

Violence against children and employment outcomes in Uganda: what are the pathways to decent work for young people?

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Executive summary

- In Uganda, many young people face challenges in the transition into work, and once in work, are often exposed to environmental hazards, excessive hours or violence
- Our study examined the relationship between violence in childhood and adolescence and job-related outcomes.

Key findings

- Those who experience violence in childhood are more likely to have poorer work outcomes. This may be explained by experiencing poorer mental health and other early vulnerabilities.
- Cohort data from Luwero, Uganda, revealed that two in five young people experienced violence in the workplace in the past year. Workplace violence was high in all sectors, and especially for female domestic workers, and individuals who experience vulnerability in early life are at greater risk.
- Family and peer connections may help young people access work, and may also be created through work



Policy recommendations

- **Prevention of workplace violence:** Raise awareness of young people's rights at work and invest in interventions to reduce workplace violence, particularly in the informal sector
- **Protective measures:** Identify those at risk of dropping out of school and intervene early. Schools need to place a greater focus on mental health.
- **Promotion measures:** Build the life skills of young people in school or training to empower them to navigate violence.

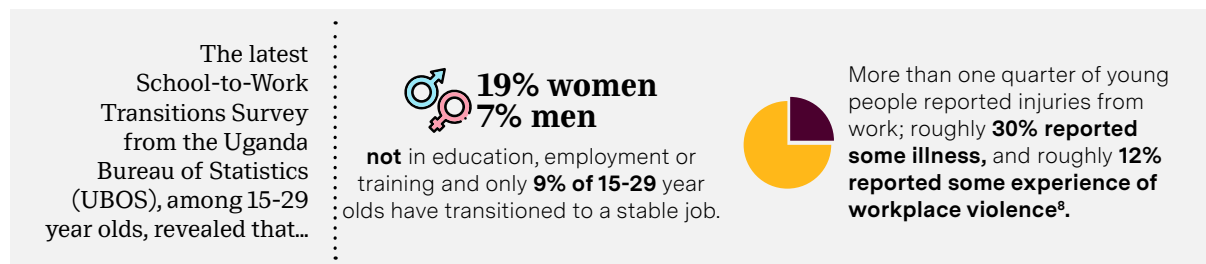


Introduction

Three in four Ugandans aged 18-24 years have experienced at least one type of violence - physical, sexual or emotional - during their childhood¹. Those who experience violence in childhood and adolescence are more likely to experience negative consequences in later life including physical and mental health problems, poorer educational outcomes, unhealthy behaviours, and future experience and perpetration of violence²⁻⁴. Studies from high-income countries find that people experiencing violence in childhood have lower employment, income, occupational status and job skill in later life⁵. However, Longitudinal evidence is lacking from low-and middle- income countries, where experiences of violence and the labour market may be different from high- income countries.



According to ILO estimates, globally over 47.5 million adolescents aged 15 to 17 years are exposed to environmental hazards, excessive hours or violence in work, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like Uganda. Young people are more likely than adults to be in low status, insecure and unstable work, and experience violence in the workplace^{6,7}. In Uganda, many young people face challenges in transitioning from school to work, and once in work, often experience poor quality of employment. Women are also more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment, earn lower wages and be unemployed⁸.



What are the pathways that lead to poor work outcomes?

We carried out a study to examine the relationship between **violence in childhood and adolescence** and **job-related outcomes**. In this study, we used existing data from international and Ugandan surveys, and also interviewed young people and others involved in employment and skills training in Uganda. A full description of the study methods can be found in a separate [methods brief](#).

Results and conclusions

1. Childhood violence leads to poor work outcomes

Analysis of the national Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS) across nine low-and middle-income countries revealed that those experiencing violence in childhood were more likely to be working in a hazardous sector. Data from a cohort in Luwero also showed that young people who experienced certain forms of violence in childhood were:

- Less likely to be in decent workⁱ
- More likely to experience workplace violence

2. There are gender differences in work outcomes

There are clear differences between young men and women across several outcomes related to work, including their [transition into work](#), type of work, and influence of experiencing violence.

Type of work: Young men and women work in different sectors. Cohort data from Luwero showed that the majority of young women work in domestic work (32%) and retail/trade (32%), while the majority of young men work in farming (33%) and manual work (28%). National VACS data revealed that young men were more likely to be working in a hazardous sector than young women in all nine countries.

Relationship between violence and work: There were more links between childhood violence and workplace violence for boys than girls.

- For young men, those experiencing most forms of violence were more likely to have experienced violence in the workplace.
- For young women, workplace violence was only more common among those who had been bullied.

There were different relationships between violence and decent work for boys and girls. School violence was important, but in different ways for boys and girls.

- Young men who had experienced violence from a teacher, and young women who had been bullied, were less likely to be in decent work.
- Young men who had experienced severe physical violence were less likely to be in decent work.

ⁱ We defined decent work as being in paid work, not working excessive hours, and not experiencing workplace violence. These were the best dimensions of decent work that we could capture with the available data.

3. Young people can experience violence in all types of workplaces

Cohort data from Luwero revealed that two in five young people experienced violence from employers and/or peers in the workplace in the past year. Violence was common in all work sectors, but was particularly high among domestic workers, with half of female domestic workers reporting violence perpetrated by an employer and one in five by a young person associated with the employer's household.

Speaking to young people across different workplaces also highlighted the abuse and physical dangers that they face, including sexual harassment and exploitation.

*“We are mocked at work even if you ably do that particular aspect on the job.”
“When it comes to the girls, some of them might want the job but the boss may want to sexually harass you yet you don’t want them to use you sexually and so you decide to leave and go home.”*



Young people described the value of life skills in navigating situations of workplace violence.

“Although I never received training in life skills, I am aware that in our everyday life, we meet challenges, but how do you overcome them? Say, you are abused by another young person, how do you respond?... In the institutions where we normally train from, such skills are not there but you can use your level of judgment and your home training to handle such situations”.



2 in 5 Young People



Two in five young people said that they had experienced violence from employers and/or peers in the workplace in the past year.

1 in 2 Young Girls



Domestic workers are particularly high risk, with 1 in 2 young girls employed in domestic work reporting violence in the workplace in the past year.

4. Mental health and other vulnerabilities may link childhood violence with poor work outcomes

Experiencing poorer mental health or other vulnerabilities may explain the relationship between violence in childhood and poor work outcomes.

Mental health

Poor mental health was both a consequence of violence and a risk factor for workplace violence and other negative work outcomes. Individuals with poor mental health in early adolescence were more likely to leave school early. In later adolescence, those with poor current mental health were much less likely to be in decent work and more likely to have experienced workplace violence in the past year.

Other vulnerabilities

Other vulnerabilities in early life, such as economic adversity, may play a role in later experiences of violence and poor workplace conditions. Vulnerabilities in early adolescence, including violence and economic adversity placed adolescents at increased risk of workplace violence in later adolescence. It may be that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have substantial economic pressure to accept any job, regardless of its quality, safety and likelihood of violence.

5. Connections may help access to work, and be created by work

Cohort data highlighted the importance of connection to family and schoolⁱⁱ in relation to work outcomes. For boys, those with a stronger connection to family and school were more likely to be in decent work. We did not find that connection to family or school was associated with work for girls which may be because working as a young woman is determined by other relationship markers.

Adolescents also described how being in work helps them to build a network across the country, which in turn helps them to cope with adversities.

“I have also moved around the country...I have related with different people from there...I have gone through hardships but now I can easily overcome them, I know how to deal with them.”



6. Improving the working environment

The workplace can be perceived as either a positive or negative environment. Negative aspects included being poorly paid particularly when starting a new job, but even once trained, some experienced poor or no pay, and pay cuts.

“I worked for him for four months but he would not pay me well and it was really hard for me to support myself as well as my mother.”



ii Connection to school was defined as: I feel that my teachers care about me, I feel safe in school, I feel like I belong at school, I like to spend time at school. Connection to family was defined as I feel that my parents/caregivers care about me, I feel safe at home, I feel like I belong at home, I like to spend time at home.

Adolescents also described working in poor conditions, sometimes with physically dangerous conditions and health hazards.

"I was once hit by a brick as we were loading and more to that I was hit by a spade, such kind of work is heavy and draining. I was not helped, I had to incur the costs for treatment myself."



"Whether it's night or day, you have to work, ... coldness affects me badly, I tried to explain but they couldn't listen to me."



Yet, the workplace can also be a positive environment, providing enough income to meet the needs of young people and the needs of their family.

"I can pay my own rent, buy myself clothes and in case I am sick I am able to go for treatment."



Young people and key informants also highlighted the benefit of having mentors in the workplace who support them in translating their knowledge into practice and further develop their skill set.

"They should have a coach at the workplace to help them utilise the skills properly. A mentor, a guide at the place of work, a team leader, the team spirit and that's all. Because they have the skills and applying them is the challenge and that is the only way you can do that." (Key informant)



Policy recommendations or implications

The following recommendations are derived from both study findings and discussions with members of the network which was formed to promote study ownership and uptake of findings.

Prevention of workplace violence

- Raise awareness among young people of their rights at work.
- Increase regulation and oversight, and enforce existing legislation in workplaces to address power imbalances.
- Invest in interventions to reduce workplace violence across all sectors. These should be tailored towards the diverse range of formal and informal workplaces, and targeted towards those with the highest prevalence of violence, such as domestic work, construction, mining and sex work. Given the links between violence in different settings (e.g. workplace, and home), interventions to reduce violence and challenge social norms across multiple settings are also needed.
- Prioritise informal workplaces for policy/intervention. Young people are most likely to work in informal sectors which are least likely to be covered by labour inspections, collective bargaining agreements or legislation.

Protective measures

- Ensure that structures are in place within schools to identify those at risk of dropping out of school, so that interventions (e.g. provision of financial support) can be put in place to support young people, and especially girls, to complete their education or skills training programmes.
- Schools need to place greater focus on the mental health of students to support them to stay in school and help to prevent longer-term impacts of experiencing violence.

Promotion measures

- Schools and training institutions should provide psychosocial skills and life skills training to help young people to cope with adversity, build resilience and protect themselves against any form of abuse.

References or useful resources

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