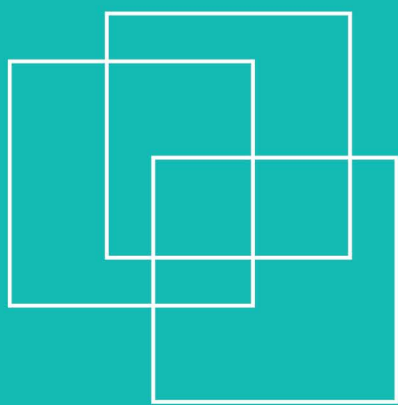




International  
Labour  
Organization

# Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zone in Yangon, Myanmar - 2015



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International  
Programme on  
the Elimination  
of Child Labour  
(IPEC)

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First published 2015

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*Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zone in Yangon, Myanmar* / International Labour Office, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) - Myanmar: ILO, 2015.

ISBN: 978-92-2-130200-1 (Print); 978-92-2-130201-8 (Web PDF)

International Labour Office; ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour  
child labour / child worker / working conditions / rapid assessment / industrial district / Myanmar - 13.01.2

Also available in Myanmar (Birman): *Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zone in Yangon, Myanmar* (ISBN 978-92-2-830200-4 (Print); 978-92-2-830201-1 (Web PDF)), Geneva: ILO, 2015

*ILO Cataloguing in Publication Data*

#### Acknowledgements

This publication was elaborated by Anna Zongolowicz, Consultant, for IPEC and coordinated by Jodelen Ortiz Mitra from the Myanmar Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (My-PEC) – ILO Yangon Office. Comments, contribution and support were provided by Piyamal Pichaiwongse, Lourdes Kathleen Santos-Macasil, Selim Benaïssa, Hnin Wuit Yee and Ei Haymar from ILO Yangon Office, Simrin Singh from ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bharati Pflug and Bijoy Raychaudhuri from ILO Headquarters. Funding for this ILO publication was provided by the United States Department of Labor (Project MMR/13/10/USA).

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Printed in Myanmar

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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	v
<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	1
Research location.....	2
Research hypothesis.....	3
<b>II. Objectives of the study</b> .....	3
<b>III. Methodology</b> .....	4
Focus group discussions .....	4
Key informant interviews.....	5
Structured interviews with children .....	5
Sampling.....	5
Ethics.....	6
Research limitations .....	7
Risk management and monitoring .....	7
<b>IV. Findings</b> .....	8
The living and working conditions of child labourers, including demographics .....	8
The magnitudes, processes and influences coming from above the community level .....	19
The effect of prior programmes, if any, on children and their work and families .....	21
The attitudes of employers and local authorities to possible programme introductions .....	21
Perceptions of different groups about child labour .....	22
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b> .....	25
Demand-driven vocational training.....	25
Supporting youth and adult employment.....	27
Community awareness raising.....	28
Monitoring and law enforcement.....	28
Further research .....	28
<b>References</b> .....	29



## Executive summary

This Rapid Assessment intended to capture data on the living, working and education status and conditions of child labourers in the Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zone to inform the design of child labour prevention and elimination interventions for industrial zones. It also aimed to gather the preceptions of different groups about child labour, the effect of prior programmes for the elimination of child labour, and the attitudes of employers and local authorities to possible programme interventions.

The assessment was conducted by an experienced team of local enumerators supervised by an international Team Leader. Data were collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews with adults concerned by child labour, such as parents, employers and teacher, as well as questionnaire-based interviews with children who work within the industrial zone of Hlaing Thar Yar.

**Results of the Rapid Assessment confirmed that child labour exists in the Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zone.** The majority of girls and boys interviewed can be considered as child labourers because they are either below the legal age for employment or are engaged in work requiring longer working hours than prescribed by law for their age-group.<sup>1</sup>

**Half of the interviewed children were below the legal age for employment of 13 years old in Myanmar.** The youngest employed child was eight (8) years old from the informal sector. The other half of the children reported having started work at an average age of 12.5 years old, a few months shy of the legal working age. Boys reported having started work at a younger age than girls.

**Almost all of the interviewed children worked in excess of the maximum working hours prescribed by the law for different age groups.** The majority of 13-15 year old children reported working in excess of 4 hours a day, including in smaller garment factories, while 89.1 percent of 16-17 years old children reported working more than 40 hours a week. The study did not find major differences in the working hours or remuneration between girls and boys. None of the children reported working between 6pm and 6am. Girls reported spending more time than boys on household chores in addition to working outside the household for a wage.

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<sup>1</sup> The current legal minimum age of 13 years is only applicable to the formal sector factories, shops and establishments and is generally below international standards of 14 years per ILO Minimum Age Convention (C138). Given this gap in the legal framework, this study used a stakeholder-based definition of child labour as those:

- i. children aged 5 - 12 years in economic activity for more than 1 hour per day / 6 hours per week;
- ii. children aged between 13-15 years engaged in economic activity for more than (a) 4 hours a day/ 24 hours per week, or (b) between 6pm to 6am; and
- iii. children aged 16-17 years (considered “adults” by the labor law) engaged in economic activity (a) for more than 44 hours per week, or (b) between 6pm to 6am.

“Household chores” or work performed in own household and also called 'unpaid household services' are not considered economic activity. However, “domestic work” or work done outside own household, whether paid or unpaid is considered an economic activity.

This definition is not entirely aligned with international standards on statistical child labour measurement as defined under the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) Resolution 18 of 2008.

**Children were found performing a wide variety of jobs, ranging from water delivery to garment sewing.** There was a correlation between the children's age and the amount of remuneration they received. The younger children received smaller remuneration from daily wage jobs, which require little skill. The study found that younger children are more likely to work in informal and unregulated work environments than older children making their working conditions more difficult to monitor for the authorities.

**The formal sector, particularly the garment and food factories were also found to employ children.** One food factory was found to employ children under 13 years of age, while garment factories were found to employ children who were 13 years old and above. Smaller factories appeared more likely to employ 13-15 year old children than large factories.

**Children working in the informal sector are more exposed to hazards with greater risks of illness and injuries.** Body aches, sore muscles and headaches reported by children are all reflective of the type of work that most of them perform. Working outside, pushing and carrying heavy loads and bending over for long periods were common among children who identified dust/ fumes and extreme heat as two of the most common hazards they face at work.

**Children who enter the workforce were found to drop out of school to do so.** mostly at the end of Grade 4 or 5. They find it difficult to reintegrate the education system, mostly due to the opportunity cost of not working, cost of school expenses and lack of interest or motivation to study.

**The sense of obligation to work to support their families is very high among child labourers and even higher in single-headed households, most often headed by mothers. Poor parents also think that children should contribute financially to the household.** Individual survival depends on family survival and vice versa.

**In addition to poverty being the main reason for child labour, the lack of coherent legislation** emerged as a major challenge to the enforcement and implementation of actions intended to prevent and eliminate child labour. Employers expressed that they were rendering poor families a service by hiring children and did so in response to parental demand rather than through open recruitment of children. What is more, employers perceive children to be more obedient and reliable employees than adults. There is a general expectation among children and employers that the children should learn skills where and while they work. The skills-based remuneration among children seems to support this perception.

These data in the present report give a clear indication about the gaps that must be addressed to prevent children below 13 years old from working and to provide decent and safe jobs for those of legal age for employment. The following interventions are therefore recommended:

**Awareness raising at the community level and within the industrial zone.** As a crucial first step for changing attitudes and behaviours toward child labour, community leaders and members, including parents, children and teachers should be sensitised to the perils and long-term drawbacks of child labour to the family, community and

society in general. Likewise, awareness raising sessions targeting workers, employers, enforcement agencies, including the labour inspectorate, should be conducted.

**Strengthening of enforcement mechanisms.** The ongoing labour law and education reform should take into consideration issues of minimum age for employment, hazardous work, working hours, working conditions and law enforcement mechanisms in conformity with international standards set under relevant ILO Conventions. The capacity of labour inspectors, workers' organisations, employers' organisations and civil society organisations for monitoring child labour should be promoted and, where it exists, enhanced.

**Provision of livelihood and employment opportunities for parents and other adult members of the household.** Supporting adult employment, especially that of mothers whom the study found to be mostly unemployed or underemployed, or fathers who are casual labourers, to obtain decent and stable jobs could help prevent younger children from precociously entering the workforce. Mainstreaming gender concerns in livelihood improvement programmatic interventions is essential.

**Adapting vocational training bearing in mind the working children's circumstances.** The importance and relevance of vocational training is not well known or understood by the children and their parents and this lack of understanding should be addressed prior to implementing any programme. Increasing access to demand-driven vocational training is also necessary. In addition, any curriculum should take into consideration the children's socio-economic backgrounds and motivation for working, the long hours they work, the fatigue they experience and the little time off they receive from their employers. It will require that children be allowed by their employers to invest time and effort into any training. It also may be possible to support younger children to return to school, while the older children will require skills that can help them improve their situation in the future. Programmes should be designed to supplement and provide them with value-add, complimentary and demand-driven skills rather than replicate those which they already possess.

Potential modalities for implementing this are: earning while learning which is recommended for older children, who may otherwise not wish to return to school or pursue their education due to the risk of losing income; workplace apprenticeships with the aim of balancing the interest of children and employers and making sure this is regulated and free from abuse; conditional cash transfers systems best suited for families/mothers of younger children who have only recently dropped out of school and can be easily rehabilitated or who are at risk of dropping out of school in order to work to supplement family income; and school-based apprenticeships for middle and high school students who are at risk of dropping out of school which provides a combination of basic education and vocational training that can prepare children for a variety of crafts and trades that align with their preferences and the area's/ country's skill needs.

**Further research or studies.** Other studies that would be useful to complete in industrial zones include the mapping of educational and training institutions for children and youth, social mobility and turnover of child labourers, living and working conditions of street children, type of jobs available to children and the impact of adult migrant work on children. All these studies must consider the gender dimension.





## I. Introduction

Child labour that is “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.”<sup>2</sup> Due to its detrimental nature, is a global phenomenon affecting developing, and to a lesser extent, developed countries.<sup>3</sup> The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that there are 168 million child labourers in the world, with the most being in Asia and the Pacific<sup>4</sup>. While these numbers represent a decline from estimates in 2000, which pegged child labour at 246 million, it remains a sensitive issue that requires a comprehensive multi-stakeholder solution.

Poverty, cost barriers to education and lack of effective labour legislation are just some of the factors, which contribute to the existence of child labour. The 2014 census has revealed that there are 7,862,576 children aged 10-17 in Myanmar, 23.7 percent of whom are employed.<sup>5</sup> The magnitude of the phenomenon will be revealed when the results of the ILO’s country-wide labour force survey will be published.

One difficulty in studying child labour in Myanmar is the lack of alignment between national legislation and internationally recognised limits and standards. There is no specific child labour law in Myanmar and existing related laws need to be reviewed and enhanced to comply with the international labour standards. It is important to note that reform efforts are underway and that the issue of child labour is being addressed.

The Shops and Establishments Act provides that children below 13 years old are not permitted to work in any shop, commercial establishment or establishment for public entertainment. It further mentioned that no person employed in a shop or commercial establishment or establishment for public entertainment shall be permitted to work for more than 8 hours in any day or more than 48 hours in a week. The Factories Act of 1951 prohibits children below 13 years old from working in factories while those 13 years old and above are allowed to work but are required to procure a Certificate of Fitness to gain employment. In addition, children between 13-15 years old are not allowed to work in any factory for more than 4 hours a day and between 6pm to 6am. Those 16-17 years old are allowed to work up to 44 hours weekly. The current Child Law defines “child” as a person who has not attained the age of 16 years.<sup>6</sup> The Factories and General Labour Laws Inspection Department (FGLLID) imposes additional regulations but these contradict the minimum age principles laid down in ILO Conventions and do not cover children working in the informal economy, where the vast majority of child labour is believed to exist. Hazardous work for children has not been defined and mapped yet.

The current legal minimum age of 13 years is only applicable to the formal sector factories, shops and establishments and is generally below international standards of 14 years per ILO Minimum Age Convention (C138). Given this gap in the legal

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<sup>2</sup>IPEC, What is Child Labour? Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch (2014). Tobacco’s Hidden Children: Hazardous Child Labour in US Tobacco Farming. Available at: [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0514\\_UploadNewNew.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0514_UploadNewNew.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/child-labour/lang--en/index.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> UNFPA (2015). *2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census*. Available at: [http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/2015/05/25/12157/myanmar\\_census\\_2014/](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/2015/05/25/12157/myanmar_census_2014/).

<sup>6</sup> The Child Law is currently being draft by the Government of Myanmar.

framework, the present study used a stakeholder-based definition of child labour, which considers child labourers to be:

- children aged 5-12 years in economic activity for more than 1 hour per day/ 6 hours per week;
- children aged between 13-15 years engaged in economic activity for more than (a) 4 hours a day/ 24 hours per week, or (b) between 6pm to 6am; and
- children aged 16-17 years (considered “adults” by the labour law) engaged in economic activity (a) for more than 44 hours per week, or (b) between 6pm to 6am.

“Household chores” or work performed in own household and also called “unpaid household service” are not considered economic activity. “Domestic work”, however, or work done outside own household, whether paid or unpaid is considered an economic activity.

Daily working hours	Age of working children		
	Younger than 13	13-15	16-17
>4 hours but <=8 hours	Child Labour	Child labour	
>8 hours			Child labour

## Research location

Hlaing Thar Yar (HTY) Township was identified as a high-prevalence area for child labour in Yangon based on consultations with national and local stakeholders. It is a satellite town to Yangon and was established in 1985. It has the biggest industrial zone in Yangon where the manufacturing facilities of national and international companies are located.

Data from the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) shows that the Hlaing Thar Yar (HTY) Industrial Zone measures around 67 square kilometres and comprises 20 wards and nine village tracts. The area is home to mostly garment and light industries. National and international companies operate in the zone<sup>7</sup> and there are 46 state-run primary schools, eight middle school and four high schools in the area. The Yangon Technical University is also located in this Township (not in the industrial zone).<sup>8</sup> Sponsored vocational training initiatives are present, e.g. IT education, which targets low-income families, funded by the Korean International Cooperation Agency. In addition, there are, private vocational training schools, such as the Myanmar International Domestic Training Centre.<sup>9</sup>

YCDC data also shows that in December 2008 there were more than 340,000 people living in the area. The first population swell in the area resulted from a government-led resettlement programme in 1989-1990, which saw over 1.5 million people countrywide

<sup>7</sup> MIMU (Myanmar Information Management Unit) (2009). Profile Hlaingtharyar Township, April 2009. Available at: [www.themimu.info](http://www.themimu.info).

<sup>8</sup> Data retrieved from Yangon City Development Committee website.

<sup>9</sup> The scope of the rapid assessment did not allow the enumerators to establish the exact number of initiatives or centres that may exist in Hlaing Thar Yar, nor their access, cost and/or quality. Further research is required to establish the existence, turn-over and participation in public, semi-private and private vocational training initiatives in the area.

moved from inner-city to peri-urban and even rural areas.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Yangon, squatters who previously occupied areas around pagodas and monastic compounds, were moved to industrial zones, including Hlaing Thar Yar.<sup>11</sup> It is thought that as many as 500,000 people were moved in Yangon alone.<sup>12</sup> The second population swell occurred in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which took place in May 2008, and caused widespread damage and loss of life in the Ayeyarwady Delta. Today, Hlaing Thar Yar, and its perceived abundance of jobs, continues to attract labour migrants from various parts of Myanmar.<sup>13</sup>

The township is generally unsafe, and there are areas, such as ward 19, which are known for robbery,<sup>14</sup> underage persons being taken from these areas into armed forces, children in prostitution and gang-related crime, such as elimination of unwanted social elements from communities or extortion of rent-money from migrant workers who “squat”<sup>15</sup>. The lack of social cohesion, human mobility, lack of law enforcement or police and authorities’ collusion with criminal entities render Hlaing Thar Yar not only unsafe but ripe for exploitation and abuse, to which children are especially vulnerable.

## Research hypothesis

Child labour is common in the Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zone in Yangon, Myanmar, which attracts workers from Yangon and other Regions and States. Among other reasons, it is the result of economic hardship experienced by families, socio-cultural attitudes of parents and employers, ambiguous legislation and weak law enforcement, insufficient incomes for adults, and lack of adequate facilities and opportunities for children to gain education and learn skills.

## II. Objectives of the study

This Rapid Assessment intended to capture data on the living, working and education status and conditions of child labourers to inform the design of interventions for industrial zones. It also aimed to gather the perceptions of different groups about child labour, the effect of prior programmes for the elimination of child labour, and the attitudes of employers and local authorities to possible programme interventions.

The government and workers’ organisations expressed to the ILO their desire to implement non-formal education interventions for industrial zones and this study aims

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<sup>10</sup> Bosson, A. (2007). *Forced migration/internal displacement in Burma with an emphasis on Government-controlled areas*, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), Norwegian Refugee Council.

<sup>11</sup> Lubeigt, Guy (2007). *Industrial zones in Burma and Burmese labour in Thailand*, *Burma Update Conference*, Australian National University. Available at: <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs4/BU-2006-Lubeigt.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Bosson, *Forced migration*.

<sup>13</sup> Noe Noe Aung (2013). In Hlaing Tharyar, illegal residents face tough decisions in *Myanmar Times*. Available at: <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/8182-in-hlaing-tharyar-illegal-residents-face-tough-decisions.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Boutry, M. (2014). *Urban Poverty in Yangon Great City – A Qualitative Study of Urban Poverty, Its Causes and Consequences*, p. 30. WFP, UNICEF, UN-HABITAT.

<sup>15</sup> ILO Rapid Assessment team comments.

to inform the design of such interventions. The employers who participated the study were sympathetic to its goals and willing to engage with the ILO. Further research, focused on the needs and strategies of employers, is required to determine “if, how and why” they would support the implementation of non-formal education interventions in the area.

### III. Methodology

The research was designed and managed by an international consultant under the supervision of ILO’s My-PEC staff. The tools were pilot tested on March 14, 2015. A team of locally recruited enumerators (5) and one supervisor collected data between April 1-8 in Hlaing Thar Yar’s wards 1,2,4,5 and 7 as well as the Tharyargone, Thamegone, Shwelipan and Htainpin areas. The timing of the study was established with the guidance of local authorities. The three research tools<sup>16</sup> used in this assessment were structured interviews with children aged 7-17, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with adults. The majority of the children were interviewed in their homes, due to confidentiality issues noted during the pilot phase of the project. The enumerators established the children’s age by asking them how old they were. Children or their parents were not required to produce proof of age.<sup>17</sup> The research tools were developed in consultation with ILO’s FPRW-SIMPOC.

#### Focus group discussions

A total of six FGDs were held with parents, employers and NGOs/CBOs/CSOs. The FGDs were homogenous to gather gender-specific perspectives and to avoid gender-related censorship, e.g. in the case of the parents, whose roles inside the household do not reflect their roles outside the home. Each FGD was composed of 6-10 members and lasted between 45-90 minutes.

The FGDs were composed as follows:

- mothers of child labourers (1)
- fathers of child labourers (1)
- female employers of child labourers (1)
- male employers of child labourers (1)
- female NGO, CBO, CSO workers (1)
- male NGO, CBO CSO workers (1)

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<sup>16</sup> See Annexe.

<sup>17</sup> The FGLLID did provide the ILO with a list of factories where underage children were found working. The FGLLID requested confidentiality in the use of the list, and where FGLLID staff assisted research, access to the youngest children was not made possible. Interviews at factories were not pursued as it was noted that when management and authorities were involved in the process, the enumerators could not interview children of their choice, rather, the intermediaries supplied the interviewers with selected children who were almost all 17-18 years of age.

## Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with religious figures,<sup>18</sup> relevant authorities (e.g. FGLLID officials and labour inspectors), community workers (NGO/CBO/ CSO), health workers and teachers. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Myanmar language. Researchers took notes during the interviews, which were not audio-recorded. Audio recordings were avoided to encourage interlocutors to speak freely and to guarantee confidentiality.

## Structured interviews with children

Structured, questionnaire-based interviews were conducted with 100 child labourers (50 girls and 50 boys) in Hlaing Thar Yar. Children between the ages of 7-17 were interviewed at their workplaces and homes (evening time). The questionnaires were designed to capture demographic data about child labourers, and data regarding their working conditions and circumstances.

## Sampling

Three non-probability sampling methods were used for this rapid assessment: quota sampling, volunteer sampling and snow-balling.

The quota sampling method was selected to identify child labourers for participation in questionnaire-based interviews. The researchers selected children, who had been identified as child labourers, according to sex, age activity and location. Previous research had shown that interviewing high numbers of children in the same establishment, e.g. 10 servers in a teashop, resulted in early saturation as children share their experience of being interviewed with other children including their answers to questions they remember. To limit saturation, researchers interviewed a maximum of five boys/and or girls in one location.

Quota sampling, being a non-probability sampling method, can result in a bias and sampling error since it does not meet the basic requirement of randomness as some children may have no chance of selection or their chance of selection may be unknown. This method, however, offers advantages for a rapid assessment as it is easy and quick to perform and gives a good representation of certain groups without over-representing them. In addition, using quota samples makes comparison of groups easy. It is also a helpful method to create an accurate sample of the studied population where a probability sample cannot be obtained as in the case of Hlaing Thar Yar.

Volunteer sampling to select participants for focus groups discussions was chosen to avoid pressure on women and men to participate in the study against their will. People in Myanmar do not engage easily in public speaking and expression of opinion in front of people they do not know. Volunteer sampling was also used to ensure that focus

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<sup>18</sup> Religious figures were Buddhist monks and Christian priests. The team supervisor said that an attempt was made to interview an Imam, however, the interview request was turned down.

group discussion participants were well informed about the research topic and methods before making a decision to participate.<sup>19</sup>

The bias associated with this sampling method is that voluntary participants may have pre-established opinion or interest in the research topic, and they want to share it publicly. Their views do not necessarily represent or match those of people who choose not to participate in the focus group discussion. This bias, however, is mostly problematic in large opinion poll studies.

Snow-balling is a useful technique to access relevant people who may not be known outside their communities. It facilitates reaching people who may not otherwise agree to the interview. In Myanmar, where inter-personal relationships and recommendations from mutual acquaintances are important precursors to establishing contact, snow-balling helps to efficiently identify and recruit participants. The bias associated with this sampling method is that people may recommend friends, acquaintances and colleagues who share the same ideas and opinions, which can lead to quicker saturation.

## Ethics

The rapid assessment relied on voluntary and confidential participation of respondents, except in the case of key informant interviews where some respondents allowed for their names to be recorded. Specific measures were taken by enumerators when interviewing children to ensure that their presence and actions does not interfere with the well-being of the child.

Where possible, children were interviewed at their workplace where the prior consent of the employer. To minimise interference in the children's working schedule they were interviewed during meal breaks. Enumerators were instructed not to continue with an interview if they felt the child was pressured into participation. In at least 50 percent of cases, children were interviewed in the evening at their home where the parents' consent was sought.

Enumerators worked in tandem when interviewing children. In case an adult, e.g. an employer, wanted to be engaged in the interview with the child, which could impact on the quality of data, the adult was engaged/ interviewed at the same time as the child thus avoiding interference. Enumerators did not come across situations of abuse.<sup>20</sup>

Children were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The enumerators asked for their names to facilitate interaction during the interview, however, the names were not recorded. The children were told they could stop and withdraw from an interview if they felt uncomfortable.

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<sup>19</sup> Volunteer sampling can be complimented by the nomination method, whereby confirmed volunteers may nominate people they think would make good participants, i.e. participants who are concerned by the issue and who express their thoughts.

<sup>20</sup> The study was designed to seek out abusive working situations, and the fact that other types of child abuse were not found does not mean that children are not living/ working in vulnerable conditions where they risk physical and emotional abuse. Short-term studies are not an appropriate instrument to investigate cases of abuse.

## Research limitations

This is the first time that the ILO undertook a rapid assessment on child labour in the chosen area inhabited by 686,827 thousand people. There exists *limited institutional data on child labour* in Hlaing Thar Yar,<sup>21</sup> although mentions of underage recruitment into the armed forces and child labourers in the area can be found in a limited number of publications<sup>22</sup> and reports of child labour have been made through the ILO forced labour complaints mechanism. At least one reason for lack of information regarding child labour in the area is reported low accessibility to child labourers by enumerators.<sup>23</sup>

Members of the research team mentioned stakeholders' fear and reluctance to participate in interviews given the sensitive nature of the subject matter. There is much at stake for the various actors, ranging from economic benefit to job security. The reluctance to speak openly with the enumerators was particularly visible in the case of children who work at factories and who were interviewed in the workplace. The presence of employers, supervisors and governmental authorities in the vicinity of where interviews were allowed to take place was intimidating. In addition, employers and relevant stakeholders insisted that only "older" children worked in the factories and granted enumerators access to selected children who were 16 or 17 years old. There were also concerns with data confidentiality as in some cases authority figures wanted to be present during interviews and during the pilot test at least one person requested copies of notes taken during interviews.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the Research Manager instructed the enumerators to interview children outside their workplace whenever possible, which gave a better picture of the situation in the area.

## Risk management and monitoring

The ILO conducted awareness raising about child labour and liaised with the relevant authorities in Hlaing Thar Yar before and during the Rapid Assessment to manage risks on low cooperation of the authorities and respondents. The purpose of the study as well as the use of the data was tackled so that the target groups would recognise the importance of their responses. Participants included employers, workers and industrial zone authorities. There was no formal assessment of the commitment of the audience after the awareness raising session, however, the industrial zone manager and the labour inspectorate focal person offered their coordination support to the study.

ILO staff monitored the data collection and entry processes through spot checks, observation and regular follow-up with the team and Research Manager.

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<sup>21</sup> UNICEF released the 'Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar' in July 2012. In the report, child labour is discussed in general terms. UNICEF was contacted to confirm whether the organization had done any research in Hlaing Thar Yar and may have data/ lessons to share. Child labour is mentioned in Save the Children's publications regarding peri-urban poverty and nutrition and industry publications about industrialisation and foreign investment.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF (2012). *Situation analysis of children in Myanmar*, July 2012. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Myanmar\\_Situation\\_Analysis.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Myanmar_Situation_Analysis.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> *The Involvement of Minors in Solid Waste Management in Yangon*, Research conducted for CESVI in February and March 2014, accessed at: <http://www.swmproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/Research-Olivia.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> This happened during the pilot test following an interview, which was monitored. A blank copy of the questionnaire was shared. Data from the pilot test was not used in the analysis.



## IV. Findings

### The living and working conditions of child labourers, including demographics

Children between the ages of 7-17 years old were targeted for interview. The majority of children interviewed were above 14 years old as they were easier to access – enumerators reported that during household-based survey, parents were reluctant to have younger children interviewed, while at work places, older children were more permitted or willing to be interviewed. The youngest child interviewed was 8 years old.

Children	Children's age			
	Girls	%	Boys	%
Under 13 Yrs	5	10%	9	18%
13-15 Yrs	15	30%	15	30%
16-17 Yrs	30	60%	26	52%

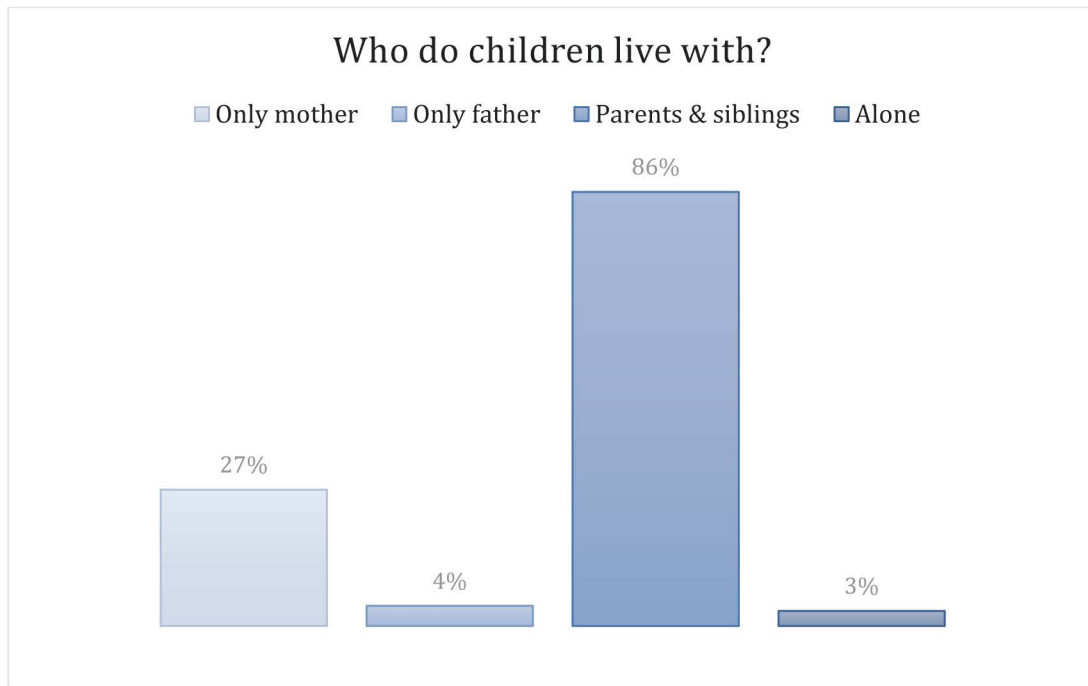
Children below the legal age for employment were found working inside industrial premises in Hlaing Thar Yar. The assessment found that the average age at which girls started work was 12.7 while the boys began at 12.27. In both cases, they started working under the legally allowed minimum age.

Over 90 percent of the children identified as Burman and Buddhist. The rest of the children reported to be Shan, Karen or Rakhine. The ethnicity variable was not used in the analysis.

Children were found to live in predominantly nuclear households, i.e. with their parents and siblings, rarely with extended family members and friends. In the case of single-headed households, children were more likely to live with mothers than fathers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This information does not capture the living arrangements of street children in Hlaing Thar Yar and further research is required to understand their specific living conditions.



Out of 100 child respondents, 25 were found working in garment factories and 13 in food factories. Of those in garment factories, 5 of the children were in the 13-15 year group and 20 in the 16-17 group. Of those in the food factories, 1 child was under 13 years of age, 3 were in the 13-15 age group and 9 in the 16-17 age group.

Children reported working in a wide range of sectors, and findings suggest that younger children work in less regulated environments such as places, which prepare water for delivery, rubbish collection sites and the highway compound<sup>26</sup> – where their working conditions are more difficult to monitor rendering them more vulnerable than the children who work in the formal sector. The jobs available to the children are similar to those available to adults – children reported their parents working as casual labourers, factory hands, street hawkers and builders, with the exception of teashops and restaurants, which appear to be almost exclusive domains for boy and girl labour.<sup>27</sup> In some cases, children work alongside their parents, performing less skilled work.

Children who work in factories are not always involved in the production process. The younger children often clean or serve, or perform tasks, which are not skills-intensive. Stakeholders at the findings validation workshop of the present assessment suggested that many of the children in the factories “do packaging”. During the workshop, it was also pointed out that further research is required to understand the type of tasks carried out by children in factory settings, and that more precise task definitions are needed, e.g. “cutting fabric” was considered too broad, while “cutting off threads” and “cutting off labels” were deemed more appropriate.

<sup>26</sup> This is specific to Hlaing Thar Yar, which is connected to Yangon by three bridges i.e.: the Aung Zeya, Bayinnaung, and Pan Hlaing bridges, which require a fee to cross. Children who specified that they worked for “other” were found to be working at a highway compound, i.e. one of the toll way gates. They did not specify what they did, however, enumerators observed the area and said the children mostly sell water and snacks to motorists, or accompany their parents who do.

<sup>27</sup> The present assessment did not look into turn-over of child labourers, nor did it look into what happens to child labourers once they reach adulthood, although anecdotal evidence suggests that they remain in low-skilled labour. The issue merits focused research.

## Work places

Work place	>13	13-15	16-17
Teashop	2	4	...
Grocery Shop	...	...	2
Garment factory	...	5	20
Food factory	1	3	9
Construction site	...	2	3
Transport company	...	1	3
Restaurant	...	2	...
Private house	...	1	...
Family business	1	...	...
Other	9	12	18
Other: highway compound	7	4	2

Younger children were found to work in less structured settings than older children, mostly outside of regulated or accessible work environments where their working conditions and wages cannot be monitored. While all children are at risk of receiving daily wages, which make for insecure livelihoods, it is evident that the younger the child the higher the likelihood of being paid daily, and the older the child, the higher the chance of being monthly. The research did not find evidence of children not being paid, however, the sample was small, and it is possible that there are working children in Hlaing Thar Yar who are not paid for their work, e.g. children who work alongside their parents in rubbish collection. Further research is required to establish whether children receive contracts at work although anecdotal evidence suggests that this is not the case.

## Frequency of children's wages

Frequency	Under 13 years	13-15 years	16-17 years
Monthly	8.3%	50%	69.1%
Weekly	16.7%	3.3%	3.6%
Daily	58.3%	36.7%	25.5%
Other	16.7%	10%	1.8%

The assessment did not determine whether the difference in monthly wages between boys and girls could be attributed to gender. The sample was too small to draw such a conclusion. It did note, however, that the younger the child, the lower the wages, which reflects the kind of low-skilled work the young children perform and the unregulated environments within which they work. What is more, while both younger and older

children worked mostly in excess of 40 hours a week, younger children were more likely to work shorter hours, which may explain their lower wages.

Overall, the monthly wage averages also appear excessively high across all age groups and may indicate that a social desirability bias influenced the amounts that the children reported.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the 16-17 year old age category, the average amounts are skewed by the relatively high wages in the construction industry.<sup>29</sup>



Children working in private households and teashops reported earning the least a month. These children, however, are also accommodated and fed at the workplace, which is considered by employers as payment in kind. Those working at a “transport company” did not specify what they did, however, there are thousands of small bus companies in the city, and many young boys are found working as bus conductors. The highest earning children were found working on construction sites, where the older said they built (again, this will need to be defined in more detail for further studies) or carried rocks.

<sup>28</sup> Employers at small garment factories reported paying children aged 14-16 35,000 MMK/month in basic salaries. See p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Even though only three children in the 16-17 year old age group reported working at a construction site, they reported earning between 140,000-160,000 MMK/month). While the construction industry is known for relatively high wages in Myanmar, these amounts should be considered with caution.

### Average monthly salaries

Type of work	Average monthly salary
Private household	28,000 MMK
Teashop	35,000 MMK
Restaurant	60,000 MMK
Transport company	70,500 MMK
Food factory	78,000 MMK
Garment factory	83,000 MMK
Grocery shop	127,000 MMK
Construction site	140,000 MMK

The rapid assessment found that 90 percent of the interviewed children worked alongside other children, and in most cases, alongside their *peers*.<sup>30</sup> Of the children under 13 years of age, 50 percent said they worked with children aged 7-10, and 35.7 percent reported working with children aged 11-13 years. Among the 16-17 year olds, 55.4 percent reported working with children aged 14-16 and 26.8 percent said they worked alongside 17-18 year olds. The presence of peers is important to the children's social development and well-being, something, which is often denied to domestic workers, who find themselves isolated from peers.

What is most important to note is that almost all of the working children reported to be working alongside other children, including children below the minimum legal working age. This indicates the widespread practice of child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar as indirectly captured in the assessment.

### Children working alongside children

Age group	Under 13 years	13-15 years	16-17 years
7-10	50%	3.3%	0%
11-13	35.7%	30%	8.9%
14-16	0%	53.3%	55.4%
17-18*	7.1%	0%	26.8%
No answer	7.1%	13.3%	8.9%

<sup>30</sup> Places such as teashops and restaurants are known for employing numerous children at once. The present assessment found children across many work sectors, however, it does suggest that certain jobs – e.g. those requiring less skills or those, which are underpaid – may be 'reserved' for children. Thus, the construction industry will employ adults and children, however, the children may find themselves carrying water or shoving sand, while youth and adults are involved in more complex activities. Further research into this issue is desirable.

\* In Myanmar, it is common to say 18 years old instead of 17 years old. People round up the age.

The rapid assessment revealed that almost all the interviewed children – regardless of sex - can be defined as child labourers. While they did not report working between 6pm and 6am, 50 percent of children under 13 years, 73.4 percent of 13-15 year olds and 80.3 percent of 16-17 year olds reported working between **6-7 days a week**. In addition to working many days, the majority of children also reported working more than 40 hours a week. The assessment did not ask the children to break down their working hours into “normal” working hours and over-time, however, interviews with employers at factories suggested that children can and do work overtime to earn extra money.

#### Weekly working hours

Hours	Under 13 years	13-15 years	16-17 years
1-10	14.3%	0%	0%
11-20	7.1%	6.7%	0%
21-30	7.1%	3.3%	1.8%
31-40	35.7%	6.7%	9.1%
40+	35.7%	83.3%	89.1%

In addition to working long hours, children, regardless of sex, receive little time off work. In the majority of cases, the children said they were granted one break during a working day – it was not specified how long the break was. In the table below, it is evident that children in the 16-17 years age category are almost 20 percent more likely to receive a lunch break than children under 13 years of age. The youngest children are also the least likely to receive any breaks at all.<sup>31</sup> This reflects their working conditions as daily wage labourers in informal working environments, e.g. as water deliverers. Those most likely to receive regular time off work are the older children who are employed in factories.

#### Work breaks

Days	Under 13 years	13-15 years	16-17 years
Morning	7.1%	3.4%	1.9%
Lunch	78.6%	79.3%	94.4%
No breaks	7.1%	3.4%	0%
Other	7.1%	13.8%	3.7%

While the majority of children interviewed said they received some time off work, it was the 16-17 year old children who were the most likely to receive at least one day off

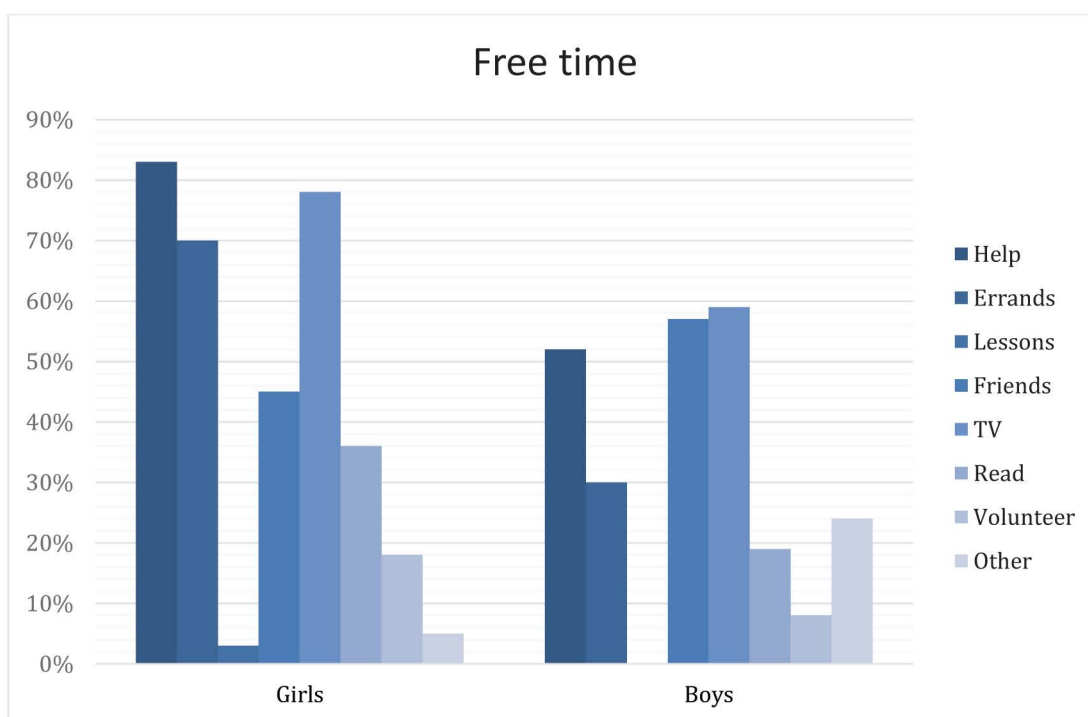
<sup>31</sup> In the case of “other” children said that they received “a little” time off or “two hours” a day. The latter was the case for children in unstructured activities, e.g. delivering water.

a week and the least likely to not receive any time off at all. Almost half the younger children reported not having any time off in a week. Once again, the unstructured nature of younger children’s work leaves them more vulnerable to exploitation as their working conditions are difficult to monitor.

### Free days

Days	Under 13 years	13-15 years	16-17 years
One day	8.3%	44.8%	53.7%
Two days	33.3%	6.0%	9%
1 x every 2 weeks	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%
Festivals	16.7%	3.4%	11.1%
No free days	41.7%	44.8%	22.2%

By the children’s own indication, they spend their free time – i.e. time not spent at work - mostly by helping around the house or running errands, followed by watching TV or playing with friends. Girls appear to spend more of their free time on house chores than boys, and are more likely than boys to watch TV who are more likely to play with their friends. In addition, boys are more likely than girls to spend their free time doing nothing or sleeping (other) and even though both sexes may spend their free time at home, it is evident that girls spend more time helping around the house than their male counterparts.



All children reported having household chores, with younger children reporting spending more hours a day doing those chores than older children. Boys under 13 years of age said they spend 3.67 hours a day on household chores, while girls under 13 years of age said they spent 2.60 hours. Boys between 13-15 years of age said they spent 1.38 hours a day on household work while girls in the same category said they worked 3.13 hours in the household. In the case of children 16-17 years of age, boys spent 2.31 hours a day on chores and girls 2.97. The girls reported carrying out many of the kitchen-related and cleaning tasks while the boys took on most of the external activities (70.3 percent) related to running errands and delivering water. The latter may also explain the discrepancy in the hours that the youngest boys and girls spend on household chores, since many of the young boys reported working as paid water deliverers and many of those also deliver water as their household chore.

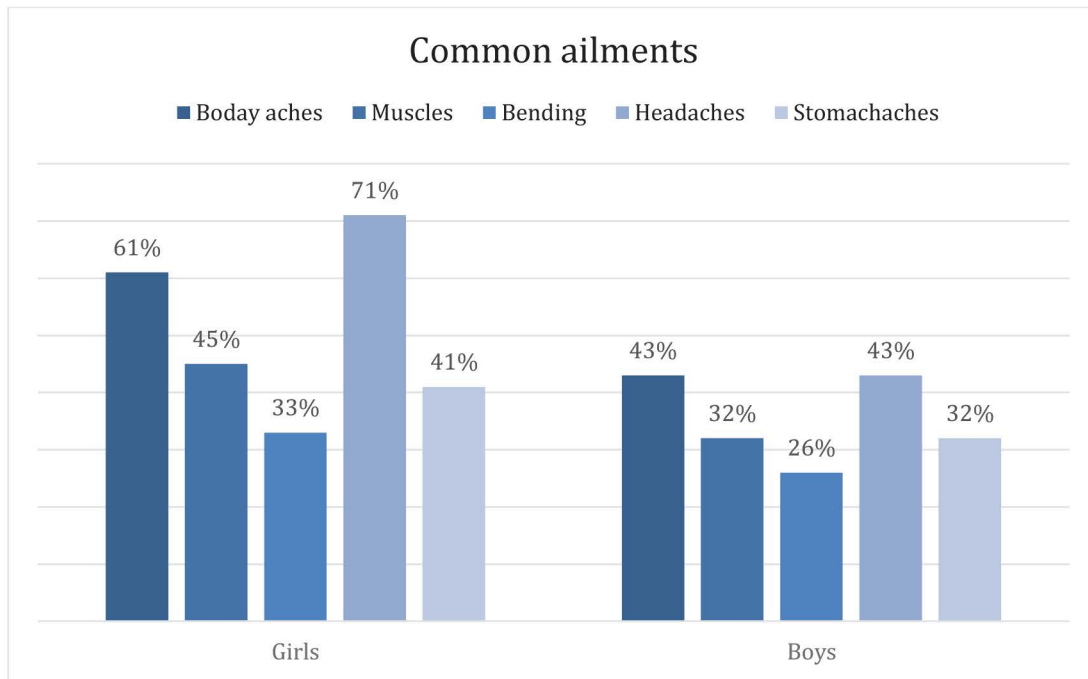
#### Household chores

Activity	Girls	Boys
Cooking	61.7%	13.7%
Cleaning	83%	37.8%
Babysitting	27.7%	10.8%
Shopping	76.6%	29.7%
Adult care	14.9%	5.4%
Washing	78.7%	16.2%
Other	27.7%	70.3%

Children across all ages reported being physically tired due to work while emotional fatigue was reported with less frequency. They also mentioned suffering from numerous work-related ailments, the most common of which were headaches and body aches for both girls and boys. Overall, girls reported suffering with greater frequency than boys. This may be because in addition to working for wages, girls perform more household chores, which exacerbates their physical condition. It is also possible that boys may have reported less suffering due to not wanting to exhibit or describe any situation that may be associated with weakness.

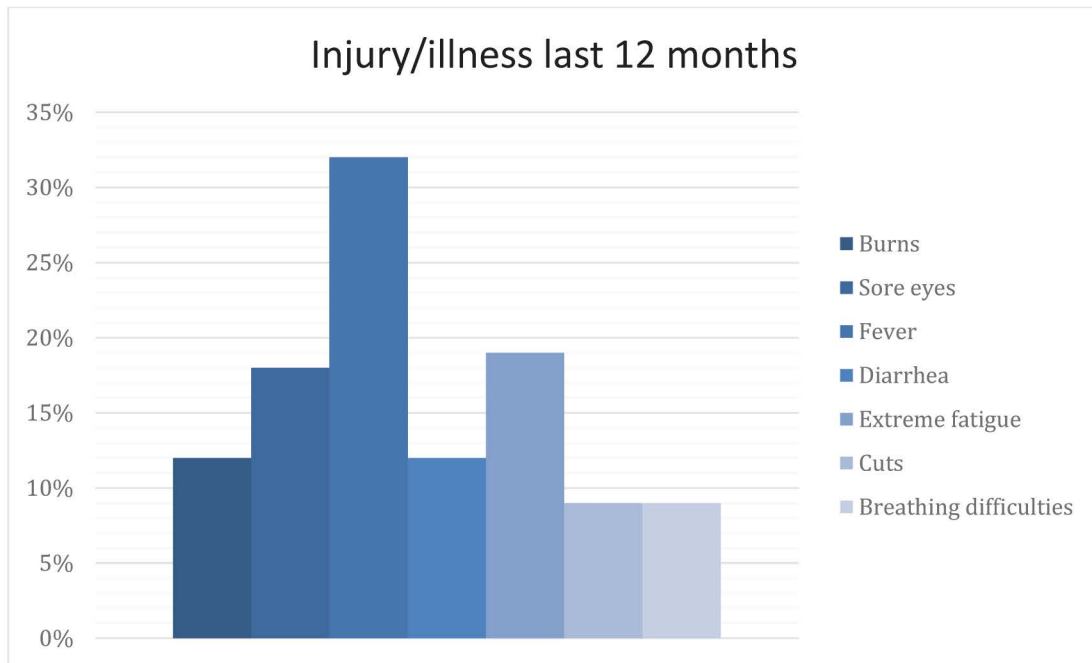
Body aches, sore muscles and headaches are all reflective of the type of work, which most of the children perform, which is usually low-skilled and repetitive. Working outside, pushing and carrying heavy loads and bending over for long periods were common among children who identified dust/ fumes and extreme heat as two of the most common hazards they face at work.



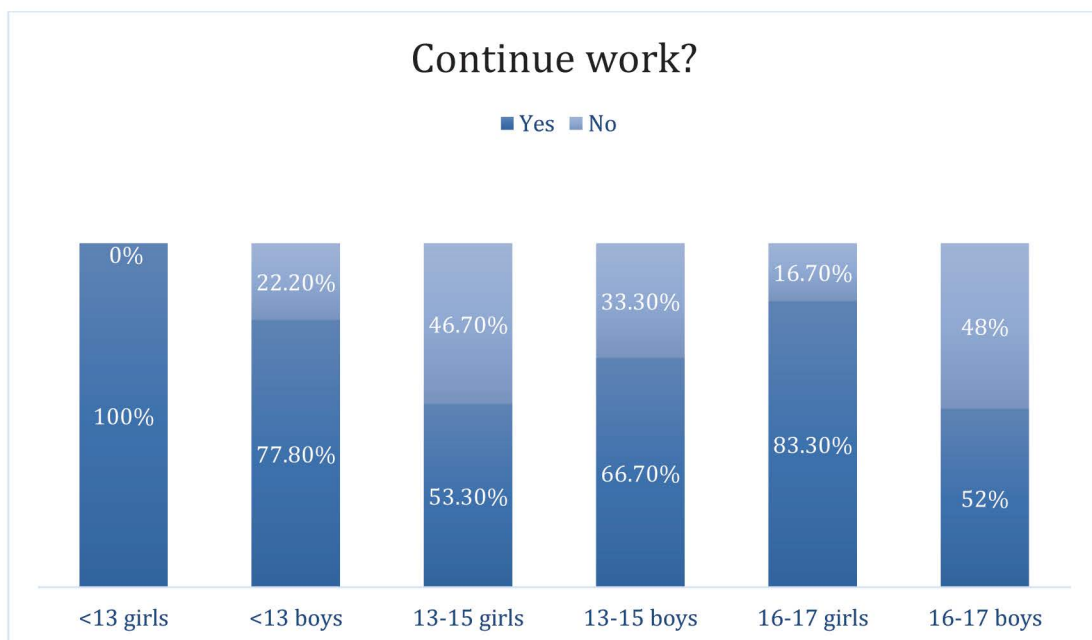


The most common work-related injuries and illness reported by the children were fever, extreme fatigue, sore eyes and diarrhea. It is difficult to determine whether fever and diarrhea can be attributed to the kind of work performed by children, especially knowing that these are common ailments.<sup>32</sup> Extreme fatigue and sore eyes, however, reflect the kind of work that the children do, such as carrying rocks or sewing.

<sup>32</sup> Further research regarding the health conditions of all children in Hlaing Thar Yar is required. Dhiarrea is common among urban populations in Myanmar, and it results in the highest number of fatalities associated with waterborne diseases, The 2013 "Water Supply Improvement Project Study for Yangon City and Patheingyi City" found that "the contribution of municipal water supply to improving public hygiene is inadequate" in cities like Yangon. It showed that in Hlaing Thar Yar only 2% of the water supply was provided by the Yangon City Development Council (YCDC), 1% by public wells, 69% by private wells, 23% by neighbouring wells and the remaining % by other sources. The study found that "62% of the residents excluding those (38%) receiving YCDC water supply have been using water that has not been subjected to appropriate water quality controls as drinking water, and these residents are exposed to the risk of waterborne infectious disease [such as dhiarrea]." In addition water supplied by YCDC was found to inadequately disinfected. Available at: [http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/kenkou/suido/jouhou/other/dl/04\\_150324b.pdf](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/kenkou/suido/jouhou/other/dl/04_150324b.pdf).



The majority of children, especially girls, reported liking their jobs and when asked whether they would like to continue working most said yes, especially girls under 13 years of age and between 16-17 years old. The children's desire to continue to work needs to be understood in the same context as their decision to work, i.e. *children wanted to work to supplement the family income and help with family debt, and they could not access education due to prohibitive costs*. Work is perceived as an opportunity to escape or improve their circumstances, a chance to be productive or useful to their families. Just as the children's expressed desire to work reflects their circumstances, opportunities and obligations, their appreciation of their jobs does not necessarily suggest they enjoy the actual work, rather that they like the opportunity to fulfil their obligations towards their poor families.



Of the interviewed children, only 12 percent of the girls and 24 percent of the boys said they are attending government school in the current year. Most of the in-school respondents were in the lower age categories attending primary or middle school. Of children under 13 years old, 64 percent said they are attending school. Only two of the children – boys – said they attend high school. It is important to note that “attending” can mean that the children are enrolled in school, which does not necessarily mean that they attend regularly. Of those attending school, 67 percent of the girls and 42 percent of the boys said they missed school days mostly due to experiencing difficulty in understanding lessons or finding school boring.<sup>33</sup>

#### School level

Age group	Primary school	Middle school	High school
< 13 years girls	2	...	...
< 13 years boys	7	...	...
13-15 years girls	...	3	...
13-15 years boys	...	2	1
16-17 years girls	...	...	...
16-17 years boys	...	...	2

While the majority of the interviewed children did not attend school in the current year, almost all of them attended school in the past, and the present study found a correlation between children dropping out of school and starting to work. Of the interviewed children, boys appeared to have attained higher level of education than girls who mostly completed primary school. The assessment did not identify children who only worked during school holidays.

#### School level attained

Age group	Primary school	Middle school	High school
< 13 years girls	2	...	...
< 13 years boys	...	1	...
13-15 years girls	8	2	1
13-15 years boys	6	5	1
16-17 years girls	18	12	...
16-17 years boys	6	12	4

<sup>33</sup> School holidays were not considered as “missed school days” in the study.

Of the child labourers who no longer attend school, only 45 percent said they would like to return to school.<sup>34</sup> Over half of those wanting to return, i.e. 54 percent, were 16-17 year olds, while 37 percent of those wanting to go back to school were 13-15. There were 14 children under the age of 13 interviewed for the assessment and 9 of those children are currently in school, while 3 reported that they would like to return to school. The assessment results do not make it possible to draw definitive conclusions regarding the children's desire for schooling, however, it is safe to suggest that some children may find work more rewarding or useful and that a return to school is not necessarily a desired solution to their predicament.

### The magnitudes, processes and influences coming from above the community level

The study found that poverty is the main driving factor behind child labour. Poverty is also the main barrier to education, the cost of which is the primary reason for which children discontinue their schooling,<sup>35</sup> in addition to the lack of interest, which is compounded by difficulties at school, boredom and little ambition on the part of children. Families of child labourers and communities in which they live, seek out and provide jobs to children as a means of sustaining families. While the value of education is understood, its pay-off is too far into the future for poor families to bank on it.

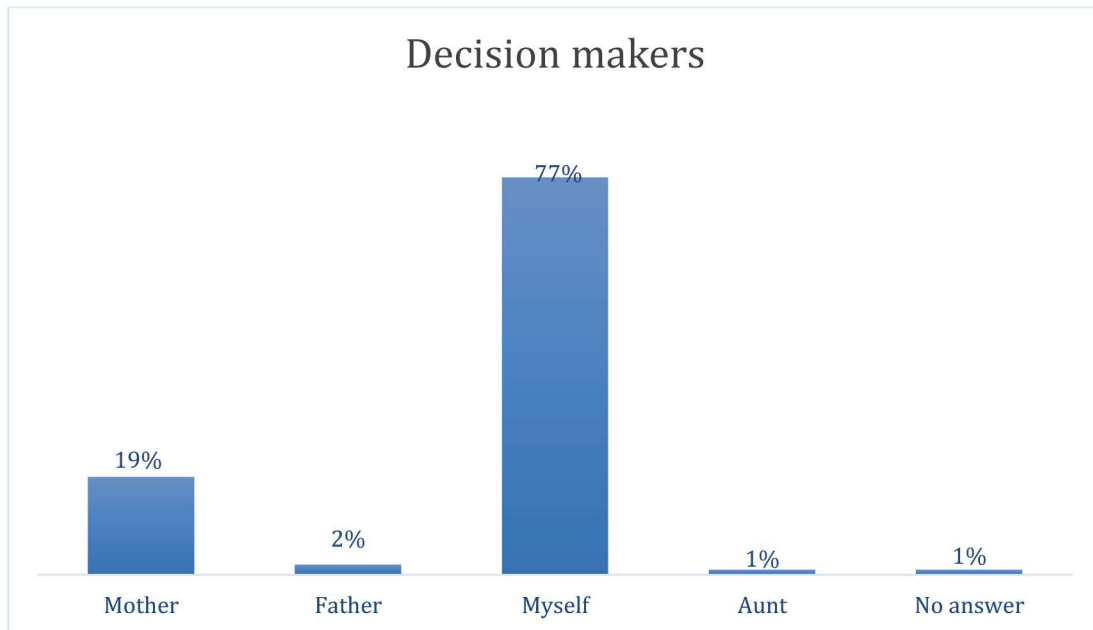
The present assessment found that 77 percent of the interviewed children made the decision to work. While children's agency has been well-documented in developing countries,<sup>36</sup> and there is no reason to doubt that children, even young children in the present assessment, decided to work, the reasons behind their decision, e.g. family income, debts and the high cost of education suggest that *mutual interdependence* rather than individual independence are at play. The study did not find that the children were coerced to work, however, this does not mean that pressure generated by cultural beliefs about children and their duty to gratify their families did not played a part in the children's decision-making process.

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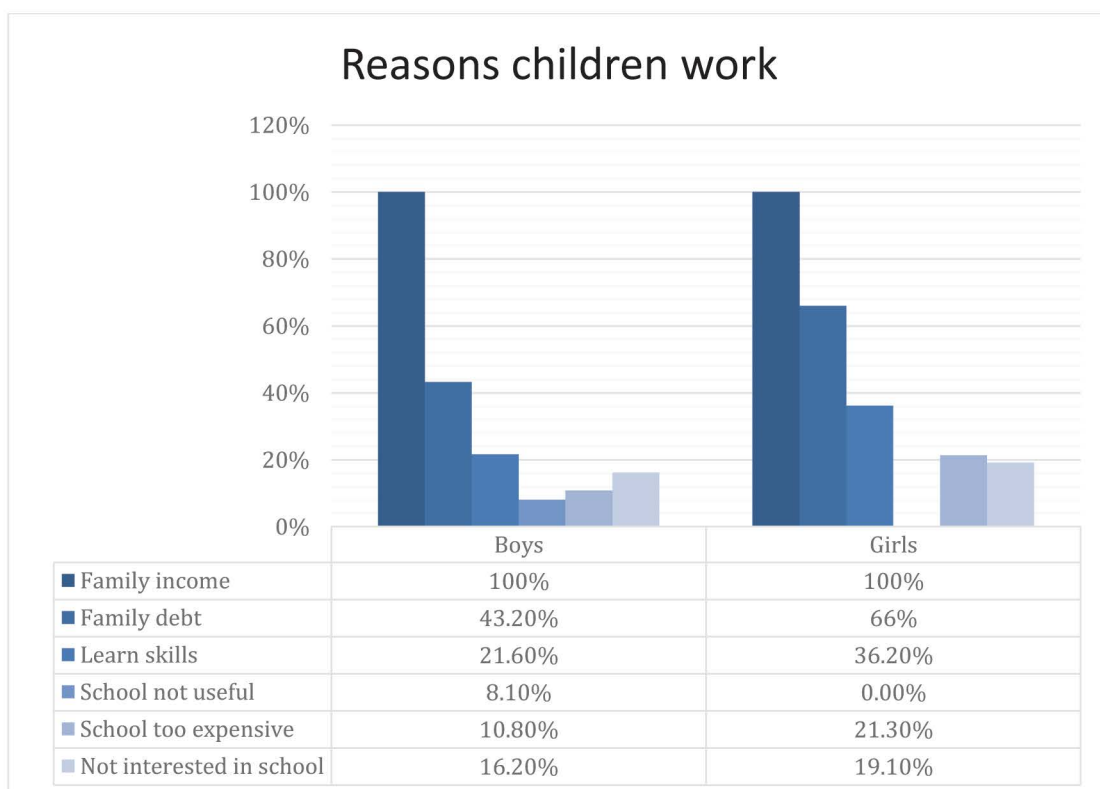
<sup>34</sup> The study did not look into 'why' the children would like to return to school. It is possible that the older children may realize that schooling may offer higher returns in the future, that they associate it with a certain status in society or that they are tired of their jobs. Further research is needed on this specific issue.

<sup>35</sup> In Myanmar, education is free in principle. Parents do not pay fees to send their children to school. It is the indirect costs associated with education, e.g. supplementing teachers' salaries, uniforms, books and transportation that place a financial burden on the families. It is a common practice for underpaid teachers to request that children attend afterschool paid tuition at the teachers' homes in order to pass subjects or obtain good grades. In addition, families sending children to school *invest* in children, which is a long-term financial strategy, while families who send their children to work achieve short-term financial gain.

<sup>36</sup> See: G.K. Lieten, *Children, Structure and Agency: Realities Across the Developing World*, Routledge Series in Development and Society (Book 16), Routledge, 2008; Olga Nieuwenhuys, "The Wealth of Children: Considering the Child Labour Debate", in *Studies in Modern Childhood. Society, Agency, Culture*, ed. Jens Qvortrup, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 167-183; Ann Whitehead, Iman M. Hashim & Vegard Iversen, "Child Migration, Child Agency and Inter-generational Relations in Africa and South Asia", Working Paper T 24, Sussex Centre for Migration Studies, 2007.



Children do not work for individual benefit. They work for a variety of reasons, the majority of which revolve around helping their families. Supplementing family income and paying family debt were the main reasons given by children combined with the desire to learn skills, which reveals that children and/or their parents may see the workplace as a setting where children can learn skills for the future. The prohibitive cost of education contributes to children taking up employment. Some 32 percent of the children said that one of the reasons why they had to work was that schooling was too expensive.



The relationship between the cost of education, its perceived value and the need for skills should be further explored to understand children's "lack of interest" in education. The apparent lack of knowledge about and/or interest in vocational training may be linked to "lack of interest" in education where the immediate benefits in the form of income and improved livelihoods are not visible and therefore difficult to calculate.

Children work to help their families, which is reflected in the way they spend their salaries. Of the interviewed children, 91 percent said they give all or part of their salaries to their families, only one child said he *only* spends the money on things for himself, and 84 percent of the children said that their salaries go towards the family budget, things for themselves, skills acquisition and savings.

### The effect of prior programmes, if any, on children and their work and families

Only 12 of the 100 interviewed children said they had received vocational training. The skills they had learnt were car repair, sewing and cooking. Of those 12 children only 8 wanted additional vocational training. When asked about who provided the original training, children were unable to name the entity and identified skills-acquisition with their employers.

The low number of respondents regarding previous vocational training and the inability to identify vocational training providers suggests lack of understanding as to what vocational training is. Current responses indicate that children associate vocational training with work, which may explain why they do not want more "vocational training" as this could mean "more work".

The assessment identified efforts by the government and monastic schools to provide skills to disadvantaged children such as traditional snack making, knitting, or sewing. Interviewees identified World Vision and Save the Children as providers of specific trainings on shelter and disaster risk reduction as well as climate change adaptation, which offer important survival skills, however, may not be sufficient for employment. According to teachers at the Non-Formal Education Programme "*there is no vocational training for free*" in Hlaing Thar Yar.

### The attitudes of employers and local authorities to possible programme introductions

Teachers, religious figures, community workers, local authorities and even employers were open to vocational training for child labourers, and some, such as community workers, actively encouraged it on the condition that they children did not have to pay for it.

The assessment, however, did not delve into what the various stakeholders understood "vocational training" to be. Teachers and religious figures<sup>37</sup> involved in education (e.g. monasteries and Sunday schools) were open to anything that encouraged further education and learning among the children, while employers were more concerned with

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<sup>37</sup> Buddhist and Christian. Muslim religious figures did not want to participate in the research.

skills acquisition relevant to the jobs they offer. Community workers used the expression freely without detailing what they envisioned as appropriate/useful vocational training or the ideal way to deliver it.

One teacher from the Non-Formal Education Programme said that even if free vocational training existed “*the parents will not allow them [the children] to attend*” revealing a potential gap between the wishes of the community and the authorities and those of the families, who may value education in theory, however, they do not see value in it in the short term, which is more important for their immediate survival.

Current practices associate skills acquisition with work. Children learn skills through work rather than through special courses or training. The current system resembles an apprenticeship - one in which children enter the workforce at a young age, and as they grow older, they learn their trade, be it construction or garment sewing.

### Perceptions of different groups about child labour

All of the adults interviewed during the rapid assessment stated that children have duties and obligations in the family and that they should help their parents. Some of the interlocutors, e.g. teachers, believed that children should only run errands for their parents or help in household tasks.

Focus group discussions with parents of working children revealed that they were all migrants from the countryside.<sup>38</sup> The parents came to Hlaing Thar Yar in search of work and while most of them agreed that their children’s education was more important than work, they also felt that children whose families could not afford to send them to school should work to learn skills and earn their keep. This attitude reflected their belief that children have duties and obligations towards their families and that they could start helping around the house at the ages of 12-13. In addition, while this was not made explicit by the parents, it is possible that employment is seen as a protection scheme for children who may otherwise fall into undesirable social circumstances or take up drug use.

Most of the interviewed parents of child labourers had worked as children, some dropped out of school to help on family farms at the age of 10, while others were unable to attend school due to lack of facilities in the area. The interviewed parents all performed low-skilled labour mostly on construction sites or as casual labourers picking up work that was available on a given day and enduring income insecurity.

Information gathered from the discussion with mothers and anecdotal evidence suggests that fathers’ alcoholism and inability to work are contributing factors to child labour, particularly in households where the mothers do not engage in paid work.

Parents identified numerous factors that contribute to children’s well-being and growth. Among those were food, shelter and clothing as well as education and avoidance of

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<sup>38</sup> There are recent and long-term migrants in Hlaing Thar Yar and the area continues to attract workers, especially from the Ayeyarwaddy Delta, which saw an exodus of people following the 2008 Cyclone Nargis. One teacher interviewed for the Rapid Assessment commented on the human mobility in the area saying that most adults are itinerant workers going from place to place according to job availability, which greatly affects their children’s ability to continue schooling.

substance abuse. Parents also identified “*good behaviour and character*” as necessary to children’s well-being and believed those could be instilled through obedience and respect for the parents. At the same time, some parents felt that if they could not provide for their children, then the latter should be free to choose what to do with their lives.

It was evident from the interviews that the parents wanted the best for their children and recognized that their ability to provide for their children’s needs has an impact on the latter’s well-being. Yet, they were unable to fulfil all their parental obligations due to economic difficulties, and delegated financial responsibilities to their children.

**“They (the children) know the power of money and how to earn it.”**

Focus groups discussions and interviews with staff of non-governmental, civil society and community-based organisations in Hlaing Thar Yar revealed that staffers are aware of the pervasiveness of child labour in the area and the lack of development opportunities for working children and precarious working conditions for their parents. They see the problem as a result of numerous factors ranging from poverty and the lack of education of the parents, which leads to lack of ambition in the

children, to the children’s own desire to earn money to escape their misery. As one interviewee stated, the working children “*know the power of money and how to earn it*”. This sentiment was echoed by a teacher in the Non-Formal Education Programme, who said that while children should help in the house, “*they should not work paid jobs. Once they know how they can earn money, they tend to follow money and put aside education*”. This opinion reflects the finding that only 48 percent of the surveyed working children expressed a desire to return to school.

Those working in and for the community who were able to describe child labour, had mostly a negative view of child labourers. They saw them as “*aggressive because they encountered people who treat them bad every day*” and lacking in ambition. They were able to ascribe the children’s plight to their families’ socio-economic conditions and rural backgrounds pointing out that many of the child labourers were disadvantaged in their home communities before coming to Hlaing Thar Yar with their parents or as independent child migrants. The respondents felt that the situation of child labourers,

**Discussions with employers revealed that they see child labour as a result of the household poverty and that they do not see how child labour can be eliminated without eliminating poverty first. In most cases, employers believe they are rendering a service to poor families who rely on the child for additional income and worry that if the child did not work, the family would face more difficulty.**

especially independent migrants, was inevitable, with one saying “*It’s a real tragedy: the sender (the parent) and the children cry but they have no choice*” describing situations in which parents send their children away for work.

The employers were reluctant to admit whether they employ children under the age of 13, however, they did say that parents of very young children come and request jobs for the children. The assessment showed that businesses, such as garment factories, producing goods for the local market were more likely to hire children than businesses producing for export. This does not suggest that child labour does not exist in export-oriented factories, but that the problem may be



pronounced in smaller local manufacturers, which are less visible and where controls are less strict.

The employers did not explicitly state that there is an economic benefit to hiring children,<sup>39</sup> however, their replies suggested that children do make for cheaper and more obedient – easier to manage - employees. All of the interviewed employers felt that by hiring children they were being helpful in an otherwise helpless situation that many poor families face. They said they did not actively recruit children, however, they did not refuse to hire children when asked by parents or relatives of the youngsters. Yet, garment factory owners specified that an average basic salary<sup>40</sup> of a child between the ages of 14-15 is 35,000 MMK/ month and can reach 60,000MMK/month for 16-year old children. These amounts are significantly lower than those reported by the interviewed children, however, the interviewed children were mostly 16+ years older and worked in larger, export-oriented factories where it is possible that they earn higher wages. It is possible that children reported higher salaries out of fear of getting into trouble with their employers (although the majority of them were interviewed outside the workplace). It is also possible they reported total salaries, i.e. salaries inclusive of overtime and benefits.

In addition to earning lower wages, children appear to be better employees. Employers described children mainly as “*active, obedient and honest*” and said they were more likely to remain in their jobs, unlike adults who switched jobs without warning and/or once they reached a certain skill level. It appears then that employing children has a number of benefits to employers, although these are not necessarily vocalised.

Employers, much like community workers, parents, religious leaders and teachers felt that children had an obligation to help their families. Unlike teachers and religious leaders, who felt that children’s help should be limited to the household, they believed that children from poorer families should not only perform house chores but should also earn an income. This belief supports their decision to employ children, as does the conviction that they are rendering a service to those who need help.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar is pervasive and is considered inevitable. As one labour inspector put it “*from the point of law, it should not be allowed but from the point of humanity, who else can help the family*”. It is seen as a direct result of poverty that is also the main barrier to children accessing education. The local authorities turned to the ILO with a request for assistance to introduce vocational training initiatives in the area to alleviate the problem. The present recommendations reflect the interests of the local authorities concerned with the elimination of child labour and the findings of the rapid assessment. The latter has shown that there are numerous barriers to the successful implementation of vocational training, that the alleviation of child labour requires that family units are targeted and that solutions beyond vocational training as well as more research are required to effectively tackle child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar.

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<sup>39</sup> Employers did not specify whether children were more productive or hard-working.

<sup>40</sup> This amount does not include overtime or possible benefits.

## Demand-driven vocational training

Interviews with children and their parents showed that child labour is “about the family”. Of the interviewed children, 73 percent said that they had an obligation to help the family, while parents of working children all held this belief. Community leaders, teachers, authority figures and religious leaders in addition to employers were also of the belief that children had a duty to help their families, albeit not all of the interviewed adults thought children had to earn an income. Vocational training interventions will need to take into account that the children are not *sole* actors in their circumstances and that all initiatives for children should consider the impact they may have on the children’s families. The families’ buy-in and support for vocational training, especially the mothers’ approval – seeing that mothers are influential decision makers within the household – are an important prerequisite for possibly successful programmes.

Provision of skills need not be done in isolation, but also look at what is the demand in the labour market. Before introducing any new interventions, a careful stocktake of what is currently available and an assessment of past programmes should be done. In addition, access to existing TVET institutions should be promoted and strengthened for disadvantaged children.

Training needs to be defined and adapted to the children’s circumstances bearing in mind their socio-economic backgrounds, the long hours they work, the fatigue they experience and the little time-off they receive from their employers and/or are allowed to take. Vocational training will require that children be allowed by their employers to invest time and effort. In situations where children cannot be removed from employment at the risk of worsening their families’ and by default their own financial situation, engaging with employers to identify ways to improve the children’s situation and working standards with a view to:

- 1) removing children from arduous work and/ or working hours;
- 2) removing them from hazardous working environments by assigning them to more appropriate jobs;
- 3) allowing them to spend their free time on learning and acquiring skills that are useful not only for their future employment, but also productivity in the current workplace.

While it may be possible to support the younger children to return to school, the older children will require skills that can help them very quickly to improve their situation in the future, therefore programmes should be designed to supplement and provide them with related skills rather than replicate them. In the current garment production system, where Cut-Make-Pack (CMP) factories dominate,<sup>41</sup> children learn limited skills, e.g. sewing on buttons, cutting off threads, or, by employers’ indication, packaging. These skills will not allow them to move onto more sophisticated work in the future. In this case children could benefit from learning wholesome skills in product making that would allow them to produce the final product by themselves, capacitating them for improved working conditions or starting their own business in the future.

Vocational training programmes may fail due to lack of buy-in and ownership, which are linked to the programmes’ lack of relevance or perceived value for the children and

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<sup>41</sup> See: <http://www.myanmargarments.org/factory-information/cmp-versus-fob/>.

their parents. Older children's lack of interest in education may also have repercussions for any theoretical programmes or ones, which too closely simulate a school setting. Initiatives, which tap into the existing set-up between children and their employers, or initiatives, which encourage new cooperation between the two, can also be beneficial providing that they take into consideration the children's well-being and the employers' interests. Projects in other countries suggest that the simultaneous engagement of children and their employers led to changes most valued by children.<sup>42</sup>

### **Earning while learning<sup>43</sup>**

These initiatives are recommended for older children, who may not wish to return or pursue their education due to the risk of losing income. In this case vocational training can be combined with a productive activity. Children are given an opportunity to combine academic and practical education. They attend institutions where they can study the theoretical aspects of their craft or trade and apply this knowledge to a productive process, which results in an output and income.

### **Workplace apprenticeships**

Workplace apprenticeships tap into the existing system whereby children are sent to work and learn a craft or trade along an employer/ artisan. They do not attend school. Car mechanics, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, repairmen and other professionals often possess knowledge, which they dispense slowly to the children over many years. Their efforts could be supplemented by theoretical input from an outside entity to compliment existing practices with newly introduced techniques. While these initiatives aim at the children and their employers and aim for a balance between the needs and interests of both, there is a risk that workplace apprenticeships may be unpaid. Efforts should be made to ensure that youngsters headed into apprenticeships are awarded for their work.

### **Conditional cash transfers**

Initiatives of this type are best suited for families/mothers of younger children who have only recently dropped out of school and can be easily rehabilitated or who are at risk of dropping out of school in order to work to supplement family income. Conditional cash transfers could also be used in the case of families who would allow their children to participate in a vocational training programme that would offer skills for gainful employment in the future but that would strip the children of their income for the duration of the training.

### **School-based apprenticeships**

These initiatives require that educational institutions provide a combination of basic education and vocational training that can prepare children for a variety of crafts and trades that align with their preferences and the area's/country's skill needs. Such initiatives are best for secondary (high school) students and can be useful where the

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<sup>42</sup> M.F.C Bourdillon, *Rights and Wrongs of Children's Work*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> These initiatives are common in developed and emerging economies. They have become particularly popular in India where students from financial, technical and social study fields are able to combine academic learning with paid skills acquisition.

children are at risk of dropping out of school.

Holistic initiatives, which act on the children, their families and their employers, and which recognise the importance of the children's income to their households, are recommended in Hlaing Thar Yar where families struggle for survival and where child labour is widespread. Awareness raising should accompany all demand-driven vocational training initiatives, to maximise the possibility of their successful implementation.

### Supporting youth and adult employment

There is reason to believe that the obstacles, which women face in gaining and maintaining regular, gainful employment contributes to child labour. Exploitation and harassment in the workplace, may also cause women to opt out of paid labour, pushing their children to work. According to research from Chiang May University, in Hlaing Thar Yar “women workers argue that factory work is unfair, insecure, exploitative and pays poorly” and that in addition to sexual harassment they experience physical abuse and salary-related problems such as their employers refusing to pay overtime or intentionally paying incorrect salaries.<sup>44</sup>

Initiatives, which aim to help the family unit, or the women within the family unit can help ease the burden on the working children. Mothers, the majority of whom are housewives or casual labourers, could be assisted in obtaining secure jobs and regular incomes, which could help prevent younger children entering the workforce early. Improving the labour inspection system to recognise, address and promote understanding of workplace difficulties specific to women could be helpful in this. Engaging with women in an attempt to identify and promote appropriate forms of work, e.g. those, which allow them to fulfil their childcare duties – could also be helpful in stemming the flow of young children into employment.

Men's employment is equally important. Men continue to be considered the breadwinners of the family and their absence, through death, illness or separation as well as their inability to earn an income contribute to child labour. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while men do not experience the same type of harassment as women in the workplace, they are also faced with insecure jobs, irregular and/or insufficient pay and exploitation.

Mothers and fathers need to be employed and/or earn enough income to keep their children out of work. Initiatives, which aim to provide both women and men with demand-driven skills that could improve their livelihoods, can constitute an additional measure in the prevention of child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar.

### Community awareness raising

Community awareness raising initiatives can be part of a multi-pronged approach to eliminate child labour. Sessions about the perils and long-term drawbacks of child labour could be conducted for parents, teachers, community leaders, religious figures,

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<sup>44</sup> Chaw Chaw, “Rural women migrating to urban garment factories in Myanmar”. In Mingsarn Kaosaard & J. Dore (Eds.), *Social challenges for the Mekong region* (pp. 203–224). Chiang Mai, Thailand: Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University, 2003, p. 215.

employers, adult workers and workers' organisations, the police and other local stakeholders. These should be conducted with sensitivity to promote understanding of the issue and encourage the common search for solutions.

### Monitoring and law enforcement

The study found that current monitoring and law enforcement measures are not entirely effective, primarily due to ambiguous legislation and lack of alternatives for child labourers. One interviewed inspector said child labourers could not be removed from their workplaces predominantly because the children's parents were against such a move, which would plunge their families further into poverty. The same inspector claimed that removing a child from factory would mean that the child would soon be found working elsewhere as the parents would seek for the child to be re-employed. The best that could be done was to ensure that children were not overworked and that they were given easier tasks.

In the future, as new legislation emerges with clear guidelines for the employment of children, official monitoring mechanisms could be strengthened and labour inspectors empowered to prevent and eliminate child labour in a sustainable manner.

### Further research

More research is required to understand the dynamics of child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar and beyond. The major issues identified during the rapid assessment related to child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar were conditions of adult employment, migration and the availability of educational and training institutions for children and youth. Other issues, which emerged from the analysis and discussion, are the social mobility of child labourers, the turnover of child labourers, the living and working conditions of street children and the type of jobs available to children. Specific research into the identified areas will allow the local stakeholders and supporting institutions to design relevant and targeted interventions for the elimination of child labour in Hlaing Thar Yar.

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