

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Case Study Series

**Factors Influencing  
Decisions to Use  
Child Labour: A Case Study  
of Poor Households in Kabul**



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## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation headquartered in Kabul. AREU's mission is to conduct high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and facilitating reflection and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Current funding for AREU is provided by the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, and the governments of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Funding for this project was provided by UNICEF.

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## Acronyms

ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
AKTC	Aga Khan Trust for Culture
CCA	Cooperation Center for Afghanistan
CDC	Community Development Committee
CFA	ChildFund Afghanistan
CSO	Central Statistics Office
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
TdH	<i>Terre des hommes</i> (a Swiss children's aid organisation, the largest one operating outside Switzerland.)

## Glossary

<i>elagasht</i>	a person who is idle, or wandering without a purpose
<i>bolani</i>	an Afghan snack (resembling a stuffed pancake) made from a flour and eggs batter, usually with leek and potato stuffing
<i>chars</i>	hashish
<i>pahpur</i>	a crispy snack, usually enjoyed by children, made from <i>daal</i> flour and spices; sold everywhere, including the bazaar or on the streets
<i>sya kari</i>	the design pattern in a carpet
<i>shura</i>	a community decision-making group
<i>dam chub</i>	a wooden plank, an essential element in carpet weaving

## Executive Summary

This case study is the first of three to explore the processes through which poor households make decisions about whether or not to put children into work. By focusing on poor households, which both do and do not use child labour as part of their livelihood portfolios, the study moves the debate beyond poverty as a primary reason for children working. Poverty and its related factors clearly have a role to play in forming the context within which households make decisions about labour allocation across their members. However, other factors such as understandings of livelihood risks, available responses to these risks and assessments of the social and economic costs and benefits of education and work for boys and girls, all enter into the decision-making process.

This study aims to draw out the range of influencing factors that seem to differentiate poor households, which do use child labour from those which do not, to inform ongoing efforts in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) to mitigate the factors leading households to depend on child labourers, as well as to inform the work of the social protection consultative group within the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) process, which has not had significant focus on child protection and child rights issues. This case study does not make specific recommendations for action; the final study reports, comparing results across the three case study sites, will have a strong policy and programming focus on both improving children's conditions of work as well as on more preventative measures which build from understandings of what influences different households to make the decision to have children work.

The term "child labour" is used throughout this study to represent children's work activities, whether paid or unpaid across all levels of risks and hazards. It includes unpaid domestic tasks or paid work inside the home, unpaid work in a family enterprise, or any work outside the household, such as vending, collecting firewood, scavenging, or doing house work for others whether paid or not. This work can be done in combination with schooling or not. Child labourers are defined as those aged 14 and less, working in any type of context (for pay or not, at home or outside), and those aged 15 to 18 working in more hazardous occupations. That said, this study does not aim to locate specific cases representing the most dangerous forms of child labour, or work involving the most risk (sex work, trafficking or smuggling). It aims to understand more usual forms of child labour and how households consider different options when making decisions about who will work and in what activities.<sup>1</sup>

This case study was conducted primarily in Kabul city, with ten cases identified largely through referrals from non-governmental organisation (NGOs) working on child labour, informal education and on livelihoods issues. They were drawn from across various residential areas of the city, as selection was driven by the desire to find diverse case stories and to represent different ethnic groups composing the socially diverse capital city. Focusing on one neighbourhood, while providing a consistent sub-context for the case, would have missed the city's social and economic diversity. Two additional cases were selected from Paghman.

The study sought to go beyond the existing quantitative studies of the incidence of child labour, including the relevant data that will result from the 2007 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA). Instead, the study complements these data with more in-depth investigation of the complexity behind the numbers, particularly related to

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<sup>1</sup> While none of the study's cases worked in these highly risky activities, some parents did express worry about their children's exposure to these risks in doing other forms of work, particularly vending.

understanding why some poor households have their children work while others do not. The study used qualitative methods to focus on a small number of cases but spent a significant time with each household to delve into motivations and trade-offs in decision-making, information which will be important to designing policy and programmes sensitive to the needs and motivations of these households.

**Key findings of the study include:**

- **Irregularity of work for adults, low earnings and high expenditures on basic needs**, particularly housing and fuel, are key contextual factors which characterise the lives and livelihoods of all the study households – both those using and not using child labour. They tend to be necessary but not sufficient conditions for deciding to put children into work.
- **Debt** is also common across the case households, again contributing to considerations of using child labour but alone not a determining factor.
- The **absence or lack of a male earner** leads households to seek alternative ways to access income. In two separate cases, where the male head of the household died, both families tended to rely on other relatives for some or all financial support, as well as in one case on children's earnings. Other households had an aged or ill male household head who did not work; they relied on adult female income and child labour. However, in other households with adult male earners, children still worked for income, signalling that both lack of male adult workers and the low and variable earnings obtainable by adults in informal employment can influence decisions about using child labour.
- **Gender norms** constrain choices about how to allocate the labour available to the household; they effectively close down certain options for creating a livelihood, particularly the options open to adult females, meaning more earning burden may fall on children, particularly boys, to support the household.
- Assessments of the possible **moral or behavioural benefits of work** differ across child labour and non-child labour households. The former see work as something to keep children out of trouble and out of crowded home environments, as well as a medium through which children will learn responsibility and skills. Non-child labour households expressed more strongly the possible threats associated with work, particularly work outside the home for boys, such as interacting with bad friends who lead children astray or being pressured to earn and hence engaging in illegal or immoral acts to bring home the money. Worry about children is evident in all the households, but the non-child labour households were stronger in their sentiments about the moral risks involved in working.
- Non-child labour households were more likely to have had **direct experiences or knowledge of others whose educated children had been successful** in achieving a secure livelihood (i.e. role models). This informed their drive to keep children in school.
- **Personal education experiences of parents** are another factor influencing assessments of the benefits and costs of having children work, study or do both. Some educated parents wanted to provide their children the same opportunity they had, while other parents who had not benefited from their education expressed more interest in their children learning a skill to give them better options.

Uneducated parents were motivated by their own “blindness” to educate their children and not have them work. Others sought to diversify their children’s experiences by having them work and study.

- **Decisions about having children work can be conflictual;** in some cases economic need was the factor convincing a reluctant parent to have children work. Seclusion norms for women and older girls also led to conflicting interests, with some women expressing an interest in working out of the home, but husbands or male children not agreeing.
- In many cases **children do have a voice in the decision to work**, themselves, expressing their choice to work due to interest, seeing other children working or boredom at home. However, they also understand the economic needs facing the household, so there is some measure of compulsion behind this “choice”, reflecting feelings of responsibility. This is also evident in eldest boys in non-child labour households expressing desires to work to help the household, but not being allowed to, yet.
- **Mental stress related to feelings of responsibility** are also evident among child labourers, manifested by lack of sleep, bedwetting, expressed wish that the work did not exist, or recognition of the need to give up schooling for work, and the disappointment associated with that.
- **Households with child labourers assessed carefully the type of work children would do.** For females this related more often to where they work (at home or not), with pressures for girls to stop outside work (i.e. scavenging) upon puberty due to risks to the household’s reputation. For boys it was often about whether an apprenticeship was desirable; learning a skill was valued (over vending work), but whether an apprenticeship would lead to skill building was also questioned. Much depended on the shop owner and his willingness to teach and treat his apprentices well.
- **Most of the child labourers in the study did not work under conditions meeting with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Afghanistan labour code.** Hours of work were long, pay is low and a range of risks and hazards are present in workplaces, whether they are at or around home (household work, carpet weaving), in workshops or on the streets. These include: harassment and fighting while vending, exposure to the weather, traffic risks when crossing roads, gossip, physical punishment from shop owners, physical injury in workshops, injury from carrying heavy weights, dust and splinters from wool, and mental stress.
- While many households expressed interest in educating their children and give up a lot to do so, there is also considerable **concern over the quality of government schools**, as well as **experiences of harassment and beatings**, leading some children to withdraw. **Families also expressed problems with meeting the costs associated with schooling.**
- **Children and their parents expressed happiness over their participation in NGO-run accelerated education courses**, which are free and provide material aid. This is in part due to the aid provided, but also due to better quality teaching and more attention given to students.
- Child labour households expressed an **appreciation for the economic, moral and learning outcomes of work.** Parents place value on the learning outcomes of work

associated with the skills their children would gain in the work setting. Moral outcomes link back to the expectations expressed by some parents that work would keep children busy and out of the street and minimise worry about where children are or with whom, for both girls and boys. Economic outcomes refer to financial contributions to household basic needs, children's income being saved for their own needs (school items, clothes) or being spent independently (less common). Most working children contributed all of their income to the household budget, hence it was important to household survival.

- **Parents face great struggles in deciding both how best to provide for their families and to prepare their children for the future.** Despair and depression were not uncommon in response to debt levels, joblessness of spouses, rent demands or just the day-to-day struggle to feed the family. Fears for children's safety in moving about the city were also widely expressed in light of increasing insecurity from car bombs and kidnap threats. Thus, the endemic economic, social and human insecurity characterising the lives of the respondent households calls for a concerted and coordinated state response.

## 1. Introduction

This case study is the first of three in a larger study examining household decision-making around using child labour.<sup>2</sup> The study seeks to go beyond poverty as a primary explanation for child labour, to explore across poor households who use and do not use child labour how and why they have come to these decisions, in particular looking for differences in risks reported and responses made. It also examines education and work trade-offs and how households assess the social and economic costs and benefits of both work and schooling in decisions about child labour, within a context of relatively weak formal educational institutions. It describes the types of work children do and their associated conditions of work framed within requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Afghanistan Labour Code. It also as discusses how parents and children assess different options across work types. Finally, it reviews the aspirations of parents for their children, as well as children's own aspirations, and evidence of the strain many parents face in making decisions about what is best for their households and their different members.

The primary focus of this study is on the household and how members think through and assess options in deciding about having children work or not. While it does not ignore child labourers and their work conditions, it aims to take a more preventative perspective in unpacking how decisions are made and how policy and programmes may be able to intervene to influence these decision-making processes such that the balance of factors shift more towards children not working. However, it is also clear that child labour will not be eliminated in the short or medium term, in part because the changes required to reduce poor households' dependence on it are long-term in nature (i.e. improving employment opportunities for parents; improving the quality of formal education and employment options available for graduates). In addition, child labour is also perceived as an alternative means of learning, valued for the skills it can bring, linked to future vocations. Thus, understanding what work children do and how to improve the conditions and outcomes of child labour are also important. This study will address both but with more weight on the household level considerations, as the more unique contribution of the study.

"Child labour" is used throughout this study to represent children's work activities, whether paid or unpaid and across all levels of risks and hazards. Thus, it includes unpaid domestic tasks or paid work inside the home, unpaid work in a family enterprise; or any work outside the household, such as vending, collecting firewood, scavenging, or doing house work for others whether paid or not. This work can be done in combination with schooling or not. For the purpose of this research child labourers are those aged 14 and less, working in any type of context (for pay or not, at home or outside) and those aged 15 to 18 working in more hazardous occupations. That said, this study has not aimed to locate cases representing the most dangerous forms of child labour or work involving the most risk (sex work, trafficking, smuggling)<sup>3</sup>; it aims to understand more day-to-day forms of child labour and how households consider different options when making decisions about who will work and in what activities.

By exploring the complex and multiple considerations informing household decisions about the use of child labour, the study highlights the complexity needed in policy responses seeking to reduce dependence on child labour in its everyday and worst

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF and the Child Rights Consortium have provided funds in support of this study.

<sup>3</sup> This was in part due to the considerable skill required to conduct interviews with children and adults on such issues, in order to ensure their protection from harm. AREU researchers are not equipped with such training.

forms. It does this in part to inform ongoing efforts in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) to mitigate the factors leading households to depend on child labourers as part of efforts to create a more secure living, as well as to inform the work of the social protection consultative group within the ANDS process, which has not had significant focus on child protection and child rights issues. While this case study does not aim to make specific recommendations on how to reduce child labour and its risks, a later paper drawing from the evidence across the three case studies composing the larger study (Kabul, Badakhshan and Herat) will do so.

This case study and the larger study overall do not focus on estimating the incidence of child labour, so they will not report numbers of children working in the field sites and in what types of work. Collecting such numeric, quantitative data should not be a one time exercise, but a repeated effort which enables the government to monitor changes in levels of child labour in relation to policies implemented. Household and individual level quantitative data on labour force participation are currently collected through the NRVA survey exercise; AREU's study complements these data by uncovering the complexity behind the descriptions of numbers of boys and girls working to try to better understand why this happens. It does this by using qualitative methods to interview a small number of poor households in great depth to understand the reasoning and decision-making processes behind the use or non-use of child labourers as part of household livelihood activities. In the Kabul case, 12 households were interviewed; ten in Kabul city and two in Paghman village. Of these, four did not use child labour at the time of the interview while the rest did. More information on the study methods is given in Section 3.

## 2. Study Context

The case study was conducted largely in Kabul city, with two additional household cases drawn from a peri-urban village in Paghman. Kabul is the capital of Afghanistan and is largest city in the country. In 2004, its population was estimated at two million people.<sup>4</sup> Kabul city has been the site of other studies on child labour, including studies focusing specifically on street children.<sup>5</sup> It was also one of three cities in which AREU conducted longitudinal research on urban livelihoods.<sup>6</sup> The previous child labour studies have tended to be numeric and descriptive, listing characteristics of the children interviewed (education, length of time in work, hours worked, earnings, etc.) and their families and not delving into details beyond poverty or death of a parent for why children work, and not comparing these working children and their families to similar poor families, which do not put children into work. The AREU urban livelihoods study was also largely numeric, and provides some evidence of variation in the use of child labour in the livelihoods of poor urban households, as well as the earnings of children in a range of work types. It was conducted in 2004-05 in three cities (Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad), in which 40 purposively selected poor households in each city were interviewed each month for 12 months about income, expenses, who works and in what activities and assistance received from a range of sources. From these data variations in the use of child labour emerged, across time, field sites and households. Compared to the other cities, among the children in the 40 study households Kabul had a higher incidence of child labourers, with children under 18 composing 42 percent of all incidences of work across the 12 months of interviews, compared to 28 percent in Herat and 22 percent in Jalalabad. In terms of percent of children among the 40 households working, in Kabul 48 percent of boys reported working at some point during the 12 months of study, compared to 10 percent of girls. Hence, a considerable share of children did not work, and this is among poor families only.

The *Terre des hommes* (TdH) joint study (2002) focused specifically on street working children and described the work conditions and needs of these child labourers. Street based work activities are very common among child labourers in Kabul, though for boys more than girls. Key activities include vending, mobile services (car washing/shoe polishing), begging and collecting paper and other fuel sources for the household's fuel needs. The AIHRC study (2006) was national in scope and studied all forms of child labour, with shopkeeping, vending, work in workshops, tailoring and carpet weaving as the key activities identified. It describes poverty as the key reason for child labour, but again does not note that not all poor families use child labour. It also states that lack of adult earners is a main driver for child labour, something generally associated with poverty status, particularly if the adult male does not have work. While poverty is clearly associated with child labour, and absence of adult earners is also important in some households' decisions about child labour, it is necessary to think more broadly than this, as children in some households with adult workers are also working, and in some households with few to no adult workers, children are not working. This case study thus considers variations in how different households experience risks (e.g. income inadequacy, income irregularity, debt levels, ill health) and the different possible

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<sup>4</sup> UNFPA and Central Statistics Office. "Province of Kabul: A socio-economic and demographic profile household listing - 2004" (Kabul: UNFPA and CSO, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> *Terre des Hommes* (TdH), Aschiana and CSO. "Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul" (Kabul: TdH, 2002); AIHRC, *An Overview on Situation of Child Labour in Afghanistan* (Kabul: AIHRC, 2006); Jo de Berry, Anahita Fazili, Sami Hashemi, Friba Nasiry, Said Farhad and Mariam Hakimi, *Children of Kabul: Discussions with Afghan Families* (Kabul: Save the Children-United States, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Jo Beall and Stefan Schütte. *Urban Livelihoods Synthesis Paper* (Kabul: AREU, 2006).

responses in relation to using child labour (e.g. send children to work full time now for income; have them work to learn a skill for future pay off; or send them to school full-time for future pay offs), with assessments of risk and evaluations of responses influenced by a range of personal experiences.

The de Berry piece (2003) differed from the other studies in that it was a qualitative study which conducted a series of group discussions with children living in Kabul and their parents in order to understand their views of their needs and interests. In its research approach it is closer to that of this case study. However, this study focused on children's wellbeing versus only child labour, assessing obstacles to children achieving wellbeing and the ways they cope with such constraints. One key finding was the parents' focus beyond physical wellbeing when defining overall wellbeing for their children. Also important are morality, good behaviour, positive relationships and religious faith. Threats to children's wellbeing included issues related to child labour, missed educational opportunities, poverty, exploitative work situations and gendered expectations. Many of these themes were also identified in this case study.

The Kabul-based households were concentrated in two areas; two in Dehmazang and four in Kart-i-Naw. The other four were spread around the city and two others were selected from a Paghman village. This dispersal of cases reflects the search for particular case stories as a guide to respondent selection, versus choosing a neighbourhood or two and focusing on the stories to be found there. The latter strategy may have been too concentrated given Kabul's social and economic diversity, limiting the breadth of experiences to be explored. However, this dispersed approach to case selection makes analysis more complicated as there are differences across the households in access to and quality of public services, differences which may affect how the households understand their situations and what livelihood strategies they choose. Table 1 summarises a few key characteristics of the Kart-i-Naw, Dehmazang and Paghman neighbourhoods; more detailed area descriptions are in the Appendix.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the three main neighbourhoods from which respondents were selected

Characteristics	Kart-i-Naw	Dehmazang	Paghman
Physical location, access	Hillside; access problems; dirt roads	Foot and side of hill; access problems; dirt roads	One hour by car from Kabul
Water	Several water outlets but water comes only every 3 days; supplemented by purchasing water	Some residents at base of hill have wells but water not for drinking; residents up the hill have water piped through taps outside homes but comes for only a few hours a day, people line up for it	Access to public water sources
Electricity	No city power; can buy into private generator scheme	Old section has city power; new section does not	Can connect to private generator scheme
School	Primary school for boys and girls in neighbourhood	Government school	School located an hour away by foot
Clinic	Clinic, a 20-minute walk away	No health clinic or hospital nearby	One government clinic in the bazaar, 10 minutes away by foot
Tenure	Informal settlement	Informal settlement	Not applicable

### 3. Methodology

This section details how the fieldwork in the Kabul site was conducted. It first addresses the ethical and methodological issues raised in conducting the research. It then provides information on the interview methods used and how the research team selected cases.

#### 3.1 Ethical and methodological issues

There are several differences between children and adults that pose ethical and methodological challenges to the research process especially in regards to interviewing children about sensitive issues such as child labour. In regards to interviewing children, the challenges stem from the differences in power between children and interviewer-adults, the adult's duty of protection, and the continuing process of cognitive development of the children. These challenges exist along with the fundamental principles of research ethics which apply to research with children or adults, and include objectives to: "do no harm", obtain informed consent from the respondents, and protect and respect the privacy of all respondents. These principles must be adhered to throughout the research process, starting with the development of the methodology, and continuing during data collection, data analysis and ending with the presentation of the research findings.

It is essential to ensure that all participants understand the negative as well as positive consequences of consenting to participate in the research process, and that they can choose not to participate.<sup>7</sup> AREU recognises the burden placed on respondents in its research and carefully abides by informed consent procedures. Field researchers make clear what the respondents are being asked to do, that no direct benefit will result and that no harm will come from not participating. Respondents are then requested to consider whether they wish to be involved or not, given their life circumstances.

To the extent possible, in-depth interviews with children or adults were conducted in a neutral setting of safety and comfort. However this was often a challenge since women and children do not have a private space, and often times interviews with child labourers and with mothers were not done in private. In collecting the data for this case study, the interviewers were sensitive to the child's responses and avoided potentially controversial questions, leaving the child a choice of discussing more sensitive issues such as risks at and attitudes towards work. When possible, interviewers tried to speak with children alone, after obtaining parental agreement. However there were times when this was not possible and parents themselves pressured the child to answer the questions, at time embarrassing the child with uncomfortable details. In these cases the research team asked the parents to hold these details and switched the conversation to a lighter subject.

In the context of this study the researchers were cautious when asking children about their experiences at work. The team was aware of possible shame or abuse associated with some of the work types in which the children were involved; they left enough space to allow children to share any uncomfortable or painful moments, but did not pursue the subject if they saw that the children were reluctant. The team also used neutral language to explore children's work experiences. For example, when interviewing children who scavenged for firewood or metal the team asked about how the children collect firewood or metal, and then asked them to describe the experiences, allowing children to say whether they feel ashamed, proud, or burdened or whether they enjoyed

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<sup>7</sup> Schenk, Katie and Jan Williamson. *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and Resources*. Washington, DC: Population Council, 2005.

their work. This approach neither judged the children nor led them to a particular answer.

Children unlike adults are on a steep curve of psychosocial and cognitive growth, learning and developing new skills. They are actively forming their ideas about society and how it should function, and have different perceptions of time and language. This has significant implications as to what the interviewer can ask in the interview and how. In the case of this study some of the children didn't see their activities as work; thus the research team asked children to describe their daily routine focusing on each of the activities separately. The research team did not rush children to answer, and often had several minutes of silence before the children answered. To understand issues of time they asked the children to remember how many Ramadans they have worked; whether it was cold or hot when they first started working; or if any relatives were sick when they changed their activity. This later fed into the second interviews with the parents and allowed the researchers to draw out an approximate timeline of the child's work through triangulation. However the most challenging difference in interviewing adults and children is the limitations of language – whether limited vocabulary or unfamiliarity with verbal situations – that are often interpreted as children's inability to understand certain events or concepts.

### **3.2 In-depth interview methods**

This study employs qualitative research methods. Qualitative research does not aim to be representative of the larger situation, and this study in particular is not describing the general situation of working children. It provides a rich context that allows in-depth analysis of the patterns of behaviour underlying decision-making processes, and of the subtleties in motivation associated with household reliance on child labour. Comparisons between the households will help to understand why some poor households do and others do not employ child labour.

The fieldwork for the Kabul case study was conducted from June to September 2007. The work in Kabul city ran throughout the entire length of the fieldwork, whereas interviews in Paghman were conducted in September during the month of Ramadan. The research team consisted of two male and two female Afghan field researchers and two international researchers.

The data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. In each household the ideal was to interview both the mother and father (separately) and in child labour households, the focal child labourers. Each parent in a child labour household was to be interviewed twice, for a total of five interactions with each of these households. This pattern was not followed in all cases, either because one parent was not living, or because some fathers worked long hours and were difficult to reach twice. In these cases the first interviews with fathers were longer than the standard one to two hour period. For the non-child labour case households, each parent was interviewed once and no child was interviewed due to the limited timeframe for the study.

A number of interview guides were developed to draw out the differences in the decision-making process of the households in relation to reliance on child labour. The set of interviews aimed at uncovering the context within which decisions about using or not using child labour were made, including, for child labour households, the moment when the household started to rely on child labour and what was happening in the household at that time. The guides for the initial parental interviews focused on the household's livelihood history, assets held, major events experienced, attitudes towards formal education, and plans for the future as the areas ultimately informing the

household's existing livelihood strategy. This approach also recognised the fact that not all decisions are made consciously and allowed the team to capture ad hoc or passive decision-making processes. This framework was applicable to all households participating in the study, both those using and not using child labour.

The second parental interview in the child labour households intended to explore the role and responsibilities of the focal child labourer. In some cases the focal child was the only one working; in others s/he was one of several children that were labourers. The second interview explored the household's coping mechanisms and the child's contribution to the livelihood strategy. It also explored options and constraints the households had in their livelihoods and whether there were any options to avoid the reliance on the focal child working. Follow up interviews were necessary with some of the households (both child labour and non-child labour) if the original conversations did not supply all the required information. There was only one interview with the focal child labourer. The aim of this interview was to understand the child's perspective on the role s/he has in the household, and to obtain a description of working conditions.

### 3.3 Case selection and recruitment

The households for this study were selected based on their socio-economic status, livelihood strategy, reliance on child labour, the focal child's age, and ethnicity. The study aimed to compare experiences across poor households both using and not using child labour. Thus low socio-economic status was a key criterion in selecting case households. Additionally, the selected cases aimed to represent a range of livelihood strategies and including households with children that: (i) work full time, (ii) combine work and schooling, and (iii) do no work. This would enable the study to also investigate how work and education trade-offs are considered. The age of the focal child was to be between 9<sup>8</sup> and 14 years old, or up to 18 years old, if it was particularly hazardous work, to ensure that the respondents fall under the definition of child labour used by ILO.<sup>9</sup> Kabul is a multi-cultural city and to reflect this diversity, this study worked to recruit a range of ethnicities among the responding households.

All the responding households, except for two, were identified via agencies working on either education or livelihoods.<sup>10</sup> The initial strategy was to find the appropriate cases through the educational centres working with street and working children. Half of the participant households were identified via these centres. However it posed an unexpected problem: the majority of the potential cases were of Tajik origin. To address this issue the secondary selection strategy targeted other educational and livelihoods NGOs, covering different parts of the city, through which the research team identified four of the participant households. One case was identified by approaching children on the streets or in workshops. This strategy was used less often due to discomfort on the part of the male field team about community perceptions of their presence. These concerns were supported through the study results which highlight parental fears of children interacting with strangers. The last participating household was found through a personal referral: one of the team members saw a child working in the mechanic shop he used to repair a private car. The team member had a good

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<sup>8</sup> The minimum age is needed to ensure that the child is capable of engaging in the interviews. Interviewing children younger than 9 years old requires different techniques.

<sup>9</sup> As outlined in the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (No. 182).

<sup>10</sup> The agencies providing assistance in case selection included: Afghanistan Demain, Agha Khan Trust for Culture, Children in Crisis, CCA, EMDH, Ora International.

relationship with the owner and asked him to introduce the research team to the apprentice's household.

A major challenge in the fieldwork was recruiting potential households to participate in the study. The research team spent a considerable amount of time explaining the purpose of the study, the role of AREU, and that all the information collected would be kept confidential to every potential respondent. Some identified households agreed to be interviewed, but then never had time to talk to the research team. Other households refused to talk altogether. Some of the potential respondents felt that the study would invade their privacy and did not agree to participate; others wanted to be compensated for their participation, and refused to engage given that no benefit would come from working with the team. This challenge lengthened the fieldwork period as many households were approached before the final 12 cases were identified as willing participants fitting the study's criteria.

**Table 2.** Respondent identifiers and basic characteristics

Child identifier <sup>11</sup>	Ethnicity	Residential location	In child labour (CL) or non-child labour (NCL) household
Homa	Tajik/Pashtun	Kart-i-Naw	CL
Palwasha	Tajik	Kart-i-Naw	CL
Zara	Hazara	Dehmazang	CL
Hassan	Tajik	Dehmazang	CL
Satar	Tajik	Kart-i-Naw	CL
Nazir	Hazara	Chendavol	CL
Akbar	Pashtun	Qalacha	CL
Waheed	Tajik	Paghman	CL
Fahim	Tajik	Kart-i-Naw	NCL
Marouf	Hazara	Afshar-Qargha road	NCL
Shahnaz	Hazara	Khoshale Khan	NCL
Friba	Tajik	Paghman	NCL

<sup>11</sup> All respondent names have been changed to protect their privacy.

## 4. Key findings

This section will draw out the key themes emerging from the household interviews. It compares and contrasts the situations of those who do and do not utilise child labour in order to understand the less obvious motivations behind the decision to have children work. The section starts by investigating why children do or do not work and the motivating factors behind this decision – the core issue of the study. Then education and the trade-offs between work and education are discussed, followed by descriptions of the conditions and experiences of child labour among the working children, framed within the Afghanistan labour code and international standards in order to illustrate to what extent children work in conditions less than desirable. Finally, the section ends with a discussion of actual and expected outcomes of work amongst the respondents and the aspirations of parents and children for the future. How feasible are expected outcomes and aspirations given contextual constraints, and what does this imply for the future?

### 4.1 Why do some children work?

One strength of this study is its inclusion of poor households who do not use child labour within their portfolio of livelihood activities. This facilitates the acceptance of poverty as an important contextual factor, but also goes beyond it as the main reason for use of child labour. Hence the case examines some of the other differences in household experiences and conditions which influence the decision to have children work, including risks and how households respond to these. Do they opt for more immediate responses such as child labour in order to reduce livelihood risks because of personal experiences or a lack of other choices? Or, do they consider more long term investments in children's education for a future payoff as more appropriate responses?

#### 4.1.1 Low-paid and irregular earning activities

While this study aims to assess factors other than income poverty as reasons for child labour, one cannot abstract from the poor economic situations of the households as a reason for having children work. Respondents linked a "poor economic situation" to a combination of factors including not only low income, but also irregular income flows, high expenditures (rent, fuel) and debt levels associated often with consumption needs or due to past crises (largely ill health).

Four of the eight cases using child labour have a working adult male present in the household. However, among these three are dependent on informal sources of self-employment, leading to very variable income flows. These low and variable income levels are one motivation for the children to work as the statements below show (also see Table 3 for a description of the household work activities in both child labour and non-child labour households). The first is from Nazir, a boy who vends water and juice while also continuing his schooling, and the second from the mother of Satar, another child labourer, in response to a follow-up question by a researcher.

*I started work to earn an income since our economic status was low. There was no money in the house to buy fruit... We peel almonds to save on winter fuel. ...we don't have money in the house, whereas we pay 2,500 Afs as house rent, therefore I started working. – Nazir*

Interviewer: *You meant you can't manage your life expenditure if the boys don't work?*

*Yes, we can't. How can we manage our life with only the irregular income of my children's father? He had gone out yesterday to work but today he*

*couldn't go out in the early morning, he was at home. When my son in law asked him why he hadn't gone out to work he said to him that he hadn't gone because he didn't have any money, not even for the cost of the ticket to Paghman...A few days ago the landlord came to our door and asked us to pay the monthly rent, but I had no money to pay our share. So, my children's father borrowed 700 Afs from my son-in-law and paid the rent. Look at that flour sack...we have bought it on credit.*

— Satar's mother

In the case of Palwasha's household, while her father has a seemingly more stable job and earns in dollars, the company is not regular in its payments, leading to difficulties in meeting household expenses and paying off debts. This led to the need for the younger girls to collect paper to save on costs of fuel.

*I am trying to find a better job in order to invest money and repay my debts as well as release my mortgaged land...Except my salary I don't have any other income source. That is why sometimes my daughter goes outside to collect papers in order to save money on buying firewood.*

— Palwasha's father

Waheed's recently deceased father had also depended on self-employment income, meaning Waheed and his brother also had to contribute to the household income. A regular income also does not guarantee income security, as illustrated in Fahim's case. His recently deceased father reclaimed a government job on return from refuge, but the low salary, though regular, was insufficient for the household, particularly after the father fell ill.

*I: Why did you quit school after one year?*

*My father's salary was 2,500 Afs, which was not enough for my household and my father was often getting upset, since his salary was not enough for sugar and flour and there was no money left for gas. I told my father I would start working. — Fahim*

Fahim started working in refuge in Iran at around age five or six to help with rental costs (see below), and only recently stopped work after joining an accelerated education course run by an NGO. He could do this because a cousin is supporting the household. However, this dependent relationship appears to be weakening, meaning Fahim is considering returning to work, which his mother seems to support, given the family's need for assistance:

*My sister in law's son is supporting us monthly by giving us 5,000 Afs to 6,000 Afs. Sometimes he gives us 2,000-3,000 Afs if he is unable to provide more. Now it is two months that he has not supported us.*

— Fahim's mother

*I am thinking that I must start any work since our economic status is low.*

*I: When does this feeling come to you?*

*When there is no money at home for supplies such as gas or bread... and my mother gets angry and concerned that we don't have these things, then I have this feeling. — Fahim*

There was evidence of conflict in decision-making about child labour in Fahim's case, with his father being less interested in having his children work, as the following quote

shows. He was educated and wanted his children to have this opportunity as well. Circumstances, however, may not allow this.

*I: So how did your children work when their father did not agree?  
Because we had no other option. His salary was 2,000 Afs monthly. It was hardly enough for his treatment and medical expenses. He told me not to let the boys work outside but I told him his salary was being spent on his treatment, so what should we do for eating, how do we manage our other needs? At this time my sons started working and they could earn up to 40 or 50 or 60 Afs per day and they bought some food for the household like potato, okra and onion. — Fahim's mother*

Fahim's case raises the issue of ill health and its effect on income flows. Three child labour cases lack an adult male earner, not due to the absence of an adult male (like in Fahim and Waheed's case) but largely due to ill health. In two cases, Homa and Zara, their fathers are present in the home, but unemployed whereas for Hassan, his father died a martyr many years ago, but his grandfather is present. However, his age and health status make him able to work only now and again, meaning Hassan is expected to assist the family, along with his mother who bakes bread in their *tandoor* for pay.

Zara and her household face a similar circumstance, related to a large age difference between her mother and father, meaning her father is elderly, ill and unable to work. While they lived on proceeds of a land and tree sale for some time, these funds recently ran out, meaning the household made greater efforts to obtain access to a carpet loom, in their hill top location. The difficulty in moving the loom up the hill meant that while they have been interested in having their daughters weaving carpets, geographic barriers intervened. In the end a relative and friend carried a loom up, meaning the girls, only a few months before the study started, began weaving again for a contractor, but had yet to complete a carpet.

In Homa's case, her father is not old, but has jaundice (as does Akbar's father) meaning he has been out of work for some time. During the study, he obtained some daily wage construction work through a social connection, where his inability to do hard labour was known. Hence, it was closer to a form of assistance than work. Her father's ill health has meant that Homa's mother has worked for neighbours doing laundry, but she is currently expecting a child so is unable to do this. Homa has worked in a range of activities from age ten, including scavenging for paper, to selling in a shop outside their home, to bringing water. She is now 12 years old, reaching an age where outdoor work is less possible, given gender norms in the community, meaning the household soon needs to identify another daughter to go out to collect paper. How gender norms intersect with work expectations is assessed in section 4.1.4, with particular attention to Homa's rather unique case.

Table 3. Household work activities, child labour and non-child labour households

Child identifier	Child work activities	Parent work activities	Work/ Income regularity
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
Homa, age 12, female	Scavenge for paper; run shop at home; fetch water	Father no work; mother washes clothes	Low cash flow; work irregular.
Palwasha, 15, female	Perform household (HH) chores at home	Father cooks in Ghazni for German construction company; earns US\$150 per month	Problems with salary payment; company unreliable
Zara, 11, female	Weave carpets; recently restarted this activity, working with sisters	Father no work; mother works sporadically: wool spinning, sewing uniforms; also collects paper for fuel	Will earn 1,500 Pakistani rupees per metre when carpet is completed; lived off proceeds from land sale; sold trees for HH expenses and son's marriage.
Hassan, 16, male	Apprentice in water pump repair shop; used to apprentice in metal shop; used to sell water/ plastic/ <i>bolani</i> .	Mother baking bread in <i>tandoor</i> for last 5 years; grandfather works sporadically: collects and resells old bread and metal	Low cash flow; variable income; in possession of widow ID card
Satar, 10, male	(2 oldest boys) Sell <i>pahpur</i> ; also sold water and plastic; collect papers and fetch water after vending; younger son (age 6) helps father	Father collects and sells old metal, earns 150-350 Afs per day; mother performs HH work	Variable income; has lower income in winter; children also earn variable income
Nazir, 13, male	Sell plastic bags/water/ juice, started 8 months ago; earns 20-90 Afs per day; 2 younger brothers vend water	Father sells shoes in bazaar; mother peels almonds with compound women; no pay but keeps shells for winter fuel.	Misses meals at times; Nazir and father earn variable income; vending subject to police harassment
Akbar, 11, male	Apprentice in mechanic shop (earning 30-50 Afs per week for transport), owner non-relative; past jobs: carpentry work, water/ plastic bag vending; started work at age 8 in Pakistan	Father drives cousin's flying coach at fixed points; was in military, expecting pension; did daily wage work for 2 years after service; mother bakes bread for pay; last year worked on land when father fell ill.	No fixed income; rents vehicle, no license or vehicle documents; misses work due to illness
Waheed, 12, male	Apprentice in <i>naan</i> bakery for 3 years, earns 50 Afs per day; can bake own dough for free; eldest brother, 13, apprentice in tailor shop	Father died recently; was cobbler/shoe repairer in city, earned up to 100 Afs per day, often less; Mother does HH work	Past and present income very low and variable; depends on paternal uncle for support

Child identifier	Child work activities	Parent work activities	Work/ Income regularity
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
<b>Fahim</b>	Started work at age 5 in Iran, on return has worked multiple jobs (mobile charging, selling water/juice). Stopped working 1.5 months ago to join course; considering returning to work.	Father died 1 year ago; had government job before migration; got it back on return after much effort. Earned only 2,500 Afs per month.	Depends on cousin, who used to give 5-6,000 Afs monthly, now down to 2-3,000 Afs. Received no support for 2 months.
<b>Marouf</b>	Sought tailoring apprenticeship for eldest son but only in winter recess: not successful; eldest son wanted to work full-time to pay debts but father refused.	Father borrowed money and opened a shop last year. Performed many casual jobs before this. Mother performs HH work.	Livelihood became better after opening shop, though income still varies. Mother wants father to go to Iran for work.
<b>Shahnaz</b>	Eldest son, 13, has tried to work but father disapproved.	Father collects and sells old metal. Worked before in relative's sandal factory, and worked in daily wage construction. Mother does HH work.	Has only one source of income. Lives by what is earned daily; very variable income.
<b>Friba</b>	Eldest son (16) wants to work; mother resists though looked for short-term apprenticeship; he does help father.	Father is guard/gardener for small pay. Mother works as cook and cleaner in a school.	Both have regular incomes, about 4,500 Afs monthly in total.

While the lack of a male earner has a role in the use of child labour, clearly it is not a sole determining factor, as other cases using child labour had male earners present. Overall, adult work insecurity matters, associated with the type of work done as well as who does it, making some households respond by putting children to work. However, as Table 3 shows, work and income insecurity is also a characteristic of the households who did not use child labour. Marouf's father has a shop, but as is usual, daily sales and thus profits are not high or consistent. Also, he only recently opened the shop, previously being engaged in various casual jobs before this. Shahnaz's father, like Nazir's, earns a living from recycling old metal while Friba has a regular but low income as a school cook, while her elderly husband contributes to the household through a small stipend as a guard/gardener; they buy food monthly on credit. Therefore, a low economic condition is not a sufficient explanation for why children work, as these families also struggle to survive on low and irregular incomes but have decided not to put their children into work.

Table 4. Presence of adult male earner

Child identifier	Adult male earner present?	Why not?	HH response to augment income
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
Homa	No	Ill and unable to find work	Mother washes clothes; stopped now due to pregnancy; girls scavenge for papers.
Palwasha	Yes		
Zara	No	Ill health/old age	Land and tree sale; daughters resumed carpet weaving.
Hassan	No	Death of father; ill health/aging grandfather	Mother started baking bread; son worked since age 9-10.
Satar	Yes		
Nazir	Yes		
Akbar	Yes		
Waheed	No	Death, 3 months prior to study	2 boys continue work as apprentices (started prior to father's death); one uncle provides short-term financial support.
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
Fahim	No	Death, one year ago	Cousin supports them but more erratically than before. Fahim thinking of working again.
Marouf	Yes		
Shahnaz	Yes		
Friba	Yes		

#### 4.1.2 Household expenditures: housing and fuel

Another form of insecurity affecting household livelihoods is related to housing. In Kabul city rents are high due to rapidly expanding population and high demand. Therefore many families reported moving many times since their arrival in Kabul in order to find less costly housing. This expense affects both the child labour and non-child labour households as Table 5 shows, with six households paying rents ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 Afis per month (4 child labour and 2 non-child labour households). Four cases, only one of which does not use child labour, had own housing or lived with a relative for free. In Palwasha's case the household encroached on government land and built a home, going into debt to afford this. The two Paghman cases did not have the stress of rent costs to consider as it was not traditional there to charge rents – very different from living in Kabul city.

Table 5. Access to and costs of housing

Child identifier	Housing
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Homa	In paternal grandmother's compound; no rent but internal conflict.
Palwasha	Own constructed house on encroached government land.
Zara	Now in own house after many moves in past.
Hassan	Rental housing; 10,000 Afs per year at first; now 15,000 Afs per year.
Satar	Rental housing; 1,000 Afs per month; moved many times due to inability to pay; children's income contributes to rent.
Nazir	Rental housing; moved due to high rent; at times unable to pay; miss meals to afford rent at 2,500 Afs per month for 2 rooms.
Akbar	Rental housing; have not paid rent for 2 months. Rent is 800 Afs for one room. Moved from previous housing due to much higher rent (2,000 Afs)
Waheed	Own house
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Fahim	Own house
Marouf	Rental housing; pays 1,200 Afs rent per month; moved multiple times since coming to Kabul.
Shahnaz	Rental housing; pays 2,000 Afs per month; moved multiple times since return to Afghanistan 3-4 years ago.
Friba	Free housing

High rental costs did have an explicit role in decisions to put children into work in some cases. Nazir's previous quote notes how the 2,500 Afs house rent was part of the reason his father's income was insufficient, meaning Nazir needed to work. The previous statement from Satar's mother points to similar reasoning. In Fahim's case, the household now has their own housing, but it was rental costs in Iran while in refuge which drove him to work selling tables and sandals from age five, so his income could cover other non-rent expenses:

*I was paying my money to my parents, because the income my father earned, he was saving for the house rent. My parents were spending my income for house expenses.*

However, Marouf and Shahnaz's households are under similar economic strain as Nazir's and Satar's and have not put their children into work, showing a different understanding of the risks associated with rent costs and the value of child labour as a response.

Fuel is another burdensome cost for poor households in Kabul. Fuel, such as gas or firewood, is needed for cooking in all seasons and in winter for heat. Hence in some households, children are asked to collect any burnable material to use for cooking and/or for heat, so the household does not need to buy any or as much. This was a main activity for some children in child labour households (Homa; Palwasha's younger sisters) as well as an additional responsibility after other paid work tasks (Satar). Gender norms can play a role in whether or not children go out to collect, specifically girls. While in Palwasha and Homa's households girls at or approaching puberty are doing this outside work (though this may soon change in Homa's case, see Box 2) in Zara's household,

where only girls are present, none of the children are allowed to collect papers – the mother does it due to the shame associated with having the girls move about outside the home.

#### Box 1. Work insecurity and child labour

Nasreen is Nazir's mother and the wife of Ahmad. Including Nazir, she has six children aged 3 to 13. Ahmad's income from vending shoes in a market near a cinema in Kabul is highly variable due both to changing demand for shoes and to being forced to stop selling due to a strong and at times violent police presence:

*"[The police] don't understand our problems and living conditions, therefore they always beat and bother us to leave this place and not work. Last year they attacked me and spilled my goods in the street. Police beat me by a stick, whereas I told them to allow us to work, since I explained for them that if I don't do this work, what else could I do, robbery, stealing, kidnapping or what should we do! Police troops are harassing us 5-6 times in a day and they make us flee and clear the place, although they are receiving from each vender 20Afs as bribe."*

This variable income is insufficient to meet household needs, meaning the older boys also do vending work, combined with schooling, while Nasreen, following norms of female seclusion, works from home shelling almonds for a trader...and pays money to do so. Nasreen earns no income in cash for the work she does. Instead she pays for the nuts' transport to her home, all so that the family can reduce expenditure on fuel wood, and burn the shells during Kabul's cold and snowy winters. Thus, extreme need creates the context in which women such as Nasreen are integrated into productive work, but on highly negative terms – in this case for no cash pay from the trader though he can now sell his nuts at a higher price, and footing the bill herself for the almonds' transport.

This case highlights the lack of power and choice available to the urban poor, men and women alike, as they strive to piece together livelihoods which adequately provide for their families. This is not easy when local governance structures are actively working against you and when you have so little voice to negotiate employment terms that you work for cast offs, not willing to risk your current access to an important fuel source and the winter security it provides for the possibility of better conditions in the future. Policies which aim to improve the quality and security of employment opportunities available to adults may be one part of a strategy to reduce poor households' dependence on child labour.

#### 4.1.3 Debt

Debt is common among poor households in rural and urban Afghanistan, from both formal and informal sources.<sup>12</sup> As Table 6 illustrates, the case study households, both those using and not using child labour, are no exception. All report having some debt and most noted that they often or at least at times have to buy daily items on credit from shopkeepers. This is a reflection of the income insecurity they all face and hence is again a common challenge and not in and of itself sufficient to drive families to decide to have children work.

Debt levels vary widely, from relatively smaller outstanding amounts of a few thousand Afghanis (Nazir and Zara's households) to debts over 100,000 Afs for Akbar and Marouf's households. Reasons for borrowing include daily consumption, house construction, funeral costs, rent, ill health and investment. The existence of debt for rent again

<sup>12</sup> Klijn, Floor and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: AREU, 2007); Beall and Schütte, *Urban Livelihoods*.

emphasizes the burden of housing costs for these families.<sup>13</sup> Investment and consumption credit led to Marouf's household's high debt burden; but even though Marouf's older brother Yousaf saw this as a reason to help his father earn to repay, his father disagreed:

*One time Yousaf decided to give up his studies and work somewhere to repay the debts but I didn't let him do that. I insisted that he keep up with his education. Yousaf is a very intelligent boy. I didn't let him work in any condition. I'm uneducated and so is my wife. And now we can see how hard the life is for uneducated people.*

The father goes on to say:

*In my mind there is no one poorer than me. If I can send my children to school though I have economic problems, then why can't others? Everyone can do anything they want. No one can say I was so hopeless that I did that (kept children from school).*

This highlights a relatively high sense of agency on Marouf's father's part. He feels he can make things work out for his family, such that he can have Yousaf and his other children focus on their education; this is driven in part by his own high valuation of education.

Table 6. Debt levels

Child identifier	Debt
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Homa	10,000 Afs microcredit taken for shop (now closed); shopkeeper credit for daily needs.
Palwasha	Obtained credit from relatives; mortgaged land in village.
Zara	2,500 Afs for consumption.
Hassan	10,000 Afs for this year's rent; sold daughter-in-law's gold for 5,000 Afs toward rent cost.
Satar	50,000 Afs related to unpaid rent and consumption in winter.
Nazir	3-4,000 Afs borrowed from shopkeeper for daily consumption.
Akbar	High debt: 200,000 Pakistani rupees spent on brother's and father's illness in Pakistan. Akbar feels responsibility to help repay.
Waheed	Unknown total debt to shopkeepers; know only of 3,500 Afs owed locally in Paghman, not from Kabul shopkeepers. Father, who recently died, kept track of this.
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Fahim	10,000 Afs for house construction.
Marouf	10,000 Afs in microcredit for shop; 124,000 Afs for shop and consumption (jobless for 1-2 years). Mother says if HH struggles to repay then might think of sending children to work.
Shahnaz	US\$100 debt for house rent; also 10,000 Afs microcredit loan.
Friba	About 2,000 Afs credit per month owed to shopkeepers; buy on credit monthly and pay from salary.

<sup>13</sup> This finding is corroborated by the Tdh et al study of street working children in Kabul (2002) which found that 80 percent of the households sampled live in rental housing, increasing expenditures of the household and pressure to earn income.

Marouf's case (NCL) differs from Akbar's (CL), where in the latter case, their high debt burden linked to a brother's ill health and death while in refuge in Pakistan and the costs of the father's ongoing treatment led to the household decision for him to work. As Akbar says:

*Before my brother's death we were rich and had many properties, but when my brother fell sick we spent everything on his treatment...We got a loan of 200,000 Rs from my uncle, which we have not yet repaid. In the meantime, my father has taken loans from our relatives who own garages. Also my father has taken 5000 Afs as a loan from other mechanics who are my relatives, but over time and my current work I could repay them. After my brother's death we borrowed a lot of money which made me start working.*

— Akbar

Akbar's case also illustrates the difficulties household members have making the decision to have children work, as Akbar's father states:

*All of the household was insisting that I allow him to continue to study. Anyhow, I convinced them that our economic status is too low. What should we eat? I told them that if Akbar works and earns 30 Afs at least it would contribute to our income and we would have a little bit better life.*

He goes on to note Akbar's mother's interest in education (though uneducated herself) and the negotiation around work and schooling which took place:

*His mother was saying that her son should continue his education and not work. However I satisfied her that we are facing too many difficulties and our economy is too low. I would enrol him next year, don't worry about it I told her. When I could find a job and earn enough money I would enrol him to school, or if it would be that I would enrol him in school and he worked half a day too. Finally she agreed with me.*

Marouf's and Akbar's fathers differ in their valuation of education, leading to the different assessments of the need for their sons to work. Marouf's parents both stated a clear responsibility to educate their children, while Akbar's father is highly educated but feels it did not do him much good. Section 4.2 examines decisions about education and work in more detail across the case study households.

#### 4.1.4 Household composition and gender norms

Table 7 provides a summary of household size and composition for the respondent households. Household composition, particularly the age and sex of household members, can affect decisions to use child labour, since different people have different access to labour markets based on norms shaping work expectations. As noted above age and health status of household members, particularly of the "expected breadwinners", can have an effect on perceptions of household insecurity and decisions about child labour. If male household heads are older and/or unwell, this may put a strain on others in the household to earn the necessary income. Homa, Zara, Akbar and Hassan's households all experienced this and the children are contributing to household income. Note however, that an older unwell male head is also present in Friba's household but she is the one who went to work. There is a large age difference between Friba and her husband, not uncommon in the Afghan context. While in some cases this may increase the risk of children working, and perhaps at young ages, Friba has opted to work to avoid this. Her personal commitment to her children's education is why she made this decision. Therefore, the absence or frail health of a male household head may contribute to

children working, but it does not always lead to child labour, particularly if there is a high commitment to education in the household, often linked to perceived future returns to the children and parents.

Gender norms and expectations play a considerable but not fixed role in decisions around having children work, which children work and in what broad types of activities. This is not surprising in the Afghan context and many of the respondents fit expectations, with girls, if they work for income at all, expected to do so in the home, and boys out of the home environment. Eldest boys particularly feel pressure to work - internally as well as in some households, from their parent(s) (e.g. Hassan). All eldest sons in non-child labour households expressed an interest in working, but parents would not allow it.

Some evidence of flexible gender expectations exists for girls in a few case households, with Homa presenting a more extreme example (Box 2). There is also evidence of slowly changing gender norms through statements, usually from mothers, about what work girls and women should be free to do. Contradictions are also very apparent, particularly around household chores, signalling the struggle such social change brings.<sup>14</sup>

*You can't distinguish between boys and girls. Whenever my daughters go out I tell them to consider themselves as a man, don't be afraid of anything....I mean that they should not think of themselves as women and weak, or that they do not have the ability to face anything. You can become an employee, a teacher, just have confidence.*

— Friba

However, Friba goes on to note: *Sharif is a boy, he is a man and a man doesn't do the house chores. Girls are responsible for the house chores.*

*Being a teacher is good for them (women). Or when they attend a meeting they could speak well and they could talk about women's rights. Because I think women have no power, they are like hostages of men (their husbands). They should know their rights and have an ability to save themselves...I think if they learn good skills...this is very good for girls. But if they go to another house and wander around the area and go around the shops this is not good.*

— Zara's mother

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<sup>14</sup> Gender norms in relation to education are examined in section 4.2.3.

Table 7: Household size and composition

Child identifier	Household (HH) size and composition
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Homa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 people: 8 children ages 2.5 to 14 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 5 daughters, 3 sons; mother pregnant with 9th child</li> </ul>
Palwasha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 people: 8 children ages 2 to 15 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 6 daughters, 2 sons, who are youngest</li> </ul>
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 people: 3 children ages 11 to 15 years; mother and father; father's second wife.</li> <li>• All daughters</li> </ul>
Hassan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 people: 4 children ages 16 to 20 years; mother, grandfather</li> <li>• 3 daughters, 1 son – Hassan</li> <li>• Father martyred some time ago</li> </ul>
Satar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 people: 6 children ages 5 to 18 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 2 daughters, 4 sons; daughters are eldest</li> </ul>
Nazir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 people: 6 children ages 3 to 13 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 1 daughter, 5 sons; Nazir is eldest of all children</li> </ul>
Akbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 people: 5 children ages 8 months to 11 years; mother and father; grandfather (paternal); (1 daughter lives in Pakistan with maternal grandfather)</li> <li>• 1 daughter, 3 sons at home; Akbar is eldest</li> </ul>
Waheed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4-5 people: 4 children ages 10 to 18 years; mother; eldest daughter (age 18) is married; comes and goes</li> <li>• 2 daughters, 2 sons</li> <li>• Father died 3 months ago.</li> </ul>
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Fahim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 people: 4 children ages 7 to 14 years; mother.</li> <li>• 1 daughter, 3 sons; Hashmat eldest</li> <li>• Father died 1 yr ago.</li> </ul>
Marouf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 people: 4 children ages 6 to 15 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 1 daughter, 3 sons; eldest is son</li> </ul>
Shahnaz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 people: 6 children ages 1.5 to 14 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 3 daughters, 3 sons; daughter is eldest</li> </ul>
Friba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 people: 3 children ages 8 to 16 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 2 daughters, 1 son; son is eldest</li> </ul>

**Box 2. A household's willingness to negotiate gender norms**

Homa's case is distinctive in its illustration of a household's willingness to bend gender norms, for a time at least. This willingness reflects both gendered expectations of male children as future household providers, and this family's long wait for a son. Homa has seven siblings with an eighth on the way, but the first five are girls. This put a strain on Homa's mother due to both expectations that wives will bear male children and the future security associated with boy children. While Homa is not the eldest female child, her parents' unhappiness seemed to affect her deeply, to the point where she took on the mantle of the household's eldest son, as her mother's statement below shows:

*M: She liked to wear boy's clothes. When she was 8 years old she liked to be called Qais; her hair was short like a boy's and she was always saying, dress me in boy's clothes and let me go with my father and work outside of the house...*

*I: Why did she wear boys' clothes?*

*M: When I was saying that I do not have a son, she would answer, don't worry if you don't have a son, see me as your son, I am your son, and asked to be called Qais.*

Her father goes on to note:

*She liked to play football. At that time I had no son so I used to dress her in boys' clothes... Most of the time she was spending outdoors; she was bringing house supplies from outside to the house. We called her Qais because we had no son at that time.*

This pattern of being outside and taking on traditionally male roles continues today. While Homa no longer dresses as a boy, she helps to support the household, and continues to work outside of the home collecting paper, even at age 12 when issues of honour and threats to female respectability mean many young girls are removed from outdoor work, and some even from school. However, her father was kept unaware of this contribution and when he found out he beat Homa, as her statement below testifies.

*In the past he [my father] didn't understand [about my collecting papers], because I hid that from him. Because if he would know about it, he would beat me and he would say, "you dishonour me with your work". So if my father was at home, I threw the sack on the roof of the house. When my father left the house I went up to take the sack... I was trying to go out when my father was not at home, because he always asks where I go. And I answered him nowhere. Then when he left the house I went out and brought some papers. When he came back he saw there were some papers around the tandoor. So he understood... One time my grandma notified my father that your daughter Homa goes out. So my father came and beat me hard.*

Thus, in his view, she is becoming too old for such outside work, due to risks to his honour, even though it is his inability to work which drives her to take on this responsibility. The poor economic condition of her household causes her great worry, worry beyond that desirable for such a young girl.

*My father goes to sleep easily. But while the light is on all my family members are awake. When it turns off, the others fall asleep, but I can't. I am thinking a lot and worry about my family's condition... I always sit down like this [she sat with her knees close to her chest and her head down with her eyes closed] and I think where can I find more papers for the next day.*

— Homa

Gender norms also very much enter into women's thoughts of working and their abilities to translate such thoughts into action, perhaps forestalling children's entry into work. Friba is among the more unique cases in the study, where her husband's relative physical and mental weakness due in part to their considerable age difference mean she has significant decision-making authority in the home. She is a clear breadwinner and works to prevent her children needing to do so. In other cases where women are currently working, they either conform to seclusion norms by working within the home (Nazir's and Hassan's mothers) or by wearing a *burqa* when outside (Zara's mother when collecting papers). Nazir's mother, when younger, had worked outside of the home in a sarai (small factory), but now she cannot, because, as she says, "my children grew up and they don't allow me to work outside. They say it is shameful for them".

Fahim's mother speaks of seeking work as a cleaner in an office or hospital if her nephew again fails to provide them financial support, but has not acted on this in any way. Homa's mother, who washed clothes at home for pay before her impending delivery, now realizes she must find better work once she recovers. This was not a smoothly made decision in the home, though, and Homa's age and the social inappropriateness of her continuing to work outside also had a role:

*Homa is about 12 years old now and it is not good for her to go outside, so we will have to send other children (to collect papers). Last night I spoke to my husband, after the delivery I will have to work. ... Homa's father told me, you are not allowed to go outside as long as I am alive; when I am dead you can go. Then I told him, so you go out and find work. But he answered, I can't find any work. You go and find work for me, so I can work.*

— Homa's mother

Marouf's mother has also considered working, illustrating the financial challenges her household faces though it is not opting to have children work. She is constrained in seeking work by expectations of hospitality and of a woman always being home to care for a guest.

*M: Yes I would like to work after lunchtime, if I could find it.*

*I: What is Marouf's father's opinion of you working outside?*

*M: He doesn't care in this matter; he believes all men and women are like brothers and sisters...It is my *bi ghairati* (fearfulness) that I don't work outside now. ...I think it would not be good if a guest comes to our home while I am not at home and am busy outside. I don't like our relatives to say something behind my back whenever they come to my house and find the door has been locked. Then they would have the opportunity to say, how is this woman, where has she gone, why has she left her house?*

Finally Zara's mother may have more liberal opinions about women working outside the home, but she is unable to stand up to her husband's very different views, as the exchange below illustrates:

*Mother: My daughters are not well known with *pesta paki* and other sorts of work....If I or my daughters knew of these things, we would definitely go there [to a sarai for work].*

*Father: No, it is not customary among us to send our daughters outside to work. If they go out who would bring water to the household, clean and also cook and bake the bread?*

*Mother: Yes, of course we have no time to work outside...*

Hence gender norms act as a constraint on choices about how to allocate the labour available to the household. They are a form of chronic risk which frames the process through which households assess what options are available in creating a livelihood, at times closing down potential sources of income flows (adult women) in favour of others (men; children).

#### 4.1.5 Learning good behaviour

One factor differently influencing parental interest in having children work across the child labour and non-child labour households is moral benefit, related to learning good behaviour. Parents in child labour households expressed more interest in keeping children busy and out of possible mischief as well as learning the responsibility of earning money, both of which would come through work. The former interest reflects some strong fears of children, particularly boys, “going bad” through idleness, including what some might consider play or leisure activities – flying kites, playing marbles.

*Waheed was very naughty when he was a child. He was flying kites, climbing on walls and getting on the roof all the time. So later we decided to send him to work somewhere so he would not hurt himself.*

– Waheed’s mother

*Nazir likes playing ball and running as well as football....But you know all children like to spend their time freely and they don’t like to work. But I forbid him from wasting his time and sent him to work, because if he doesn’t work now and learn to earn money, while he is young, how would he work and learn this in future when he gets older?*

– Nazir’s father

In Hassan’s case his mother and grandfather showed concern with idleness and immorality, and his mother with Hassan learning responsibility and taking some of the earning burden from her:

*We thought it (water selling) would be better than leisure, staying home and playing all the time in the alley or becoming elagasht. ... He was working to bring some food and to learn to justify right from wrong, to not let his mother bake bread all the time. Also to have a good future he should know that finding food is not so easy.*

– Hassan’s mother

Note Waheed’s mother’s use of the past tense in describing Waheed’s childhood. This is not necessarily typical among the respondent households (see Nazir’s father’s quote above) but does raise the issue of what is a child and childhood in Afghanistan? Investigating this was not within the scope of the study, but expanding understanding of this could contribute to understanding variation in parents’ decisions about child labour usage.

Small living spaces and large family sizes come together to make women’s environments within the home stressful. Thus another reason for children working, linked to children’s behaviour as well, is some mothers’ desire for peace in the house, and sending some children out to work to achieve this. Schooling could have the same effect, but it is only for a few hours a day.

What about those households not putting children into work? Some expressed quite the opposite view about moral benefits of work, instead seeing work and being out in the streets as possibly causing moral harm. It illustrates a different understanding of risks and benefits.

*I think people who send their children out to work are crazy, because their children learn bad things from outside. They find bad friends who will take them the wrong way. These things have bad impact.*

– Marouf's father

*As I consider children who are working, the majority of them are involved in robbery. This is because some families are telling their children to earn 100-200 Afs per day, so if the child could not earn that amount he would steal or rob or do sexual activities to get money....For example there is one of my relatives who forced their children to work and earn an exact amount of money. Now one of his children is in jail in Iran. His second son fled from the police to another province due to robbery. I tell these stories to my children and advise them.*

– Shahnaz's father

The last respondent brings out the risks of children feeling pressured into engaging in sex acts for pay, one of the most exploitative forms child labour can take. While the study did not focus specifically on cases of such work, this statement provides evidence that some parents are aware of these risks facing working children in Kabul. Shahnaz's father's statement also brings out the importance of direct experiences in decision-making processes, particularly in the form of role models, which may provide examples of either positive or negative experiences of work and schooling for children. This is explored further in section 4.1.6.

One cannot conclude however that parents in households who have children work, particularly in street-based activities, do not have some fears about what their children do or who might harm them. This was explicitly expressed in Nazir's parent's case. Nazir's father checks regularly on his sons in the bazaar to ensure they are alright and has told them that if they have any problems or see any bad acts, including sexual abuse, they should tell the police and come to him. Nazir's mother, after an encounter with some boys who had turned to hashish and other negative behaviours, expressed fears for her sons:

*In spring when I took the carpets to wash in the Kabul river I saw three children who were the same ages as my sons. First they were swimming in dirty water, then they went under my carpets. Suddenly I smelled something bad. I went to them and saw they are smoking cigarettes and chars (hashish).... After this event I was afraid that my children would become like these children because they go out to the streets where there is every kind of person.*

– Nazir's mother

Finally, Shahnaz's father is one of the only respondents who expressed a more positive opinion about play for children. He resists others' advice about having his children work and not play in the alley – giving them a freer, less stressful life.

*Now here my neighbours tell me to send my children to work instead of being free in the alley to play football as well as marbles. But I rejected their words and said to them I want my children to be educated and free, to*

*not be under stress. Playing is good entertainment for them, to learn their lessons well.*

So far, economic, social and moral factors, which have a role in decision-making about child labour, have been discussed. Both child labour and non-child labour households share similarly poor economic conditions as well as a context where gender norms influence who in the household can work and in what activities, constraining the ability of households to freely assess livelihood options across their members. Clearer differences were identified across the two household groups in perceptions of the moral risks and benefits of work, with this then being a factor in their different decisions about having children work. The next section will examine an issue touched on above – the value of direct experiences in colouring judgments about the risks and benefits of children working. Parents' education exposure and education outcomes seem to influence decisions about child labour – both among those households using and not using it, as does first hand experience of role models showing both the potential of education for children's economic futures, and the potential of work and learning a skill.

#### 4.1.6 Role models and parental education levels

All of the case study households had economic problems, meaning such problems form part of the context informing decisions to use child labour but they do not determine the outcome. More strongly held negative expectations of the moral outcome of child labour coupled with different personal experiences of the benefits of education versus work via role models or parents' own exposure or lack of exposure to education seem to play a role in differentiating non-child labour households from those using child labour, as illustrated below. This is due to how such experiences may colour parent's perceptions of what can be gained from both options – work or schooling, and whether parents are willing to bear existing livelihood risk now without children's contributions, awaiting future pay offs from education investments.

Fewer of the parents in child labour cases provided stories of role model influences or said that their personal education experiences affected child labour decisions. More of the non-child labour parents did so. The three child labour cases mentioning these issues were Nazir, Akbar and Hassan. In Nazir's case, his mother knew someone who did well out of a metal working skill, so she has aspirations for Nazir to enter that trade, or a similar one (carpentry, mechanic), to ensure income security in future. However, she also recognises this change in activity would mean forgoing Nazir's daily income from selling juice, as apprentices are often unpaid. It is a difficult decision to make, especially when Nazir's continued schooling is also a consideration.

*It would be good for him to learn a skill for his future. I would like him to learn this skill [metal shop work] because it has a good income. We had a neighbour in the past who had a metal shop and his life was very good and his home looked like a bouquet of flowers. ...But I am wondering if I send him to be an apprentice in these kind of shops, how would I manage my present life because if I send him to work as an apprentice in a mechanic shop for example, he would not have any income until he learns the skills well.*

– Nazir's mother

For Akbar, in addition to the high debt the household holds, his father's direct experience of education, specifically his inability to obtain a good job though he has a military university degree, means Akbar is working full time and not studying. His father values skill learning over education, with Akbar working long hours as an apprentice in a

mechanic shop, for little cash income now but the hopes for a better future than his father's.

Unlike Akbar's father, in Hassan's case his mother's lack of education is what matters. She had been interested in education as a child but her father did not allow her to go. This increased her commitment to having Hassan study while working, even to the point of standing up to pressure from her brother who wants Hassan to leave school to work full time. As will be seen in section 4.2.2, this also led to changing Hassan's work so he could manage both earning and studying.

For the non-child labour cases, role models whose educated children went on to become high earners, or direct experiences of education (either lack, or early withdrawal or positive experiences), led to high valuations of education and willingness to struggle at times to see their own children educated. This did not always happen, as in Fahim's case, and in some cases the investment made was clearly for the future benefit parents would receive through their children's care. These households' experiences made them more positively assess the potential long term benefits from schooling, which are not at all assured, against the short or medium terms gains from work or skill building.

In Marouf's case, neither parent was very well educated, with his mother not having any schooling and his father to third grade. However, role models have set the example of what education could achieve. One neighbour in their home district put three sons through university and they now are engineers and doctors. This is a goal Marouf's mother aspires to emulate, but wonders at the cost and whether her household can meet it. For her daughter she also has aspirations, based on another neighbour's daughter's economic success:

*Oh dear sister, I said let her finish 12th grade first, then it is up to her to decide to stay home and do house chores or go out and find a job.... There is a girl originally from Jaghoori District, in my neighbourhood, who was educated to 12th grade as well as an English course. Now she is working in an NGO and earns USD600 monthly, as an unmarried girl.*

– Marouf's mother

Shahnaz' father has direct experience of relatives who were educated and became successful professionals (doctors, businessmen) who now support their parents. He also strongly values education for his children because he personally felt the lack of it. He enjoyed school but after the death, on separate occasions, of his parents, he had to leave school to work. Hence his personal education experience along with these examples of successful education investments make him committed to educate his children and keep them from work. Access to education for his children was important to his decision to return to Afghanistan from Iran, where his children faced enrolment difficulties. He can see the future rewards of investing in his children's education today, while other households, in part through not having such examples in their experience, instead value the earnings children can make today.

*I don't expect any work from my children, 100 percent. Instead I am expecting them to help me through their education.*

– Shahnaz's father

Table 8. Parental education and role model experiences

Household (HH) identifier	Parent's education	Role model experience
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>		
Homa's HH	Father: 11 <sup>th</sup> grade; questions value of education given own employment problems	
Palwasha's HH	Father: 10 <sup>th</sup> grade	
Zara's HH	No formal education	
Hassan's HH	No formal education; lack of own education inspires mother to educate Hassan	
Satar's HH	No formal education	
Nazir's HH	No formal education	Mother's knowledge of someone who successfully used metal working skills to gain a secure life makes her aspire to an apprenticeship for Nazir. Father's tailoring apprenticeship in the past makes him prefer vending for Nazir.
Akbar's HH	Father: military university; sees little value to his own education.	
Waheed's HH	No education	
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>		
Fahim's HH	Father: educated; did not want children to work but circumstances made this necessary soon after his death.	
Marouf's HH	Father: 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade; parents state strong responsibility to educate their children.	A household from home district educated sons to university: now doctor and engineer. Girl from home district educated to 12 <sup>th</sup> class, with English, earns high NGO salary.
Shahnaz's HH	Father: 7 <sup>th</sup> grade; had to stop schooling to work after both parents died; committed to his children's education.	Relative's children working and pressed to earn, resort to robbery; one in jail in Iran. Other relatives educated their children — now successful and support parents.
Friba's HH	No formal education; mother has some literacy and is strongly committed to children's education.	

Fahim's case shows that parental valuation of education is not always sufficient. His father was educated and a government worker. He did not want his sons to work. However, in the face of struggles during refuge in Iran and then the father's illness and inability to support the household after return, this value had to be compromised. Fahim did work but never gave up on the idea of schooling. With his father's death and cousin's financial support he has joined an NGO-run education centre and while feeling the pressure to return to work, he will try to do so only part time to continue his studies. His mother encourages him in seeking work, as well as considering doing the same herself.

It is Friba's complete lack of education, even though some of her relatives were educated, which drives her to educate her children. She hopes that her struggles will secure her spiritual future, and she believes so much in education that she, with support from relatives, barred her eldest son from leaving school to work, going to work outside of the home herself instead. Note though that Friba was not against her son working during school holidays – but could not find such work in the neighbourhood.

*I think they should keep up their studies that in future they thank us for our support and struggle. Education of children is a great honour for their parents, although it has advantages for them as well. It would be that the children pray to God to keep your place in heaven because you sent them to school....If all mothers in Afghanistan had the same spirit like me it would have advantages for their own children and also for the country.*

– Friba

The above sections have attempted to illustrate the complex motivations driving household decisions about whether children work or not, stressing that economic struggles are not a sufficient explanation as they are shared across households which use and do not use child labour. Instead personal education exposure and knowledge of others' positive or negative work and education experiences also play a role by influencing assessments of risks and appropriate responses – work, education or a combination of both – as the better way to prepare their children for the future, and secure parents' own futures. The final section in this chapter will look more at children's participation in decisions about their work.

#### 4.1.7 Children's involvement in decisions about work

Children expressed various levels of interest in working for income. While in many cases economic need drove this interest, in others, seeing peers working, feelings of boredom or wanting to purchase some personal items also contributed to children's relatively easy acceptance of working. Waheed in particular expressed multiple times in his interview that he had been bored at home and wanted to work, with the family encouraging him in this effort. Nazir related a desire for new clothes which drove him into work - clearly the household's inability to support such expenditures was a key factor, but Nazir's interest in being able to make such purchases made him willing to enter work, particularly as he also attended school. His mother recounts his entry into work:

*I think it was a wedding ceremony, and it was the first day of winter. Nazir asked his father to buy new clothes for him so he could attend the wedding. His father told him that he has no money for that. So Nazir told us, I see some of my friends who I play with on the street, they are working, selling plastic bags on the street, and they get some money and some things such as clothing and bicycles. So Nazir asked, allow me to work with them. ... First we – Nazir's father and I – weren't sure about sending him to work, but he insisted that he would be careful about himself so we allowed.*

While Nazir started work for this reason, he soon began contributing to the general household budget and now expresses responsibility for maintaining the household, given his father's irregular income flows.

*I mean I feel responsibility to work and support my family as well as my father. Today my father's shoe provider had not brought any shoes for him, therefore he is free today, so I feel that I have to work.*

— Nazir

Akbar's story is complex. While he reports boredom while living in Pakistan as a reason he opted to work, his mother also relates financial constraints not allowing the purchase of school supplies leading Akbar to request to work, to enable him to help support the family and afford these items; of course now he is still working but not studying - all of his income required for household daily needs and debt payments.

The costs of schooling are a driving force for other children too – at times in response to likely off hand remarks reflecting parental stress in the face of children's requests for money for school supplies. They end up telling children to go out to earn if they are in such need, and in some cases the children do, to the parent's surprise, as in Hassan's case:

*One day he left the house and came back at night. When he came back his eyes were hurt...and his forehead was burned too. He went to Shahr-i-Naw and found work...He left the house without informing us...I only complained the day before that how should I prepare your pen, pencil and your clothes? The next day he himself went and found that work.*

— Hassan's mother

Hassan also resists working at times, to his mother and grandfather's disappointment. This is where children's work can show more signs of compulsion, as also in Zara's case. She and her sisters work due to their father's ill health, their mother's inability to work outside of the home for pay due to the father's prohibition of this, and because the income earned from a land sale has run out. Carpet weaving is hard for Zara though, and while her parent's portray the work as the children's "choice", so they can earn money for clothes, the money really goes to basic household needs. Zara's own statement gives some insights into her views of the work and the physical and mental stresses she associates with it:

*I: you said that sya kari (the design pattern in a carpet) and combing are difficult for you. How is it difficult?*

*M: If I do it, maybe I cut the string. Then to tie the string is so hard. ... When we push the dam chub [a wooden plank, an essential element in carpet weaving?] it is difficult. When dam chub goes up there are two rows, they are very close to each other, and someone should insert a piece of thicker horizontal string. When my sister inserts this string, Masooda and I should push the dam chub, two people for each side at the same time. It is difficult. ... It makes a person tired. And I tell myself, I wish this carpet wasn't here.*

Evidence from Satar's case shows the greatest level of parental compulsion. The research team were not able to interview him without his parents present, but his mother herself had no problems recounting physically forcing Satar to work, against his tears, tiredness and other complaints:

*Poor boys, when they return back from work [selling pahpur] early, I send them to collect papers and bring water. They both would cry that we are tired and we don't want to go for paper collecting or water bearing. But I convince them that if they don't bring water and paper, what would happen to our cooking and drinking? When they don't accept my words then I slap them and send them by force.*

It is important to note that this is not a case where the children are the sole household earners. Satar's father works collecting metal, and an older brother also works. None of the children now study, Satar having left a government school because of harassment by classmates. The parent's have no education themselves and clearly value the income the children can earn today, even in such relatively low skilled work as vending water and *pahpur*, over possible future returns from schooling or learning a skill. Satar seems to internalise this pressure; his is the only reported case of bedwetting among the respondent households.

Male children in households not using child labour also have voiced interest in working — often due to the visible economic constraints under which the family lives and a feeling of responsibility to bear some of this burden. However, such interests are resisted, for the most part, with Fahim being one current non-worker (with a past history of work) who is most likely to return to work, with his mother's blessing, due to their increased risk of losing financial support from a relative.

Access to and quality of schooling also influences child labour decisions through affecting perceptions of the value of formal education over work. The next section reviews some of the trade-offs between work and schooling as expressed by respondents, as well as children's direct education experiences, both in NGO-run courses and in government schools.

## 4.2 Education decisions and experiences

This section examines perceptions of education among the case households, including education expectations, children's direct education experiences and how they differ between government schools and the NGO run accelerated courses some are involved in. It also assesses the trade-offs raised in balancing work and school for some of the households. The section then returns to a discussion of how seclusion norms enter into decisions about girls' access to schooling.

### 4.2.1 Education experiences and expectations

Table 9 provides a summary of child education access. Most of the parents of children who are involved in school have high expectations of the experience, even though those with children in government schools are aware of their shortcomings. Hence expectations may be rather beyond the feasible. At the base level, and among the most achievable expectations, is the desire for children to be literate, to be able to read signboards in the city and letters — often alluding to wedding invitations. These aspirations were often stated in relation to parental illiteracy and feelings of dependence and blindness. Some parents also connected providing education opportunities to fulfilling their roles as parents; they did not want to be "cursed by" their children in future for not having provided them this opportunity. This is linked to some respondents' views that education would lead to a brighter future, and by not providing this opportunity, their children would lose out and blame them. Again, this in part relates to some parents' own lack of education and prospects, though is also countered by other parents who are educated and still feel there are few opportunities

for decent work. These aspirations of children having a good future and ‘becoming someone’ often involve becoming a doctor or engineer, aspirations whose feasibility for many will be low given the education investments required. This is a theme the case study returns to in Section 5. For Homa though, education means independence, and in view of her mother’s dependent position and father’s inability to provide for the household, she sees her education as providing her the platform from which to get work in future, to support her own family, if her husband should not be able to – her personal risk reduction strategy.

**Table 9.** Children’s education access

Household identifier	Children’s education
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Homa’s HH	Homa in centre (3 months); other school age children not studying.
Palwasha’s HH	Palwasha studied to 2nd class in the past; 2 sisters in a course; 1 in government school.
Zara’s HH	1 girl in a course; 1 girl was in government school but faced discrimination; Zara and sister in literacy course.
Hassan’s HH	Hassan goes to a course but failed many times; had been in government school but did not do well; youngest daughter studied to 6th grade.
Satar’s HH	Satar attended centre; finished and enrolled in government school; left after being harassed. Eldest son in centre but withdrawn to go to work. Daughters and young sons not in school.
Nazir’s HH	All school age children study.
Akbar’s HH	Akbar no longer studying; no money for uniform and supplies; no other child is studying.
Waheed’s HH	All children study in government school.
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>	
Fahim’s HH	Fahim in center for 1.5 months, as are 2 younger siblings; younger sister now in government school.
Marouf’s HH	All but youngest child study; 12-year-old boy goes to course.
Shahnaz’s HH	All children of school age study; 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son attend a course. Others in government school.
Friba’s HH	All children study in government school.

Moral learning is another expected outcome of education. Parents expect children to learn right from wrong, how to pray and be good people, through attending some sort of educational institution.<sup>15</sup> Finally Marouf’s father and Friba can articulate broader goals of education, beyond those achievable by their own children, incorporating national level aims. In Friba’s case she sees more educated Afghan citizens as leading to no more

<sup>15</sup> Smith (2008) provides further support for this motivation behind sending children to school.

fighting in the country, while Marouf's father associates education with development and also an end to fighting.

*In my mind education is very important for children. You can see other developed countries and what do you think, why have they gone that high? This is just because of education. If we were educated and our people were educated, we also could establish our country like other developed countries. There is no fighting in other countries, like in our country.*

— Marouf's father

Through what means might these diverse educational aims be accomplished? Amongst the case households, children were enrolled in primarily two forms of educational institutions, government schools and NGO-run accelerated courses which target working children or children who have missed out on education opportunities. They seek to reintegrate the children into government schools at an appropriate grade level for their age. These courses provide opportunities for play along with learning and provide clothes and stationary to the children, as well as assistance after integration into government school (uniforms, stationary, progress monitoring). They often recruit children through social workers who identify working children in the vicinity of the centres; some children see or hear about the centres and go themselves to enrol, as Fahim did.

Because these centres were entry points used to identify cases in this study, many of the households had a child who was currently or had been attending a course. This was not always the study's focal child labourer, however. In Table 10, households assess educational institutions with which they have had contact.

As illustrated in Table 10, there are three key differences between government schools and the NGO-run courses:

- costs,
- quality of learning environment and outcomes, and
- potential for harassment/ill treatment.

The costs associated with attending government schools include those for uniforms, stationary, books and exam booklets. As already noted, these costs led Akbar to be withdrawn from school, as his household could not afford them any longer, and other children were working in order to afford them for themselves or siblings. Shahnaz's mother notes that if these became unaffordable in future, she would have to consider withdrawing her children; as of now they cannot buy all the books required and the children share with other classmates, with potentially detrimental effects on education outcomes. Hence school related costs are a considerable burden on these poor households, and have a large role in decisions about education.

The fact that the courses provide clothes, stationary and books for children is a major draw, and convinced a few reluctant parents into allowing a child to attend, as there were no associated costs. In some cases (Fahim and Satar) the material aid seemed more important to the mothers than the education, with Satar's mother in particular not viewing these as sufficient, and hence she removed her eldest son so he could return to work. However, most other households involved in the courses valued this aspect quite highly, and did not find it insignificant.

Table 10: Assessments of education institutions with which household has had contact

Household (HH)	Education institutions	Assessment
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>		
Nazir's HH	Government	Harassment in government school, but stays enrolled
Satar's HH	Course and government	Course's material aid key to attendance, but considered too little; eldest son withdrawn and put back into work; Government school harassment for Satar made him quit; quality problems noted with government school
Akbar's HH	Government	Costs too high so withdrawn from school
Waheed's HH	Government	Teaching reported not to be good, but Waheed made effort to change school after a work shift change, so he could stay in school
Hassan's HH	Government and course	Prefers the course for its learning environment and sporting activities
Homa's HH	Course	Free attendance and allocation of books, clothes, stationary convinced father to allow Homa to attend Homa has learned manners at the course.
Palwasha's HH	Government and course	Free course attendance and allocation of books, clothes, stationary convinced father to allow course attendance of younger girls. Quality of learning at course noted to be better.
Zara's HH	Government and course	Free course attendance and allocation of books, clothes, stationary convinced father to allow attendance. Removed from government school due to harassment
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>		
Fahim's HH	Government and course	Course's material aid key to attendance. Fahim prefers course for its better quality teaching.
Marouf's HH	Government and course	Course had behaviour effects: more well behaved after attendance
Shahnaz's HH	Government	Costs of school currently just affordable; but if increase would withdraw children. Quality of government schools questioned
Friba's HH	Government	Quality of government school poor according to Friba and her son

Quality issues were raised by a few parents and children in relation to government schools. Satar's mother noted that teachers in the government school did not teach well, as did Shahnaz's mother. Satar was enrolled in government school after finishing his accelerated course, but only stayed for a few weeks. This was because of the third factor raised in comparing the centres with government schools. A few of the children reported ill treatment or discipline problems in the government schools, which for Satar and Zara, meant they left school. Satar was harassed and beaten up and that is why he only remained in government school for a few weeks after enrolment. Nazir as well reported being beaten up by boys of another ethnic group; he however has remained in

school. Zara's father also related ethnic-based discrimination in school as one key factor in his not allowing the girls to continue. That the schools do not protect the children or attempt to create a safe environment for all is a failure, and there are reports from parents that teachers themselves feed into some of these differences through attention to high performers and labelling some groups as poor performers. No one reported such issues in the centres, but it also must be noted that, as reported in the methodology section, these tended to include only specific ethnic groups.

Hassan has himself had experience in both institutions and prefers the centres, though it seems largely for the opportunity for sport and play. Fahim also has had experience of both types of education institutions (government school indirectly) and very much favours the courses. They teach better, give more time for lessons, ensure students understand and are supportive and not abusive to the students. As he says:

*I am happy with this course since I have very kind teachers, who are teaching students very well, as well as giving pens, notebooks and other things. Teachers are monitoring students; when everyone is learning well then they teach new lessons.*

He goes on in a second interview:

*There are a few of our neighbours who attend government schools. They tell me that students are sitting under the sun and there are no good quality classes. Second, my sister is in fourth grade and she does not know dictation very well. This is a clue of bad teaching quality there.*

Other parents also report quality differences, with Palwasha's father stating that it is only after attending the course that his school-going children learned to read and write; they did not accomplish this in the government school. Finally, Homa's mother and Marouf's father note behaviour changes in the children - they are more responsible, less naughty, after attending their courses.

Thus, while many of the parents in the case households strongly value education, it seems that the government schools are not yet able to meet these expectations or to provide the level of education that might allow the children to meet their own or their parents' expectations of the outcomes of education. While NGO run courses fill a clear need and provide a quality service, they cannot replace a state provided education system in terms of outreach and scale. Some of these concerns with quality and the potential rewards from education, coupled with the economic needs described previously, mean that some parents who can have children in school, opt to have them involved in both school and work. Issues around this are discussed next.

#### 4.2.2 Work/education trade-offs

Some of the child labour cases illustrated the dilemmas involved in deciding between education and work, or more often, trying to find ways to balance both. Two cases illustrate high levels of pro-action in order to enable children to continue schooling as well as work, illustrating the families' commitment to enabling their boys to study. Hassan is one of these cases and is especially interesting because, due to a problem during operations he had as a small child, he suffers learning problems and has consistently failed in formal school and at his current NGO run course. However, his mother and grandfather moved him from his job in a metal work shop in part because the employer no longer wanted him to work part time. He offered Hassan 500 Afs per month to work full time, giving up schooling. His mother refused this, saying: '*he could give up the work but not the school. I don't care about the money but I say learn how to write. I accept the value of education because I am illiterate myself...*' illustrating

the motivation of parental education gaps in educating children (see section 4.1.6). Hassan was then moved to his current work where the employer was willing to have him attend the course.

Waheed himself took action, with the help of a bakery customer, to find a new school when his school times shifted to morning – his working hours. He left school for one week in the transition but then restarted at the new school, in the afternoons. He reports the family's expectation that even if he works, he is still expected to study. This does not come without personal costs, illustrating some of the challenges in combining work and school for these young children. Waheed has for two years in a row failed his mid term exams because he cannot take time from work to study. This raises questions regarding how much the children can gain from schooling under these circumstances, particularly if school quality is also poor.

In Nazir's case, his father values education more than work, but seems to be hedging his bets by involving his children in both activities. Nazir himself notes that he works to help his father and studies for his and his family's future. His father concurs but is more concerned about that future, particularly in terms of what work opportunities will be available for educated youth. He wants some government assurances: *"I am thinking of the current government that it should provide an environment in which the children could make their futures better through education..."*

In Zara's household, it is her elder sister's enrolment in an accelerated education course that caused concern in her mother, in relation to getting a carpet completed on time. On Fazila's recent enrolment, her mother admits to immediately considering who will weave the carpets, as Fazila is more skilled and the younger girls are just learning; the younger girls were still too young for the course. The dependence on Fazila and prioritizing of work over schooling is evident in a later interview, when they are already late in delivering their first carpet. Fazila has not been attending her course, nor have the other girls attended their literacy class:

*He [their father] didn't allow the girls to go to school because they start work earlier and earlier. The owner of the carpet called us everyday to see if the carpet is ready. Yesterday, Fazila's teacher came here and asked why Fazila didn't come to course. We told her she has to work and finish the carpet. The teacher said, no problem but Fazila should come to school every other day and study her lessons at night.*

– Zara's mother

This story shows the close attention given by the course leaders in following up with students who stop attending, something unlikely to be found in government schools with much larger enrolments. It also shows their pragmatic approach, recognising the reality of child labour but seeking to find ways, which admittedly might be stressful, for children to continue with both school and work.

Satar's mother is the only case where there is great clarity that schooling is problematic. She notes that: *"They must work because we haven't got anything at home. If they go to school we would face problems."* It is not as if Satar's father does not work as well, so this clear negative opinion is somewhat surprising as it is not found in some other cases which appear to have worse economic circumstances. It likely reflects on one hand the parents' lack of exposure to education, which they do not perceive to be a deprivation as in some other households, as well as an inability to consider the future pay offs of educating their children. Satar's mother seems the parent most based in the material present and how to survive now, unlike some of the

other parents, for whom this is clearly a major consideration but who through other experiences or interests can take a slightly broader view of the world. This is also evident in how Satar's mother assessed the boys' enrolment in the NGO run course mostly in relation to the material aid available.

Many of the child labour cases try to enable their children to both work and study, showing the value attached to both and the desire to diversify their children's skill sets in light of not knowing what opportunities will be available in future. While the non-child labour cases are less willing to support combining education and work as a full time strategy, some also recognise the value of learning a skill. If work was available during school holidays, two of the four cases would allow their children to participate (Friba, Marouf's mother) while Fahim and his mother are both considering his return to part time work, combined with studies.

#### 4.2.3 Seclusion norms and education access

As with decisions about work – who works, in what activity and where – seclusion norms also influence decisions about education. Concerns about girls being out in public while travelling to school are paramount, due to the threats to reputation this entails. The girls are exposed to the view of other men, and may have their own interests raised in young men, leading to all sorts of risks. As Zara's mother relates, in relation to Fazila's attending a course:

*Because she is going to school, she sees different people on the way and maybe it will be a fashionable boy. Then she will get to know him and will ask us to marry her to this fashionable boy. I know a girl from my relatives, she worked in a clinic. She had some male colleagues and she asked her father to agree for her to marry a colleague...When she said that to her father he felt bad. But the girl insisted and finally her father agreed. But he was not happy. I think this is not good. I would not want my daughter to be like that girl. It is a shame and disgrace for us..*

Concerns about shame have also meant that Palwasha and her twin, who lost out on education opportunities due to migration and war, are not allowed to go to school now. They are ashamed of sitting with young children, and their mother is concerned that if they are sent to school, something bad may happen, leading to disgrace. Reputational issues win out over education, for these two girls, due to their ages. Younger girls in the household do attend school, however, in part due to the example of a relative who educated her daughters through high school, one of whom is now a tailor. Role models then have effects on education decisions, both negatively and positively.

Friba counters these concerns about reputation, putting more faith in her daughters, and educated girls in general:

*Parents who say such things [about girls' exposure to unknown men out of the home] are completely uneducated and illiterate. They don't think about their daughters' future. Once girls become educated, literate no one dares to annoy them or scare them or say anything to them and they themselves know well how to behave outside.*

However, she is among the few to have these views, with many parents expressing concerns with honour, though not all allowing them to stop their daughters' education, yet. As the girls age, access to schooling may change, as Homa's father says:

*I don't worry about her going to school since she is still a child. However I am not able to guarantee in future if she will attend school or not, because she is a girl and men look at girls too much. When the girls grow up boys love the girls ... so they are teased and I am afraid she will be kidnapped or raped by someone.*

Hence, Homa's own dreams of schooling and finding work in future to help her household may come to nothing if her parents decide she can no longer attend. What also keeps some girls in school in the face of these concerns with honour is their mothers' illiteracy and their desire that their daughters do not have the same fate.<sup>16</sup>

### 4.3 Experiences of work

This section focuses on those cases where children are working or have worked (i.e. Fahim) to look at what factors were important in deciding what type of work would be done. It then goes on to describe children's experiences of work in relation to work conditions and risks.

#### 4.3.1 Work type decisions

While parents may prefer to put their children, particularly boys, into work in which they could learn a skill, such choices were not always available. Waheed's case shows this. He lives in the Paghman village, and while his father preferred to place him into a mechanic or metal shop as an apprentice for the greater future income expected from these skills, only the local dash (*naan* bakery) had an opening, and this because a cousin owned it. Hence networks matter very much to finding opportunities, for children as well as adults, and desired work is not always available.<sup>17</sup>

The high value placed on skill building is reflected in several other cases of male child labourers. For example, Hassan was moved out of water and plastic bag selling into first a metal workshop then a water pump repair shop as an apprentice because his grandfather "*told him you have a future, and you should learn a skilled business*". Akbar's father shares this belief that such vending activities are of little use. His wife recounts this statement: '*He [Akbar's father] became really upset and said there is no skill in selling water. You will become a young adult tomorrow and your future will be destroyed*'. Akbar's father also was concerned about his son's safety selling water on the streets, fearing a traffic accident. Therefore he found Akbar an apprenticeship in the mechanic shop where he gets his coach fixed, where Akbar is currently working.

Nazir himself and his mother both expressed concern about the future benefit of his water and juice vending. Nazir saw the work as having no benefit and wanted to learn a profession, such as iron-smithing. His mother, as recounted earlier, also wants her son to enter an apprenticeship, though is concerned about the loss of daily income this change would bring.

Children often enter vending work because of low entry barriers and the ability to earn some income each day, even if it is not high. Of those boys starting work in vending only Satar and his brother have remained in this activity, with the other boys either moving into alternative work types over their work histories or expressing the desire to do so (Nazir).

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<sup>16</sup> For more in-depth discussion of household education decision-making processes, including the effects of social expectations, see AREU's previous work on this subject (Hunte 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Most of the working children entered work through some form of informal network, including seeing other children working (i.e. vending water or plastic bags) or through a relationship with an employer.

Nazir's father, and Fahim's father as recounted by his wife, saw apprenticeships quite differently. They expressed concern over having the boys working directly under a shop owner, noting the possibility of ill treatment. Fahim's father preferred to have his son working freely in the streets, vending and recharging mobiles for this reasons.

*I would like that they work in a mechanic shop. But their father, from his bed, ...said he preferred they beg on the streets versus work in a mechanic shop. He didn't like his sons to work under orders of the shop owner...sometimes owners shout at or beat them.*

— Fahim's mother

Nazir's father concurs and while worrying over the future Nazir's vending work will provide him, also does not want him in an apprenticeship if this means giving up schooling or working, as he says, 10 to 15 years to learn a skill, with little income earned during this time. It seems like slavery to him, and he relates his own experience as an apprentice in a tailoring shop for four years in which the owner only taught him to sew Afghan trousers.

Finally for the females, it is reputation again that matters, especially as the girls grow older. This was evident in Homa's father's change of perspective about Homa working outside as she became older, and for Zara's father who states that:

*I want my children to do any work that is best for them and which should be honourable enough to keep their reputation.*

#### 4.3.2 Conditions of work

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Afghanistan is a signatory, and the country's updated labour code, approved by Presidential decree in February 2007, both serve to protect the interests of children in relation to work and exploitation through work. The UN Convention, being of cross national relevance, is more general, protecting children from economic exploitation, hazardous work and work which might interfere with schooling or be otherwise harmful to the child. The labour code, being a national legislative document, is more specific, defining the working age as eighteen, though allowing light, non hazardous work for children age fifteen to eighteen. Recruiting children under age 18 for hazardous work is prohibited. The work week for child labourers age 15 to 18 is less than that for adults, set at 35 hours instead of 40.

To what extent do the children's work experiences fall within these guidelines? This will be examined by looking at working ages and approximate work hours, and reviewing work conditions, as well as the risks reported by parents and children about the work done and its conditions. Children's work hours and risks are summarised in Table 11.

According to the Afghan labour code, none of the children should be employed in their current activities. Only two of these children are in the age group that qualify them to work in light, non hazardous activities: Palwasha and Hassan. The rest of the children are below the minimum working age, indicating the idealistic nature of the labour code in light of the realities of these households. Palwasha in doing household chores does heavy work on a daily or weekly basis (carrying water; washing clothes), and for significantly more work hours than considered safe. Her mother recounts how in bringing water from a reservoir about 30 minutes away, they are unable to use a cart because of the uneven roads and steep hill. Thus the girls must walk, bringing water on their heads which causes pain. Hassan works now and has worked in the past in hazardous activities, in a metal work shop and now in a water pump repair shop. He also works more hours

than is advised, particularly given that he is considered to work only part time and is paid at a part time apprentice rate.

Table 11: Working children's daily routine and exposure to hazardous conditions

Child, age and work	Daily routine	Hazards
Waheed, age 12, apprentice in bakery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 24 hours per week.</li> </ul> Works 8 am-12 pm, 6 days a week; school 12pm - 4pm; Mosque from 6am-7am; buys household needs after school; plays after school.	Smoke from oven caused a breathing/nose problem; limited access to toilets.
Nazir, 13, vending juice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 18 hrs./week.</li> </ul> Works 1 pm-4 pm, 6 days a week; school in the morning; study and/or play after work.	Harassment from other children on the streets; heat in summer (allowed not to work); crossing roads.
Akbar, 11, apprentice mechanic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 70-84 hrs./week.</li> </ul> Works from 7 am-12 pm, then lunch and prayers; works again until 8 pm, 7 days a week; if little work then Friday is off.	Physical punishment by shop owner; risk of hot car parts, noxious fumes; risk of physical injury from the vehicles.
Hassan, 16, apprentice water pump repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 36 hrs. part-time/week.</li> </ul> Works from 7 am-12 pm, then 6pm-7pm, 6 days/week; course in afternoon 2pm-6pm.	Due to past operation cannot lift heavy loads; physical injury risk; physical punishment by shop owner.
Satar, 10, vends <i>pahpur</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 55 hrs./week.</li> </ul> Works from 8 am-4 pm, 6 days/ week; walks 30-40 minutes to vending area; carries water/collects paper/ firewood after work.	Fights with older boys/gangs of boys; robbery; exposure during long walk to vending area (winter/ summer); crossing roads; disease risk from picking paper from trash.
Palwasha, 15, house chores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 50-60 hrs./week.</li> </ul> Daily HH chores from 7am to afternoon; 1 hour rest after lunch; bed at 8pm if no electricity;	Long work hours; physically heavy work: water carrying, clothes washing; water carrying causes pain.
Homa, 12, collects paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 20-25 hrs./week.</li> </ul> In course from 7 am-4pm, 2 days/ week; other days 12-4pm; collects papers from 4-6 pm and in mornings; carries water in mornings and on Fridays she carries water and collects paper;	Heatstroke on hot days; crossing roads; stranger men; disease risk from picking paper from garbage dumps; reputation.
Zara, 11, carpet weaving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works about 54 hrs./week.</li> </ul> Weaves carpets from 7 am-12 pm and helps carry water; lunch; literacy course from 1-2 pm; weaves carpets until evening prayers (6 or 7pm); do homework just before dark; sometimes weave even after dinner:	Dust and splinters from wool; tiredness from long work hours; mental stress: wishes carpet would disappear; headaches from carrying heavy water; reputation.

From the above information, it is clear that only three of the children work within the advised work week hours, and that these three are under the prescribed working age. Five work more than the maximum hours and many of them far beyond it. Akbar is a prime case, exemplifying the fears expressed by Nazir's and Fahim's fathers about the possibility for exploitation and ill treatment if working under an employer. He works extremely long hours and in a hazardous environment, for essentially no pay – only lunch and some money to cover transport costs. He recounts an experience he had of near injury:

*Once the vehicle jack broke and the car came down on my chest, since I was beneath it. I was beneath the vehicle for two hours and I was not able to breathe well. I had to keep my breath inside my chest and breathe slowly ... because the vehicle was right on my chest.*

He also experienced injuries in earlier work in a carpentry shop. In both cases one or both parents wanted him to stop this work, but he convinced them to allow him to continue.

Risk of such injuries is shared with Hassan. He expressed fear while working in the metal workshop, because it was dangerous and shared an experience of a small injury in his current work. Both boys also share experiences of physical punishment from shop owners due to errors made while working. Hassan calmly accepted being slapped by his current employer for any mistakes made, as he has to learn, and shared an experience of being beaten by a metal part in his previous work because he cut a piece too short – the beating caused a cut on his hand which needed medical treatment (paid for by the owner). Akbar risks physical abuse when tools go missing and the owner blames all apprentices; he is also beaten when making an error, something his father agrees with as a means to ensure the boys learn quickly.

Nazir, Satar and Homa all work outside of home or a workshop. They must wander the streets or a bazaar in search of customers or burnable trash. This exposes them to a different range of risks. Nazir and Satar both recount experiences of harassment by other boys working in the streets or living in the areas where they vend. Nazir seemed less regularly exposed to this, in part because he tends to work in the vicinity of his father's vending site, and his father keeps an eye on him. However, Satar and his brothers travel far to sell their *pahpur*, to find a place with fewer vendors and more demand. They are far from home and any watchful eye and are more regularly harassed, with groups of boys taking the *pahpur* and not paying, or taking money or the old goods some people exchange for *pahpur*. All three face risks from the heavy traffic in Kabul, where crossing roads or working along the road can be very dangerous.

Homa is less picked on in this way, though does note comments made about her being out picking papers. She ignores these comments, realizing both that if she responds she opens herself to attack, and that the problem lies with them, particularly those making comments to do with issues of reputation. That said, she did share one experience of being afraid of a man she saw while out collecting papers, who she feared wanted to kidnap her. His face was covered and he was watching her closely, making her run home. Homa's mother now does not let her collect papers for long, when she starts out after her course, at 4 pm.

Many parents of both working and non working boys and girls expressed fears of kidnap. Some could relate known cases of kidnap, murder or attempted kidnap while others had heard rumours of these occurrences. This adds an additional layer of stress to lives that

are already full of worry and highlight the difficulties underlying the decision to have children working, or even travelling to and from school.

Nazir, Satar and Homa also are exposed to bad weather – whether the cold and snow of winter or the heat of Kabul’s summer. Homa makes a cardboard head cover in summer or wets her hair while Nazir, with his parents’ consent, does not go out on very hot days. Finally, Homa and Satar, in collecting papers and other burnable waste, are exposed to risks of disease, depending on where they do the collecting. Homa got a skin disease in the past, when she collected paper from garbage dumps; after that her mother told her not to collect in such places. Satar still does so but did not recount any similar experiences of ill health.

Zara as a carpet weaver is exposed to the range of risks associated with this work, including problems from the fibre dust and from splinters from unclean wool which fly into her eyes, causing pain and redness. She and her sisters cover their mouths with scarves to reduce the dust problem but cannot do much about the splinters. She also expresses tiredness in relation to the work and the long hours, which are done along with household chores; it was earlier noted that she expressed a desire for the carpet work to disappear, highlighting her tiredness and the mental strain involved in supporting the family. In relation to her household duties, she told of problems resulting from carrying water on her head, which has given her a tendency to have headaches. She can no longer carry water this way, instead carrying buckets by hand.

Fahim, while not currently working, had experienced direct interactions with police in his past vending work, and was the only child to do so. While working recharging mobile batteries the police came and smashed his cart, making him lose mobile chargers and suffer losses. This was even when he paid from 10 to 50 Afs to the police, to protect his vending space. In the end, the police harassment made the work untenable, and was part of the reason he stopped. Fahim was also detained by police once, under accusations of being part of a ring with shopkeepers who sold broken mobiles, which he then approved as working. He was detained for part of a day and was very relieved to not have to spend a night in detention.

Children and parents recounted the risks associated specifically with the children’s work above. But what about risks related to the wider world into which the children are sent for both work and schooling? One clear factor is the security environment in the city, where car bombs are increasing, raising fears among parents about sending children out to work or school. Marouf’s parents both express this fear in relation to their sons’ travel to school and recent explosions, as well as risk of traffic accidents, while Nazir’s father expresses the same worry for Nazir and his brothers while they are out working.

*Everybody in the household is concerned about unexpected events, such as suicide attacks, vehicle explosions, robbery and fighting. ... My wife was also worried about these issues but I explained to her that whatever their destinies are, nobody could change it and they are not the only children who work on the road; thousands of children are working.*

– Nazir’s father

The latter part of this statement illustrates that some measure of comfort seems to come from a fatalistic response, that no one can affect their children’s fate, as well as the fact that many children share the same risks, so it is not only their children who are so exposed. Other parents shared these coping responses.

The reputation of female children is a perceived risk of having girls working, similar to the discussion around decisions about educating girls and the reputational risks that are considered in these decisions. Disturbingly, issues of honour also may outweigh concerns for girl children in relation to the persistent worries expressed about kidnap and murder of children.

*A few days ago, my niece came and told an event. She told me that the dead body of a girl who was the same age of my younger daughter ... was found in a hole in a neighbourhood close to Kart e nau. Her body was bloody and her sack was beside her. That girl had left her house with her sack to collect papers, but when she didn't come back to home that day, her family became worried about her, so they looked for her everywhere they knew, but they didn't find her. On the second day her dead body was found in a hole, we don't know what happened to her.... After I heard that story I told Homa, it is not necessary to go to street to collect papers. These papers are not worth the honour we could lose as a result. — Homa's mother*

After this event, Homa's mother responded to Homa's fears and had her only collecting paper from her course and on the way; however the high concern over the family's honour in relation to such a possible outcome for a daughter shows the strong need to maintain reputation in the community. A similar concern for the family's reputation can also be associated with boys' actions, as Fahim's mother relates.

*I am worried about what the neighbours think that my children are out til late at night [when they were working]. Do they send them for robbery or prostitution? I think to myself like this.*

However girls, as evident in decisions about both work and schooling, experience more direct restrictions as a result of their roles as bearers of the family honour.

None of the children's work activities is without some risk, but what is evident is that there is little institutionalised effort to reduce these risks, with the authorities at times being a source of risk versus protection. While some NGOs offer vocational training, have drop in centres and try to bring working children back into schooling, these efforts tend to address the symptoms of the problems versus the underlying structural causes leading children to work. Most of the parents are very aware of the range of risks facing their children but they are unable themselves to often do more than worry, check on them or try to protect them from afar; they cannot be with their children at all times due to their own responsibilities.

#### 4.4 Outcomes of work and aspirations for the future

This final section assesses what the case households which employ child labour have achieved through this, as well as parental and child aspirations for the future. It closes with a reminder of how difficult parents find it to make decisions for the household and its members' wellbeing.

The parents and child labourers in the child labour households mention three types of outcomes from the children's work: economic, moral and learning. These correspond with the motivations for children working, which are in part economic, but also involved the other two factors as well, with learning especially relevant in some households' choices of work type. The income of the child labourers, or the expenditures saved (i.e. via collecting papers, other burnable items) however small, help the households meet basic needs for food or rent, and in some cases are spent on other important needs,

such as clothes for the children, debt repayments or school supplies (Table 6). Zara and her sister's first carpet earnings (received at the very end of the study period) were spent partly on debt repayment for food bought on credit, and then to fund current basic needs. In Nazir and Akbar's households, some or all of their income is saved, to be used by their mothers on clothes for the children or other needs as they arise. For example, Akbar's mother saves his small weekly wage and tries to use it for Akbar, but also has to dip into it herself – in one case because guests came and she had to serve them according to Afghan custom, or risk her household losing honour. Nazir's mother too tries to use Nazir's and his brothers' income for their clothes and school supplies, but it is also a household safety net, according to his father, used if they fall short on income for rent or food. Thus, it is a means to guard against the risk of variable income from parental work activities. This is not to say that the households not using child labour do not experience the same risk – most do. However, they have a different idea of the usefulness of children's income in guarding against this risk.

**Table 12: Children's earnings and its use**

Child, age and work	Payment rate	Use of earnings
Waheed, age 12, apprentice in bakery	Earns 50 Afs/day; can cook bread for free.	Gives money to mother for daily needs. Had kept some money for himself; less so after father's death
Nazir, 13, vends juice	Earns 20-90 Afs/ day, depending on sales.	Money put in savings box, used by mother for children's needs (clothes, school supplies); father sees it as safety net.
Akbar, 11, apprentice in mechanic shop	Receives 10 Afs/day, for transport; lunch given at shop.	Mother tries to save his income for children's clothes; mother used it once to meet costs of guests.
Hassan, 16, apprentice in water pump repair shop	100 Afs/week	He keeps about 25-50 Afs for himself (for bathing and personal needs); the rest is for household daily needs.
Satar, 10, vends <i>pahpur</i>	Together with brother earns 30-50 Afs/day.	Given to mother for daily needs.
Palwasha, 15, house chores	No payment	No payment
Homa, 12, collects paper	Fuel cost savings	Fuel cost savings
Zara, 11, carpet weaving	Each carpet brings 1,500 PK Rs./metre, earned across all sisters.	Money used by household for daily needs and debt repayment.

Moral outcomes largely related to keeping children busy and out of trouble. For example, Zara's father is very pleased that his daughters are engaged in carpet weaving. He does not worry what neighbours or others think because:

*This is a good use of their time. Otherwise they would learn bad things such as dancing, having relations with others outside and doing lots of other unfavourable things.*

Similarly Akbar's father is pleased Akbar is learning a skill and busy; Akbar will not become lazy or a "loafer". He instead will be kept busy with a skill that allows him to serve the community and his family in future, and keeps him from joblessness now and in future, which he says leads to stealing to survive. So, both girls and boys gain moral benefits from work.

Finally, as Akbar's father also brings up, learning a skill is a very valued outcome of work for some of the child labourers, particularly those boys in apprenticeships. Both they and their parents consider learning a skill important for the future. Hassan's grandfather most explicitly states this, illustrating his weighing of the trade-off between income right now, which might be higher if Hassan was in a different activity, such as vending, versus learning a skill which should have future pay offs, though these are highly dependent on the shop owner actually passing on the skills.

*Those works [selling water or bolani] don't guarantee a bright future. I know that his current work will benefit his future and make it bright since it is a skill which can earn much money.... He is going to marry and that takes money, so he has to learn a skill. I know there is less income now, but he is learning a good skill.*

These were some of the actual outcomes parents and children reported from their working. What about the aspirations parents and children, both working and non working, hold for the future? What factors might assist in their achievement?

One common response from parents on being asked about the future of their children was the desire for them to be someone, a person, or something in the future; this aim is shared across child labour and non-child labour respondents. When probed further about what they meant the answers fell into rather typical categories, drawing from ideal types in this context, as also noted in Hunte's work on education decision-making (2006): doctor, engineer, pilot. While these are likely dreams beyond the reach of many of the respondents they exemplify the parents' desires to provide their children the ability to achieve, to not hold them back from striving toward different goals. Part of this is also helping children to be educated, literate.

Some of the children also talked about these goals for themselves, both education and interest in the same professions detailed above. Fahim aspires to education, embodied in a stated desire to be an engineer, but also sees great obstacles in his path, due to the likelihood his mother will ask him to start working again. Homa wants to teach, as well as preserve some measure of independence by not marrying. She has seen her parents' struggles and wishes to be someone with a job, not a husband, and thus able to ease her parents' life in future, as she says below.

*I wouldn't like to get married. I'd like to be in my parent's home. I want to take care of my parents. When I grow up and become a teacher, and my parents are old and weak, I want to do their work and take care of them. If they have a daughter in law, and she doesn't do my parents work, and she fights with my mother, I will do my mother's work.*

The desire for independence is also found in Palwasha, who is currently not studying and works caring for her home all day. She has a role model in a cousin who is educated, moral and has a beauty parlour. She too wants to do this, if only to avoid being

dependent on others for money all the time. However, as she notes, the likelihood of reaching this dream is low, because of her household responsibilities. Her younger sister, who is studying, has more options, according to Palwasha.

*Yes I would like to work because everyone can solve their own problems...People who don't have any job must raise their hand to their parents to give them some money. ...I have to do house chores and other things, so it is not important that whatever you wish for does not come true.*

Homa's interest in supporting her parents in future is an aspiration shared with other children. In particular, Fahim wants to be able to send his mother on Hajj in future, build a stronger house and marry his siblings – he has taken on the responsibility of the senior male, at a young age. Hassan is in a similar position, and feels his mother's heavy work load, washing others' clothes and baking bread. He wants to take on the household's support, in time, freeing his mother from such work. She too has instilled this need in him.

Of course one obvious aim across all the households, linked in part to enabling their children to be something in future, is the desire for increased economic security. Sometimes this is expressed as enabling children to be self sufficient, and in other cases, through hoping children can have their own home, reflecting the burden of rental payments on household budgets. Some of the children and parents are more concrete about their hopes for future security, through their children establishing workshops and earning well. This is common among the families where boys are in apprenticeships, particularly Akbar and Hassan.

Not many parents could articulate how they could concretely help their children to achieve any stated goals. This in part reflects the faith that God will provide, and an unwillingness to supersede this through over-confidence in one's own actions. However, creating a supportive environment for studies was one response, from Nazir's mother, and among the non-child labour households, keeping their children out of work was their primary strategy. Beyond this, and out of the parents' realm of action, an environment guaranteeing improved human security is necessary, where the children could be safe in their work or schooling, responding to the considerable concerns parents expressed about the range of threats their children are exposed to in moving about the city.

In closing, it is important to come back to the parents in these cases, and to note the strain everyday life places upon them, physically and mentally, as this is the context in which they are struggling to make decisions about what is right for their households and their children. Despair and depression were not uncommon among parent respondents, in response to debt levels, joblessness of spouses, rent demands and just the daily struggle to feed the family. As Homa's mother stated: *Sometimes I become tired of my life and I say, "Oh my God, death is better than this kind of life"*. These struggles go on day after day, generally without support from any formal state institutions. The centres and their teachers provide some aid and become involved in the households of their students, but this is generally short term assistance and cannot replace a state response to the economic, social and human insecurity characterising the life of so many Afghans.

## 5. Conclusion

This case study sought to investigate the factors that influence household decisions about the use of child labour, comparing experiences of poor households who both do and do not put their children into work. This comparison, among households in both categories which experienced difficult economic conditions, served to illustrate that more than income poverty or absence of male earners drives incidence of child labour. This is not to say that reducing poverty is not a necessary first action, but that this will not necessarily be sufficient to reduce household use of child labour.<sup>18</sup> Also needed is attention to reducing a broader range of risks poor households face, including risks of ill health and debt, chronic risks associated with social norms and risks that investments in skill building and formal education may not have future pay offs. The latter highlights what appears to be a key difference between the child labour and non-child labour households. Those not using child labour seem more inclined, though not necessarily better able, to struggle though current work-based insecurities and cost of living challenges while keeping their children from work for the pay offs envisaged in future from investing in education. Often very personal experiences drive this difference in risk assessments and responses. Working to assist more poor households to be able to look to and invest in the future of their children and themselves, through providing greater security in the present is the challenge facing the Afghan state and those international agencies working with it. This includes improving economic security, social security and human security, and achieving improvements in all three through interventions sensitive to transforming the social inequalities limiting the options of many people.

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<sup>18</sup> Note that middle and higher income households also may have children working. Further research is required to understand their motivations for this and the conditions under which these children work.

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## Appendix 1: Neighbourhood descriptions

Kart-i-Naw is located on one of Kabul's hills. Mud houses are concentrated at the bottom of the hill with very few at the top. The main road at the bottom of the hill is asphalted, the rest of the streets and alleyways are dirt. Because the neighborhood is located on the hillside cars can go part way up; people have to carry goods the rest of the way themselves or use donkeys. There is a bazaar at the bottom of the settlement, with construction material, mechanic, stationary, grocery, and tailoring shops. New apartments blocks are built along the side of the main road. The settlement itself is not covered by Kabul's urban development plan, adding to the chaotic development of the neighborhood. There are several hand pumps that were installed by a development agency, but the water comes every third day, and is not enough to cover demand, so the inhabitants buy water from a variety of suppliers. There is no access to city electricity; there is a private generator that charges 500AFs per month per household; it operates from 6:45pm to 11:00pm. There is a clinic 20 minutes by walk from the neighborhood and a primary school for both males and females in the neighborhood.

Dehmazang is a neighborhood located at the foot and on the slopes of TV Mountain in Kabul. It is a thoroughway to the southern part of Kabul. This neighborhood is approximately 10 minutes by car from from Kabul center. There is a Kabul Police and Traffic department headquarters at the border of the neighborhood. This neighborhood is an informal settlement, but according to residents, traces its existence to about a century ago. Currently there has been a construction boom as a result of Kabul's rapid expansion. The older part of the neighborhood has access to city power, whereas the newer one does not, with only a few houses having an electricity line. Some residents at the foot of the hill have wells but this water is not potable; it is only used for washing. Those living on the slopes have water piped up to public taps. Water comes for only a few hours each day and people must queue to collect it. The neighborhood does not have any hospital or clinic nearby. There is a government school. The main road of Dehmazang is asphalted but the neighborhood or residential area roads are not; access to the upper part of the neighborhood is particularly challenging in wet weather. Kabul Zoo is located across the main road from this neighborhood; there are also a number of metal works shops making metal doors, gates and carts, as well as other construction shops. Dehmazang Public Bath is very famous and is open all day long, drawing people from across the city.

The village in Paghman in which two case households were identified has about 200 households and is located about an hour's walk from Paghman centre and about an hour by car from Kabul. The majority of the population is Tajik with about 20 families of Pashtun ethnicity. The majority of the people are Sunni Muslims. The livelihood of the community is typical of a peri-urban community and includes daily wage work, masonry, carpentry, and service-type work; fewer households are engaged in farming, gardening, or sharecropping. The majority of the villagers migrated during the conflict. Currently Paghman is a destination for returnees and internal migrants due to its proximity to Kabul. Most of the returnees and internal migrants are poor. The community has access to drinking water and electricity. One of the villagers owns a generator, and charges 100AFs per lamp per month. At the time of the study, the village enjoyed a stable security situation. Most of the children (both boys and girls) attend the school which is an hour's walk from the village, and some of them combine work with schooling. There is a government health clinic in the bazaar, a ten minute walk from the village.

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