

Recognizing Children's Contribution to Care Work at the Household: The Potential Role of Social Protection in Maintaining Child's Right and Wellbeing

Abstract:

Background and Objectives

Background

For most societies, children involvement in household work and to some extent in community work is considered normal and has become a common practice until now. In fact, this practice is regarded necessary in the development of a child; socially, physically and emotionally, as something that they need to become an adult. Furthermore, it also contributes to the wellbeing of the family, as shown by study of Rama, Sharma and Linda M. Richter (2007). However, despite the benefit it brings, it is also necessary to really look into that practice as most of the time the work done by children is undermined by other people even by family member, and there is concern that children contribution might bring unintended impact on their wellbeing and will further deter the fulfillment of their rights. Concerns are more obvious especially for children from poor family and during economic crises, as their contribution might be higher than children from other families.

Objectives

Based on that, this paper aims to describe the condition of children that are doing household work including caring activities, and see how it will affect their wellbeing and fulfillment of their rights. First, the paper will explore children contribution in the household work; what kind of work they are doing, especially related to unpaid care work, the time allocated for that activities and the likely impact of doing that work to their wellbeing. This paper will also highlight the potential role of social protection in maintaining child's rights and wellbeing in such circumstances.

Methodology

To achieve the above objectives, this paper will present a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data is derived from relevant national statistical data set—the national socio-economic survey (SUSENAS), while the qualitative data is deduced from findings from various SMERU's study that are related to children issues, among others are: exploratory study on impact of conditional cash transfer program with child labor component support in 2011; qualitative part of child poverty and disparity study in 2010; preliminary study on unpaid care work in 2012; and food price volatility study in 2012.



Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, children contribution to household work could be problematic. In one hand, it certainly contributes to family wellbeing, but most of the time it failed to be recognized by other family member. Regarding the impact of that work to children, a study by Rama S and Linda M Richter (2007) showed that children's time devoted to do the house work sometimes made them often deprived of the chance to play and make friends, and are vulnerable to verbal, physical and social abuse (Rama, S, Linda M Richter, 2007).

The issue becomes more problematic because it adds up to the existing debate about 'unpaid care work'. This kind of work, previously known as 'reproductive work' though important, also has been neglected by development practitioners, even among feminists and gender activists, thus never reached into development agenda. As Eyben (2012) mentioned that this happened partly due to its invisibility, long nature of neglected due to social and political agendas behind it. Only recently that there are efforts to bring back the issues of unpaid care work into the development agenda (IDS, 2012); yet attention or focus on children's involvement in that type of work is still limited.

In many societies, especially those keeping hold traditional norms, unpaid care work in form of household work carried out by children often seen as child devotion to their parents. Performing household work also perceived as a good way in training children to work and to becoming responsible person that will be useful for their future. Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child stipulated that there is no prohibition for children help out their parents at home as long as in ways that the work do not harmful to their physic (health), mental, social development, and interfere to their education.

Relating to the concept of wellbeing, it includes aspects such as material and immaterial such as relational and subjective. Child material wellbeing could be determined from their education and health status. While child relational wellbeing could be determined from their relation with other family members. As for child subjective wellbeing, could be determined from their hopes, fear, and aspiration (Sumner, et all, 2012) In a more dynamic term, wellbeing is a combination of: what a person has, what a person can do with what they have, and how they think about they have and can do (McGregor, 2007). Since the concept of wellbeing are not limited to material aspects, doing the unpaid care work to some extent could also impact child's non material wellbeing, including feeling discontent and emotional dissatisfaction in the long term.

Further on the wellbeing concept, Eyben and Fontana (2011) stated that wellbeing of some may be at the cost of wellbeing for others—often the powerless and vulnerable. In the context of children doing the housework, sometimes it makes children in powerless position, especially girls, as the work distribution is disproportional towards them. Girls tend to have more work, usually inside the house – compared to boys. Boys also generally have more autonomy than girls as mentioned by Boyden and Levinson in Rama S (2007). Elder girls often put in the second position—after mother, as the most responsible person in doing unpaid care work. It often found that children do multiple works, for example mind their younger sibling, perform other domestic chores, and even perform out home paid work while still enrolling in school. Those activities that often taken as daily routine, are possible to lessen their leisure time, making them losing opportunity in social activities even reduce their performance at school. Some other house work

requires physical effort, such as fetching water to distance place and cooking with firewood, even put them in hazardous condition that will jeopardize their material wellbeing in term of health condition.

Preliminary Findings

In Indonesia there are approximately 54 million people (around 23.7% of its total population) involved in unpaid care work activities. Most of them are women, coming from low-income family, and more than one third of them are still in children ages. Children accounts for 37% of total Indonesia population and children involved in unpaid care work accounts 22% of the total children.

Disproportional unpaid care work responsibility occurs between boy and girl. Among children involved in unpaid care work, 69.53% of them are girls while boys are only 30.47%. As much as 31.87% of the children facing double burden by doing unpaid care work while schooling, as much as 8.19% doing unpaid care work while working, and 5.20% doing unpaid care work while becoming unpaid family worker. Around 2.45% are facing multiple burdens by doing unpaid care work while schooling and working; and as much as 2.17% doing unpaid care work while becoming unpaid family worker and schooling. Ironically, 50.12% of the children involved in unpaid care work facing neither double nor multiple burden as they only perform unpaid care work but out of school.

A qualitative research conducted by SMERU in 2010 has found that drudgery house work would deprive child's well being in non-material term due to inadequate leisure time (SMERU, 2010). Beside of doing a range of domestic works, some children also work to collect grass for livestock feeding, and helping parent on farm. Disproportional distribution of unpaid care work responsibility, in some cases has jeopardized girl's right in attaining education. As revealed from another qualitative research conducted by SMERU, there was a girl whose decided to discontinue her school since her mother leave for abroad to be migrant worker. She was entitled to replacing her mother to do all the domestic work, since her father did not do so much (SMERU, 2012)

Policy Implication and Recommendations

Looking at the above findings, one potential measure to address the problem and to maintain children wellbeing during such circumstances is trough the creation of appropriate and child sensitive social protection (programs). It could be done through maintaining and improving the performance of the existing programs for example program that aims to ensure child access to health and education services, while also create protection programs and policies that are 'child sensitive' that will have more structural impact.

At more practical level, we can start to think and try to implement what Diane Elson's term of **3Rs** to maintain child wellbeing:

- **Recognise** the extent and value of care and care giver (child): include measures of unpaid care in household, design social protection to recognize domestic and care work.
- **Reduce** the drudgery of care: invest more in water and sanitation facilities, better cooking technology and fuel, improve housing quality.

- **Redistribute:** intra household responsibility allocation; awareness building activities to encourage men and boys to do their share; invest in high quality ECD, child- and elderly care; provide accessible medical care, etc.

Lastly, all key actors as mentioned by Razavi (2007) in diagram of ‘Care Diamond’ that consists of government, community, and the private sectors needs to be involved and taken active part in the above activities.

Keywords: *children wellbeing, child rights,(unpaid) care work, care diamond, child protection*

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