



Addressing poverty in a globalised economy

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Addressing poverty in a globalised economy

The magnitude of child poverty

Goal one of the Millennium Development Goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, with the objective of halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people in the world whose income is less than \$1 a day. Progress has been uneven, with some regions, including east Asia and south-east Asia, having already met the target (east Asia went from 33% of its population living in extreme poverty in 1990 to 9.9% in 2004; while south-east Asia went from 20.8% in 1990 to 6.8% in 2004).¹ Other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, have been making much slower progress (in 1990 46.8% of sub-Saharan Africa was living in extreme poverty compared to 41.4% in 2004).

While economic growth alone is not enough to ensure poverty reductions, those regions in which poverty has decreased are those that have experienced high economic growth, for example China in east Asia. In contrast, in sub-Saharan Africa, while the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day has fallen slightly, the actual number of people living on less than \$1 a day has increased. For the most part, countries in this region experienced small or negative economic growth during the 1980s and 1990s.

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While the \$1 a day line is the most commonly cited indicator of extreme poverty, there are many more people who live in poverty than is captured by this figure. The World Bank World Development Indicators give some estimates

of the proportion of people living on less than \$2 a day: 36.58% of the population in east Asia and the Pacific; 9.79% in Europe and central Asia; 22.17% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 19.7% in the Middle East and north Africa; 77.11% in south Asia; and 71.97% in sub-Saharan Africa.²

Addressing child poverty is one of the most important long-term challenges facing policymakers around the world. Acute poverty is a threat to children's lives now, their future opportunities, and those of their countries. A Unicef study looked at seven areas of severe deprivation for children (shelter, safe drinking water, decent sanitation facilities, education, information, health and adequate nutrition) and concluded that over 1 billion children suffer from at least one form of severe deprivation, with about 700 million children suffering two or more forms.³

Even in countries with low absolute poverty rates, the relative poverty of children is a pressing concern. The European Union defined poverty in relative terms in 1984 as limited resources that exclude the poor from the minimum acceptable way of life in the member states in which they live. Relative poverty rates are rising in rich countries. According to a 2004 Unicef report on relative child poverty (defined as living in a household with an income less than 50% of the national median), relative poverty rates have increased in 17 out of 24 OECD countries.

1. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007. Available at http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2007/UNSD_MDG_Report_2007e.pdf

2. World Development Indicators database for 2004.

3. Unicef, *The state of the world's children 2005: childhood under threat*.

Addressing child poverty

Effectively tackling child poverty requires addressing family poverty. There are three main ways to lift families out of poverty. The first mechanism is work: enhancing the quality of parents' jobs so they can better contribute to family income and are better able to care for their children. The second approach is education: improving children's access to and quality of education so that they will have better work opportunities as adults. The third is through income support programmes that increase family income by direct transfers.

While income support mechanisms have been valuable in temporarily providing income to specific sectors of populations, they are rarely effective long term means of alleviating poverty for large proportions of the working age population and their dependants. Consequently, this section will focus on changes in parental work in education that would affect intergenerational poverty. More specifically, we will address the issue confronting policymakers of how to simultaneously ensure parents have economically viable work opportunities that allow them to care for their children and provide children with strong educational opportunities.

Conditions faced by working poor parents

Our research group has analysed large, nationally representative, closed-ended, publicly available household-level surveys of more than 55,000 households in the United States, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Botswana and Vietnam. A wide variety of global settings were chosen in order to examine the differences and commonalities among the experiences of working adults and their children across national borders, social class, occupation, gender and ethnicity. Specifically, in addition to representing different regions around the world, the selected countries represent high-, medium-, and low-income nations; have economies driven variously by natural resource extraction, manufacturing and services; and include democratic as well as socialist governments.

At the same time, we have conducted more than 1,000 in-depth, open-ended interviews in the United States, Russia, Mexico, Vietnam, Botswana and Honduras of working families, employers, teachers, childcare providers and health-care providers. In addition, we examined how public policies in over 180 countries around the globe compare in terms of meeting the needs of working families.

Data from our global research clearly document that parents pay a significant financial penalty for care-giving, and must often choose between caring for their children and earning any income. Penalties include direct financial losses in terms of salary deductions and fines as well as indirect income losses in terms of missed job promotions and, in the most extreme cases, loss of a job altogether.

While a significant risk for all parents, the penalties for care-giving are harsher for lower income parents. From interviews conducted in Mexico, 58% of parents with incomes lower than \$10 a day Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted lost income or job promotions or had difficulty

retaining a job because of the need to care for sick children, compared to only 25% of parents whose incomes were higher than \$10 a day when having to fulfill other care-giving responsibilities. Eighteen per cent of parents in Mexico with incomes lower than \$10 a day lost job promotions or had difficulty retaining a job. In Botswana, 41% of parents with incomes lower than \$10 a day lost income or job promotions or had difficulty retaining a job because of the need to care for sick children, while 23% lost job promotions or had difficulty retaining a job because of other care-giving responsibilities. In contrast, the numbers for parents with incomes above \$10 a day were a relatively lower, 19% and 12%, or about half of those of poorer families. In Vietnam 70% of parents with incomes lower than \$10 a day lost income or job promotions or had difficulty retaining a job because of the need to care for sick children, compared to 55% of parents whose incomes was higher than \$10 a day.⁴ Overall, lower-income working parents are more likely to suffer financially from caring for their children.

Detailed examples give a sense of what lies behind the statistics. Ngo Van Cuong of Vietnam worked in home construction.⁵ He and his wife had an infant son, Kinh. Cuong explained that when his wife “bought some prawns from the market that she thought were good. She cooked them for Kinh. He developed some allergic reaction the next morning. His face and body turned red all over after he ate them.” Their infant had the allergic reaction at a time when his mother was working. Because the family needed the money she would earn on those days to get by, Cuong went to his workplace to explain that he needed to take the day off to care for his son. “I asked my boss to take that day off. But he insisted that I couldn’t take that day off or else he would fire me, so I had to listen to him.”

Cuong stayed at work in the morning, but when he returned home from the midday break, he saw how sick Kinh was. “When I saw my poor child after I came home in the afternoon, I stayed home to take care of my child and didn’t return to work.” Cuong described how he took the afternoon off and then returned to work on Monday to find that his employer had fired him. Cuong had a simple desire: “My dream job is to be a regular corporate employee so I still get paid when I’m sick or my child is sick.” It was obvious why a one-year-old—especially one covered with hives and experiencing a serious allergic reaction—could not be left home alone or in poor-quality care, but Cuong’s need for earnings was equally marked. He explained how that month he had needed to borrow “shared money” from people in the neighborhood. The 20% interest rate on this shared money made it hard to repay.

Like so many other aspects of the experiences of working parents and their children, we heard the stories of suffering echoed across borders. Refilwe Keetetswe of Botswana risked losing both her pay and her work in order to care for her child. In the end, she lost any chance at promotion. A mother of two, Refilwe worked at a bank. She explained:

At times, my child would get sick and I couldn’t afford a caretaker, so I had to stay home. If you stay home for three days, it appears on your record. At the end of the year, you don’t get an increment for that. At times I had to stay for three to four days, or I’d take my son to Molepolole until I’d find someone to look after my child in Gaborone. At times he was sick, the caretaker had left, and there was no one to look after him. They’d

4. Throughout this paper the \$10 per day threshold is adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity for all countries.

5. All names have been changed to protect respondents’ confidentiality. While recognising cultural differences in the practice of referring to individuals by name, for consistency each person is introduced by full name and then the first name only is used in subsequent references to that person.

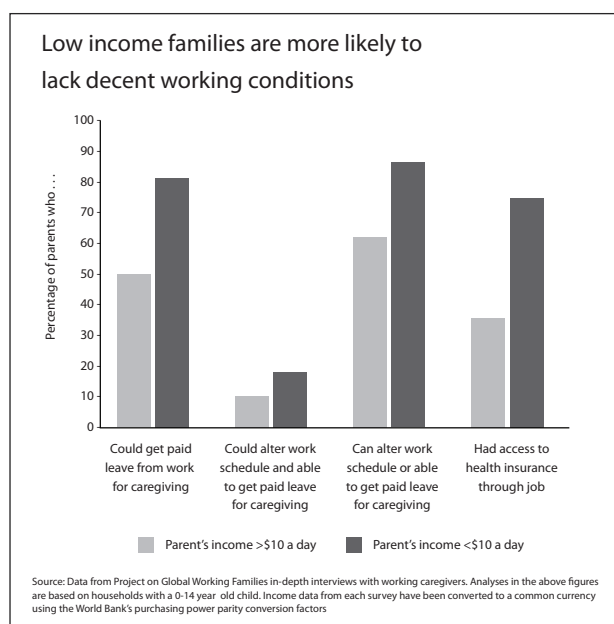
ask me if I still needed a job or did I need to go and look after my child. That's what they'd say ... It was so difficult. They would maybe ask how my child was, and then they'd leave me. They needed me at work. They said to me, "We need your services or we will employ someone else while you take care of your child."

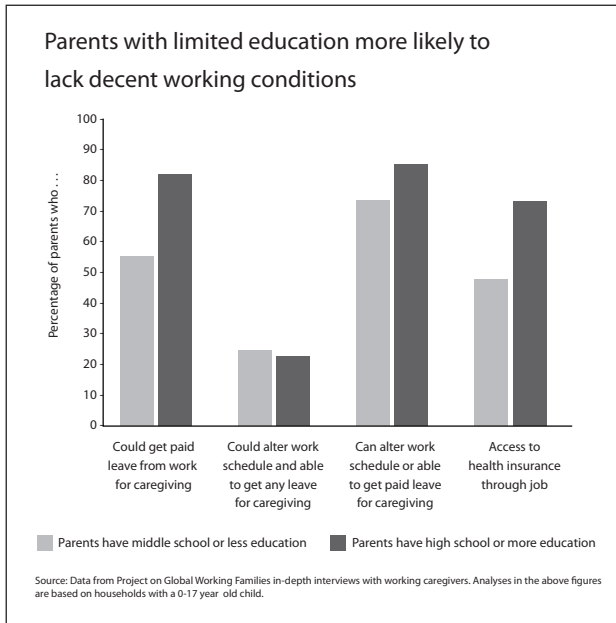
Even when parents were not fired from their jobs, the actual risk of being fired weighed heavily on the choices they made. In Moscow, we spoke with 52-year-old Viktoriya Daniilovna Kozlova, who was working as a dispatcher for transportation and raising her two sons. She never felt she could take time off to provide care when they were sick, since she feared losing her job in a setting where companies provided little support for working parents and in an economy where jobs were scarce. "We need money. My child is sick and I would be happy to stay home, but I need money," she explained. "I cannot even take one day a week because I'm afraid I will be fired."

Irene Echeverria Perez was all too familiar with the consequences of being absent from her work washing dishes in a hotel in Mexico to care for sick children. While her daughter had not been ill often, her son had been born with a serious heart condition. Before he died, at the age of only nine months, she was consistently torn between taking leave to attend to him directly and earning money to pay for his medical care.

She explained: "They don't pay. No, they don't pay. If you don't work, they don't pay you ... [It is] 1,000 pesos every two weeks that I receive. If I work a day less, it's less money." She went on to describe how missing a day of work without permission meant losing three days of pay. Irene's son died on a day when she was at work. She often wondered if he would have survived longer had she been at home, but with three days' lost wages for each day missed without permission, there was no way to feed her children if she missed more days. The doctors had to give her tranquilizers when she learned of her son's death. Six years later, her mental health was still fragile; she sadly summarised, "I suffer."

With the burden borne by low-income parents and their children from income loss, they are also more likely to face economic penalties for care-giving because they frequently have worse working conditions in general. From data collected by the Project on Global Working Families, 83% of respondents with incomes higher than \$10 a day (PPP adjusted) in Mexico, Botswana and Vietnam could get paid leave from work for care-giving, compared to only 49% of respondents with incomes lower than \$10 a day. Even benefits such as work flexibility are much less available to lower-income workers. While 88% of parents with incomes above \$10 a day had access to paid leave and/or flexibility, only

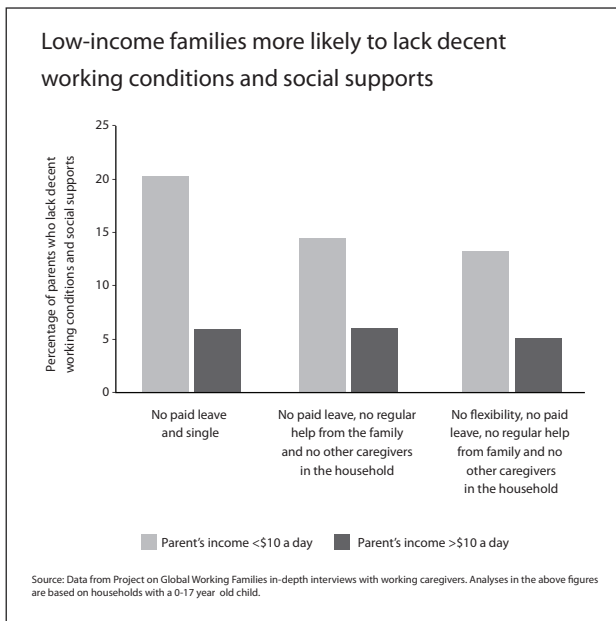




64% of parents with incomes below \$10 a day could have the same benefit.

The same differences held true when looking at other social indicators such as education. Eighty-two per cent of parents with high school education or more received paid leave from work for care-giving, while only 56% of parents with middle school or less received the same benefit.

The lack of decent working conditions for parents with less education, just as with low incomes, means that they are more likely to confront penalties at work as a result of care-giving. Moreover, these parents are also less likely to benefit from social supports that might compensate for some of these difficult working conditions. While one often hears the argument that help from extended family can supplement parental care-giving and reduce the consequences of this work-family trade-off, low-income parents are less likely to have social supports in terms of help from extended family.



In the Global Working Families Study, 46% of parents with income above \$10 a day could rely on extended family for help and did not need to provide care themselves, while only 32% of parents with income below \$10 a day had the

same support. On top of this, low-income parents are more likely to have additional care-giving responsibilities. Forty-seven per cent of parents with income below \$10 a day need to provide assistance to an adult family member compared to 42% of parents with income above \$10 a day.

Low-income working parents have a higher care-giving burden while lacking the working conditions and social supports that might make this load manageable. As a result, their children are more likely to suffer from lack of adequate care. Ultimately, the gap in working conditions for lower income parents contributes to reinforcing and perpetuating existing socioeconomic inequalities.

Conditions faced by children

Gabriela Saavedra's home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, had been crudely built with scrap wood and was now old and falling apart. While in elementary school, Gabriela, along with her three siblings, had inherited the house when her mother died of uterine cancer that had gone undiagnosed

and untreated for too long. Now 19 years-old, Gabriela was renting out the eight-foot-wide downstairs of the shack, although “renting out” was more a figure of speech: the woman downstairs was dying of uterine cancer herself and had not been able to pay rent for months, but kicking her out or demanding rent was the last thing Gabriela could do after having witnessed her own mother’s painful demise.

To get to Gabriela’s own room in the shack, you had to climb an outside wooden ladder, of which the top two rungs were broken—a ladder she had to climb holding her 19-month-old toddler, Ana Daniel.

Sitting in a chair in a weathered Nike sweatshirt, Gabriela described the sweatshop where she was working. She made clothes for export from 7.00am until at least 6.00pm, seven days a week. But many nights, with no advance warning, the Korean owners would require everyone to stay until 9.00 or 11.00pm. There had been several shifts when they had been required to stay until 5.00am the next morning, leaving no time for sleep after getting home before the morning commute back to the factory. Gabriela and the other workers had been told that if they refused to work the mandatory overtime shifts, they would lose their jobs.

The dangers of her job increased with the sleep deprivation. “I was sewing at 3.00am, and I couldn’t do it any more because I was so tired. I almost cut off a finger.” She told us of others who had worked at the factory longer and suffered serious injuries because of extreme fatigue. Overtime pay was even lower than her normal wages. Gabriela noted, “I’ve heard that overtime at night should be paid at 200% of normal wages, but they pay only 75% [of normal wages].”

Despite working seven days a week from 11 to 22 hours a day and making 100 shirts an hour, Gabriela earned only 400 lempiras, or US\$26 a week. Food was expensive at the factory—\$1 to \$1.50 a meal—but the 15 minutes allotted for a lunch break left no time for alternatives. Even though she ate the factory food once during an 11- to 22-hour day, Gabriela spent \$7–10 of her weekly salary on her own meals. The next \$10 paid for formula and diapers for her daughter. That left \$6–9 a week for any other necessities. Gabriela could not afford to lose any of the limited wages she earned, so she worked when she was sick. She also worked when Ana Daniel was sick.

On the eve of a children’s holiday, Gabriela’s husband, Daniel, had been coming home with a gift for their daughter. With a full two weeks’ wages in his pocket, Daniel was attacked and murdered. Not long before our interview, Gabriela’s 10-year-old stepsister had started caring for the toddler, but she was to return to school within weeks of our departure. Gabriela had no idea what she would do then.

Gabriela’s face lit up as she displayed the clothes she had made for her daughter out of thrown away scraps she had taken from the factory. When asked what she would change in her life if she could change one thing, she answered without hesitation. She spoke immediately, not of the condition of her house or of her wages, but of caring for Ana Daniel: “I would like to work

fewer hours. I would like to have someone who could take care of my daughter over here. And I would like to leave work earlier to be able to spend more time with her.”

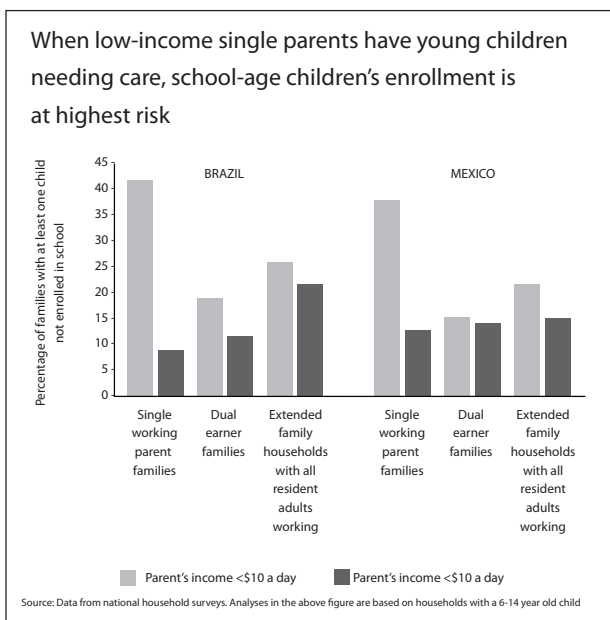
Despite her mother’s adoration, Ana Daniel did not have a chance at a healthy childhood if her mother remained in the sweatshop where she worked. The pay was too low for them both to eat adequately. There was no money to repair the burned-out holes in the side of their shack, or to fix the missing rungs on the ladder that one day could trip Ana Daniel and cause her to fall more than a dozen feet to the ground. There was not enough money to pay for water cleaned of the diarrhea-inducing pathogens that are one of the leading causes of malnutrition and death for children younger than five. Moreover, the punishing work schedule necessary for subsistence left Gabriela no time to be a parent, and Ana Daniel was at risk of being locked alone at home, with no one to care for her.

All around the world, the children of working poor parents are being left home alone or in the care of other children. Being left home alone or under the inadequate care of another child has detrimental consequences for children’s wellbeing, with negative results in terms of health, developmental outcomes and education. While the problems are especially serious for pre-school children, young school-age children are also placed at a disadvantage when they are left without adult supervision.

Our Global Working Families Study found that 48% of parents in Botswana, 27% of parents in Mexico and 19% of parents in Vietnam had to leave a young child home alone or in the care of an unpaid child. The damaging effects of children being left home alone are clear. Children who are left home alone are much more likely to suffer accidents or other emergencies. Sixty-six per cent of parents who had to leave children home alone or relied on an unpaid child for care reported accidents or emergencies while they were at work, in contrast to 43% of parents whose children were sent to formal childcare. Even if less urgent than accidents or emergencies, being left home alone had strong negative impacts on children’s development. Thirty-five per cent of parents who had to leave children home alone reported that their children had behavioral or developmental problems.

When parents lack other care-giving options, school-age children lose chances at the education they need to exit poverty. They are often kept home from school to care for their younger siblings while their parents are at work. The presence of children under five in the household was associated with a lower possibility of school enrollment for older children in each of the five countries we studied. This was true for both the children of single working parents and the children of dual-earner parents. The school-age children of lower income parents were particularly affected. Forty-two per cent of low-income single working parent families in Brazil and 37% of low-income single working parent families in Mexico who had an infant to five year-old also had at least one school-age child not enrolled in school. The consequences of these scenarios include markedly diminished long-term chances of children growing up out of poverty.

Moreover, when children did attend school, working poor parents in the countries we studied faced considerable restrictions in their ability to care for their children's education, since providing adequate care often meant incurring financial losses. Restrictive working conditions prevented parents from helping with homework and participating in school meetings and events, thereby involving themselves in their children's education. Children whose parents reported barriers at work preventing them from participating in their education had higher proportions of academic and behavioral problems than children whose parents did not report such barriers. Sixty-six per cent of parents who reported barriers in helping with homework due to work-family responsibilities had children with academic or behavioral difficulties at school, compared to 31% of parents who did not report barriers. Fifty-eight per cent of parents who reported barriers to participating in school meetings or events had children with academic or behavioral difficulties at school compared to 33% of parents who did not report such barriers. The role of working conditions and affordable educational opportunities are two crucial ones described below.



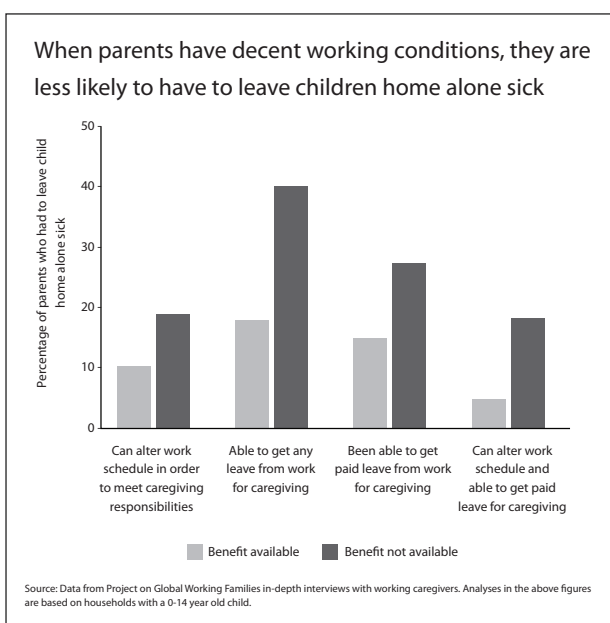
Helping children and their parents exit poverty

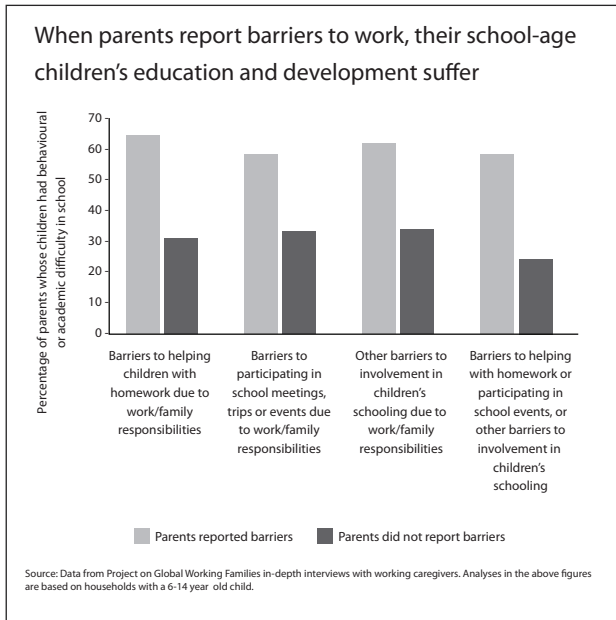
While we often hear the argument that we cannot act to address child and family poverty directly since we do not have enough information on what works, the fact is that we know that some measures do work and could be extremely important in improving the situation of children and their working poor parents.

A floor of decent labour conditions

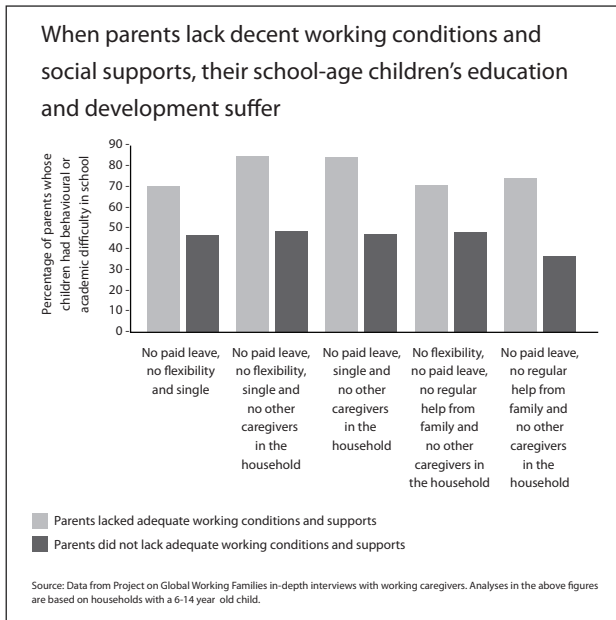
Parents who had decent working conditions were much less likely to leave children home alone. In looking at pre-school children, 46% of parents who lost pay because of care-giving responsibilities had left their children home alone compared to 21% of parents who did not lose pay.

Having decent working conditions makes a great difference in parents' ability to provide good care for their children. Forty per cent of parents who were unable to take any leave from work for care-giving had to leave a child home alone sick; the number was only 18% for parents who were





able to benefit from leave for care-giving. Nineteen per cent of parents who could not alter their work schedule or get paid leave for care-giving had to leave a child home alone sick; for those who did have these benefits the number was only 4%. Children of parents who had some measure of flexibility in their work schedules were clearly much more likely to receive parental care when sick. In fact, in each country we studied, at least two out of five parents who experienced difficulties at work had to leave a sick child home alone. Parents' working conditions also made a significant difference in their capacity to contribute to their children's education.



The existence of decent working conditions once again made a huge difference to children's outcomes. Eighty-three per cent of low-income parents with no paid leave, no flexibility, were single and with no other care-givers in the household reported that their children had behavioral or academic difficulties in school, compared with 48% of low-income parents who did have adequate working conditions and supports. Seventy-one per cent of parents, regardless of income, with no paid leave, no flexibility, no regular help from family and no other care-givers in the household had children with behavioral or academic

difficulties in school, compared to 47% of parents with adequate working conditions and supports. In short, parental working conditions have a tremendous impact on children, and this affect is exacerbated for low-income parents who can ill afford substitute care.

Early education and a realistic chance for school-age children

Providing quality, affordable child care can make a great difference to the lives of children and their parents. To begin with, when parents have access to early childhood care and education, their children are much less likely to be left home alone. Only 14% of parents who had access to paid informal care or formal child care had left their children home alone, compared to 82% of parents who did not have either formal care or paid informal care.

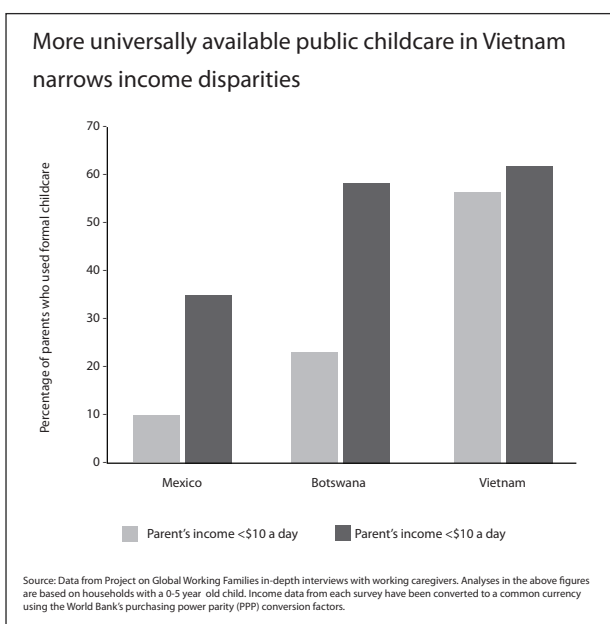
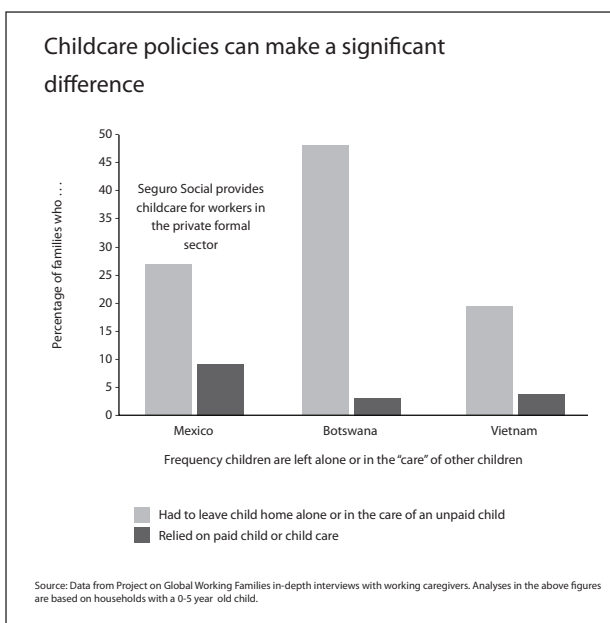
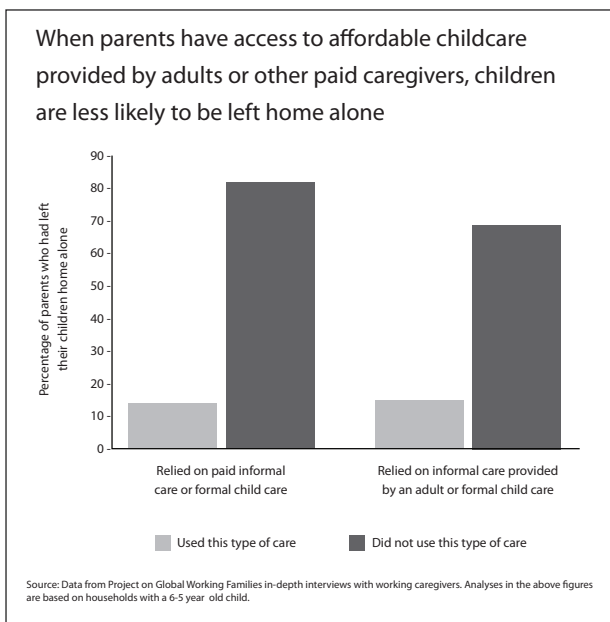
Childcare policies are extremely important and can make a significant difference in the lives of children and parents. Looking at the three different countries is illustrative.

Forty-eight per cent of families in Botswana had left a child home alone or in the care of an unpaid child. Botswana has no childcare policy. Mexico fared better with 27% of families having left a child home alone or in the care of an unpaid child. Mexico provides childcare for workers in the private, formal sector through social security, and the gap was particularly narrowed for those served by the program. Vietnam has a policy of universal formal childcare and only 19% of families had left a child home alone or in the care of an unpaid family. The gap between higher and low-income families was effectively reduced due to the broad public nature of the program. These striking differences in outcomes reveal that public policies and programs can make a critical difference for working families.

A strong policy of universal childcare can reduce the income disparities in access to education services as well. In Vietnam, where there is universally available childcare, 57% of parents with income below \$10 a day used formal childcare, a negligible difference compared to the 62% of parents with income above \$10 a day. These examples of policy initiatives to ease the precarious working conditions faced by global families illustrate that changes in these areas are feasible and already underway.

Is there enough global consensus to raise the floor?

Much of what is needed has been embodied in global agreements. A few central examples follow. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN in 1948. The founding document of the United Nations, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, establishes that “everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence



worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection” and that “everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.”

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been accepted by 177 countries. It requires all signatories to take measures “to prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status; [and] to introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority, or social imbalances.”

Childcare is another area where UN conventions have made significant strides. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been signed by 192 countries, and states that “for the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present convention, state parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.” CEDAW also emphasises the importance of providing childcare: “The provision of necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.”

Parents’ ability to take time off work to care for their children is extremely important for health and development. There are many different ways in which this can be addressed by national legislation

Moreover, a large degree of consensus on many basic working conditions is reflected in their widespread passage to legislation at a national level. As we have discussed previously, parents’ ability to take time off work to care for their children is extremely important for health and

development. There are many different ways in which this can be addressed by national legislation. At least 143 countries around the world guarantee paid annual leave. At least 129 countries require employers to provide a mandatory 24-hour period off each week. Paid sick leave is another benefit that has extensive agreement; it is provided to employees in at least 159 countries. Paid sickness benefits for at least one week is provided by 148 countries.

Countries that provide a floor of decent working conditions such as paid leave encompass all regions and levels of development. Measures such as paid maternity leave enjoy near universal agreement. One-hundred-and-seventy-two countries out of 176 guarantee paid maternal leave. More than half the countries which provide paid leave for mothers offer at least 14 paid weeks. Sixty-nine countries guarantee paid paternity leave. At least 109 countries protect women’s right to breastfeed at work. The majority of these countries guarantee the right to breastfeed for at least a year. Furthermore, contrary to the common argument, having good labour policies does not appear to be detrimental to a country’s economic competitiveness. Of the 14 countries ranked at the top of the Global Competitiveness Index, only the United States does not provide paid sick leave or paid maternity leave.

Country	Any paid leave for health reasons?	Amount of paid leave available
Australia	Yes	31 or more days
Canada	Yes	31 or more days
Denmark	Yes	31 or more days
Finland	Yes	31 or more days
Germany	Yes	31 or more days
Iceland	Yes	31 or more days
Japan	Yes	31 or more days
Netherlands, the	Yes	31 or more days
Norway	Yes	31 or more days
Singapore	Yes	11-30 days
Sweden	Yes	31 or more days
Switzerland	Yes	31 or more days
United Kingdom	Yes	31 or more days
United States of America	No	

While there has been significant progress in reaching global agreement on conventions and enacting legislation that would aid working parents and their children, there are also real limitations. ILO conventions suffer from a lack of enforcement and accountability. While the ILO requires signatories on conventions to report on laws and practices, it has very limited powers to enforce compliance. National laws can be more immediately effective since they would be easier to monitor, but there are no assurances of implementation. A great deal depends on political will and governance capacity in each country.

Moving from lose-lose to win-win

There is a great deal more we need to learn about the conditions in which young children are being reared and the struggles that their working parents are facing worldwide. But the evidence is clear about two essential points:

- The lack of decent working conditions and social supports makes it nearly impossible for millions of parents to balance caring for children well with working and prevents millions of families from exiting poverty;
- Young children are being left home alone, in the care of other young children, and in grossly inadequate care. The healthy development of all of these children is placed at risk, as is the education of the only slightly older children pulled out of school to care for them. As a result, their chances of exiting poverty as adults are placed in jeopardy.

Recommendations: putting democracy and civil society to work

The world of work could truly be transformed, and with it not only the lives of working adults but the lives of the children and elderly family members they care for, if we held countries accountable for what they have already said they would do. Perhaps more striking than any other finding from our examination of laws in 180 countries was how many of them already contained crucial protections to ensure decent work and decent working lives. Not only have

the overwhelming majority of countries signed international agreements and conventions that, if implemented, would guarantee children decent care and help them and their parents exit poverty, but the majority have also passed laws in their individual countries that guarantee that those working can take leave when they are sick, that women can take leave when they give birth to a child, that there are maximum work hours and days of rest—the list goes on. Given the potential in protections provided for in these policies, here is what we would recommend:

- All trade agreements should include an enforceable clause that countries will fulfill their own labour laws and abide by the international agreements they have already signed. No one could argue that such trade agreements are either culturally imperialist or protectionist, since they are freely adopted by signatories. Enforcement would only kick-in if the country does not abide by its own laws.
- A global organisation, it could be an existing one like the International Labour Organisation if it is up to the task, will be charged with assessing whether countries are in fact implementing the laws they have passed and agreements they have signed. A group of representatives from other countries would help assess compliance. And a simple and straightforward report card would be issued. No more requirements for someone to obtain and read 50,000 pages of reporting merely to understand what a country has said it has done—still without any independent evaluation. That report card would be sent home to the citizens of each nation to help empower them to ensure that their country followed the laws that were passed. The report card would also be available in an easily accessible form to consumers who could decide whether they wanted to pay more to purchase items from countries that had better practices.
- Countries that neither signed basic agreements nor passed any laws guaranteeing decent work would be highlighted. As companies decided what country to produce in and as consumers decided what country to purchase goods from, it would be easy for them to spot where the outliers are. This would dramatically change the power and recourse of both consumers and the ability of companies who seek to purchase from countries with decent working conditions. The current lack of readily available transparent information has created a marked failure when it comes to individuals being able to pay more for more humane conditions—a marked failure which the first step in reversing would be better information.
- We recognise that creating decent conditions for adults and children and assisting families in exiting poverty require two types of change. The first requires little financial assistance from richer countries to poorer ones. All countries can afford to ensure a day of rest or leave when a worker is sick. The cost of this kind of guarantee of humane working conditions is higher in high-income countries, which can better afford the cost, and lower in low-income countries where salaries, and thus the proportionate cost of leave, are lower. The second set of changes requires an increased investment in education—from early childhood care and education on up. In the long run, these investments can be self financing. As countries invest more in education, they would be able to compete for the higher wage and salaried jobs and create a stronger tax base that would be able to fund the educational expenses. The start up costs, however, of investing

in education are clearly out of reach for many of the poorest families and may be out of reach for some of the poorest countries. A global fund, similar to the global health fund, will be required if we are to reach these Millennium Development Goals.



progressive governance

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