



## **Parents' Cognitive and Affective Interactions in the Character Development and Aspirations of Children Engaged in Labor in Butuan City, Philippines**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research endeavored to determine the relationship between the parents level of cognitive and affective interactions and the level of personality development and aspirations of children engaged in labor at a certain urban poor area in Butuan City. There were 91 families who were involved in the study.. The findings revealed that most of the children are between ages 8-13 years old or at school age and are already engaged in labor. These children have high level of aspirations to someday lift their families from a poverty-stricken life. Their involvement in child labor is a starting point towards this dream. Findings also disclose that the affective and cognitive nature of parents interactions is highly manifested in the households. As a consequence, there is high level of moral and social development of the children. Despite their present economic predicament, they are able to maintain right attitudes towards other children and their elders. They socialize positively with others since they are secured of the love and acceptance of their families. Moreover, children with high level of aspirations tend to have high level of moral and social development. The affective and cognitive nature of parents interactions has significant relationship with the social development of the children. This means that the parents interactions with the children focused more for the development of their childrens life skills than on moral skills. This is particularly due to the aspirations to rise from their present economic desolation.

*Keywords:* Child labor, Parents affective interactions, Parents cognitive

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## 1 Introduction

Every child has the right to the most basic necessities in life such as healthy environment, formal education and most importantly, a loving family to come home to. These rights are violated through child labor. Child labor is a condition resulting from the crippling poverty that most urban families encounter (Zulueta & Liwag, 2006). The consequences of child labor on an underage child can be numerous and devastating on his/her physical, mental, and emotional state. It can seriously hamper the well being of a child who is supposed to get a sound education and nutrition to develop into a healthy adult. Flug (1998) posits that due to child labor those children end up being malnourished, weak and suffer from a large number of ailments.

Today, it is observed that hundreds of thousands of Filipino children are deprived of the opportunity to share in the prospects of development. The door of the opportunity is closed on them simply because their "childhood" is wasted in premature work rather than nurtured in school and at play.

In many urban communities in Butuan City, children under 18 years of age are observed to be already engaged in working such as scrapping, selling plastics and bottles for them to earn money to meet their necessities in life. It is also observed, however, that these children are not involved in fighting with other children. Nor are they observed to be shouting at their parents or siblings. This scenario inspired the researchers to determine the possible home factors that may have bearing on children's moral and social development.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Maslow's theory (1946) explicitly identifies the basic needs of man such as physiological needs, personal safety, social affiliation, self-esteem towards self-actualization. These needs become the basic source of motivation for every human endeavor. Maslow posited a hierarchy of human needs based on two groupings: deficiency needs and growth needs. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once each of these needs has been satisfied, if at some future time a deficiency is detected, the individual will act to remove the deficiency.

Primary among these needs are the physiological needs which include food, clothing and shelter. Yet many families, especially in urban poor areas are barely able to find opportunities of satisfying these needs. Hence, driven by the nature of these fundamental needs, each member actively participates in the search for the means by which these needs are met.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation and personality, concerning peoples' inherent growth tendencies and their innate psychological needs. It is concerned with the motivation behind the choices that people make without any external influence and interference. SDT focuses on the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-motivated and self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2002). It is the determination of the person to meet his/her needs that will drive him/her to act towards the satisfaction of such needs. Such determination motivates the child to participate in the search for an income, no matter how little it might be, so that their basic needs may be met.

In addition, Choice Theory (Glasser, 1948) teaches that outside events never "make" one to do anything. What drive man's behavior is internally developed notions of what is most important and satisfying to him. The internally created notions of how man would like things to be are related to certain Basic Needs built into the genetic structure of every human being. It is by choice that the parents allow their children to develop effective life skills via child labor. They have the notion that meeting the family's basic needs is a shared responsibility of every able member of the household.

Meanwhile, children engaged in child labor have to develop for themselves the appropriate character befitting of growing individuals. Such character in the social and moral aspects are very important lessons that are first taught at home are also taught in schools. The Social Domain theory states that children construct different forms of social knowledge including morality and other forms of social knowledge through their social experiences with adults (parents, teachers and other adults), peers and siblings. Kohlberg's Morality Development theory (1987) states that there a certain period in a child's life wherein his acts, or his perceptions of the morality of an act, are based on the physical consequence/result of the act, not on whether the act itself is good or bad. In this stage, one is motivated by fear of punishment; or one is motivated to act by the benefit that one may obtain later. This has led to the predominant focus of the formative role of parents, peers and social institutions such as schools in the development of moral reasoning development (Holden, 2010).

### 3 Methodology

This study employed the descriptive research design. It utilized a validated questionnaire to gather the needed data. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted to validate the responses of the children and to gather more salient points about parents' cognitive and affective interactions with their children. The data that were gathered were analyzed with the employment of descriptive statistics and the test of significant differences such as the t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

### 4 Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows the profile of the children in terms of age. It can be gleaned that the majority of them are in the grade school age. Worthy of notice is that not one of them was below 7 years old. This implies that the preschool-age children are still in the care of the parents at home. In the FGD done with the parents and children, it was gathered that some of these children are in school half of the day and go to vending after their classes. The data shows that the children are of school age of at least in the primary level. There are 17 of them who are aged 7-9 years old. These children are still in Grades 1-3 in the primary level. There are 39 of them who are in the ages 10-12 years old; and there were 35 children in the study who were at least 13 years old.

The distribution of the children according to sex (Fig. 2) shows that the majority (65%) of the children engaged in labor are males. This indicates that the families regard the males as responsible for the livelihood of the families, suggestive of paternal headship in family affairs.

Table 1 shows the data on the level of aspiration of the children engaged in child labor. The responses of the children to the indicators reflect their desires to satisfy their needs of good health, acceptance and being loved by other people. Young as they are, they also want so much to be able to buy what they want. These are expressions of a life deprived of the basic necessities in life. It is their determined aspiration to rise above their present economic desolation.

The home factors that were looked into the study included the parents' interaction with the respondents. The affective nature of parents' interactions pertains to interactions that concerned with rewards and punishments that the parents gave their children. The cognitive nature of parents' interactions relates to those interactions that concerned with advises and admonitions of the parents for their children.

Table 2 shows the level of expression of the affective nature of parents' interaction. The data on extent of expression of the cognitive nature of parents' interaction reveal that the cognitive nature of parents' interaction is highly expressed to the children. The

responses of the children fall into the mean range which indicates that there are some instances when they feel the expression of the affective nature of their interaction with their parents. In the FGD with the children, they claimed that their parents love them. Some of these children, though, find their parents to be inconsistent especially when it comes to punishments. Sometimes, a bad mood becomes the reason for a whip. At other times, simple misbehavior gets a smack or a nag. However, these are a part of upbringing as understood by the children. They love the family, hence, they find it worthwhile to engage in income-generating tasks as an expression of their love and concern for the family.

During the FDG, some of the parents claimed that clear instructions and house rules are set in the family to maintain order and for the children to avoid punishments (Tab. 3). The assistance they could give their children for school work is limited by their knowledge of the subject matter, especially in mathematics. It can be thus said that the children feel that their parents desire for the best to happen for their families. These children, feeling this situation at a young age, are optimistic that someday they will be drawn out from their deplorable situation.

The character development of the children engaged in child labor was categorized into moral and social aspects. In Table 4, it can be noted that most of the children's responses are located in the middle of the three-scaled instrument. The responses to the indicators are equivalent to "sometimes", which just bespeak the kind of moral reasoning of children in their ages. The data also imply that there are times that their actions are borne out of their family orientation (Kohlberg, 1987). It can be recalled that the parents claimed to have given the right directions to their children. Thus, whatever actions and decisions that the children make in particular situations reflect the upbringing practices of the parents. Remarkably, the overall mean response equivalent to "sometimes" point out the fact that the children have a high level of moral characteristics that may be raised to a higher level as they mature and gather more understanding about how life should be lived.

The level of character development in terms of social aspect of the children is shown in Table 5. Most of the indicators fall in the mean range which indicates that the social development of the children is high though they engaged in labor. Children have a good social relationship towards others. They are interested and liked to be friends with others. The overall weighted mean equivalent to sometimes indicate that their engagement in labor had helped them realize some social responsibilities that may be functional as they grow older.

Table 6 shows the result of the analysis of variance in the levels of character development across age groups. The analysis revealed that the social and moral development of the children did not significantly differ across the four (4) age groups. This is evidenced by f-ratios of 1.101 and 2.052, respectively. The significance values of 0.353 and 0.052, respectively, are beyond the 0.05 level of significance set for analysis. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected. These results imply that age grouping is not a differentiating factor in the level of personality development of the children. That is, the older ones did not have higher levels of social and moral development than the younger ones. This could be due to their close association with each other whereby they share almost the same experiences which could help them grow along the social and moral aspects of their personalities.

The t-test was utilized to compare the level of character development between the males and the females. The test yielded values which are beyond the 0.05 level of significance set for analysis. This means that the level of personality development of the males did not differ significantly from the females. Thus the null hypothesis is not rejected. This finding implies that the males and the females have almost similar social

and moral skills.

The result of the correlation analysis between the parents' affective as well as cognitive interactions and the level of the children's character development is shown in Table 7. The analysis revealed that the affective and cognitive nature of parents' interactions had a significant relationship with the children's social development. This finding implies that if the children feel the love and affection of their parents, they have the tendency to get along well with others as well as develop social skills that will help them realize their day-to-day goals, regardless of whether these are simpler or complex.

On the other hand, the affective and cognitive nature of parents' interactions did not obtain significant *r*-values with moral development. This implies that the love and affection of the parents did not have a significant bearing on the moral development of the children.

## 5 Conclusion

The findings of the study show a typical urban poor community where the children are engaged in the economic endeavors of the family, instead of finding these children in schools or in study centers. Child labor is not a new issue. It is a condition that marks many urban poor families. It locates the children at the center of the situation where they have no choice but to be an active partner in the family affairs; to be burdened by the economic predicament of which they are not supposed to address; to be hostaged by emotional blackmail because they are a poor family.

Surprisingly, the community where the respondents of the study reside seem to remain buoyant despite their depressing living conditions. Parents are still able to provide the affection and love for their children. However, due to the limited time for every child in the family, these interactions are not always encountered by the children. This indicates the passive attitude of parents towards the development of character among the children.

As regards their character development, findings reveal that the children have almost similar views about social and moral development. These children can squarely face anybody without feeling ashamed while scraping, scavenging, or selling bottles because they are proud members of their family. They are underaged but are already resourceful economic partners in the households. Their situation seems dim to outsiders but in the hearts and minds of these children are found the optimism that someday their lives will be better.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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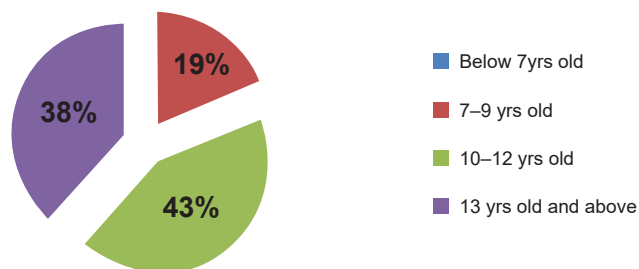


Fig. 1: Age Distribution of the Children Engaged in Child Labor

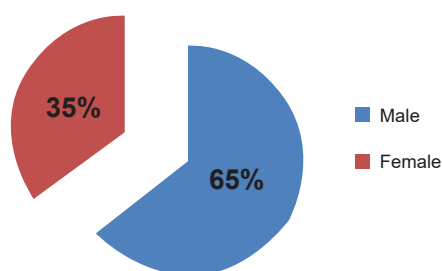


Fig. 2: Distribution of the Children Engaged in Child Labor in terms of Sex

Table 1: Level of Aspirations of the Children Engaged in Labor

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. To be a wealthy person.	2.29	Sometimes	High
2. To grow and learn new things.	2.56	Always	Very High
3. To have my name known by people.	2.16	Sometimes	High
4. To have good friends that I can count on.	2.57	Always	Very High
5. To be physically healthy.	2.65	Always	Very High
6. To assist people who need it, asking nothing in return.	2.56	Always	Very High
7. To choose what I do, instead of being pushed along by my life.	2.15	Sometimes	High
8. To know and accept who I really am.	2.52	Always	Very High
9. To feel that there are people who really love me, and whom I love.	2.73	Always	Very High
10. To have enough money to buy everything I want.	2.62	Always	Very High
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>2.48</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>High</b>

Table 2: Level of Expression of Affective Nature of Parents' Interactions towards their Children

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. You have a friendly talk with your mother/father.	2.41	Sometimes	High
2. Your parents tell you that you are doing a good job.	2.34	Sometimes	High
3. Your parents threaten to punish you and then do not do it.	2.22	Sometimes	High
4. Your parents reward or give something extra to you for behaving well.	2.19	Sometimes	High
5. You play games or do other fun things with your mom.	2.21	Sometimes	High
6. Your parents give up trying to get you to obey them because it's too much trouble.	1.96	Sometimes	Very High
7. Your parents hug or kiss you when you have done something very well.	2.05	Sometimes	High
8. Your parents get so busy that they forget where you are and what you are doing.	1.97	Sometimes	High
9. The punishment your parents give depends on their mood.	2.04	Sometimes	High
10. Your parents hit you with a belt, switch, or other object when you have done something wrong.	2.04	Sometimes	High
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	2.16	Sometimes	High

Table 3: Level of Expression of the Cognitive Nature of Parents' Interactions

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. Your mother/father helps with some of your special activities (such as sports, boy/girl scouts, church youth groups).	2.29	Sometimes	High
2. You fail to leave a note or let your parents know where you are going.	2.13	Sometimes	High
3. Your mother/father asks you about your day in school.	2.30	Sometimes	High
4. Your mother/father helps you understand about your family's situation	2.18	Sometimes	High
5. Your mother/father helps you plan for the tasks on the coming day.	2.26	Sometimes	High
6. You go out without a set time to be home.	1.91	Sometimes	High
7. Your mother/father talks to you about your friends.	2.09	Sometimes	High
8. You help plan family activities.	2.55	Always	Very High
9. Your mother/father goes to a meeting at school, like a PTA meeting or parent/teacher conference..	2.50	Always	Very High
10. Your parents calmly explain to you why your behavior was wrong when you misbehave.	2.24	Sometimes	High
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	2.25	Sometimes	High

Table 4: Level of Character Development in Terms of Moral Aspects

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. If someone gave me too much change at a store and if I knew they did, I tell them.	2.25	Sometimes	High
2. If I see kids fighting and there was no way to call the police, I stop them.	2.28	Sometimes	High
3. I tell a lie so that I can't be punished.	1.53	Sometimes	High
4. If somebody hurts me, I hurt him back.	1.71	Sometimes	High
5. I do good so that my parents will feel good about me.	2.48	Sometimes	High
6. I do household chores because I know it is the right thing to do.	2.51	Always	Very High
7. If I am asked to tell a lie, I could do it to save my friend from a punishment.	1.66	Sometimes	High
8. I can help other people without pay.	2.24	Sometimes	High
9. When my parents told me to buy at the store and there's change left, I return the change to my parents.	2.32	Sometimes	High
10. I tell bad words in some situation.	1.77	Sometimes	High
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	2.25	Sometimes	High

Table 5: Level of Character Development in Terms of Moral Aspects

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. I have interest in others.	2.10	Sometimes	High
2. I have the capacity for humor.	2.20	Sometimes	High
3. I expect a positive response when approaching others.	2.33	Sometimes	High
4. I'm not easily intimidated by bullying.	1.86	Sometimes	High
5. I have a positive relationship with one or two peers.	2.30	Sometimes	High
6. I have "give-and-take" exchanges of information, feedback, or materials with others.	2.46	Sometimes	High
7. I was able to maintain friendship with one or more peers even after disagreements.	2.33	Sometimes	High
8. I accept and enjoy peers and adults who have special needs.	2.20	Sometimes	High
9. I like to be named by other children as someone they are friends with or like to play and work with.	2.56	Always	Very High
10. I'm not excessively dependents on adults.	1.89	Sometimes	High
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	2.22	Sometimes	High

Table 6: Analysis of Variance in Character Development across Age Groups

Aspects of Character Development	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Decision
Social Development	Between Groups	0.576	3	0.192	1.101	0.353	Do not reject $H_0$
	Within Groups	16.741	96	0.174			
	Total	17.137	99				
Moral Development	Between Groups	0.414	3	0.138	2.052	0.052	Do not reject $H_0$
	Within Groups	6.454	96	0.067			
	Total	6.867	99				

Table 7: T-test of Personality Development between Sexes

Character Development	Sex	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.	Decision
Moral Development	F	68	2.10	0.259	1.642	0.104	Do not reject $H_0$
	M	32	2.01	0.266			
Social Development	F	68	2.28	0.420	1.357	0.178	Do not reject $H_0$
	M	32	2.14	0.409			

Table 8: Correlation Analysis Between Affective Nature of Parents' Interaction and the Children's Character Development

Character Development	Affective Interactions			Cognitive Interactions		
	r	Sig.	Decision	r	Sig.	Decision
Moral Development	0.045	0.659	Do not reject $H_0$	0.006	0.951	Do not reject $H_0$
Social Development	0.364**	0.000	Reject $H_0$	0.349	0.000**	Reject $H_0$

\*\* significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$