



**HAL**  
open science

# How do Working Children Feel About Their Lives? And Why it Matters That We Know

Catherine Pellenq, Susan Gunn, Ali Mohammed Vaqas

► **To cite this version:**

Catherine Pellenq, Susan Gunn, Ali Mohammed Vaqas. How do Working Children Feel About Their Lives? And Why it Matters That We Know. Springer. Tiliouine, H., Benatuil, D., Lau, M. K. W. Handbook of Children's Risk, Vulnerability and Quality of Life. Global Perspectives, Springer Nature, Switzerland, 2022., Springer, pp.254-267, 2022, 978 3 031 01782 7. hal-04128688

**HAL Id: hal-04128688**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04128688v1>**

Submitted on 20 Jun 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **How do Working Children Feel About Their Lives?**

### **And Why it Matters That We Know**

\*Catherine Pellenq, PhD\*, Susan Gunn, MPH, PhD\*\*, Mohammed Vaqas Ali, PhD\*\*\*

\* Catherine Pellenq: Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Apprentissages en Contexte,  
Grenoble Alpes University, France

\*\* Susan Gunn: International Labour Organisation (Rt'd), Geneva, Switzerland

\*\*\* Mohammed Vaqas Ali: Forman Christian College, Lahore, Pakistan

*A child's story ...*

*"I am Sarswati. I am 15 years old. I dropped out of school at grade 6 when my family became so poor we could no longer afford two meals a day. This is the second year I have come with my father to the brick kilns and I plan to come again next year. I must, because this way my little sister can go to school. My day is usually like this: I wake up at 2 AM and mold bricks using a flashlight for light until the day breaks. I keep doing this until 11 AM and then go quickly to make lunch for my father and me. Then I take a nap, do the dishes and other housework and at 1 PM start to work again. This time, my task is stacking up the bricks that have been drying. At 7 PM I go back to cook dinner and go to bed about 9 PM. Yes, I know that some people say this work is dangerous, but it's okay for me, because the other workers take care of us. The only time I got hurt was when I dropped a brick on my bare foot." (ILO, 2014).*

Yet when we analyzed Sarswati's psychosocial profile, it tells a different story. The heavy sense of obligation for her family's welfare was creating a serious level of depression, anxiety and stress. Most of all, Sarswati does not feel she has a choice and the future looks bleak.

It is not only adults who work, nor the youthful population of underdeveloped countries. Everywhere in the world, from household chores to steady jobs, work is part of the life experience of children. Depending on the conditions and nature of this work activity and the age of the young person involved, it may be classified as child labour, youth employment, or just ‘helping out’, but regardless of its designation there are health risks involved. Most countries have ratified international agreements against child labour<sup>1</sup> because people recognize that work can be dangerous and one naturally recoils at images of children slaving in the hot sun instead of sitting in school. But there has been a tendency to look at the risks through an adult occupational and safety health (OSH) lens, focusing on hazards which are physical, observable, and perhaps more typical of the workplaces common in industrial societies.

We know comparatively little about the costs to the mind and body of a person in the full throes of growth and maturation who is being exposed to industry’s recent chemical wonders or to repetitive, mind-numbing tasks, or to constant humiliation (Sudhinaraset & Blum, 2010). We know little because it has been a challenge to measure such impacts ... much easier to dispense with the problem by legislating that children should not work. Making work illegal, off-limits, however, does not solve the problem, as older children (above 15 years of age; 14 in some countries) are usually of legal age for a regular job, young children are often engaged in some form of household support, and those in between want to work a few hours a week outside of school for pocket money and experience. An estimated 62.088 million children, age 5-17, are doing age-appropriate work and household chores. On the other hand, 160 million children are doing work that is considered child labour in that it poses a potential threat to their health and well-being (ILO & UNICEF, 2021).

We must remember too, that a lens focused on dangers, risks, and vulnerabilities gives us only a blurry image, if any, on well-being. What is the other side of the coin? What offers a child strength, support, and solace?

This chapter offers an example from the brick manufacturing sector to illustrate the value of eliciting the children’s own view of their mental and physical state and the situation in which they find themselves. It shows how this child-oriented (rather than adult-oriented) perspective on risks and well-being can be measured on a population basis and, as such, how it can be the entry point to more appropriate policies, whether of protection or prohibition. It argues that, for project and policy guidance, the methods for assessing children’s psychosocial well-being

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

are not the same as those required for diagnosis and treatment of pathology, which are individualistic by necessity. Instead, these are methods which can and must be incorporated in routine surveys or preparatory studies for large-scale projects. Through them, we can gain a broader picture of how a particular group of children feel, and we avoid making interventions that, to our eyes, give them a “better” childhood but which, to their eyes, are not helpful at all.

## Background

Some of the earliest Conventions adopted by the Member States of the International Labour Organization (ILO) aimed at protecting children from abusive work.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it was the visual and literary depictions of the horrors to which child miners or factory workers in Europe were subjected that contributed to calls for universal rules or labour standards in general. In these Conventions, which serve as guides to national laws, health is embedded in the very definition of child labour, for example, “work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years”.<sup>3</sup> In the non-binding Recommendation (R.190) that accompanies the most recent of the child labour Conventions (C.182), these risks are spelled out in some detail:

- (a) “work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse;
- (b) work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces;
- (c) work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads;
- (d) work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health;
- (e) work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer.”

While the work which poses physical risks is laid out clearly enough and relatively easy to identify, what is the “psychological abuse” that (a) above refers to? How is it determined? There has been a tendency to shrug and say “you’ll know it when you see it” but all too often, it is not seen. Children who work behind closed doors as maids, for example, one of the most common forms of child work, may not suffer physical harm, but social isolation can cause them

---

<sup>2</sup> ILO Convention No. 5 - Minimum Age (Industry), 1919; ILO Convention No. 7 - Minimum Age (Sea), 1920; ILO Convention No. 10 - Minimum Age (Agriculture), 1921; ILO Convention No. 33 on Minimum Age (Non-Industrial Employment), 1932.

<sup>3</sup> ILO Convention No. 138, Article 3

a great deal of mental harm. In fact, children are often sought for work – by parents as well as outside employers – because they are compliant, wanting to please, fearful of what might happen if they did not work – which leaves the impacts experienced by the young person largely invisible. For this reason, ILO Recommendation 190 calls for special attention to be given to “the problem of hidden work situations, in which girls are at special risk”.

To understand, then, whether child workers are experiencing “psychological abuse” and are therefore victims of child labour, a risk assessment cannot confine itself to safety and health hazards as is typically done with adult workers, but must also include measures of children’s psychological development and functioning. Since the areas where child labour occurs most frequently are areas where health or research professionals tend to be less frequent, the assessment tools and methods also need to be practical.

Meeting such requirements may seem daunting but the rewards can be extremely important. There is good reason to suspect that, in the case of children, psychological risks can be equally or even more important than physical ones due to the fact their brains, intellectual capacity, and social skills are all in a stage of rapid development. In addition, government policy and parental decisions are based on what they understand is the likelihood that children will be hurt or alternatively, their life chances enhanced, by the activities in which the children are engaging. If the information that policy-makers and parents have is incomplete, and is limited to whether or not a work situation might cause injury, for example, their actions will reflect this and the children will not receive the protection they need.

Culture has traditionally been a reliable guide for families to know what is good or bad for children. It offers powerful arguments in favour of child work: training in technical skills, entry to future employment, development of confidence and desirable habits, and possibly provision of food and shelter as well. But tradition is no longer so reliable in a rapidly globalizing world where there are new stresses, new toxic materials, new forms of work (think of e-waste recycling) and work in which new, non-traditional skills are required.

Add, then, to this lack of relevant and up-to-date information, the powerful forces of poverty. We tend to assume that putting a child to work is not a matter of decision but of necessity. True, poverty is certainly a dominant factor but it is important not to forget that there are others, gender discrimination being one example. Addressing poverty and the other root causes of child labour is extremely important, but long roots take a long time to extricate, whereas working children are facing risks now. It can be argued that what is most urgent is not trying to determine the type and relative strength of the different causal factors of child work, but

rather to determine the type and relative strength of the risks involved in the work the children are doing.

In short, whether work will either exacerbate the conditions under which a child lives or ameliorate them, whether parents will be convinced that their children should or should not work, whether governments will decide to proscribe or allow a particular type of work for persons under 18, the full range of risks and advantages – psychological as well as physical – must be known.

### **The Challenges of Measuring Physical and Psychological Risks**

What is OK or not OK for children to do? Commonly accepted standards of risk have been developed for a wide range of chemical and physical exposures. They allow us to say that concentrations above a certain level have been shown to affect health and should be avoided. However, these standards are only for adults and only for physical risks. There are no such risk standards for persons under 18 years of age,<sup>4</sup> nor should there be, given that children have different vulnerabilities at different points in their development. Hence, governments have resorted to using age as the common standard for laws – children of the age to go to school (normally 5-15 years), should be in school, not at work.

In spite of the fact that there are no health risk standards to guide the decision on whether children should work or not, the methods do exist for at least measuring the physical risks, and this is occasionally done. (These are not done with the intention of establishing standards for children, but of highlighting where interventions might be needed). On the other hand, the methods for measuring psychological risks and impacts of work relevant to children have received very little attention. The best known work has been with the comparatively small and specific populations of child soldiers and children exploited in sex work, with the notable exception of a significant study on child domestic workers (Hesketh et al., 2012)

Our objective, therefore, has been to develop, test and validate methods of measuring psychological risks and impacts of work on young persons, and to thereby demonstrate the importance of the information which can be gained. The methodological criteria we set were that the tools could be used (a) cross-culturally, (b) with children of the age range 11-17,<sup>5</sup> (c)

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) for chemical exposures and Biological Exposure Indices (BEIs).

<sup>5</sup> children within this age group have likely already been working for some time and have the maturity to reflect on their experience and express themselves accordingly.

with groups of adequate size that statistical inferences could be drawn, and (d) by persons who were not psychological professionals.

We chose the construction sector, specifically handmade brick manufacture, for our initial focus. Not only is it large, employing an estimated 5 million children in over 20 countries, but it is growing, thanks to the demand for bricks in the rapidly growing cities of the developing world. In South Asia overall, almost 20 percent of the total work force employed at brick kilns is under 18 years of age (Khan & Lyon, 2015). However, this ratio is not equally distributed across the region. For example, it is estimated that 30% of the brick workers in Nepal are children (ILO, 2014a) and in some Pakistan brick factories, a majority of the workers are under 18 years of age (ILO, 2013). In Afghanistan, some children as young as 4 years old were observed working in the brick factories (ILO, 2015a). In Bangladesh, 86% of the children were working over 8 hours per day (ILO, 2014b).

This sector is important for another reason as well: like waste-picking, this is an occupation of the poorest of the poor – people who, due to debt, drought, war, or other dislocation have exhausted all other options to put food on the table. Because of this extreme poverty, one must be very careful with interventions so as not to inflict greater harm on people who have no cushion. This is why it matters to have the children's subjective view of their situation. They see the world and their work through very different eyes than ours.

The study was carried out in four countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan – with a total of 915 child brick workers, and a comparison group of 638 children from the same areas and socio-economic level who did not do this work. The psychosocial component was one part of a larger occupational health study aimed at understanding the actual environmental, physical, economic, educational, and social situation of the children so that appropriate assistance could be provided. (ILO, 2015b)

### **The Research Methodology**

The tool that was developed for the psychosocial component is called the “Instrument for Psychosocial Assessment of Working Children” (IPAW). The questions are answered using a visual device corresponding to a Likert scale of four options. Some questions relate to the work situation, others to general psychological development and functioning. (For further information on the design, process and sources used in developing the IPAW, see Hofman & Gunn, 2014).

The IPAW draws on three bodies of literature: (1) Martin Woodhead's conceptual frameworks identifying the multiple ways, both positive and negative, in which work is likely to affect



children's psychological well-being (Woodhead, 2004), (2) studies in child development and child psychology, such as the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) as well as instruments which have been used with discrete populations, such child soldiers (Jordans et al, 2008), and (3) measures for assessing psychological well-being of adult workers. It was expected that the latter two would yield appropriate instruments which had already been validated. However, after testing with child workers, it was clear that while these helped to define the areas of inquiry, there were substantial gaps,<sup>6</sup> requiring that a new instrument be developed (Leka and Jain, 2011).

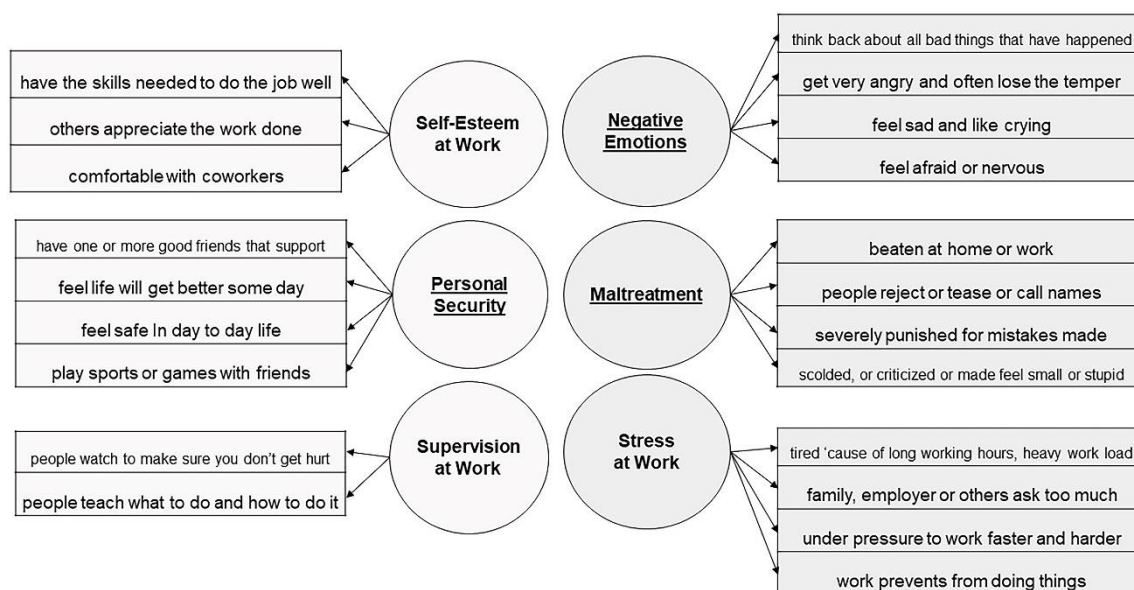
The IPAW, currently 38 items, has been demonstrated to have the properties and metrics of a reliable assessment tool (Pellenq & al., 2019). These items are structured into different factors which are capable of revealing and confirming the multiple psychosocial dimensions of child workers' well-being (Pellenq & al., 2021). The psychological domains they reflect are: Stress at work, Self-esteem at work, Supervision at work, Negative emotions, Personal security, and sense of Maltreatment and abuse (see Figure 1). These domains were found to be the ones that are both, those most relevant for working children and the minimum necessary for understanding the children's subjective well-being. Although there are additional domains that could be included, there is a trade-off between what can be practically included in a child's interview along with all the other demographic and social information required.

### **Figure 1**

---

<sup>6</sup> Existing instruments tended to be skewed toward western or industrial settings, adult stressors (such as alcohol use, family/work balance), or psychological pathology. Widely-used assessments for children did not take adequate account either of the work variables or of children's subjective well-being which recent research is suggesting is of key importance (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014; Rees & Dinisman, 2014).

### Factorial Structure of the IPAW



Note: Positive factors in light grey; Negative factors in dark grey; Underlined factors are used for comparison with controls

Of these six dimensions of subjective well-being, three are related to the working conditions of the children (Stress, Self-esteem and Supervision at work) and the questions related to these are administered just to working children. The other three (Negative Emotions, Personal Security and Maltreatment) focus on general psychological functioning and in a comparative study such as this, are administered to both the study population and the control or comparison group. Because this paper reports on how children who work in brick factories differ from those who are not engaged in this work, the following analysis is limited to these three latter factors.

Of particular concern in this paper is the factor “personal security” which is directly related, in its negative connotations, to the concept of perceived risk and vulnerability and in its positive connotations to a sense of ease and comfort in the environment.

### Results and Their Implications

The results of the physical health component of the larger occupational health study more or less confirmed the expected risks and impacts, which were primarily musculo-skeletal strain from carrying too much weight, and secondarily, injuries to feet, legs and hands from dropping bricks or stumbling over them (Graves et al., 2014). It showed, also, that parents and brick kiln owners were largely aware of and concerned about the risks to the children and took measures to reduce the risk of injury, such as ensuring that the children were kept a safe distance from the burning kilns. Given these findings, it would not be unreasonable for parents to conclude

that the infrequent injuries were not so serious as to offset the important contribution that the children made in supporting the adults' work and rendering it more efficient by, for example, turning the bricks to dry in the sun. Nor would it be unreasonable for policy-makers to decide that there was insufficient evidence to justify brick-making as a "hazardous occupation" which would make it off-limits for anyone under 18 years of age. Taking account, too, that many of these families were fleeing war or forced into such labour through years, sometimes generations, of accumulated debt, it might seem to them more humane not to put undue and unenforceable restrictions on them by declaring all aspects of brick manufacturing as "hazardous child labour". What was not expected, however, were the disturbing results gained from the psychosocial component of the study, and in particular, how the children viewed their situation (Pellenq et al., 2019, 2021).

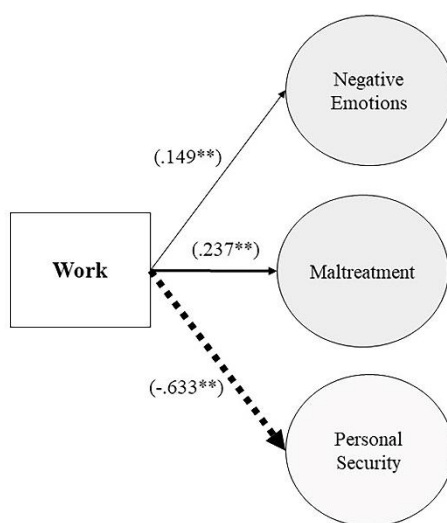
In this chapter, we report on the role that work and schooling plays in the lives of the children working in the brick-kilns of the four countries, and then present new evidence on the effects of gender and age and how these differ among the countries studied.

### *Working Children vis-à-vis Their Peers*

We find marked differences between how child workers say they feel, and how children who do not work in the brick factories say they feel. The brick workers evidence a higher prevalence of negative emotions (e.g., sadness and fear), a greater sense of being mistreated or bullied, and a substantial feeling of personal insecurity. In the statistical analysis, being a child worker is a powerful predictor of negative outcomes (see figure 2).

### **Figure 2**

*Effect of Work on Three Dimensions of Well-being (standardized coefficient  $\beta$ ). Adapted from Pellenq et al.2021.*



Note: Solid arrows indicate positive links, dotted arrows indicate negative links

\*\*  $p < .00$

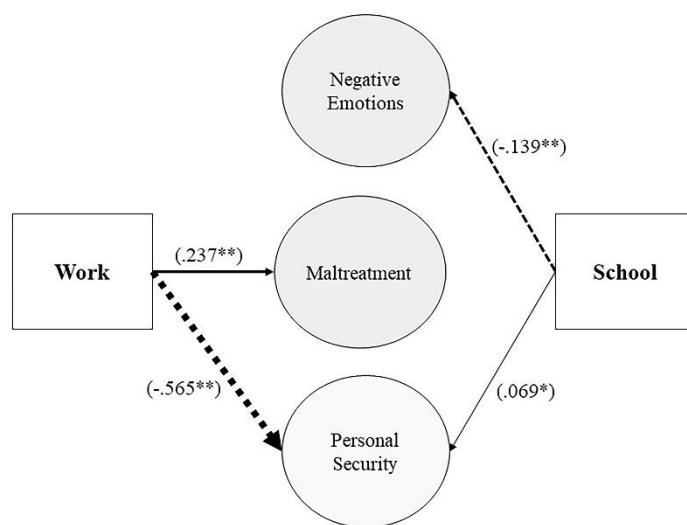
We expected that work might have a deleterious effect on certain factors, but we were not prepared for the magnitude of the effects, especially on the factor Personal Security. There appears to be relatively little documentation on this in the occupational health literature, suggesting that perhaps Personal Security is more salient for child workers than adult workers. Support for this interpretation comes from recent research which provides evidence that security is an especially important dimension for children in general (Bhomi, 2021 and Tonon et al., 2021).

### ***The Effect of Education***

Some child brick kiln workers are currently attending school or had done so previously. A surprising finding was that, when schooling is taken into account in the analysis, it effectively ‘erases’ the negative effects of the work variable on the child’s sense of insecurity. It also reduces the effect of work on fear and other, so-called negative emotions. These data indicate that simply the fact of attending school has a mediating effect on the child workers’ psychosocial well-being, reducing or deleting the negative impact of work.

### **Figure 3**

*Effect of Work and School on Three Dimensions of Well-being (standardized coefficient  $\beta$ ). Adapted from Pellenq et al.2021.*



Note: Solid arrows indicate positive links, dotted arrows indicate negative links

\*\*  $p < .00$ , \*  $p < .05$

In other words, it appears that school – independent of its quality, and possibly even duration – has somewhat of a protective effect on the working children’s psychological well-being. This is a critical area that needs to be more fully examined to see what is operating here. Is it the opportunity to play and socialize, the cognitive stimulation offered by the classes, the vision of an alternative future, or simply the chance to be away from dull and grinding work?

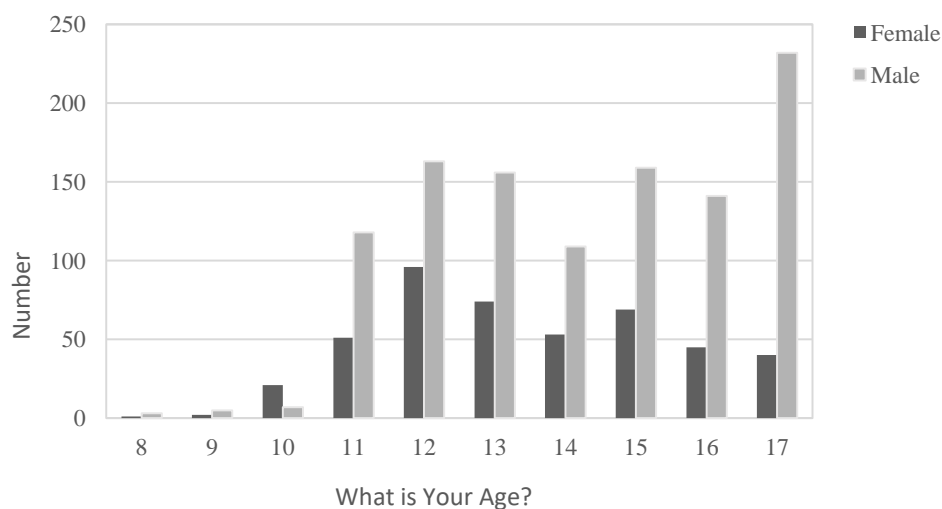
### *The Effects of Gender, age, and Local Culture*

All four study countries exhibit the same general profile of results with respect to two variables: gender and age. Overall, being a girl and increasing age have predictive value regarding the expressions of distress and fear, and the sense of feeling mistreated.

But there are differences between the countries which may be evidence of the influence of context-specific factors, such as culture and environment on the child workers’ perception of well-being. To further examine these inter-country differences, we undertook a new analysis of the total sample (all four countries) of 1553 children (i.e., both the brick kiln workers and the children who do not do this work). The total sample is composed of 672 girls and 881 boys, all within the age group 11 to 18 (Figure 4).

### **Figure 4**

#### *Age of Girls and Boys*



To do this, we stratified the data by country and undertook a regression analysis with seven predictors: gender, age, working/not working, attending/not attending school, injuries, migration, living with family or not. Table 1 presents the effects of two of these predictors -- gender and age -- while controlling for the other variables.

**Table 1**

*Standardized Beta of Gender and Age on Each of the 3 Factors of Well-Being by Country*

	Pakistan	Nepal	Bangladesh	Afghanistan
<b>Negative Emotions</b>				
Female	.293***	-.048	.096	.309***
Age	.027	.130**	-.119	.170***
<b>Personal Security</b>				
Female	.057	-.047	.049	-.040
Age	-.011	-.023	-.097	.034
<b>Maltreatment</b>				
Female	.168**	.029	.041	.150***
Age	-.255***	-.114*	-.080	-.046

*Note:* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $.05 < p < .10$ .

In this model, gender is shown to have a significant effect in at least two of the three countries for which there are adequate data. (There were too few girls in the Bangladesh sample from which to draw a statistical conclusion, but the fact that girls did not work in the brick factories after a certain age suggests that gender is playing a role there as well). As Table 1 shows, being

a girl is detrimental with respect to general well-being in Pakistan and Afghanistan, whereas the effect is not significant in Nepal.

Age is more complicated. Younger children differ from older children on the factor of “emotions”, with the younger children expressing less negativity and depression, but this is significant only for Nepal and Afghanistan. On the factor of “maltreatment”, it is the younger children who feel more mistreated than the older ones, but again only in the case of Pakistan and Nepal. Are younger children more likely to be mistreated? Are they less able or willing to acknowledge maltreatment due to their age? Or perhaps these two findings about the younger children (less depressed but having a sense of being treated poorly) suggest that they externalize or do not see where to attribute the causes of what is happening to them, whereas older children internalize these causes. With the data currently available, it is difficult to explain the local variations and further research is needed.

What is interesting is that age and gender do not seem to be having an effect on the factor “Security”. In other words, (and this is an important finding) it demonstrates that all of the children studied, regardless of their age or gender, regardless of whether they work or not, suffer from a high sense of insecurity. They feel precarious in their day to day lives. The most likely explanation is that is associated with the poverty in which both the working children and the comparison group are living. However, the children in the brick factories are faced with an additional factor – work -- which exacerbates and compounds this sense of insecurity, the exception being those fortunate enough to go to school.

To summarize, our analysis has investigated the determinants of well-being at three levels. At a micro level we have isolated the effects of two key socio-demographic variables – age and gender – finding that girls scored more negatively than boys. At the meso level we examined the effects of work and school, with the results showing that working children scored more negatively than those who did not, except in the case of those children who combined work and school. Finally, at the macro level we considered the effects of culture and locality, finding that there were, indeed, significant differences by country. The variables at these three levels all interact with each other simultaneously, and all are made more complex by the extreme poverty in which these children live. Some individuals are vulnerable in three or four ways at the same time: being a child, a female, a worker, and living in a certain cultural or environmental context. It is these children whose situation is most worrying. The potentially compounding effects of age, gender, working conditions and country, suggest numerous questions which could be answered with further study. For example, why are some older girls more positive about working than their male comrades? Do they feel that work might protect them from early

marriage? Do they see it as a path out into the world from an otherwise restricted life? Or do they just feel safer at work than at home? These are things we need to know.

Because we used a comparative method, matching a population of working children with their peers who do not do this work, both living in extreme poverty and exposed to similar social and environmental conditions, we were able to isolate the effects that are related to the work itself, independent of other factors. Our data have shown that work was the agent that had the most detrimental effect on child workers' subjective well-being. Work increases children's negative emotions and their sense of maltreatment and, although both groups of children experienced considerable insecurity due to the poor circumstances in which they lived, the sense of insecurity was even more pronounced on the part of the brick working children. Furthermore, work influences the children's ability to have harmonious relationships with their peers and others, and to envision the possibility of a better, more positive future for themselves.

The findings regarding gender which we present here demonstrate that the psycho-social situation of girls in some countries is very troubling. Work compounds the disadvantages they inherit from their society, putting them into a situation of extreme vulnerability. This study provides empirical, objective evidence for putting priority on girls in all interventions, and in particular, for putting maximum effort to getting them into school in a culturally sensitive manner.

It is also important to note that, while the gender effect is consistent across all four countries, there is some variation between countries, even between those which are similar with respect to culture and economic development. This suggests that girls' vulnerability is situational, not inevitable, and therefore subject to influence. Hopefully, such findings "can provide a fresh impetus within the countries where there are gender differences to try to understand and tackle the sources of these inequalities" (Rees, 2017, p.78).

Probably the finding which is unique and has the greatest significance is that school appears to play a mediating role in two of the three factors of well-being by either reducing or eliminating the negative burden of work. In effect, it seems that school is protective. Since the number of child workers who attend school in the brick manufacturing population tends to be relatively small, it is crucial that this be explored further in future large-scale studies and with other economic sectors. New studies should compare child workers who are attending school with children who are neither working nor attending school.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close in many countries, including those in this study, we can surmise that the loss of the chance to go to school may have had a



disproportionately negative effect on the well-being of working children as they see this window of protection and opportunity closing before them. The pandemic may well have increased their levels of anxiety and fear incorporated in the factor “negative emotions” as well heightened the sense of precariousness measured by the factor “security”.

The negative consequences may also be long term. Recent interviews conducted with brick workers in Pakistan<sup>7</sup> have revealed that since the schools have been closed for over a year, some previously school-going children have returned to working full-time. These children may be less likely to return to school after schools reopen, as families may have come to rely on the added income provided by the children. Inflation and the resulting increase in cost of living further exacerbate this risk. In addition, the loss of adult employment in other occupational sectors during the pandemic and lack of access to "welfare safety nets" (Daly et al., 2021) has led to more families becoming indebted and more families turning to brick manufacturing as a job of last resort, such that the cultural milieu in which the child workers live is also becoming more fraught.

In conclusion, understanding how children view their work, how their work is situated within their lives, and how it makes them feel about their future is key to offering them options that make sense to them. Yet very few research projects and project baseline studies make more than a cursory attempt to do this essential listening. Using a standardized instrument is crucial for cross-national comparisons. As we have seen with the comparison between working girls in Nepal and Afghanistan, their experience is very different. It throws into sharp relief differences which might otherwise be masked or glossed over and which demand further attention. Instruments designed for use on a population basis throw up questions that deeper, more qualitative investigations can explore. Results from this study suggest that a potentially fruitful area for study are the culture-specific aspects of child labour, such as the world view that a culture engenders in working children, and the psychological strengths or vulnerabilities that may derive from it. Child labour is a complex phenomenon. It may be that the psychosocial impacts of child labour are best understood by looking at them within a specific geographical context as well as in comparison with cross-cultural commonalities.

The IPAW questionnaire has been demonstrated to be a reliable tool for obtaining – not a diagnosis – but a sense of the general psychological state of children who live in very difficult conditions and who work hard to provide for themselves and their families. One of its strengths is that it is able to elicit children’s own feelings regarding personal security, a dimension which

---

<sup>7</sup> as part of an ongoing pilot project proposing to provide technical training skills to adolescent girls from brick worker families in Lahore, Pakistan.

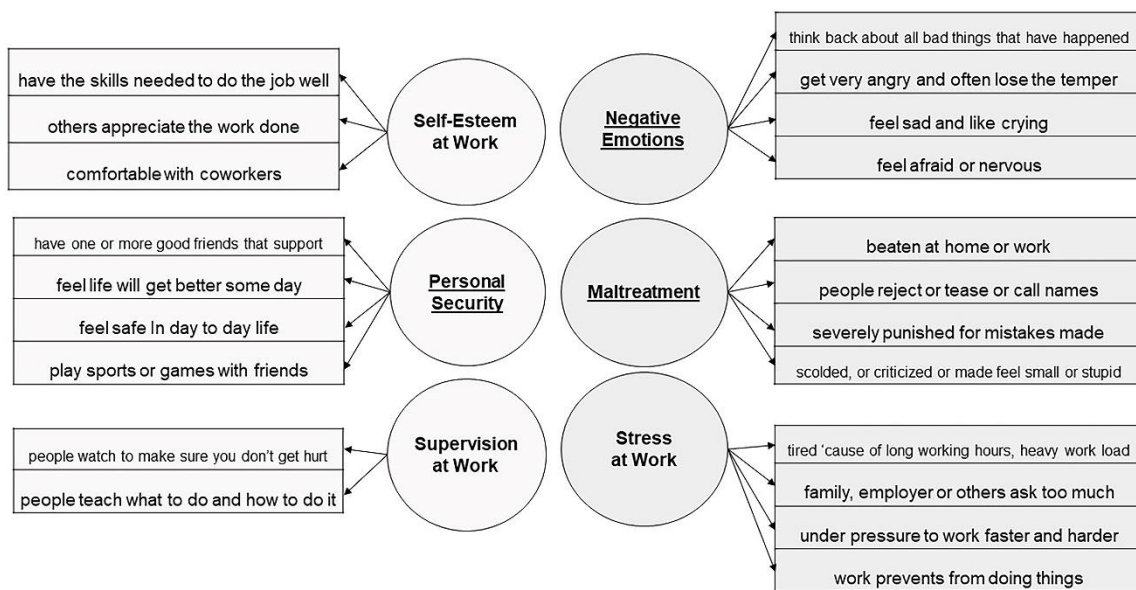
is increasingly being seen as critical to both children's current well-being as well as their future development.

## References

- Ben-Arieh, A., Casas, F., Frones, I., & Korbin, J. E. (2014). Multifaceted concept of child well-being. In A. Ben-Arieh, F. Casas, I. Frønes, J. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child well-being* (pp. 1-27). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9063-8\\_134](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9063-8_134)
- Daly, A., Hillis, A., Shrestha, S. M., & Shrestha B. K. (2021) Breaking the child labour cycle through education: issues and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children of in-country seasonal migrant workers in the brick kilns of Nepal, *Children's Geographies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2021.1891406>
- Goodman, R. (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: A Research Note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38, 581-586. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1997.tb01545.x>
- Graves, J. M., Ali, M.V., Gunn, S. (2014). Occupational injuries among child labourers: Preliminary results from a study of the brick manufacturing industry in four countries. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 71(1), A54. <https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2014-102362.166>
- Gunn, S., Jordans, M., Awan, A., & Hofman, M. (2015). *Development of an instrument for the psychosocial assessment of child workers*. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=29555>
- Hesketh, T. M., Gamlin, J., Ong, M., & Zeneida, A. (2012). The psychosocial impact of child domestic work: A study from India and the Philippines *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 97(9), 773-778. <https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2012-301816>
- Hofman, M. R., & Gunn, S. (2014). *Instrument for the Psychosocial Assessment of Child Workers (IPAC): Background and references*. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=25495>
- International Labour Organization. (2013). *Toil in soil: Impact of work at brick kilns on health of children and youth - Report of research in 5 districts of Pakistan*. ILO.
- International Labour Organization. (2014a). *Occupational health and safety assessment of child workers in the brick industry, Nepal*. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=25297>
- International Labour Organization. (2014b). *Health hazards of child labour in brick kilns of Bangladesh*. ILO.
- International Labour Organization. (2014c). *A health approach to child labour: Synthesis report of four country studies on child labour in the brick industry*. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=25300>
- International Labour Organization. (2017). *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends 2012-2016*. ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575499.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575499.pdf)
- International Labour Organization & United Nations Children's Fund. (2015). *Breaking the*

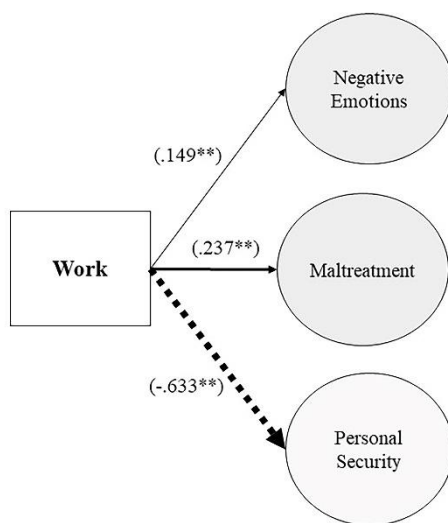
- mould: Occupational safety hazards faced by children working in brick kilns in Afghanistan.* ILO & UNICEF.
- International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, *Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward.*  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ipecc/documents/publication/wcms\\_797515.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf)
- Jordans, M. J. D., Komproe, I. H., Ventevogel, P., Tol, W. A., & de Jong, J. T. V. M. (2008). Development and validation of the child psychosocial distress screener in Burundi. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78(3), 290–299.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014216>
- Khan, S. R., & Lyon, S. (2015). *Measuring children's work in South Asia: perspectives from national household surveys.* ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new\\_delhi/documents/publication/wcms\\_359371.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_359371.pdf)
- Leka, S., & Jain, A. (2011). *Assessing psychosocial hazards and impact of child work.* ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/ipeccinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=19055>
- Pellenq, C., Gunn, S., & Lima, L. (2019). *The psychological health of children working in brick kilns: A classification tree analysis.* ILO.  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ipecc/documents/publication/wcms\\_672539.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_672539.pdf)
- Pellenq, C., Gunn, S., & Lima, L. (2021). The psychological health and well-being of children working in the brick industry: A comparative study. *Safety Science*, 140 (105251).  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2021.105251>
- Rees, G., & Dinisman, T. (2014). Comparing children's experiences and evaluations of their lives in 11 different countries. *Child Indicators Research*, 8(1), 5-31.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-014-9291-1>
- Rees, G. (2017). *Children's views on their lives and well-being: Findings from the Children's worlds project.* Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65196-5>
- Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. W. (2010). The unique developmental considerations of youth-related work injuries. *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 16(2), 216-22. <https://doi.org/10.1179/107735210799160372>
- Tonon, G., Benatuil, D., Laurito, M. J., & Molgaray, D. (2021). Children's feeling of security. In T. Fattore, S. Fegter, C. Hunner-Kreisel (Eds.), *Children's concepts of well-being, challenges in international comparative qualitative research* (pp. 269-284). Springer.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67167-9\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67167-9_14)
- Woodhead, M. (2004). Psychosocial impacts of child work: a framework for research, monitoring and intervention. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 14(4), 321-377.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/1571818043603607>

**Figure 1**



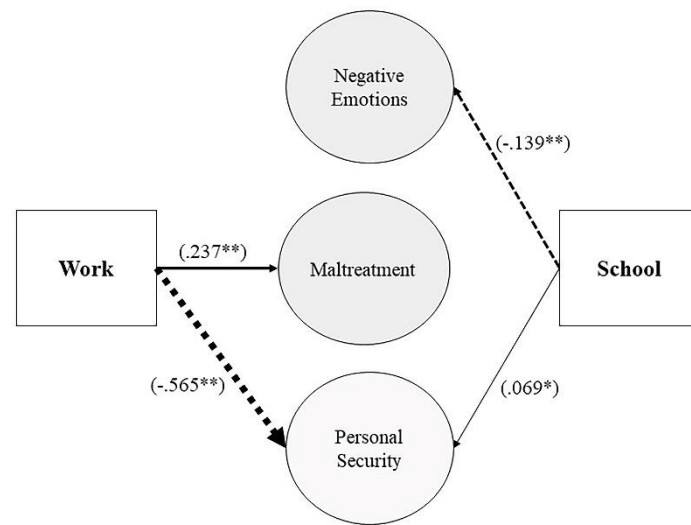
*Note:* Positive factors in light grey; Negative factors in dark gray; Underlined factors are used for comparison with controls

Figure 2



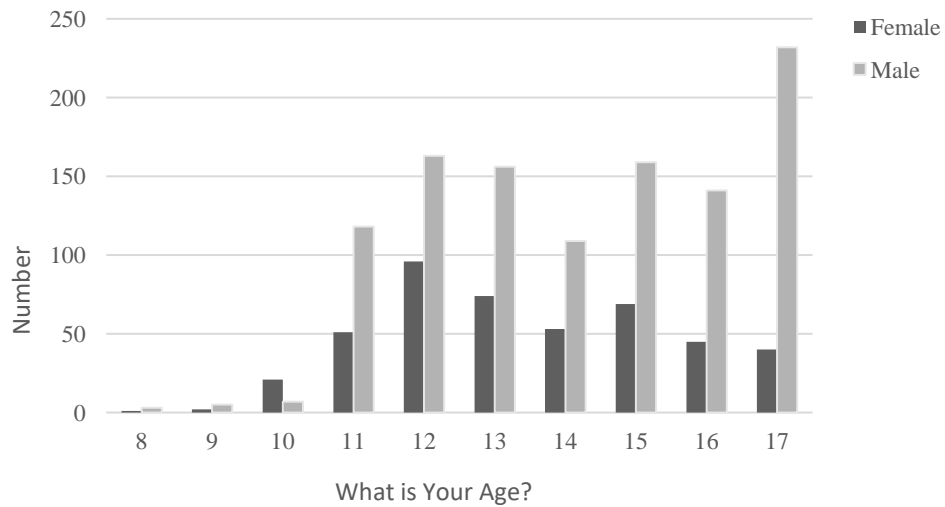
Note: Solid arrows indicate positive links, dotted arrows indicate negative links

Figure 3



Note: Solid arrows indicate positive links, dotted arrows indicate negative links

**Figure 4**





**Table 1**

	Pakistan	Nepal	Bangladesh	Afghanistan
<b>Negative Emotions</b>				
Female	.293***	-.048	.096	.309***
Age	.027	.130**	-.119	.170***
<b>Personal Security</b>				
Female	.057	-.047	.049	-.040
Age	-.011	-.023	-.097	.034
<b>Maltreatment</b>				
Female	.168**	.029	.041	.150***
Age	-.255***	-.114*	-.080	-.046