary school. In many cases, children had dropped out of school first and then looked for work. For those who combined school and work, their income was important in contributing to the costs of their own education and sometimes that of siblings. In line with other studies, work and school were by no means incompatible for many children in my study (see Woodhead, 2001; Nieuwenhuys, 1994)

High costs were only one dimension of the problems children experienced in relation to education. The way in which children were treated at school, particularly by teachers but also by peers, was an important aspect of being poor and going to school. The emphasis placed on correct shoes and uniforms by school authorities – and the inability of some families to afford them – was a recurring theme among the children participating in my studies. Children often described being singled out for ridicule when unable to afford required uniforms or school supplies. The following extract from field notes exemplifies an experience that was not uncommon.

When asked about school, Ari (aged 11) initially said ‘No, I no longer go to school. Why not? I must be lazy.’ We then talked a lot about what he does now and how it compares to being at school. Ari drew some pictures as we talked. He had liked some aspects of school, but found others difficult to deal with. ‘I often felt embarrassed. When I didn’t wear shoes, the teacher pointed to my feet, and said “this is not the way to come to school. This is bad for everyone. You must wear shoes.” I had to stand at the front – other children laughed. These things often happened. Then I no longer wanted to feel embarrassed. I stopped [going to school].’ (field notes, Jakarta, August 1995)

Ari’s experience, shared by many children in my study, suggests that Ridge’s (2002) findings in the UK that children from poor families are likely to face exclusion *within* school are highly relevant to Indonesia.

While exclusion occurred *within* schools, structural exclusion prevented some children in my studies from participating in school at all. For example, the children working as rubbish pickers, and their families, were classified as illegal migrants to Jakarta – despite most having been born there. As such, they did not hold residency cards and had no entitlement to formal educational services. Some children attended non-formal schools run by community organisations and often taught by volunteers, but formal schooling was not an option.

Poverty as difference from the official norm. Under the authoritarian New Order regime (1967–1998), great attention was paid to the construction of ideal citizens and social institutions. While these models had little resonance for the majority of society, they

aimed to create roles and expectations for women (mothers and housewives, at home caring for children), the family (a small, prosperous unit headed by an adult male breadwinner) and children (well-educated, obedient, and subject to parental authority). The legacy of this attempt at social engineering continues to be felt (Bessell, 2005). The government sought to promote its ideal types through public education campaigns, including on family planning (emphasising the advantages of parents having only two healthy, happy children) and on basic education campaigns (emphasising the importance of sending healthy, happy children to school). Similar images were (and still are) used in advertising campaigns to promote everything from toothpaste and milk to cars and real estate. Children who participated in my studies generally viewed bill-boards, government campaigns and advertisements depicting the ideal, well-dressed, well-fed family of four with a mix of amusement, irony and contempt. While many loved and valued their own families, they did not fit the 'image' – largely, in the children's eyes, because they were poor. Nevertheless, interviews and informal conversations with children suggested that the seemingly constant barrage of 'model images' had some influence over their attitudes and expectations. While they did not necessarily aspire to a model that had few parallels with their own experiences, the widespread presence of such images served to highlight absence of particular material goods, services (particularly education and to a lesser extent health care), forms of recreation and family structures from their lives. The construction and promotion of ideal families and children signalled to the children in my studies that they were not part of the society that the government valued; they and their families were 'not the right type'.

What can we learn from children's experiences of poverty? The lived experience of the children who participated in my studies has several implications for policies and services. First, family is important and children's experience of poverty is closely bound up with that of their families – even when children are no longer connected to their families. In responding to children's poverty, an understanding of their family context is crucial. The experience of the children in my studies suggests that there is no 'one size' approach, but in no case could these children be considered 'dependants'. Policies that conceive them as such are likely to miss the mark.

Second, high costs and restrictive enrolment policies (such as the need for a residency card) exclude poor children from education. These can be addressed through subsidies for poor families, school feeding programs and inclusive, non-discriminatory enrolment policies. These are standard interventions. They will not, however, address the exclusion of children *within* school. Policies that will support poor children need to address not only school enrolment, but children's experiences in the classroom and the playground.

Finally, in New Order Indonesia powerful official messages about the appropriate kind of family and childhood served to reinforce poor children's sense of marginalisation and difference. Several important studies have demonstrated the ways in which international policy can act to 'universalise' ideas about what is an appropriate childhood in ways that are not supportive of poor children (see Boyden, 1997; Burr, 2004, 2006). My findings concur with this (see Bessell, 1999), but also suggest that national policy and ideology is not simply a by-product of international pressures, but reflects a government's values and priorities. National policy and ideology needs to be scrutinised from a children-centred perspective that is sensitive to the place and representation of poor children.

Children's views on the relationship between work and poverty

Poverty is regularly identified as the major factor in pushing children into the workforce, in Indonesia and elsewhere (ILO, 1996; UNICEF, 2003; ILO, 2006). The relationship between poverty and children's work is, however, contested, with some arguing that discrimination and policy failures are a more powerful explanatory factor, particularly in South Asia (see Weiner 1990). From the mid-1990s, an argument emerged within the international child labour lobby that children's involvement in work was a result of a lack of political will to prevent – or protect – children from working, rather than poverty (see Bessell, 1999). Each of these interpretations of the relationship between children's work and poverty leads to very different policy responses. But what are children's views?

In each of my studies, I was interested in understanding how children viewed the relationship between work and poverty. Children were asked open-ended questions about why they worked, without presupposing that the answer would be poverty. The most common initial responses to the question 'why do you work' across the three studies were 'because I am poor', 'because my family is poor', or 'because I need money':

'Yes, I work because my family is poor.' (Girl, aged 11)

'Of course, I have to work, my family does not have enough for us all – I pay for things we need . . . food, my younger brother's schooling.' (Boy, aged 14)

In deeper discussions, often after two or three meetings, the majority of children made it clear that economic hardship was but one element in a complex mosaic of factors that led them into work. For most children, entering the workforce was not a single decision, but the result of a set of pressures, opportunities and constraints operating on their lives and those of their families over time. The majority of children clearly indicated the interrelationship between poverty and work. For them, poverty necessitated work and work was a response to the problem of poverty. It is, however, overly simplistic to say that poverty is the only, or even the main, reason that children enter the workforce. Aside from economic need, three factors were particularly significant: parental expectations, the desire for disposable income and increased independence.

Parental and social attitudes, children's obligation and work. First, a common theme among the children was their parents' expectation – or at least consent – that they assist in supporting the family. Children viewed their work as a way of fulfilling their familial obligations. This was particularly the case when children's work was part of the family unit and bolstered family income, as was the case with rubbish pickers. Families engaged in rubbish picking were generally income poor, had few social networks beyond their immediate community and had access to few services. Thus, parental expectations were interwoven with poverty, both in the sense of income and more broadly defined (see Atkinson, 2003; Bourguignon and Chakravarty, 2003). Other studies of children's work in Indonesia have highlighted the significance of parental and community attitudes in determining whether children work. An ILO (2004c) rapid assessment of children's involvement in mining in Kalimantan found that the high value placed on early independence among children created an acceptance of paid work at a young age. In a UNICEF (2003) study of children's work in East Java, parental and social attitudes were also found to be important. In this study, as in mine, the relationship between social attitudes and economic pressures was apparent.

Income as a need and a desire. The second significant factor to emerge was children's *desire* for income for themselves and, sometimes, for their families, which often sat alongside the *need* for income. For the children in my studies, money – or the lack of money – was an important aspect of their experience of poverty and an important reason for working. Money was necessary for meeting basic needs for food and shelter, and also for buying other items children considered important. This is illustrated by the following exchange between girls employed in factories:

M: 'I send money to my family, and then have to pay for my room. Sometimes I have some money left over – but not much.'

U: 'I send money home too – and pay for the things I need. The same. Sometimes clothes.'

Sharon: What do you do with the money that is left over?'

D: 'We use the money for snacks . . . yes snacks.'

U: 'Yes always snacks. I have something for snacks each day.'

M: 'Sometimes the cinema.'

D: 'Yes that too, the cinema.'

A: 'And cosmetics, we need to have cosmetics to look beautiful.' *Much laughter and several girls agreeing that cosmetics are important item on which to spend their wages.*

Scarcity of money created problems for these girls as they were no longer able to provide money to their families, something that was important to them and often expected by their parents. When money was scarce, they were also unable to meet their own expenses, often going without adequate food. It is important here to understand what 'snacks' (*jajan*) mean for the poor in Indonesia. Snacks refer not to additional and unnecessary food items, but to (often small) meals bought from street vendors. The girls who took part in the conversation outlined above lived in shared accommodation and had limited or no cooking facilities. Those who had cookers could not always afford the fuel to run them. Thus, snacks were a staple. Significantly, however, money was important not only for meeting basic needs, but for buying some 'little luxuries' – things the girls wanted and saw as making their lives more fun. Being able to do so was an important incentive for them to work.

Work as a pathway to independence. The third important aspect of children's view of work was the independence it brought for some. A traditional approach to child welfare presents poor children as victims of poverty whose well-being – perhaps survival – is dependent on the intervention of others (see Bessell, 2007). New social studies of childhood have prompted a rethinking of such assumptions and have highlighted children's agency (Levison, 2000; James and James 2001). Montgomery's (2001) study indicates that children do make choices even in situations characterised by poverty and abuse. Working children's capacity to identify and articulate their own interests has been demonstrated powerfully by working children's organisations around the world (see Liebel, 2003).

While most children in my studies defined themselves as poor, they did not relate to an image of themselves as victims of poverty. Many believed that their work, while not lifting them out of poverty, opened up choices they would not otherwise have. This was particularly the case for boys working independently in the informal sector and girls working in factories. Despite high levels of uncertainty and the vulnerability to violence that came with living on the streets, the boys felt some sense of control over

their lives, including control over when and how they earned an income. For the factory girls, work enhanced their control over their day-to-day choices (such as how they spent their free time) and over major life decisions. Within their families, girls are subject to far greater control than boys, particularly in regard to their interactions with young men (see Bennett, 2005; Wolf, 1992). Girls are also expected to shoulder a greater burden for household chores and care of family members (particularly younger siblings) than are boys.

Significantly, girls who had moved to Jakarta from villages elsewhere in Java indicated they were able to delay marriage and had a greater say on the choice of husband.

'My sister is in the village. She is married and has a baby. I would probably be married now too if I stayed.' (Girl aged 15 years)

'Yes. Me too. My cousins are now married.' (Girl, aged 14 years)

Having control over their choice of husband, identified by some as a direct result of their work, was explained by the girls in two ways. First, their families had less say in the matter because they were physically removed and because the girls had gained status within the family as a contributor. Second, they had a wider selection of young men available to them in the city than they would have had in the village. Work had given the girls an opportunity to renegotiate their relationships with their families and move towards greater independence in decision making (see Punch, 2002). Many of the girls working in factories valued greatly having choice over their lives, but many also recognised that this was achieved at the expense of proximity to family, time for recreation and participation in school.

An ILO (2004b) rapid assessment of children's employment in the footwear industry of West Java also found that work *can* provide children and adolescents with greater scope to make decisions about their lives. In some cases, children saw their work as allowing them to pay for their school expenses and continue their education. The assessment report (ILO, 2004b: 63–4) describes the situation of 15-year old Yayah, who combined school and work in the expectation that continuing her education would result in a better job and an easier life than that experienced by her parents. Yayah saw work not so much as a burden of poverty, but as a path out of the economic hardship of her natal family (ILO, 2004b: 63).

Work, poverty, vulnerability and powerlessness. As discussed above, a significant proportion of children in my studies viewed work in positive terms: a legitimate response to poverty or economic hardship and a means of fulfilling family obligations, of accessing disposable income and of gaining independence. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that children saw their work only in positive terms. Many children were acutely aware that they occupied a relatively low place in social hierarchies, as children, as young workers, and as poor. The combination of these social positions made children vulnerable to exploitation, violence and marginalisation, all of which many children in my studies had experienced.

The factory girls who valued the independence and increased control over their personal lives that their work provided had virtually no control over their working environment and were often exposed to situations that could only be described as

exploitative. More recent studies of children's employment in a range of sectors, including footwear manufacture, mining, fishing and agriculture have described the lack of control many children have over their terms and conditions of employment, and the often deleterious consequences, particularly in terms of health and opportunity for recreation and development (see UNICEF, 2003; ILO, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

Children's vulnerability to violence is illustrated by an incident I observed involving Bakti, a shoe shine boy of about ten years. Bakti and a group of other young shoe-shines were working in a bar in a popular tourist area of Jakarta. Bakti approached a tourist, asking (in English) 'Shoeshine Mister?'. When he was ignored, Bakti waited a moment and then persisted. This time the tourist – a bulky male – swore at Bakti and turned away from him. When Bakti asked again, this time bending down towards the man's shoes, the man kicked at him violently, grazing Bakti's shoulder. When we talked about the incident later, Bakti described it as an occupational hazard.

Sharon: 'So how did you feel, when he kicked you?'

Bakti: 'Well, I don't like it, being treated like that. But it's the way it is – it's the way we get treated. I don't like it, but it's usual.'

Sharon: 'Is it mainly tourists who behave like that?'

Bakti: 'No, a lot of people – foreigners, Indonesians. We are a pest. Sometimes they need their shoes cleaned – then they pay. Other times, we are just a pest – they treat us like a pest. Sometimes they don't look at us. But sometimes we get paid [smiles].'

Bakti was aware of his place in social hierarchies and how he was viewed not only by foreigners but also by fellow Indonesians. When a potential customer reacted violently towards him, he moved on to the next, with no expectation that bystanders would intervene to prevent or censure the hostility.

Bakti and the other shoe-shine boys occupied a marginal place within society – a place shared by the 'anak payung' (umbrella kids). In the rainy season in Jakarta, young children (usually boys aged between seven and ten years) would gather outside shopping centres offering to 'rent' umbrellas to shoppers as they raced through the downpour to their cars or taxis. I was struck by these children – dripping wet – holding their umbrellas over adults and other children who were able to afford the service. In talking to the children about their role, they explained that it was an easy way to earn some money. The work was not difficult – just wet. When asked how they were treated by shoppers, one boy explained:

Oh they don't really look at me – they just see the umbrella. (Agus)

Agus and Bakti described a similar experience whereby they are invisible to society. Visibility was gained only when their services were needed or when they became a nuisance. As Bakti pointed out, invisibility was not necessarily a barrier to earning money – but it did create a context whereby the children's lives were characterised by dismissal by those around them, vulnerability to violence and limited opportunities. This was interwoven with their need to earn an income and their social status both as children and as poor.

What can we draw from children's accounts of work and poverty?

As discussed, children's views and experiences of poverty have important implications for the ways in which social policies and services represent and respond to working children. First, the children in my studies were not dependant on their families so much as engaged in relationships of interdependence, negotiated independence (Punch 2002) and sometimes disconnection. Second, the cost of education was a major factor in a number of children in my studies leaving school, while a significant number worked in order to pay for their education. The problem was often less the incompatibility of combining school and work so much as the high cost of education for poor families. Beyond the issue of cost, however, there are serious issues around the treatment of poor children within the education system that require policy attention. Finally, the studies discussed here suggest that government policies that exclude sections of society, often the poor, from services have a marked impact on the lives of children. In Indonesia the requirement for residency cards was partly aimed at social control and partly aimed at stemming the flow of migrants from rural areas into the cities. While not focusing on 'children's issues' these policies were hard felt by many children in my studies, clearly indicating that a children-centred approach to policy needs to account for policy initiatives beyond those explicitly for children.

Children's accounts of work and poverty suggest that they do not always see their work as a problem but as a means of overcoming a series of problems with which they must deal. Work provides income and a pathway to independence. For many children in my studies, work closed some choices, but opened up others. Work also introduced serious problems into children's lives and was often characterised by exploitation, violence and marginalisation. The interrelationship between children's work and poverty raises complex and multifaceted issues, which are challenging for policy makers and service providers. The deeper understanding of these issues that comes from serious consideration of children's own views and lived experiences is a necessary foundation for effective and responsive policy.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for extremely helpful and details comments on the earlier version of this article. As always, I express my gratitude to the children who gave their time and shared their experiences so generously.

Notes

- 1 Some children were uncertain of the ages.
- 2 These children were referred to as umbrella kids or *anak payung*
- 3 These children also engaged in opportunistic income generating activities in the informal sector, but rubbish picking was their main source of income.

References

- Abebe, T. (2008), *Ethiopian Childhoods: A Case Study of the Lives of Orphans and Working Children*, Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

- Anti-Slavery Society** (2008), 'Why do children work?', <http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/antislavery/childlabour.htm>, 9 October.
- Atkinson, A. B.** (2003) 'Multidimensional deprivation: contrasting social welfare and counting approaches', *Journal of Economic Inequality*, 1, 1, 51–65.
- Bappenas Poverty Reduction Committee** (2005), 'Strategi Nasional Penanggulangan Kemiskinan', 'National Poverty Reduction Strategy', Bappenas, Jakarta.
- Beazley, H.** (2003), 'The construction and protection of individual and collective identified by street children and youth in Indonesia', *Children, Youth and Environments*, 13, 1.
- Bennett, L.** (2005), *Maidenhood, Islam and Modernity: Single Women, Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Contemporary Indonesia*, London/New York: Routledge/Curzon.
- Bessell, S.** (1999), 'The politics of child labour in Indonesia: global trends and domestic policy', *Pacific Affairs*, 72, 3.
- Bessell, S.** (2005), 'Women in Parliament in Indonesia: denied a share of power', in Manon Tremblay and Yvonne Gallagher (eds.), *Sharing in Power: Women in Parliaments in Transitional and Developing Countries*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bessell, S.** (2007), 'Responsive policy and service delivery for children', in A. Nevile, S. Bessell and T. Moore (eds.), *Responsive Policy and Support Services for Children*, Policy Brief 4, Crawford School of Economics and Government, Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Bourguignon, F. and Chakravarty, S. R.** (2003), 'The measurement of multidimensional poverty', *Journal of Economic Inequality*, 1, 1, 25–49.
- Boyden, J.** (1997), 'Childhood and the policy makers: a comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood', in A. James and A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Routledge.
- Burr, R.** (2004), 'Children's rights: international policy and lived practice', in M. J. Kehily (ed.), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Berkshire: McGraw-Hill International.
- Burr, R.** (2006), *Vietnam's Children in a Changing World*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Conticini, A. and Hulme, D.** (2007), 'Escaping violence, seeking freedom: why children in bangladesh migrate to the street', *Development and Change*, 38, 2, 201–27.
- International Confederation of Free Trade Unions** (1996), 'No time to play: child workers in the global economy', available at <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=990916169&Language=EN&Printout=Yes>, 30 September 2008.
- International Labour Organization** (1996) *Child Labour: What is to be Done*, Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organization** (2004a), *Child Labour in Offshore Fishing, North Sumatra: A Rapid Assessment*, Jakarta: ILO.
- International Labour Organization** (2004b), *Child Labour in the Informal Footwear Sector in West Java: A Rapid Assessment*, Jakarta: ILO.
- International Labour Organization** (2004c), *Child Labour in the Informal Mining Sector in East Kalimantan: A Rapid Assessment*, Jakarta: ILO.
- International Labour Organization** (2006), 'The end of child labour: within reach', Global report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Report of the Director-General, International Labour Office, Geneva.
- International Working Group on Child Labour (IWGCL)** (1998), 'Forgotten on the Pyjama Trail: a case study of young garment workers in Menkes (Morocco) dismissed from their jobs following foreign media attention', Defence for Children International and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Geneva.
- James, A. and James, A. L.** (2001), 'Childhood: towards a theory of continuity and change', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 575, 25–37.
- Levison, D.** (2000), 'Children as economic agents', *Feminist Economics*, 6, 1, 125–34.
- Liebel, Manfred** (2003), 'Working children as social subjects: the contribution of working children's organizations to social transformation', *Childhood*, 10, 3, 265–85.

- Montgomery, H.** (2001), *Modern Babylon? Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Morrow, V.** (1996), 'Rethinking childhood dependency: children's contributions to the domestic economy', *Sociological Review*, 44, 58–77.
- Nieuwenhuys, O.** (1994), *Children's Lifeworlds: Gender, Welfare and Labour in the Developing World*, London: Routledge.
- Punch, S.** (2002), 'Youth transitions and interdependent adult–child relations in rural Bolivia', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 18, 2, 123–33.
- Ridge, T.** (2002), *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Silvey, R.** (2000), 'Stigmatized Spaces: gender and mobility under crisis in South Sulawesi, Indonesia', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 17, 2, 143–61.
- UNICEF** (2003) 'Kondisi dan Situasi Pekerja Anak pada Beberapa Sektor di Tulungagung dan Probolinggo, Jawa Timur', UNICEF, Jakarta.
- Weiner, M.** (1990), *The Child and the State in India: Child Labor and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- White, B. and Tjandraningsih, I.** (1998), *Child Workers in Indonesia*, Bandung: AKATIGA
- Wolf, D. L.** (1992), *Factory Daughters: Gender, Household Dynamics, and Rural Industrialization in Java*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Woodhead, M.** (1998), 'Children's perspectives on their working lives: a participatory study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua', Stockholm: Radda Barnen.
- Woodhead, M.** (1999), 'Combatting child labour: listen to what the children say', *Childhood*, 6, 1, 27–49.
- Woodhead, M.** (2001), 'The value of work and school: a study of working children's perspectives', in Kristoffel Lieten and Ben White (eds.), *Child Labour: Policy Options*, Amsterdam: Aksant.