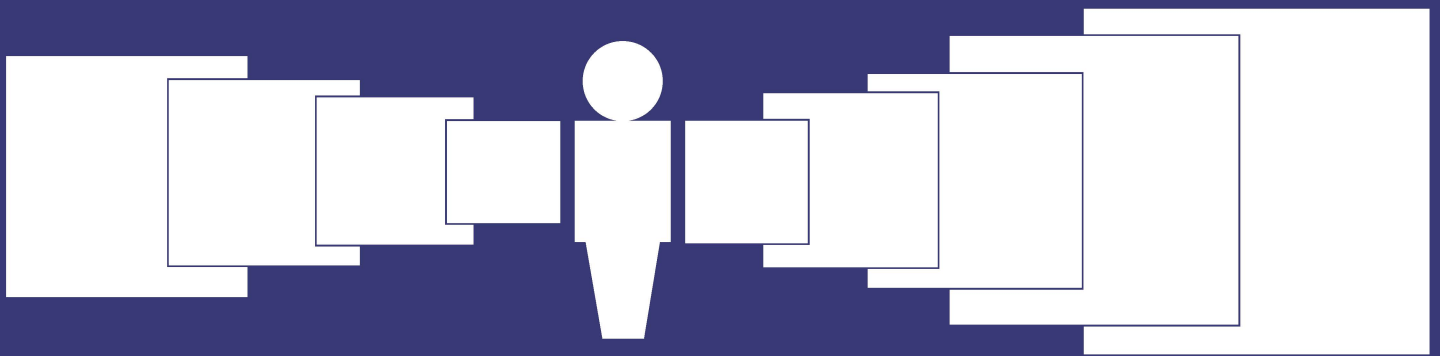


INVISIBLE GIRLS

**Child Domestic Work: A Complexity
Framework for Interventions**



Introduction

Global estimates suggest that there are approximately 17.2 million child domestic workers, the majority of whom are girls (1). Poverty, unemployment, conflict, orphanhood, gender norms and kinship traditions have led girls into domestic work, often as a financial coping strategy for poor families (2,3). For some households that host or employ child domestic workers, young helpers are often viewed as inexpensive or free, as in-kind services. Simultaneously, better off family members often take in children of poorer kin (5). In good employment situations, youth might attend school, save money, learn useful skills and gain a sense of autonomy (6,7). At the same time, many child domestic workers work extensive hours, are excluded from school (3), are socially isolated, and vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse (8). Importantly, children's circumstances can vary substantially, especially between regions and countries (9).

Main messages

- Child domestic work is an important coping strategy for poor families.
- Child domestic workers can be in harmful or safe conditions, which often vary by location.
- Child domestic work is centred in a system with multiple influential components, including local resources, the natal family, labour brokers, host households, public attitudes, skills training opportunities and labour market conditions.
- Interventions will be most effective if they take account of systems-thinking and the multiple and interacting components that affect child domestic work.

What is the current evidence on interventions for child domestic workers?

To date, few interventions have reached young domestic workers and proven to have positive effects. A recent review of interventions for child domestic workers identified only eight evaluations of five distinct intervention programmes and only one focused specifically on child domestic workers (10). Given the shortage of evidence and theory on interventions for child domestic work, this paper offers a framework that builds on complexity science to highlight the interacting social and economic spheres that influence child domestic work and indicates the intervention challenges and opportunities.

How can this framework be used to develop effective interventions for child domestic workers?

This framework suggests that challenges and opportunities for child domestic workers do not result from their individual choices and behaviour alone, but are set within communities, families and structures (12). Our framework describes the different spheres of the social ecology of child domestic work to suggest the diverse evidence we need to develop effective interventions. We highlight potential influences across these subsystems and suggest how multiple intervention components might interact to improve impact (11).

The framework suggests that to develop effective interventions, we need to take account of:

- a. how components of any system intersect to influence child domestic work;
- b. how components might respond to changing any of the conditions; and
- c. which combination of interventions might have the greatest capacity to interrupt or change the processes that result in harmful child domestic work.

The complexity framework for child domestic workers

This framework outlines eleven components that influence a child domestic worker's circumstances and outcomes and potential intervention points. At the centre of this framework are children in domestic work whose circumstances and outcomes are affected by multiple, interacting subsystems, such as the protection resources, labour recruitment system, social norms, and labour market conditions (see Figure 1).

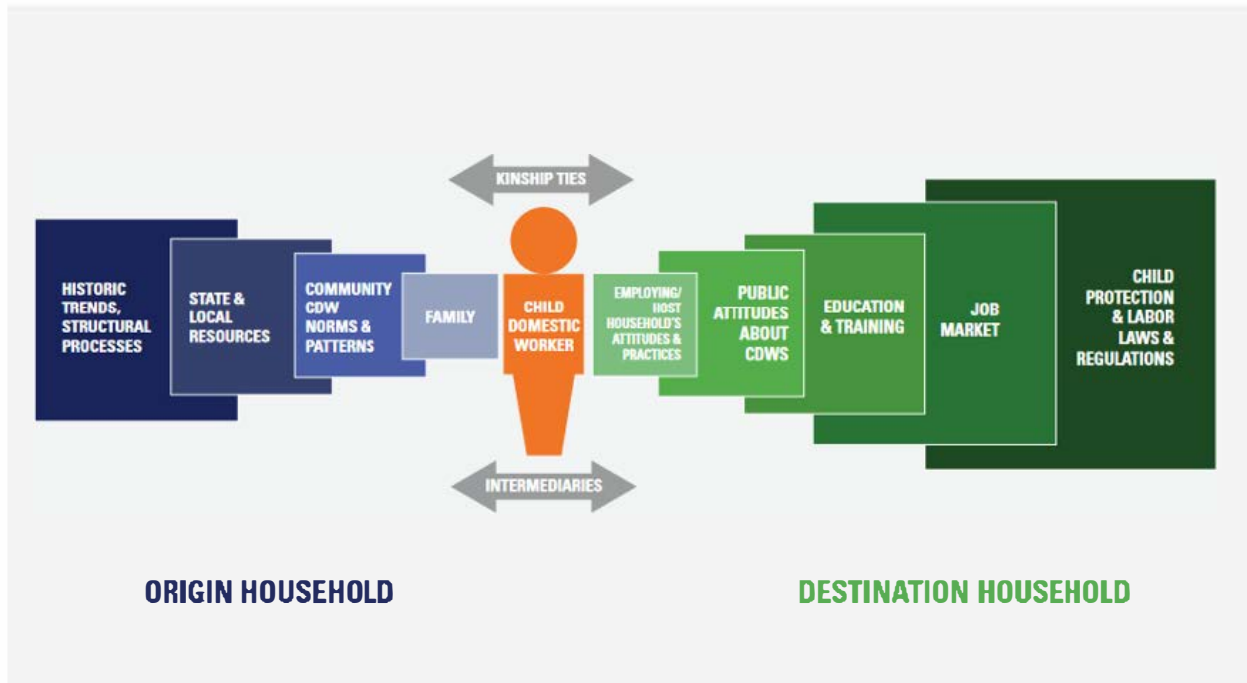


Figure 1: The complexity framework for child domestic workers

Domains at the origin household

Historic trends and structural processes

The outermost domain in the origin side, demographic and socioeconomic trends, influences livelihood opportunities and individual decision-making. Economic and social factors affect whether parents and care-takers make decisions to withdraw daughters or sons from school, engage them in family income-generating activities or send them elsewhere to work (19).

Labour markets, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), often have the double burden of a youth bulge and high youth

unemployment (20). This frequently leaves girls with the lowest paid, most demeaning work, particularly rural or ethnic minority girls (21). Yet, child domestic work has been, and remains, an important resource for many families. To develop relevant interventions, it is necessary to understand and anticipate emerging socio-economic trends, including safe livelihood opportunities for young people.

State and local resources

The second domain on the origin side highlights the role of state and non-state resources on child labour, such as child protection or cash-transfer schemes. Studies on cash transfer programmes often indicate that school participation may increase, but that school engagement and child labour are not mutually exclusive (22,23)(24)(25). Findings on microfinance and asset transfer programmes

indicate some have increased child labour, including hazardous labour (26,27). Recent research suggests that some economic empowerment activities can increase child labour, particularly in cases of home-based entrepreneurship (28). At a policy level, active labour market policies, such as skills-building, vocational training, and on-the-job training, may promote youth workforce engagement (29).

Community child domestic work norms and patterns

Traditional attitudes and practices make child domestic work an accepted financial strategy in many contexts. Poor families may rely on kinship ties or more formal pathways (e.g., independent brokers) to place children with wealthier relatives or host households (17). Placing daughters in private households as domestic help is often considered a safer, healthier option than other forms of work, such as farm work or factory labour. Moreover, child labour studies show that parents consider 'learning a trade' to be a beneficial means of helping a child develop good working habits and useful domestic skills (30). These patterns may also be generational, as a six-country study by Gamlin et al. indicated

a strong tendency for one or both parents of child domestic workers to have been domestic workers themselves (3).

Interventions to shift normative attitudes about child domestic work will benefit from particular attention to those children who are in safe, healthy circumstances (at home or in host households) to indicate what is protective. Interventions can draw on examples of behaviour change interventions that have proven successful addressing other complex social problems, such as community actions on violence against women (31) and school-based violence against children (32).

Origin family

Many households in LMICs live amidst enormous socio-economic inequalities, few material resources (33) and limited access to local income opportunities or government-sponsored social assistance programmes (34). Estimates indicate that, depending on the location, paid child labour may contribute between 10 percent and 20 percent to family income (35). Disadvantaged families also send children into domestic service to alleviate their own household's financial or caring burden (6). Young people may look to address their own situation of poverty or neglect by seeking domestic work opportunities away from home (36). Decisions about engaging youth in child domestic work are often encouraged by offers from local intermediaries. For instance, it is not uncommon for former or current domestic workers to recruit children from place of origin for employing households where

they work. Parents or caregivers may be particularly enticed by advance payments on their child's future work, and children simultaneously understand their filial obligations (37).

Interventions to foster family decision-making that prioritises child protection will have to consider household economic constraints, local gender and socio-economic norms, traditional kinship practices and social protection provisions. Importantly, intervention development efforts will benefit from evidence on cases of 'positive deviance' (38), or instances where families and girls facing financial or social challenges identify other strategies to protect the child's and family's future.

Domains situated between the origin and destination

Kinship ties and labour intermediaries

'Kinship ties' and 'labour intermediaries' are positioned as arrows between the place of origin and destination to represent their role in linking the child to the host or employing household. The placement of young people in domestic work commonly takes place either via family relations or via labour intermediaries (formal and informal). In kinship placements, the transfer of youth between households relies on family or social relationships. It is not uncommon for informal placement arrangements to be viewed as adoption or fostering situations in which wealthier families agree to support poorer relatives. Recruitment of child domestic workers can also occur through more formal brokers or 'word of mouth' (39).

To date, there is an evidence gap about individuals who broker child domestic worker placement arrangements, especially compared to overseas recruitment (40). This evidence gap likely reflects the informality of both the recruitment and employment arrangements. There still appears to be very few, if any, interventions designed to address intermediation for child domestic workers, despite the important negotiating role they might play to determine the terms and conditions of young people's employment.

Domains at the destination household

Employing or hosting households

The placement 'employing household' indicates both the direct control that these households have over child domestic workers' circumstances and how household practices are condoned by local attitudes and practices. Currently, very few studies have explored the perspectives of destination households, but literature suggest that hosts often see themselves as honouring socially normative obligations by taking in a child (4). Nonetheless, most youth are not treated like the family's children and few young workers have feelings of 'belonging'. Employing or host households often adopt the view that by providing better circumstances than the child would have in their natal home, they have created sufficiently beneficial situations for the child and these benefits will be repaid in household labour.

Extremely little evidence is available on interventions that target or involve host households or employers of child domestic workers (41). A few interventions have been targeted for adult workers, for example, the 'My Fair Home Campaign' by the International Labour Organization and the International Domestic Workers Federation, which encouraged employers to sign a pledge committing to principles of decent work (42). Similarly, an initiative in Dhaka created employer groups whose role was to persuade other employers to allow their child domestic workers to attend a class or participate in educational or training opportunities outside the household (43).

Public attitudes

This domain represents the social and cultural norms or belief consensus that establish and influence the treatment of child domestic workers. Host households' treatment of their young workers and young workers' perceptions of what are acceptable tasks and conditions generally follow local judgements and practices. While there has been considerable international debate about whether child domestic work should be considered among the 'worst forms of child labour' (unacceptable in any circumstance) or 'hazardous labour' (harmful to the health of a child), determinations about what comprises 'hazardous child labour' are left to the discretion of individual countries (44). How the state responds or does not respond to different forms of child labour can sustain or deter customary practices (41).

Although 'beneficial' examples of child domestic work receive very little international attention, evidence from Gamlin et al.'s six-country study

shows that conditions can differ widely between the number of working hours, days off, types of tasks, payment, physical punishment and whether the child attends school (3).

Interventions to shift the social contract related to child domestic work are likely to require context-specific messages. Change mechanisms that advance public consensus on generally agreed standards of safe, fair situations, alongside general disapproval of poor treatment may create a revised, shared understanding of beneficial versus harmful child domestic work. Whether host families agree to allow young workers to attend training or education activities will depend substantially on the available opportunities to stay in school, undertake vocational training or other life-skill-building activities.

Education, vocational and business training programmes

The education and vocational training opportunities depicted on the destination side represent the potential skills-building interventions that might reach and benefit young domestic workers. The most viable pathways to decent and sustainable livelihoods are believed to be through better education and vocational skills training for jobs that will pay a living wage, combined with support to gain 'soft skills', such as communications (45). A 2013 systematic review and meta-analyses focusing specifically on evaluations of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for young people in low- and middle- income countries found that among the limited interventions, those that aimed to influence a youth's entry into formal employment and their monthly earnings (i.e., versus overall paid employment or self-employed earnings) were most effective in improving employment prospects (46). A 2018 systematic review of active labour market programmes that examined the impact of youth employment interventions and labour market outcomes for youth globally found that programmes targeting the most disadvantaged youth were most effective, particularly on earnings outcomes, and there were slightly larger effects

among young women versus men (45). The types of programmes that had the greatest impact on employment and earnings were interventions that promoted entrepreneurship and offered skills training, particularly compared to employment services and subsidised employment.

In LMICs, where formal wage employment is often limited, training for self-employment and entrepreneurship is considered an important strategy (47). Ultimately, to foster a youth's successful engagement in income-generating activities, the programme must be appropriate for the selected target group, offer communications and life skills, and provide vocational skills that are linked to those demanded by the labour market (48). For interventions to reach and make a difference for child domestic workers, interventions must take account of the different learning needs and preferences of young workers. Importantly, interventions must be designed in ways that are acceptable to the host or employing families, for example, at times and in locations that suit the household circumstances.

Labour market conditions

The second largest sphere on the destination side represents the labour market conditions, and the importance of knowing the viable livelihood options for young workers. While young people's livelihood opportunities are dependent on the market conditions, simultaneously, child labour appears to affect the market conditions, perhaps over generations.

Interventions to improve young people's vocational skills and job-readiness will rely on evidence of which occupations or trades are readily available,

safe, and sufficiently well-paid. They will also need to consider skill sets that can reasonably be attained by young people with relatively limited education or market-valued skills. Moreover, given the dominance of the informal labour market, girls especially, will benefit from activities that increase their confidence, independence, financial management and decision-making.

Child labour and child protection instruments, laws and regulations

The largest domain on the destination side represents the international instruments, national laws and local regulations related to child domestic work. The main international instruments addressing child domestic work are from the International Labour Organization, such as the Convention and Recommendation concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, 2011 (C.189) (ILO, 2012), the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (C.138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (C.182) (49). Domestic work is often excluded from labour and employment legislation. National

regulation on child domestic work remains very limited due in part to perceived conflicts with privacy laws, inherent difficulties regulating informal sector activities, and assumptions that children are well-protected in private households (50). While it is tempting to prevent child domestic work by applying strict laws against child labour, it is also important not to punish poor families, but create positive incentives for parents. When considering policy and legislative interventions, careful considerations must be made to prevent inadvertent harm that strict or weak restrictions might create.

Recommendations

What should be taken into account for a robust intervention or support programme for child domestic workers?

Historic trends and structural processes

Historically, child domestic work has been an important resource for many families in low- and middle-income countries. Interventions that take global and local demographic and socio-economic trends into account will have the greatest potential to meet young workers' needs.

State and local resources

The most studied interventions are those that aimed to prevent child domestic work through cash transfer, microfinance, and economic empowerment programmes. These programmes produced mixed, and sometimes negative, results that require further exploration. Unless these strategies can be scaled up to reach all households at risk of child labour, families will likely continue to rely on child domestic work as a financial coping strategy.

Community child domestic work norms and patterns

To shift normative attitudes around child domestic work, interventions can draw on behaviour change interventions that have proven successful in addressing other complex social problems, such as violence against women and school-based violence against children. Additionally, particular attention should be paid to understand why some child domestic workers in safe, healthy circumstances versus those who are not.

Kinship ties and labour intermediaries

New interventions are needed to address intermediation for child domestic workers to improve negotiations that support the needs of children in domestic work (e.g., school attendance or training, safe working conditions, limited hours).

Origin family

Interventions that prioritise child protection must consider household economic constraints, local gender and socio-economic norms, traditional kinship practices and social protection provisions. Intervention development efforts will benefit from evidence on cases of 'positive deviance', or instances where families and girls facing financial or social challenges identify better strategies to protect the child's and family's future.

Public attitudes

Interventions to shift attitudes towards child domestic workers are likely to require context-specific messages and be targeted to specific groups (e.g., employers, brokers, children). Shifting the social contract by advancing public consensus on safe, fair situations, alongside disapproving of poor treatment may create a revised, shared understanding of beneficial versus harmful child domestic work. Whether host families agree to allow young workers to attend training or education activities will depend substantially on the available opportunities to stay in or return to school, undertake vocational training or other life-skill-building activities.

Educational, vocational, and business training programmes

The programme must be appropriate for the selected target group, offer communications and life skills, and provide vocational skills that are linked to those demanded by the labour market. Interventions must take account of the different learning needs and preferences of young workers. Importantly, interventions must be designed in ways that are amenable to the host or employing families, for example, at time slots and in locations that would be accepted by the household.

Labour market conditions

Interventions to improve young people's vocational skills and job-readiness will rely on evidence about which occupations or trades are readily available, safe, and sufficiently well-paid. They will also need to consider skill sets that can reasonably be attained by young people with relatively limited education or market-valued skills. Moreover, given the dominance of the informal labour market, girls especially will benefit from activities that increase their confidence, independence, financial management and decision-making.

What evidence gaps require further research to support child domestic workers?

Kinship ties and labour intermediaries

Intermediaries may play a key role in determining the terms and conditions of young people's employment. More evidence is needed on the individuals who broker child domestic worker placements and new interventions are needed to address intermediation for child domestic workers.

Employing or hosting households

Extremely little evidence is available on interventions that target or involve host households or employers of child domestic workers, as the few that exist focus on employers of adult workers.

What else should policymakers consider when determining the needs of child domestic workers?

Child labour and child protection instruments, laws and regulations

While it is tempting to prevent child domestic work by applying strict laws against child labour, it is also important not to punish poor families, but create positive incentives for parents. When considering policy and legislative interventions, careful consideration must be made to prevent inadvertent harm that strict or weak restrictions might create.

Discussion & Implications

This paper showed the importance of systems thinking, which indicated that child domestic work is embedded amidst multiple influences and because of the intertwined nature of this ecosystem, the most promising interventions will be those that recognise and act on various levels (51). Complexity perspectives can point to non-linear causal pathways at multiple levels that should be targeted and in what combination. And with strong data, computational tools can test intervention theories and their pathways and outcomes—prior to making costly intervention investments.

Perhaps most influential in the child domestic work social ecosystem, but sometimes neglected, are young workers' perspectives about the types of help they need and want and how they prefer to receive any assistance or training. While child domestic workers can be notoriously difficult to reach, they are nonetheless well-positioned to guide the development of interventions that will be feasible, acceptable and potentially effective to meet their hopes and expectations. Research methods that include child-centred approaches and co-production techniques have proven useful to engage young people in the conceptualisation and development of youth-centred interventions (54).

Ultimately, future intervention-focused research should seek to answer questions such as:

- Who should be included (and who will be excluded) in our target population (e.g., child domestic workers, employers, brokers, etc.)?
- What are modifiable determinants of household attitudes and treatment of child domestic workers?
- What are the safest, most effective ways to reach and engage our target group with an intervention?
- What contextual factors will influence the delivery, uptake and effects of different intervention designs and how?
- What are possible adverse consequences of different interventions?

While this paper highlights the complexity of addressing child domestic work, more importantly, it points towards strategies to develop effective interventions that take account of the multiple and potentially complementary opportunities for change to improve the lives of the millions of 'invisible' children currently in domestic work.

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