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Child Labor: Prevalence, Reasons and Knowledge of Early Learning of Handicrafts in Couffo, Benin in 2018

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Abstract

Introduction: One form of child labor is early learning, which is a less worrying phenomenon in our communities in Benin. The objective of this study was to assess the practice of early learning for children in rural areas. **Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study combined with a qualitative component conducted in the Kissamey district of Benin with four targets: child apprentices (52), master craftsmen (41), parents and guardians (34), local authorities (9). The collection tools were a questionnaire and an interview guide. **Results:** The frequency of early learning among children was 32.07% with difficult socioeconomic conditions: polygamy (75%), strong siblings (79%), out of school (33%), unmet food needs (96%). The reasons for early learning according to parents were: refusal of the child to go to school (44%), financial difficulties (31%), school failure (22%), but 38% of these children did not know the reason for their learning. The actors had little knowledge of the regulatory texts. **Conclusion**: Early learning remains a societal problem related to out-of-school and difficult socioeconomic conditions.

Keywords

Work, Trades, Children, Early Learning

1. Introduction

In the world in general and in Africa in particular, child labor remains a dis-

turbing problem and affects many children. Thus, millions of children are deprived of any chance to build themselves up gradually because they are alienated by early work [1] [2]. According to an International labor organization (ILO) report, nearly 11% of the world's child population, or 168 million children aged 5 - 17, were still trapped and locked in child labor in 2012 [3]. More than 120 million were school-age children aged 5 - 14 [3] and 29% of children in sub-Saharan Africa are in child labor and this represents 23% of child laborers worldwide. Many of these children are forced to do dangerous and exploitative work instead of going to school [4]. In Benin, dangerous work concerned more than 460,000 Beninese children in 2008 [5] and this despite the existence of laws regulating the world of work. In order to reduce the extent of child labor, the Beninese government has adopted laws to encourage children to stay in school, including the regulation on early learning in the labor code [6]. The text on apprenticeship stipulates that the minimum age for entry into apprenticeship is 14 years, with the obligation to sign a contract [6] [7] [8]. Also, no one can receive underage apprentices if he is not at least 25 years old [6] [8]. Twenty years after the adoption of this provision, what is the situation regarding the practice of early apprenticeship in Benin, particularly in rural areas?

Indeed, Kissamey district is one of the most populated in the Aplahoué commune in the Couffo department. Economic activities, notably handicrafts and trade, are developing more and more along the main roads. Two of the main roads are: 1) the road that leaves the district of Azové (the asphalt road), crosses the villages of Houngbamey and Lokossouhoué and enters the commune of Klouékanmey; 2) the road that leaves Kissamey in the central market, crosses the villages of Houétan-Touvou, Hédjénawa, Houétan, Tannou and Kélétomey and enters the district of Godohou. The objectives of this study, which took place along two main roads, were to: a) estimate the frequency of early apprenticeship in Kissamey's artisan workshops, b) determine the socio-professional and economic characteristics of child apprentices and their families, c) identify the reasons for the practice of early apprenticeship, and d) evaluate the knowledge of the actors about the regulatory texts in force.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study associated with a qualitative component that had taken place from March to May 2018.

2.2. Study Framework

The study took place at commune of Kissamey in the department of Couffo in southern Benin.

2.3. Study Population and Sampling

For the quantitative part, a census of all the workshops located along the two

main roads under study was first conducted. All workshops with at least one child under 14 years old were pre-selected. The workshops included were those for which the master craftsmen had given their consent. Assent was sought for children and consent was sought for parents after the purpose of the study was explained. Children under 14 years of age from these selected workshops, their parents and their master craftsmen were included. Figure 1 shows the recruitment diagram of the participants. A total of 52 children apprentices, 36 parents and 41 master craftsmen were included.

For the qualitative aspect, individual interviews were conducted with 9 local authorities.

2.4. Collection of Data

Quantitative data were collected using a specific questionnaire addressed to each of the targets. The variables studied were related to socio-professional and economic characteristics, reasons for entering early apprenticeship, and knowledge of the laws governing apprenticeship in Benin.

The qualitative part was conducted with a semi-structured guide by an experienced person with no prior relationship with the participants. The interviews took place in the offices of the said authorities. The languages of data collection were French and especially Adja. The interviewer took notes.

2.5. Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the quantitative data was carried out with Excel software and was based on the calculation of proportions.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically in a manual way. A consensus was then made according to their understanding. Themes emerging from the subject were identified.

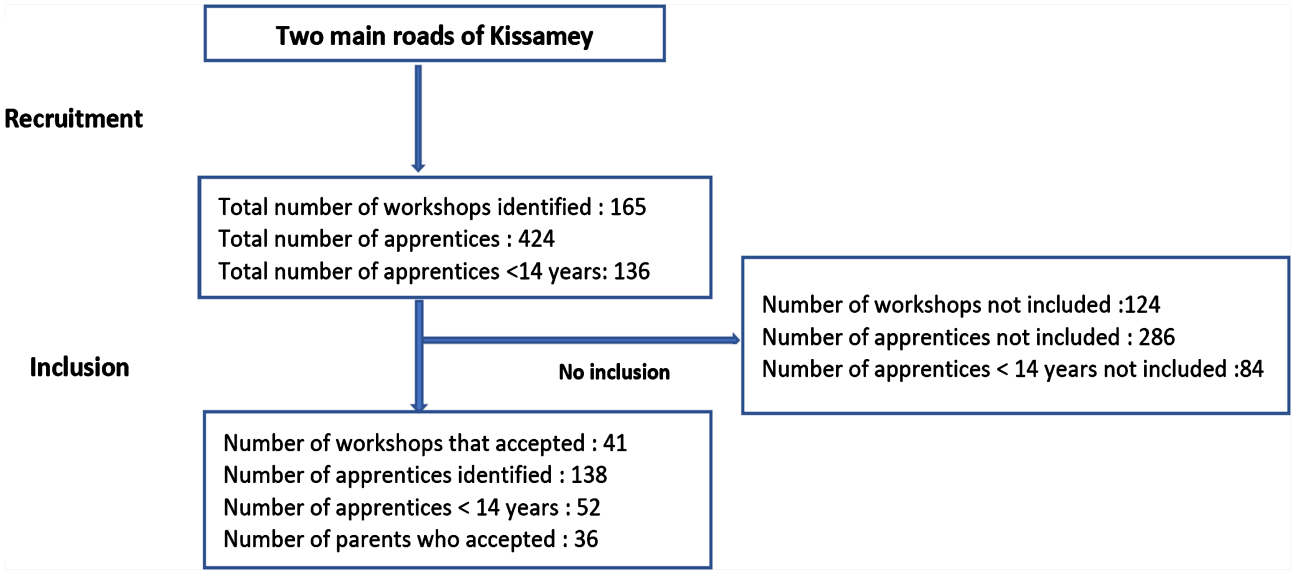

Figure 1. Study participant recruitment algorithm.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

From an administrative and ethical standpoint, prior authorizations were received from the authorities of the Kissamey commune and district. The data were processed in a way that respected anonymity and confidentiality.

3. Results

3.1. Frequency of Early Learning Practice

The prevalence of child apprentices was 32.07% when considering all the workshops of the 2 road axes with a ratio of 0.84 apprentices under 14 years old per workshop, it was 37.68% when considering only the workshops actually included with a ratio of 1.26 apprentices under 14 years old per workshop. The refusal rate at the level of workshop leaders was 75%. Among the parents responsible for the children (one parent or guardian per child), 30.76% refused to participate. The reasons given for refusal were mainly fear of punishment. The synthesis is summarized in the figure below.

3.2. Socio-Professional Characteristics of Child Apprentices

The average age of the children was 10.90 years, with more than half under 12 years of age and extremes of 6 and 13 years. The number of boys was almost double that of girls. The most represented religious denominations were Christian (57.69%) and traditional (42.31%). One third of the children had never been to school and only 3.85% had the Primary School Certificate. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the child apprentices.

Table 1. Distribution of child apprentices by socio-demographic characteristics, Kissamey Benin 2018.

		N	%
Age range	[6 - 7] years	3	5.77
	[8 - 9] years	9	17.30
	[10 - 11] years	15	28.85
	[12 - 13] years	25	48.08
Gender	Male	33	63.46
	Female	19	36.54
Religious Obediences	Christian	30	57.69
	Traditional	22	42.31
Level of study	No academic instruction	17	32.69
	Primary 1st and 2nd forms	13	25.00
	Primary 3rd and 4th forms	18	34.61
	Primary 5th and 6th forms	2	3.85
	Secondary 1st and 2nd forms	2	3.85

According to the sector of activity, 4/10 of the children were in mixed occupations such as hairdressing and sewing compared to the others activities. Figure 2 shows child apprentices type of activities.

3.3. Living Conditions and Learning Circumstances of Child Apprentices

Most of the apprentice children came from polygamous families with siblings of at least 5 children. Only 1/3 of the children were living with their parents at the time of the survey, and of these, 1/3 were in the care of their single mothers. One-fifth of the children reported that they did not have enough to eat at all. The main reasons for dropping out of school were lack of resources, school failure and the child's refusal to attend. Table 2 shows the living conditions of children apprentices.

3.4. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Parents and Master Craftsmen

Of the 41 master craftsmen, more than half (56.10%) were under 25 years of age, had a primary school education (56.10%), and were of Christian faith (68.29%). The sex ratio was 1.2. More than 4/5 of the master craftsmen were in couples. The 34 parents of children were young subjects with 11 (32.35%) aged less than 25 years, with almost half without any level of education 16 (47%) who lived in a polygamous household in 58.82% of cases. Parents practicing a traditional religion occupied 50% and 41.18% were Christians. The parents' occupations were: agriculture 20 (58.82%), handicrafts 12 (35.30) and trade/sales 2 (5.88). Table 3 presents the master craftsmen distribution.

3.5. Early Apprentices Reasons

According to parents and guardians, the children were put into apprenticeship mainly because the children themselves had refused to go to school, secondly,

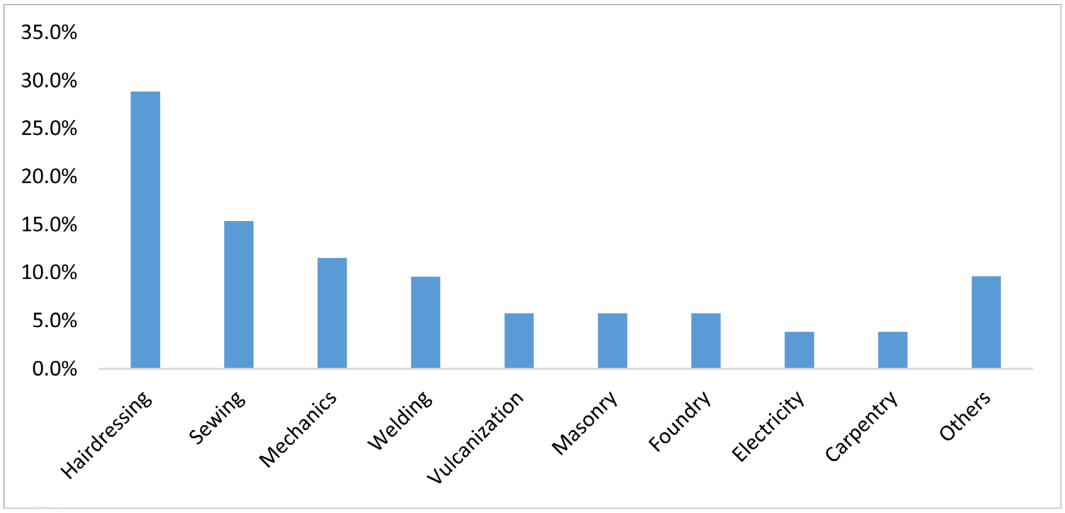

Figure 2. Distribution of child apprentices by type of activity.

Table 2. Living conditions of children apprentices in Kissamey, Benin 2018, (n = 52).

	n	%
Type of household in which the child was born		
Polygamist	39	75.0
Monogamist	13	25.0
Existence of biological parents		
Living biological parents	49	94.23
Orphans of one or both parents	3	5.77
Number of children of the biological mother		
1 - 2 children	1	1.92
3 - 4 children	12	23.08
5 - 6 children	29	55.77
More than 6 children	10	19.23
Number of children of the child's biological father		
1 - 2 children	1	1.92
3 - 4 children	0	0
5 - 6 children	10	19.22
More than 6 children	41	78.84
Person currently responsible for the child		
Both parents	12	23.08
Mother	06	11.54
Father	00	00
Pattern	21	40.38
Tutor	06	11.54
Tutor	07	13.46
Meeting dietary needs according to children		
Not at all	10	19.23
Partially	40	76.29
Totally	2	3.85
Reasons for dropping out of school		
Failure	10	27.78
Lack of means	11	30.56
Child's refusal	9	25.00
Others	6	16.66
Children's reasons for learning		
Imitation of others	11	21.15

Continued

Want to be a boss	6	11.54
Not to rest at home	4	7.69
For a better future	11	21.15
Don't know	20	38.47

Table 3. Distribution of master craftsmen and parents of children by socio-demographic characteristics; Kissamey 2018.

		Master craftsmen		Children parents'	
		n	%	n	%
Age range	< 25 years	23	56.10	11	32.25
	25 - 34 years	14	34.14	10	29.41
	35 - 44 years	3	7.34	8	23.54
	≥ 45 years	1	2.44	5	14.70
Gender	Male	22	53.66	15	44.12
	Female	19	46.34	19	55.88
Marital status	Single	5	12.20	3	8.82
	Married/in couple	36	87.80	31	91.17
Level of education	No formal instruction	10	24.39	16	47.06
	Primary	23	56.10	15	44.12
	Secondary	8	19.51	3	8.82

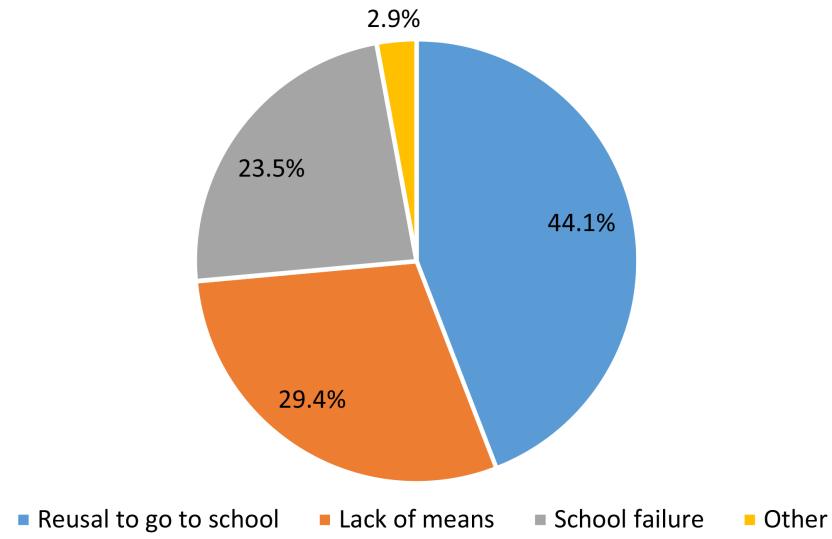

Figure 3. Distribution of parents/guardians by reason for entering their child's apprenticeship; Kissamey 2018.

because of financial problems and thirdly, because of failure in school. **Figure 3** summarizes the reasons.

3.6. Laws knowledge

The majority of child apprentices are unaware of their rights and the regulations on apprenticeship in Benin. More than a third of master craftsmen and parents were unaware of the rights of children. Among master craftsmen, although the majority knew about the existence of regulations on apprenticeship, none of them knew about the need to sign an apprenticeship contract, and only one-third had a good knowledge of the minimum age for entering apprenticeship. As for parents and guardians, three quarters were unaware of the existence of apprenticeship legislation, the need to sign an apprenticeship contract, or the minimum age for entry into an apprenticeship. Table 4 shows the distribution of apprentices, parents and master craftsmen about appenticies laws in Benin.

3.7. Local Authorities' Views on Children's Learning

A total of 9 local authorities were interviewed, all of whom were male and between the ages of 30-90. Their level of education was: no formal education (4) primary (3), secondary (2) and university (1). Their length of service in their position of responsibility was distributed as follows: three years (5); five years (2) and twenty-five years (2).

All local authorities recognized child labor in general and early apprenticeship of children as bad practices to be discouraged. According to these authorities, children under 14 years of age should be sent to school instead of being apprenticed in a craft. Of these authorities, 07 were not aware of the laws on apprenticeship. Only 02 stated that they had questioned parents about the situation of a child apprentice once and none of them had ever dealt with a conflict concerning a child apprentice in the course of their duties. None of them had ever initiated proceedings against anyone in the course of their duties for reasons of

Table 4. Stakeholders' knowledge of regulatory provisions in the context of children's craft learning, Kissamey.

		Apprentices		Master Craftsmen		Parents/ guardians	
		N = 52	%	N = 41	%	N = 34	%
Existence of texts on the rights and duties of children	Yes	11	21.5	22	53.7	22	64.7
	No	41	78.5	19	46.3	12	35.3
Existence of apprenticeship legislation	Yes	00	00	25	61.0	07	20.6
	No	52	100	16	39.0	27	79.4
Need for an apprenticeship contract	Yes	33	63.5	00	00	09	26.5
	No	19	36.5	41	100	25	73.5
Knowledge of age of entry	≥14 years	3	5.7	15	36.6	6	17.7
	<14 years	48	92.3	23	56.0	26	76.5
	Ne sait pas	1	1.9	3	7.3	2	5.8

early learning of children.

4. Discussion

The majority of the apprentices were male with an average age of the apprentices in our study of 10.90 years with 51.92% under 12 years of age thus below the age limit for schooling of children in Benin [8]. One third of them had never attended school. In terms of gender, Ayelo found a male predominance with 71.70% of male apprentices in his research on the "socio-sanitary situation of apprentices in urban areas in the 6th edistrict of Cotonou in Benin" in 2009 [9]. With regard to schooling, a proportion of 20% of apprentices who have never been to school in Benin was obtained by Ayélo *et al.* [9]. In Morocco, 20%1999, of child workers had never been to school. The failure to educate children and the lack of schooling are done in defiance of the laws on children's education, in particular the Beninese Constitution, which advocates compulsory primary education through its article 13.

It was found that most of the apprentice children came from polygamous families with siblings of more than 5 children and an insufficient satisfaction of their food needs. This situation, combined with the risks in the work environment, makes the children vulnerable to numerous pathologies, the management of which is still difficult given the precarious conditions of their families.

In fact, although the majority of apprentices had both parents living, 23.08% were with both parents and 40.38% were with their boss. This shows that the "Vidomegon" phenomenon exists in the milieu in a disguised form of apprenticeship of the child to a tutor practicing a trade. In 2009, Baloitcha GP found a similar result of 34.4% having their master craftsmen as tutors [9].

Most of the apprentices' parents and guardians were very young farmers or artisans. More than 50% were under 25 years of age. This is in line with figures from the fourth Benin Demographic and Health Survey (EDSB V) [10] which showed that the median age of first birth in rural Benin among women was 21 years. The occupational status of the parents as farmers is more related to the location of the survey. Thus Ayélo *et al.* found that 16,1% of mothers and 30.6% of fathers were farmers [9]. The socio-economic conditions of the parents define those of the children [11] [12].

The main reasons for dropping out of school cited by the children were failure, lack of resources and their own refusal to continue school, but the reason for entering apprenticeship was essentially ignored by the children. For some they had entered learning by imitation or for a better future. The individual's social environments—such as family, school, recreational settings, and peer groups—expose children and adolescents to a range of activities such as crafts [13] [14]. Indeed, parents' views were more or less similar to those of children. For parents, the reasons for entering apprenticeship were mainly the child's refusal to go to school, lack of financial means, and academic failure. Difficult socio-economic conditions determine the educational behavior and attitudes of parents and child-

ren [4]. Indeed, there is growing evidence that aspects of children's social skills related to learning (including interpersonal skills and vocational skills) contribute to early school performance [15] However, many previous studies show that the orientation towards alternating vocational training is based on diversified, heterogeneous logics linked to family socialization (young people from working-class backgrounds, importance of the craft industry) and previous school experience [12] [13] [16].

Knowledge of the regulatory texts on apprenticeship is generally low among all categories of actors. However, there is a contrast with the master craftsmen, where almost half declared that they had knowledge of such texts but did not master the clauses on the notion of apprenticeship contract and on the legal age for admission to apprenticeship in Benin. The situation of ignorance of labor regulations was also observed by Ayelo *et al.* who noted this ignorance among 63.9% of master craftsmen in their study [9]. This state of ignorance of labor standards is a challenge to the institutions in charge of labor regulations. This problem is known in the country and has led to the organization of several awareness campaigns by the Ministry of Labor over the past 20 years.

The improvement in knowledge currently observed may be linked to these awareness campaigns.

The overall knowledge of the actors also seems to be related to their level of education. Awareness-raising campaigns for the various actors still seem to be necessary, but an integration of the aspect of the standards of children's vocational training in the classic training programs of the primary school could be useful for the mastery of the related texts.

5. Conclusion

The early learning of children is a phenomenon that results from the lack of schooling and the dropping out of school of children. The difficult socio-economic conditions of the populations as well as the poor knowledge of the regulatory texts maintain this phenomenon. Innovative strategies seem to be necessary for the fight against this scourge in our communities.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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