Understanding Children's Harmful Work: The Methodological Landscape

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Introduction

Children' work is notoriously difficult to identify, assess and understand. Common definitions of child labour, light work, the worst forms of child labour and hazardous child labour, as put forward by the International Labour Organization (ILO), are premised on notions of hazard and risk[1] but do not include an explicit consideration of harm (Chapter 2, this volume). Harm can be broadly considered 'an identifiable negative impact on an individual or household' (see Chapter 2, this volume) and children's harmful work (CHW) can be thought of as 'any work that children undertake that actually results in harm to the child and/or their household' (Sabates–Wheeler and Sumberg, 2020, p 8). Forms of CHW are often hidden from sight and its prevalence, drivers and impacts are highly context specific (see Chapter 2, this volume). Research on CHW therefore requires careful consideration of both methodological approach and individual methods. This chapter provides a review of methods that are commonly used for studying child labour and children's engagement with work; considers their value for understanding prevalence, drivers and dynamics, and impact of CHW; discusses the role of mixed methods approaches; and proposes a set of methodological principles for studying CHW.

We review three types of methods in this chapter, namely (1) quantitative survey methods, (2) qualitative and participatory methods, and (3) certification methods. In addition, we review studies that adopt mixed methods research designs, explicitly seeking to achieve both breadth and depth by combining a

variety of methods, either in parallel or sequentially. Inevitably this typology oversimplifies the variety of available methods. Furthermore, many studies adopt a combination of methods and data, often in implicit ways, without making specific reference to a mixed methods approach (such as using different qualitative and participatory tools in small-scale studies). Thus, the typology categorization serves as a framework for organizing this review as opposed to a strict delineation.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, we provide an overview of methods as outlined earlier, exploring their use within studies of child labour and children's work. Second, we assess the merits and challenges of specific methods for assessing the prevalence of forms of children's harmful work, drivers and dynamics, and impact. Finally, we propose a set of research design principles for studying CHW.

Review of methods

Quantitative survey methods

A wide range of survey methods exist for studying children's engagement with work, ranging from large-scale surveys that collect information about work alongside many other topics, to purposive small-scale and child-centred surveys. We explore some of the most common survey methods.

Nationally representative, multi-purpose household surveys

National multi-purpose household surveys collect information across a range of issues and are designed to be representative at country level. Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) and Labour Force Surveys (LFS) have been used to gain insight into the prevalence and patterns of child labour (Bhalotra and Tzannatos, 2003; ILO/IPEC-SIMPOC, 2007; UCW, 2017). These surveys often do not produce detailed information on child labour but collect information on employment of household members, characteristics of the household and its members and household living standards, which can help to understand the context in which child labour takes place (Verma, 2008). In regard to child labour, most large-scale multi-purpose household surveys are guided by ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age) (C138), ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms) (C182) and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UNICEF and ILO, 2019). In turn, the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) translates these conventions in statistical terms and sets standards for measurement of child labour (UNICEF and ILO, 2019).

The narrow focus of these conventions and their rigid definitions and standards result in a similarly narrow remit in most multi-purpose

surveys. Nevertheless, surveys differ in their potential to explore children's engagement with work. Within LSMS, for example, the ability to cross reference information about children's work with data on school attendance and educational attainment, as well as demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the household and its members, contributed to its popularity for studying child labour (Bhalotra and Tzannatos, 2003). MICS provide insight into children's engagement with unpaid household chores, which are not captured in many other surveys (Dayıoğlu, 2013). A notable downside of MICS is that information about health and nutrition is only collected for children under five years of age and this limits the ability to link information about children's engagement in work to health and nutrition outcomes (ILO/IPEC–SIMPOC, 2007). Similarly, the use of DHS data is constrained due to the limited range of questions about employment being asked to individuals between 15 and 49 years of age. LFS are the most comprehensive in terms of capturing information about employment but age brackets vary across surveys, with lower age thresholds to be included in the survey ranging from 10 to 15 years (Desiere and Costa, 2019). Table 3.1 provides a comparative overview of national household surveys and their potential use for studying child labour.

Child labour surveys

Child labour surveys range from large scale household-based surveys to small scale surveys with street children (Verma 2008). The Statistical Information & Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) and the Statistics and Monitoring Unit of ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) have played key roles in developing survey-based instruments and in advising national governments on how to generate high quality data on child labour (SIMPOC, nd). Whether standalone or integrated into a larger instrument, questionnaires commonly consist of three parts: (1) household roster, (2) adult questionnaire and (3) child questionnaire (aged 5–17) (ILO, 2017). As expected, National Child Labour Surveys (NCLS) provide more detailed information about child labour than multi-purpose household surveys. For example, they usually include children aged five and upwards, thus allowing for an assessment of the age at which children start working (ILO, 2015). The questionnaires do not capture engagement in domestic chores or unpaid care work and therefore do not fully represent children's engagement with work, particularly for girls who are more likely to be engaged in housework.

Child-focused surveys include children and/or youth as respondents. A well-established survey is the School-to-Work Transition Survey (SWTS), which aimed to gain better insights into transitions from school into work and to understand youth transitions into the labour market (Elder, 2009).

Table 3.1: Overview of national household surveys and measurement of child labour

Type	Objectives	Multi–topic	Age bracket	Data availability
LSMS	(a) Foster evidence–based policy formulation on agriculture, assets ownership, health, education, income and employment; (b) Monitor the SDGs and the living condition dynamics of rural and urban households; (c) Facilitate randomized impact evaluations; and (d) Assess women and youth employment and child activities.	Yes	Varies from 7 or 10 years and above	Public
MICS	Provide internationally comparable data on children and women's lives to monitor progress towards SDGs and national development goals.	Yes	5 years and above	Public
DHS	(a) Monitor changes in population, health, and nutrition; (b) Provide an international database that can be used by researchers investigating topics related to population, health, nutrition.	Yes	15–49 years old	Public
LFS	(a) Implement policies for decent work, employment creation and poverty reduction, income support as well as other social programmes; (b) Monitor the SDGs and the living condition dynamics of rural and urban households.	No	Varies from 10 to 15 years and above	Varies by country

Sources: Desire and Costa (2019), The DHS Program (2020) and MICS website (https://mics.unicef.org/)

The survey was directed at youth aged 15–29 years of age, and its underlying sampling methodology aimed for national representation. Although it is possible to use SWTS to produce child labour estimates, its main objective was to supplement the information collected through LFS or NCLS and provide detailed data about the supply of youth labour.

Another category of child-focused surveys includes those that are developed and implemented as part of specific research studies. These vary widely in scope, sampling and types of questions asked. Examples include a six-country study that assessed whether child domestic work can be considered among the worst forms of child labour, and which administered questionnaires to over 3,000 children aged between 6 and 18 years of age (Gamlin et al, 2015). Another is a study of work and education in slum settlements in Dhaka among 2,700 children aged 6–14 years old (Quattri and Watkins, 2016).

Young Lives and the Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE) programme are two large-scale and longitudinal child-focused studies that generate quantitative information about children's engagement with work. Young Lives is a cohort study that provides five waves of cross-sectional and panel data for two cohorts of children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Bangladesh, including a total of approximately 12,000 children across all countries (Boyden et al, 2019). GAGE collects quantitative longitudinal data on approximately 18,000 adolescents between ages 10 and 19 in seven countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Nepal, Palestine and Rwanda (Jones et al, 2018).

School-based surveys collect information about how work affects school attendance or performance and attitudes to schooling (SIMPOC, nd). Schools are used as primary sampling units with questionnaires being administered to students. Interviews with teachers, administrative staff and parents may also be included, and some surveys include a control group of out-of-school children (Verma, 2008). While other surveys generally limit questions to school enrolment and attendance, school-based surveys seek to generate data about how much time children spend in school, how often they miss school because of work, and their engagement with homework and extracurricular activities (Guarcello et al, 2005). Large-scale school-based surveys were undertaken in the early 2000s with support from ILO-IPEC in Brazil, Kenya, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Turkey, among other countries (Guarcello et al, 2005).

Establishment surveys focus on the demand-side of child labour and collect information from employers or labour intermediaries. These seek to interrogate the situation in the workplace with questions focusing on the nature of work, hours of work, remuneration and pay, injuries and illnesses and other conditions of work. Establishment surveys are rarely representative as identification of establishments employing children is inherently problematic (Verma, 2008). However, they use the place of employment as an entry point so they can be valuable for collecting information about forms of labour undertaken by children living outside of the household unit or at non-registered locations, such as children living on the streets (ILO et al, 2012).

Impact evaluation surveys

Impact evaluation represents a growing body of research within which surveys are used to collect information on the effects of interventions, which often includes information about children's engagement with work. Evaluations often employ multi-purpose surveys with varying degrees of detail on children's work, typically drawing on the survey types reviewed earlier. The quality of this information varies. Evaluations of programmes that seek to reduce child labour as a primary objective tend to include more detail about children's engagement with work than is the case when reducing child labour is a secondary objective. A case in point is social protection, which has become a key policy area for reducing child labour (ILO, 2018; Chapter 7, this volume). An increasing number of studies consider the impact of social protection programmes – including schemes such as unconditional cash transfers, conditional cash transfers and public works programmes – on children's engagement in work (de Hoop and Rosati, 2014; Dammert et al, 2018). In the majority of cases, evaluations aim to capture the programme effects on an array of outcomes, and child labour tends to be only one such outcome, resulting in relatively narrow collection of information. Also the private sector, especially certification bodies such as Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade, increasingly commission impact evaluation that incorporate issues of child labour.

Small-scale surveys

The use of survey methods is not limited to collection of large-scale data. Qualitative researchers also use survey methods to develop their knowledge of the research setting, introduce themselves and to collect specific data that are important to their analysis of children's lifeworlds, work, education and social positions (Reynolds, 1991; Hashim, 2004; Katz, 2004; Dyson, 2014).

In her research on child labour in the Zambesi Valley, Reynolds conducted a census of 12 families (Reynolds, 1991): she had previously worked in the same community and thus already had a broad knowledge of the context. By contrast, in her study in south-eastern Sudan, Katz saw her village-wide household survey as a way to introduce herself and her research while constructing a socio-economic and cultural profile of the community. The survey illuminated the diversity of economic activities both on and off-farm, and their seasonality (Katz, 2004). In the context of a child-centred study of everyday involvement in rural household labour in a remote village in the high Himalayas in Nepal, Dyson (2014) undertook a full village census that included the age, educational background and occupation of all household members.

Qualitative and participatory methods

Qualitative studies and participatory methods span a range of scales, from small case studies focused on a limited number of people to studies working with samples of several hundreds. A wide range of methods are available, and increasingly, more traditional methods such as interviews and observations are used alongside more creative methods that have long been used in research with children and in relation to their engagement with work (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Punch, 2001b; Leach and Mitchell, 2006).

Participant and other types of observation

Qualitative research with children about work has made use of a variety of observational methods. Many, such as participant observation, time-use studies, writing diaries and photography, are borrowed from ethnography. These have proved useful in helping to understand the role of children and their work in households and society. Examples include Pamela Reynolds' (1991) *Dance, Civet Cat*, based on her work with Tonga children in the Zambezi Valley, and Cindy Katz's (2004) *Growing up Global*, a comparative ethnography of children's lives in a Sudanese village and New York.

Participant observation is a key element of ethnographic research and has been used to discover the range of activities in which children engage (Reynolds, 1991; Johnson et al, 1995; Punch, 2001a; Katz, 2004; Dyson, 2014). At the same, questions have been raised about the extent to which adult researchers can do participant observation with children; while researchers can join children's games and work, they will always be a different type of player in the game (Punch, 2001b, p 165; Atkinson, 2019).

Other forms of observation include 24-hour reported recall, extended periods of detailed observation and diaries, allowing for children's work to be recorded in different ways such as random 'snapshots' of labour allocation, (Reynolds, 1991; Robson, 2004). In recall interviews and diaries, children are asked to recount their activities in as much detail as possible paying attention to the timing and duration of activities. However, both methods tend to under-report work because children forget tasks that they do not find important or are done alongside other work; and are unwilling to disclose work they find embarrassing (Reynolds, 1991; Johnson et al, 1995; Robson, 2004, p 199). The recording of time-use needs careful planning vis-à-vis the agricultural calendar, school holidays and even within the day (Robson, 2004; Tudge and Hogan, 2005).

Participatory and creative methods

Photography has also been used to observe children's day-to-day activities, including their work. For example, Bolton et al (2001) tasked

11- to 16-year olds with 'making photographs'[2] of their part-time jobs. However, the method goes beyond mere observation. In South Africa, the photovoice method was used to understand children's concept of 'self' (Benninger and Savahl, 2016) and perceptions of the natural spaces around them (Adams et al, 2017). Participatory photography helps in 'making the familiar strange' to both researchers and participants and thus serves as a useful mediation tool to broaden discussions with participants, complementing, augmenting, confirming and enlarging insight from other methods (Bolton et al, 2001, p 517; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2010). The method has been adapted for use with disabled children (Wickenden and Elphick, 2016).

Other creative methods, including drawing, mapping and drama have been used to encourage children's free expression and reveal 'subjugated knowledges' (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2010; Thomas De Benitez, 2011; Johnson et al, 2014) and children's understanding of place, space and their everyday lives (Mitchell, 2006; Johnson, 2011; Bolzman et al, 2017; Bowles, 2017). Methods like drawing have been successfully used in large-scale studies (Kilkelly et al, 2005; Crivello et al, 2009; Crivello et al, 2013). Katz (2004) used 'geodramatic play' to gain insight into children's social and environmental knowledge. In South Africa, theatre-based research helped to unveil emotional challenges and notions of vulnerability among undocumented migrant youth in Cape Town (Opfermann, 2020).

Interviews

Interviews can help to explore a topic or issue in detail. Life history or life cycle interviews, for example, aim 'to explore aspects of the social spaces of children and childhood' to understand the relationships that are central to children's psychosocial and material well-being (Abebe, 2008, p 57). Semi-structured interviews focusing on children's everyday activities can elicit time-use information. Katz (2004) showed how ethno-semantic interviews could be used to effectively probe children's practices and their understanding of environmental processes and interrelationships. Participatory, creative and/or ethnographic methods can be integrated into in-depth interviews to make them more child friendly (Greene and Hill, 2005; Johnson et al, 2014). Involving children in conducting interviews may also help to break down the boundaries between the researcher and the researched but also presents challenges that must be carefully negotiated (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Hecht, 1998; Chin, 2007; Hoechner, 2015).

Focus group discussions (FDG) can create a space for children to share their understandings and experiences without having to engage in a one-on-one interview (Hashim, 2004; Gibson, 2007, p 24; Abebe, 2008; Dyson, 2014; Hoban, 2017, p 2).

Certification data

Certification systems in agricultural value chains gather a wide range of information about participating households, including background, engagement with work in priority sectors and the activities of children. These data are generated mostly by private sector organizations as part of their monitoring activities, and we therefore treat them separately from research surveys. Certification schemes and voluntary standard systems are often centred on tropical export crops, especially bananas, cocoa, coffee, sugar and palm oil. A significant part of the total production of cocoa produced in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire is under one or more certification schemes (ISEAL, 2019b).

Certification programmes emerged in the 1980s in response to consumer demands for sustainability and fairness. The first programmes concerned organic production, especially in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Later, in the 1990s, Fairtrade emerged in response to a greater focus on fairness in value chain relations involving small farmers in developing countries. At the same time, the retail sector in Europe started certification schemes around food safety and good agricultural practices, which resulted in the EurepGAP and later GLOBALG.A.P. standards (Oya et al, 2018). Dozens of new certification systems emerged in the last 20 years with varying systems and levels of credibility. In response, through International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL), the most serious certification programmes developed minimum 'credibility standards' for monitoring and reporting impact. ISEAL is a membership organization of certification schemes and sustainability initiatives that plays a key role in data harmonization and exchange (ISEAL, 2019a).

Four data collection mechanisms used within certification systems can shed light on children's engagement with work.

Audit reports

Audit reports represent the main tool for information gathering within these schemes and systems. Audit reports present information about the compliance of individual farmers or farmer groups with the procedures and requirements, document cases where issues are observed and recommend areas for improvement. Typically, control points in the audit differ when individual producers (for example, plantations or larger producers) are certified, versus group certification (that is, where the production is scattered among many small producers). Group certification requires an accredited Internal Control System (ICS), through which data quality is managed by each group or firm. Medium or larger producers are subject to external audits. The quality of these internal and external audits is a critical concern

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for the credibility of a certification scheme. Often there is a layered system with an entity that controls the quality of accredited audit firms, that in turn control the compliance of certification holders (especially producers). For example, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has an agency (Accreditation Services International – ASI) that provides this control-on-control.

Common core indicators

Despite the diversity of data collection across schemes, there is a tendency to harmonize the information collected using common core indicators in surveys and in-company monitoring systems. For example, ISEAL supported the development of linked, geographically referenced sets of basic data. These common core indicators can be mapped against the indicators for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).[3] Some refer directly to children's activities, including school attendance, distance to primary school, number of farms restricting the use of chemicals by pregnant women and children, food security, perceived change in quality of life and perception of change in level of control over household decisions.

ISEAL works on a range of projects to harmonize data flows within and between certification schemes (ISEAL, 2019a). This is to identify common and easily collectable data by implementers, auditors and evaluators. It is also to generate systems to store, link and analyse this information, and open it to researchers. In addition, ISEAL has developed guidance for structuring data sharing agreements for personal and sensitive data.

Outcome and impact evaluations

In addition to data generated within certification schemes, the minimum requirement of ISEAL members is for certification schemes (that is, scheme owners) to undertake at least one in-depth impact evaluation per year that addresses two questions: (1) Is the certification scheme or voluntary standard system producing the desired and intended sustainability outcomes or impacts?, and (2) What unintended effects (positive or negative) resulted from the scheme or system?

In the last 15 years, this requirement has resulted in a large body of research on the impact of certification systems, which have been the object of various systematic reviews (Blackman and Rivera, 2010; Blackmore et al, 2012; Oya, et al, 2018; Schleifer and Sun, 2020). Most of these studies focus on intended outcomes, like income and yield. Only a fraction of them discusses the impact or outcomes related to children's work as (intended or unintended) effects of certification.

Data on intended and unintended outcomes constitute a potentially useful source of information in relation to children's work, whether covering all

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or a sample of certification holders. The Rainforest Alliance's approach to assessing its certification system (which was developed together with the Sustainable Agriculture Network [SAN]), for example, includes three levels of data collection: programme wide monitoring, sampled monitoring and focussed research. While data for the first two types of assessments are collected within operations and as part of audits, data for focussed research is collected by an independent third party (ISEAL, 2017).

Child labour monitoring and remediation systems

Several certification schemes have explicit requirements related to children's work, such as Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS). These schemes tend to use local facilitators to collect in–depth information on all households in a defined area. Nestlé, Mars and other brands, for example, implement CLMRS as part of their voluntary standards systems. Nestlé (2019) reports that, by the end of 2019, they had identified 18,000 cases of children working under conditions classified as child labour. This includes hazardous children's work according to the definition used in Côte d'Ivoire. In other words, these systems offer purposive quantitative information on child labour or hazardous work associated with the production and processing of specific products.

Investigating prevalence, drivers and dynamics, and impact

In this section we move on to discuss the use of these methods to investigate the (1) prevalence, (2) drivers and dynamics and (3) impact of CHW. We explore the opportunities or challenges associated with each method.

Prevalence

Prevalence refers to the scale and scope of different forms of children's harmful work, and Table 3.2 presents an overview by method.

Surveys have been widely used to gain insight into whether or not children work, and to generate quantitative information about prevalence at a wide (national or sub-national) scale. The ability to collect information across a representative sample allows for quantification of the occurrence of children's work across age, gender and other lines of disaggregation. Indeed, household surveys such as LSMS, MICS, LFS and others represent key instruments for generating estimates about child labour and monitoring progress towards SDG 8 (UNICEF and ILO, 2019). Nevertheless, there are three reasons why surveys are relatively ill–equipped to provide insights into more nuanced understandings of children's work, and particularly CHW.

Table 3.2: Prevalence of CHW: opportunities and challenges

Method	Opportunities	Challenges
Surveys	Able to provide population-wide/representative estimates of prevalence – put a 'number' to the issue	Relatively ill-equipped to uncover hazardous/harmful types of work, particularly if work or workers are hidden; lack of inclusion of marginalized groups; lack of active participation of respondents
Qualitative/ participatory methods	Vital to gaining detailed insights into what girls and boys are doing, what children and adults perceive as harm, who may experience harm; allow for mapping of the temporality, places and spaces of hazard and harm	Do not provide representative statistics; require strong link into other methods that can take insights to scale
Certification methods	Potential for using data from certification schemes to gain insight into prevalence in industries/supply chains	Prevalence estimates are not representative beyond industry/supply chain; issues with reliability of data

Source: Authors

First, the rigid nature of survey questionnaires generally limits opportunities for understanding CHW. As noted by Bhalotra and Tzannatos (2003) and supported by our review of survey methods, the work categories used tend to be crude and generally only allow for distinguishing between work for wages, work on family farms or in family enterprises, and domestic work. Surveys that underpin impact evaluations of social protection programmes also vary in the level of detail and the type of data that is collected about children's work (de Hoop and Rosati, 2014; Chapter 7, this volume). Purposive child labour surveys tend to be less bounded by stipulations within the ICLS resolution and therefore offer more flexibility. A downside of most of these purposive surveys – in terms of estimating prevalence – is that they are not nationally representative and thus only provide a partial picture.

Second, a prerequisite for identifying whether or not children engage in certain types of activities is their inclusion in data collection exercises. National household surveys are notorious for excluding the most marginalized household members, to say nothing of refugee populations, children living on the streets and in institutions (Bhalotra and Tzannatos 2003; Global Coalition to End Child Poverty 2019). This is particularly problematic when studying CHW as these children tend to be at greater risk (Bhalotra and Tzannatos, 2003).

Third, information is often provided by a proxy respondent rather than by the children themselves. This may lead to inaccurate reporting: while caregivers may be well informed about their children's engagement in work, they may not have precise information about how children allocate their time or about working conditions, and social and cultural values may lead to underreporting (Dammert et al, 2018). Equally, children may overestimate time spent on certain work or domestic activities (Dziadula and Guzman, 2020). While self-reporting is generally seen as more accurate and therefore preferable (Desiere and Costa, 2019), it has been suggested that administering questionnaires to both adults and children provides the most accurate results (Dziadula and Guzman, 2020).

Qualitative and participatory methods are vital for obtaining detailed and context-specific data about children's activities, their engagement with different forms of work and the extent to which these are considered harmful, and by whom. Participatory and observation methods can help to develop relevant categories and aid in the development of survey questionnaires (see, for example, ILO et al [2012]).

Finally, certification methods can also provide insight into children's participation in certain work activities. CLMRS systems, for example, generate data on the extent of children working in agriculture and doing specific hazardous tasks (based on CLMRS' own definitions). This offers information about prevalence within a certain industry or value-chain, but the reliability of these data needs to be ascertained.

Drivers and dynamics

As summarized in Table 3.3, the different methods can provide insights into the drivers and dynamics of child labour and children's engagement with work but also present limitations.

Surveys are widely used to study drivers and dynamics of children's work. Macro-level studies focus on correlates at country-level and are mostly premised on cross-country data. The Understanding Child Work (UCW) programme, for example, considered country-level variables such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, ratification of ILO Convention No. 138, exports of clothing and textiles and the Fragile States Index to understand differences in trends across countries (UCW, 2017). Micro-level studies are more common and typically explore the role of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of households and their members. In Bangladesh, for example, the Household Expenditure Survey was used to investigate the role of household poverty and wealth in child labour, with regression modelling used to estimate associations between independent variables such as household income and educational achievement of households and the dependent variable of children's work

Table 3.3: Drivers and dynamics of CHW: opportunities and challenges

Method	Opportunities	Challenges
Surveys	Ability to estimate association and sometimes causation between socio-economic and demographic factors and children's work	Analysis is limited to a relatively small set of factors; limited ability to estimate causation as the majority are cross-sectional
Qualitative/ participatory methods	Well-equipped to uncover drivers and dynamics of harmful work from multiple perspectives and respondents (girls, boys and adults); crucial for gaining detailed insight into social norms, values and power dynamics in decision making	Require careful sampling to ensure a range of perspectives across respondents; require time to build capacity in skills and on-going ethical procedures to facilitate some of these methods
Certification data	Localized longitudinal information can support analysis of changes in household conditions and harmful work	Local facilitators in CLMRS can help collect more in-depth information but are unskilled as researchers

Source: Authors

(Amin et al, 2004). Young Lives has studied the determinants of work and school attendance and their trade-off in Ethiopia (Haile and Haile, 2012). School-based surveys have also been used to understand the relationship between children's engagement with work and academic performance (Guarcello et al, 2005).

The caveats identified earlier concerning the limitations of surveys in relation to the prevalence of children's hazardous or harmful work also hold for drivers and dynamics. The sets of questions that are included are often too limited to allow for detailed understandings of factors that are associated with, or drive, CHW. It is also important to note that due to the cross-sectional nature of many surveys, they allow for investigating association but not causality. Exceptions include studies that use longitudinal data and econometric methods that allow for estimating causal effects. In Ghana, for example, three waves of the Living Standards Survey were used to investigate determinants of child labour (Blunch et al, 2002).

Qualitative and participatory methods – and their combination – should help illuminate the drivers and dynamics of CHW. However, there are no examples of longitudinal mixed methods studies specifically on the dynamics of child labour (for example, how children's workloads changed over time; how changes in a household's poverty level may affect children's labour participation). This shortcoming has also been highlighted by others (Camfield, 2014; Kuimi et al, 2018; Ibrahim et al, 2019).

Table 3.4: Impact: opportunities and challenges

Method	Opportunities	Challenges
Surveys	Ability to estimate impact of harmful children's work on children/success of interventions on reducing harmful children's work	Measuring impact requires longitudinal or comparative research design over a long period; existing impact surveys adopt simplistic definition of children's work
Qualitative/ participatory methods	Useful to understand impact of hazardous and harmful work/intended and unintended impact of interventions; can uncover impact of harmful children's work on children/success of interventions on reducing harmful children's work from multiple perspectives	Difficult to attribute impact (although can be useful to assess contribution); questions can be scaled (to be administered to large samples) but methods need to be combined with other methods to gain full insight
Certification methods	Provide insight into impact of certification systems on harmful work	Data may not be reliable

Source: Authors

Relatedly, narratives of change can provide insight into the drivers and dynamics of children's work. CLMRS may begin to provide such narrative accounts within households that are at risk. Local facilitators may be able to identify illustrative cases, for example, particularly as children are not attending school or may not be registered in the health post when injured or ill. However, the monitors are likely to have few research skills.

Impact

We explore how different methods can shape an understanding of (1) how CHW impacts children, and (2) how interventions impact CHW (Table 3.4).

Impact of child labour on children's lives

Survey methods are commonly used to assess the impact of child labour or children's work on different aspects of their lives. Many studies are particularly interested in associations between work and education. For example, NCLS data from 12 countries were used to investigate associations between child labour and educational attainment (ILO, 2015). Young Lives data underpinned a study of the impact of child labour on educational attainment

in Vietnam (Mavrokonstantis, 2011). Several mixed methods studies also explored the impact of child labour on school attendance in Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al, 2008; Orkin, 2012). Qualitative and participatory studies can help uncover intended and unintended consequences of work, placing these within contextual understandings of harm.

Four observations are important. First, as noted earlier, most analyses are based on cross-sectional data and thus provide no insight into causality. Second, survey-based studies of the impact of children's work on children's outcomes tend to be limited to readily measurable aspects of children's work and lives. In other words, they focus on whether or not children work, the types and conditions of work, and outcomes such as education, nutrition or health. These studies are not well-equipped to investigate the impact of the worst forms of child labour (for example, trafficking, child slavery and bonded labour) on less tangible aspects of children's lives (for example, psychosocial wellbeing, relationships and aspirations). Qualitative and participatory methods are vital for understanding the wide range of positive and negative impacts of work on children's lives. Third, and relatedly, the impact of work on children should also be understood from the perspective of children. Their views of what is harmful or not can be understood through exploring what they do in their everyday lives, what they think of as work, and what they do or do not enjoy. This requires insights into why they are doing certain tasks and how decisions are made about their work: here, experience with 'child centred evaluation' is certainly relevant (Nurick and Johnson, 2001).

Fourth, the issue of temporality is key in understanding how work affects children, and whether or not it may be harmful (Chapter 2, this volume). Work may only cause harm if it is done over an extended period, and harm may present itself long after children have stopped engaging with this work. While the range of methods reviewed here are relatively well-equipped to pick up on intensity of exposure to particular risks through studying time-use, few methods have enough of a longitudinal perspective to pick up on medium- to long-term effects, particularly if the potential for those effects is not yet known.

Impact of interventions on child labour

Surveys are central to the research design of many impact evaluations, and constitute the primary data source for estimating programme effects, particularly in (quasi-)experimental settings. Evaluations cover programmes that have the reduction of child labour as a primary objective (for example, educational interventions) or a secondary objective (for example, social protection).

An important observation in relation to quantitative impact evaluations is that child labour (or children's work) tends to be loosely defined.

Studies – and their underlying surveys – are often designed without clear reference to either the international guidelines or the academic literature that problematizes dominant understandings of child labour or children's engagement in work (Chapter 2, this volume). This is certainly the case in relation to social protection, where evaluations of programmes and their effects on child labour rarely follow the ICLS resolution (Dammert et al, 2018). Notions such as child labour or children engaged in productive activities are used interchangeably, with some evaluations denoting any type of work as child labour. Some evaluations of programmes that focus squarely on reduction of child labour even suggest that there is no agreed definition of child labour and therefore adopt their own (for example, Andisha et al, 2014).

As described previously, there would appear to be scope for integrating participatory and creative methods into programme evaluations, while CLMRS may offer useful data and provide scope for collecting additional data about the impact of certification on children's engagement with hazardous or harmful work.

Mixed methods design

Next, we consider the use of mixed methods design in studies of child labour and children's work. We define mixed methods as the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in different phases of the research process (see Creswell et al, 2003). We exclude studies that only combine multiple qualitative or quantitative approaches. Also, for feasibility purposes, only studies that focused on child labour or children's engagement with work as a main point of interest were considered. A total of ten studies were identified to fit these criteria, mixing methods to triangulate findings across data sets, to use findings from one method to inform another (primarily qualitative informing quantitative methods) or to gather information using multiple rounds of data collection over a longer period of time.

Overall, mixed methods designs can be powerful as they combine strengths of various methods (Table 3.5). They often help to challenge perceptions and assumptions about children's work and thus can facilitate a more holistic understanding of CHW. The review of existing mixed methods studies shows that this potential has so far been largely under-exploited. The level of integration between the quantitative and qualitative components is generally weak: in the majority of these studies, these components were conducted separately and to a large degree independently.

With respect to the prevalence of CHW, mixed methods design offers real potential for generating more meaningful and reliable estimates. As noted in one study, national-level prevalence data were important to highlight the magnitude of child labour for advocacy work, but were of limited use

Table 3.5: Mixed methods designs: opportunities and challenges

Research focus	Opportunities	Challenges
Prevalence	Allow for providing representative estimates of prevalence and to contextualize the 'number'	Sequencing of methods often not used to full potential with survey methods often grounded in limited understandings of harmful work
Drivers and dynamics	Mix of information allows for estimating and contextualizing drivers and dynamics of harmful work	Lack of longitudinal mixed methods studies and data
Impact	Mix of information allows for assessing whether impacts do/do not exist and understanding why, combining insights about causal mechanisms primarily from the qualitative research component, and about prevalence primarily from the quantitative research component	Often there is a mismatch between understanding gleaned from quantitative and qualitative components due to different operationalizations of harmful work (although this can also be an opportunity to deepen understanding further)

Source: Authors

in guiding action and programmes, with local–level data and qualitative approaches being needed (Bhatia et al, 2020). It follows that mixed methods offer promising opportunities for estimating prevalence of CHW by first gaining more detailed insight into working conditions and then estimating prevalence using quantitative data. As noted earlier, various mixed methods studies used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain insights into the conditions in which children worked (Al Ganideh and Good, 2015; Bhatia et al, 2020). Nevertheless, few studies have made full use of the opportunity to preface survey data collection with in–depth qualitative data generation.

In terms of the drivers and dynamics of child labour, many pure quantitative studies neglect the heterogeneity of child labour, which can significantly reduce the usefulness of findings to inform policy and practice (Krauss, 2017). Mixed method designs can facilitate the identification of meaningful sub–groups of child workers and what influences their participation in work, thereby ensuring that research is more inclusive. Orkin (2012) employed a sequential, multi–phased mixed methods design to explore the drivers of both child labour participation and school attendance in Ethiopia. Qualitative methods with parents and children were used to identify characteristics of work and school that influenced participation, which were then used to inform and improve analysis using quantitative models of intra–household

bargaining with regards to children's time allocation to either school or labour. In other studies with sequential designs, the quantitative analysis proposed one or more potential drivers of child labour while the qualitative data provided details on the potential causal mechanisms behind the observed association (Shaffer, 2013). For example, based on an econometric analysis, Woldehanna et al (2008) found that children with highly educated mothers were more likely to work. Qualitative findings indicated that educated mothers were often more likely to work outside the home, thereby increasing domestic work for their children at home.

A considerable shortcoming, also observed in relation to other methods, is the lack of longitudinal data. This hampers the ability to explore what drives children's work over time, and limits the ability to understand the impact of children's work on, for example, children's health and wellbeing (Kuimi et al, 2018; Ibrahim et al, 2019). Young Lives is a notable exception to this and has undertaken various investigations into the impact of children's work. Several studies explore the impact of child labour on school attendance (Woldehanna et al, 2008; Orkin, 2012). Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative evidence, the authors found that work and school attendance may be successfully combined depending on the time each activity takes and their characteristics. A potential pitfall when it comes to mixing methods is that tools may be premised on different understandings of what constitutes child labour or harmful forms of work, thereby potentially limiting the extent to which findings can be combined and complement each other. At the same time, these alternative views can help facilitate a richer understanding.

A key observation is the overall lack of mixed methods studies on children's engagement with work. This seems to reflect the perennial and persistent divide between quantitative and qualitative researchers observed within development studies (Jones and Sumner, 2009). Findings suggest that quantitative studies still mainly focus on assessing the prevalence, drivers and impact of child labour. By contrast, qualitative and participatory research are more interested in children's experiences of work and the dynamics and complexities surrounding it. We also find that the majority of studies focus on obtaining larger scale data that can be contextualized with more qualitative methods. Relatively few studies adopt fully integrated designs or use child–centred and participatory methods in combination with quantitative methods.

Ethics of research with children

Research on children's economic activities must navigate the same basic ethical dilemmas as other research on or with children. Approaches to these dilemmas sit within wider discourses on childhood, intergenerational and institutional power dynamics, children's roles in research and the politics

of evidence. A fundamental challenge is posed by the category 'children', which by many official definitions – for example, any person under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 1989) – encompasses and extraordinary range of physical, mental and emotional capabilities, and social positions.

Informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, protocols for research on children's engagement with work must certainly address ethical issues including: transparency, confidentiality, informed consent, protection for vulnerable children, differences and inequalities between children, motivations for participation and expectations, withdrawal or opt out, intergenerational and peer power dynamics and social norms, and decision-makers views of children's opinions and evidence (Johnson et al, 1998; Johnson and West, 2018). A key question that can arise, for example in household surveys, is who is allowed to speak for children – for example, is the household head's view of the extent of a child's economic activity, or experiences of work-related harm, likely to be the same as the child's?

In addition, four broad dilemmas deserve particular attention. The first arises if the research is likely to touch on children's work activities that are illegal, or if issues of criminality (such as child trafficking or abuse) arise or are disclosed during the research. In the former case, it will be difficult to obtain institutional ethical approval. In the latter case, the roles and responsibilities of the researchers (who are neither police nor civil authorities) must be articulated, and supported by clear procedural guidelines including referral to support services when appropriate (see, for example, Johnson and West, 2022).

The second dilemma arises when images of children are used in the research itself and/or the communication around it (Wells, 2018). While it goes without saying that consent by children and parents is required, there are still challenges around the use of photos, even when the imagery is positive. Children are often keen to have their pictures and quotations included; however, this may lead to unforeseen risks to them or their families. Data management of visuals also raises important ethical questions (Johnson et al, 2013, pp 49–51).

The third dilemma is linked to the question of payment or other remuneration, particularly if children's participation means some loss of wages. This can entail a complex deliberation as it touches on power dynamics and perceptions of peers, adults and employers, as well as local research norms. As always, the possibility that payment will compromise the research process must be considered. Alternatives to cash payments might be appropriate.

Finally, there is an important dilemma around how vulnerability and agency are represented in the communication of research on children's work (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013; Johnson and West, 2018; Wells, 2018). Including children in data analysis and verification has been shown to provide

perspectives on their realities that may be otherwise missed, although adults may not recognize the validity of these perspectives (Johnson, 2017). In any case, confidentiality and anonymity must be respected in the selection of quotes and images.

Conclusion

This review leads to reflections about implications for future research on CHW. In light of the existing methodological landscape, there is real potential for future research to do something new, innovative and exciting from a methodological point of view. The review identifies two research gaps. First, despite the wealth of research on child labour and children's work, few studies use a truly integrated mix of methods. This integration would enable researchers to think beyond and challenge standard notions of children's engagement with work. Second, only a relatively small body of literature (across all research looking at forms of child labour and children's engagement with work) seems to be concerned with children's hazardous and harmful work. This literature is primarily informed by smaller-scale ethnographic and participatory research due to the complexities and sensitivities surrounding these types of work. Future research that integrates methods across disciplinary divides in more holistic ways can help to understand the breadth and depth of children's engagement with work – harmful and harmless.

In other words, it is now time to envisage a new generation of research on the prevalence, dynamics and impacts of children's work and harm. We argue that this research should be designed around nine principles:

1. Use fully integrated mixed methods designs, and make full use of secondary data to inform research design.
2. Link to, but challenge, standard definitions and mainstream understandings of child labour, including that which is hazardous and/or harmful.
3. Take a child-focused approach, giving space and weight to children's voices.
4. Be inclusive of a wide range of respondents.
5. Take context into account.
6. Account for temporality.
7. Build and build on local capacity.
8. Adhere to ethical principles and protocol.
9. Take time; allow for messiness.

As previously discussed, most of these are self-explanatory. Nevertheless, the second principle requires some further explanation. The reality is that international agencies (like the ILO), national policy makers, industry partners and most other actors continue to rely on mainstream understandings

and definitions of child labour, children's work and harm as articulated in the international conventions and instruments (see Chapter 2, this volume). While it is clear that these understandings and definitions leave much to be desired, research that seeks to bring more nuanced, context-sensitive perspectives into the policy process, and into the practice of for example certification schemes, must necessarily start on this well-established (and often aggressively defended) home ground.

Taken together, these design principles, should result in research that differs significantly from the bulk of research on children's engagement with work in a number of important ways. First, the mixed methods approach is more holistic and all-encompassing, fully integrating survey methods, qualitative and participatory methods and certification methods. Second, greater weight is given to qualitative and participatory methods. The complexities and sensitivities involved in research of children's harmful work merit the use of such methods, particularly in the early stages of the research and in relation to prevalence. Third, stronger linkages between methods should yield integrated mixed methods designs as opposed to purely sequential or parallel designs. The research process will be more iterative, data from qualitative and participatory methods feeding into survey design and findings from survey data feeding into ethnographic activities. Finally, methods are integrated across the research process to make full use of insights from individual methods and the expertise of respective researchers from design through to uptake of research findings. Crucially this requires ample allocation of time in order to make full use of learning opportunities created through the research.

Notes

[1]   Some countries also adopt their own definitions of hazardous child labour, such as Côte d'Ivoire.

[2]   The authors suggest that 'making' is more accurate than 'taking' here, in recognition that the visual image is framed by the young people.

[3]   The full list and SDG mapping can be found here: https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=e6ad0af940b44d94ac0f2f7fdc119f30

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