

EARNING A SMALL LIFE IN A BIG WORLD :AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STREET CHILD LABORERS IN YANGON, MYANMAR

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the issue of child labor in Yangon since Myanmar is a developing country with nearly 33% of children aged 7 to 16 who are working as the child laborers. In this study, the researcher treated Street Child Labor (SCL) as a form of child labor. Street child laborers are engaged in informal street work activities which raise issues on their life and health.

The objectives of this research were to explain the causes of SCLs, to examine the earning life circumstances of SCLs, to explore their health risks, and to understand how SCLs cope with their health risks. A qualitative ethnographic study was conducted for the period of five months with 15 SCLs. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, snapshot interviews and observations. This study considers critical medical anthropology as a theoretical perspective for understanding the influence of social, economic and political factors related to the causes and health consequences of SCLs.

The results showed that children were motivated to work by themselves and/or required to work for their family when the family is in financial crisis and at the same time they demonstrated the survival skills to overcome their hardships. The data indicated that SCLs suffered from deterioration in their physical, mental and social health due to inadequate nutrition, unhealthy environment, work-induced illness, stress and anxiety, and bad social dealings. The findings concluded that bearing too much financial responsibilities and earning through 3 Ds (dirty, dangerous and degrading) street occupations, and independent and freewheeling lifestyles leave SCLs in a state of poor health. The conclusion may be that SCLs simply neglected their health and received no medical treatment since the cost of health care in terms of medicine, consultation and transportation fee became the significant barriers for those who lived and struggled of their basic needs.

Results indicated that plausible recommendations are parental awareness, free, compulsory and quality education, night school/mobile school, vocational school/apprenticeship training, and free health care through outreach program.

KEY WORDS: CHILD LABOR/STREET CHILDREN/WORKING CHILDREN

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