

**STUDY OF CHILD WORKERS IN
TOBACCO PLANTATIONS
IN
SUMATRA, INDONESIA**

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH SUMATRA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research aimed to obtain a picture of the situation and condition of child workers and their families in tobacco plantations. The survey involved interviewing 100 child workers¹ and their families in several state-owned plantations in Deli Serdang district, North Sumatra province, Indonesia.

The responses to the interviews indicate that children work to help their parents in the plantation and have no official employment with the company. As a result, these children are not entitled to wages directly or benefits from the company. While all full-time workers are adults, a few children reportedly have been hired as part-time workers (though none of the respondents in this study had ever been hired). Child workers helping to meet their father's contract targets are not even considered daily part-time workers.

According to the interviews and discussions with other informants, parents encourage children's involvement in tobacco cultivation; very few children were found to have offered themselves for work. Wives also are relied upon to help make targets. Tobacco fields are divided into small plots, each of which is allocated to a contracted worker, typically a man who has a family. The number of plants, the limited time for each stage of the cultivation and restrictions on how many leaves can be picked from each plant at harvesting time makes the tasks overwhelming for one person. Due to the low compensation for the contract, workers are reluctant to hire assistance and thus are forced to mobilize their wife and children to help them. The unfair plantation policy regarding its contract system for remuneration ultimately "requires" the help of unpaid child and wife labour. Thus, the plantation company policy, in effect, creates a situation in which the employer gets the work of at least two adults and at least one or two children for the price of one adult worker.

¹ Eight of them were 18 and by UN definition are no longer "children" but have remained as part of the data.

The majority of children interviewed (78) stated that they worked to help their parents and even saw it as an obligation. Many children also said they receive pocket money in exchange for their contribution or regard their work as an exchange against the money their parents spend for school fees and books.

The respondents in this study aged 5–18 years old. Most of them (80) are still in school. The others had dropped out and nearly half of them said they left because the parents could not afford the costs. Another six said they were too lazy to go. Other informants, which included an educator and a village religious leader, believed that parents' low awareness of the significance of education was a contributing factor to children leaving school.

Almost all child respondents lived in the villages surrounding the plantation company, and 75 were from families whose father is an employee of the company. Many of the child respondents said they started working in the tobacco field at an early age. The age at which the highest number of child workers (36) first started working was 10 or 11. The mothers of child workers typically are housewives. When the planting season arrives, they automatically help their husband to achieve his contract targets, although the company hires a few as part-time workers.

Reported adult earnings indicate the families in the study are of the low to middle economic class. The male household head's income ranged from 251,000 rupiah to 500,000 rupiah.² Most parents had only a primary school education: 78 mothers, with 53 finishing primary school and 66 fathers, with 45 finishing). However, more fathers (29) went on to higher education than mothers (14).

Most of the research informants considered that the risk of an accident was high for children – though there were few reports of actual injuries. However, most likely accidents were no different than working on a family farm, such as injuries caused by a hoe or an axe. Of greater concern is the unprotected exposure to pesticides and fertilizers. Around 56 of the parents or other family members interviewed said they were aware of the risks to the children. Around 45 of the child respondents said they were aware that the work in the tobacco plantations could endanger their health and that the work may expose them to poisoning, colds, high fever, headaches and lung

² 9,000 rupiah = US\$1

problems. Some 33 of the child respondents have had a work-related accident and 24 said that they had been treated “badly”, though that refers being scolded or shouted at by their parents, a company supervisor or a field assistant.

Most children said that the work in the fields has never been in conflict with their learning process or studies at school. However, some of the research informants believed that the work in the plantations has negative impacts on children: They tend to feel too tired to study after helping their parents and some child workers who receive money from their parents use it for illegal things (gambling and drugs). Those research informants believed that children have the right to learn and play and should not be working because of the potential for harm.

To keep children from working in the tobacco plantation, their family’s economic situation needs to be improved. The researchers for this study recommend the following: First, reform the work system to be more fair and appropriate to the workers’ capacity. In addition, promote income-generating activities for families to pursue. Third, promote the importance of education among parents and local authorities, particularly those responsible for education budgets and to improve children’s access to education. Advocacy efforts can play up that children are indeed economic assets whose worth and income-earning potential can only be realized with an education and that it actually increases with the more education they get. Advocacy efforts to tackle the issue of child working in tobacco production also can use the Local Regulation No. 5/2004 on Prevention and Tackling the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which refers to the issue of children’s work in plantations.

FOREWORD

The phenomena of child labour – unlike child work, which can be constructive – is a global issue in which healthy childhoods are replaced by heavy burdens. It is a situation that the United Nations, governments and many local organizations find unacceptable. When children are involved in the world of labour, especially in work orientated to the trade market, their welfare and ambitions are likely to crumble from the weight of their burden. Many children seek employment because they have no other options. While many children also end up in jobs that do not harm them, others toil at the expense of their well-being. Some jobs clearly are hazardous for young people and these have been identified in the International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Continuing research and discussion on the involvement of children in the workforce is crucial toward eliminating all employment practices that harm young people.

As part of its expanding global research on child labour, ILO–IPEC in 2004 asked the Faculty of Social Science and Politics at North Sumatra University to investigate the lives of child workers employed in tobacco plantations in Indonesia. The researchers ultimately focused on the plantations in the subdistrict of Deli Serdang, North Sumatra.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to everyone that contributed to this study, especially to ILO–IPEC officers who trusted us with the task of conducting the research; Dr. Subhihar, MA, the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Politics; committee team members: Dr. R. Hamdani Hrp, M.Si as coordinator and Abdullah Akhyar, Saruhum Rambe and Luter Tarigan as field research assistants. We also want to express our gratitude to all the participants who agreed to answer our questions.

We hope that the results of this study will help to eliminate the use of child labour in Indonesia’s tobacco plantation industry.

Medan, Organizing team

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Dutch first colonized Indonesia around 1864, tobacco plantations in Sumatra have used child labour. In the Dutch period, children were employed at planting time to search for crickets and other pests that destroy the plants and were paid according to the number they captured. Children were paid to search for worms and harrow the earth in the process of caring for the plants (Tjandraningsih and Popon, 2002). Children also were involved in the *nyucuk*³ process, which took place in the late afternoons after leaves had been plucked in the morning harvest.

Work on a tobacco plantation has always been rigorous, with many adult labourers forced to work into the dark. Because of the long hours, each worker (typically men) bring his family members, including young children, to help him. During the colonial period, children were given wages, albeit meagre ones that dwindled over the years to nothing. Most working children currently in the plantations remain unpaid, as they work to assist their parents in reaching a contracted target (though it is only the father who is officially employed by the company). Workers who do not achieve their target in the time allocated are paid less, as payment is based on the size of the land they can cover. For those unable to keep up, the company will invite other workers to tend to the rest of the land. On the other hand, those who go beyond their targets earn extra money, which motivates workers to continue the practice of involving their family in their labour.

Plantation work in general is included among a government list of 13 of the worst forms of child labour and is to be targeted with interventions for moving children into school and/or if necessary, alternative but acceptable types of employment. This report presents the findings of a study of 100 child workers in two tobacco plantations in preparation for those interventions.

³ *Nyucuk* is a local term that describes the threading action of pricking tobacco leaves at the leaf base using a needle and nylon thread to facilitate the drying process in the drying sheds.

Research background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC, 1989) ushered in a new paradigm for regarding children as members of society and individuals with both responsibilities and rights. Article 32 of the UN CRC states that children are entitled to be protected from work that endangers them physically, mentally, spiritually, morally and socially or disturbs their education. Child labour, according to the UN CRC, is a social development problem.

Adding a specific focus to the new paradigm, the International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 (1999) Against the Worst Forms of Child Labour sought to prohibit the trading of children, debt bondage, forced labour including forced or compulsory participation in armed conflict; exploiting children in any form of pornography; involving children in the sale of narcotic substances; and employing them in work or work environments that may pose problems to their health, security or morals.

The Indonesian Government ratified both ILO Convention No. 138 regarding the minimum working age (Law No. 20/1999) and Convention No. 182 regarding the worst forms of child labour and (Law No. 1/2000). Presidential Decree No. 59/2002 identified 13 types of labour areas to be addressed in a time-bound programme (TBP) for removing child labourers:

- Prostitution
- Mining
- Pearl diving/other off-shore activities
- Construction
- Fishing (trawlers)
- Scavenging
- Producing or using explosives
- Working on the streets
- Household servant
- Plantations
- Wood lumbering, processing or transporting industry
- Industries that use hazardous chemicals.

This list in effect includes the tobacco plantations in North Sumatra, all of which are state owned, where children have been exposed to pesticides and fertilizers that are hazardous to their health. However, very little is known about the current conditions and situation of child workers in those plantations.

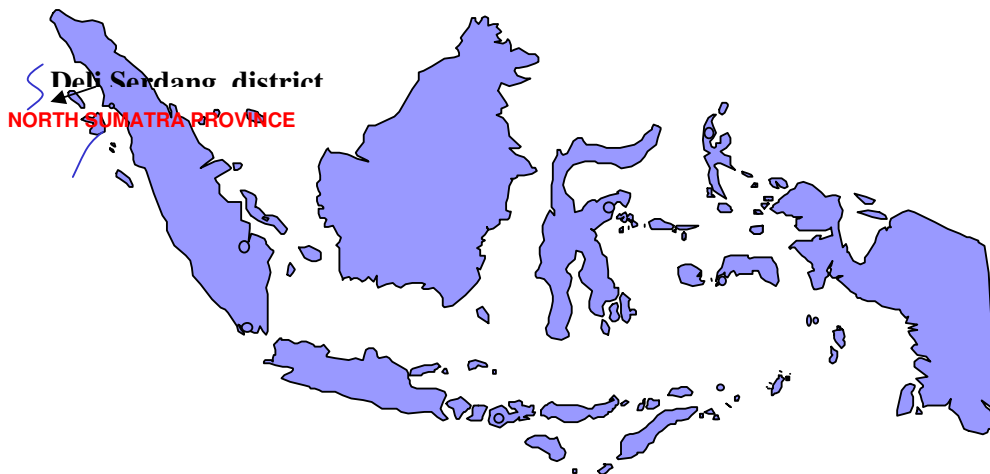
Purpose of research

This research aimed to broaden the knowledge base on child labour by assessing the conditions of child workers in tobacco plantations in North Sumatra, including a description of their work and home environments. With this understanding of the situation, interventions can be more effectively designed. The research, thus, also aimed toward gathering information necessary for making recommendations for an action programme to address existing issues.

Location of research

The research initially centred on two plantations under the management of PT. Plantation Nusantara-II (PTPN-II): Kebun Sampali and Saentis. Administratively they are situated in the subdistrict of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang district in the far northwestern side of Indonesia.

Map of Indonesia



In 2004, the timing of the research fell in between crops and no one was actually working at the time of the interviews. Tobacco had just been harvested in two plantations, which were then selected as research sites. With the season having just ended, it would somewhat easier to trace children's involvement in those areas.

However, there was difficulty in finding enough child respondents in the two main research sites for the survey to satisfy the targeted number, so the researchers included respondents from two other plantations: Kelambir Lima (seven children) and Klumpang (four children), a neighbouring plantation (7 km away in Hamparan Perak subdistrict).

Method of data collection

The researchers relied on three methods for collecting data: interviews based on questionnaires, participatory focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews.

Separate survey questionnaires were used to interview 100 child workers involved in planting tobacco in 2004 and 100 family members (one per child worker, and one child per family). Because the number of child workers was unknown before the study, the 100 responding children were selected through a snowball process: One child worker was identified and interviewed and asked to suggest other possible respondents who were subsequently interviewed and then also asked to propose others. The process continued until 100 young people had been interviewed.

Participatory discussions were conducted with a child worker group (eight boys, seven girls) and a parent group (five men, three women) only in Dusun Pondok Rawa (a subvillage in the Sampali plantation). To facilitate the discussion and achieve optimal results, a framework for discussion was prepared and participants were briefed by a facilitator.

Each of the two FGDs was conducted with a different agenda: With the children, the researchers sought more information on how they felt about working in the tobacco plantation. Topics discussed included the risks and dangers they may have encountered. With the parent group, the researchers wanted to better understand the work system in the tobacco plantation and its relation to child labourers. Topics

discussed included the management system and attitudes of parents toward working children.

In-depth interviews were conducted to gain more information on the situation of child workers and were then followed with interviews with their parents (or other family member), community figures, a union leader and community organization officials. In-depth interviews were also conducted with a religious figure, government official and teacher who were thought to be relevant.

The study took place just after the harvesting season ended and when there was no ongoing work in the plantations. Thus, no observations were made of children actually working. Some data, especially qualitative data, could not be obtained due to the limitations on what could be observed, particularly the potential safety hazards and risks the children are exposed to.

Research team

The research team consisted of a coordinator, a deputy coordinator, three assistant researchers and 14 interviewers. All team members were briefed on the purpose and scope of the study and trained in the use of the questionnaires to be used in the interviews.

Study and data analysis

Data from the questionnaires were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program to obtain frequency tables. Information obtained from the FGDs and in-depth interviews were analysed based on qualitative analysis.

Limitations of the study and problems encountered

Essentially the study went smoothly although there were a couple major obstacles: First, as already mentioned, the timing of the study – outside of the planting or harvesting season – prevented the researchers from verifying comments regarding or observing potential for risks, hazards and abuse in the workplace or the actual use of children. It is quite likely that the children forgot many issues because they were no longer recent.

Second, lack of time affected the preparation of the focus group discussions. The ideal day would have been on a Sunday when parents and children are not working; however, the FGDs were conducted during work hours, so many of the selected respondents were unable to attend. The final groups were small: 15 children and eight parents.

Other difficulties included:

- As school was in session, interviews with children could only be conducted after school hours. But many of them would go out in the late afternoon to take care of their livestock or to play. To overcome this, the researchers had to go to where the livestock were kept, usually far from the village, which was very time consuming. When finished, the researchers then had to return to visit the parents. In most cases, it was unlikely that parents and their child could be interviewed on the same day.
- The plantation is vast and the child workers' parents, most of whom worked in the plantation, lived in a wide expanse of an area. A lot of time was spent travelling to each home.
- Many of the adult respondents had difficulty calculating their wages and expenses largely because they received no fixed monthly amount, even when working with a contract.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF TOBACCO PLANTATIONS

History of tobacco plantations

A Dutch officer named Jacobus Nienhuys first planted tobacco in the Deli district of what was then called East Sumatra in 1864. Five years later a sample of the Deli tobacco arrived in Rotterdam and was acclaimed by tobacco traders due to the good quality of the leaves and the good burning characteristics; it also made for good *dekblad*.⁴ This success encouraged the establishment of a tobacco company, Deli Maatschappij (Deli Company) in 1875. Shortly after, the forests of the district were cleared and many new fields of tobacco were soon growing.

Two other companies, Deli Batavia Maatschappij and Tabak Mij Arendburg were set up in 1877, then a third, Senembah Mij, in 1889, followed by many more. With one company operating several plantations, there were 170 big and small plantations (also called estates) by 1890 (Table 1). Of them, most were located in the districts of Siak, Asahan, Serdang, Deli and Langkat.

As the tobacco fields expanded, so too did the need for workers. But at the time, the local inhabitants – Malays and Karos – were unwilling to work as labourers in the plantation. The Dutch companies were forced to bring in thousands of labourers from the island of Java (about 1,500 km away), Malaya and even China. In 1879 a Dutchman by the name of J.T. Cremer initiated the Deli Plantation Union (*Deli Planters Zelfhesterdes*) to represent private companies in their dealings with the Dutch Indies Government, by primarily importing labourers, dealing with agricultural problems and labour laws (Tjandraningsih and Popon, 2002; Erwin and T. Sabrina, 1999).

Most of the imported workers brought their wives and children with them. When the Japanese occupied the country in the 1940s, they replaced tobacco with basic commodity crops. After the Second World War and then Indonesia's independence

⁴ *Dekblad* is the name of a sheaf of dried tobacco leaf used to wrap around the cigar.

from the Dutch, many Chinese and Tamil (from India) labourers left the plantations to become farmers, traders or workers in the informal sector. The Javanese people remained working and living on the plantation when the Dutch companies resumed tobacco planting and again when the Dutch companies were nationalized to become state-owned companies in 1957.

Because of tobacco production, the growth of the Javanese population gradually altered the composition of ethnic groups in the surrounding villages as well as in urban areas, such as in Medan (25–30 km away). To this day, the ethnic Javanese remain the largest population group in Medan and in North Sumatra province.

The number of plantations gradually decreased over the years, as many could not compete with the fertile plantations located between the two big rivers of Sungai Ular (Serdang) and Sungai Wampu (Langkat). One by one, the plantations went out of business or transferred to other commodities, such as palm oil or rubber, because the land was not suitable for planting tobacco.

After nationalization of the Dutch plantations in Indonesia in 1957, all tobacco plantations in North Sumatra (formerly East Sumatra) were united under the management of the Perseroan Terbatas Plantation Negara–IX (PTPN–IX). In line with Agrarian Ministerial Decree RI No. 24/HGU/1965, PTPN–IX was allocated concession rights to 59,000 ha of land, which was bordered by two subdistricts.

Table 1: Number of tobacco plantations (estates) in East Sumatra (1869–1959)

Year	No. of plantations	Total production (bal)
1869	3	Less than 20,000
1889	170	220,000
1914	101	280,000
1930	72	190,000
1949	30	50,000
1952	25	35,000
1954	22	60,000
1957	22	40,000
1959	22	25,000

Source: Compiled by Erwin and T. Sabrina (1999)

When tobacco plantations were nationalized in 1957, only two tobacco companies survived – Deli Maatschappij with 16 plantations and Senembah Maatschappij with six plantations. Official records indicate that the 170 small and big plantations of 1889 steadily plummeted to only 22 in 1959.

Until 1971, all the plantations listed in Table 2 planted tobacco. However, in an attempt to reduce the risk of creating a monoculture and to spread income throughout the year, they started to diversify their crops. From 1982, they began to rotate the plantation with sugarcane in the fallow tobacco fields that had been deliberately left to forest for five to six years. A few plantations ceased planting tobacco permanently and focused on cocoa and palm oil trees. This diversification was later reinforced through Government Order No. 7/1996, through which PTPN–II Tanjung Morawa was appointed as the executive managers of commodities like tobacco, palm oil, rubber and sugarcane. This order also required the merger of PTPN–IX with PTPN–II. In 1996, only 12 plantations continued to plant tobacco (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of plantations planting tobacco in PTPN-II

Name of plantation	Planting season 1996	Planting season 1997	Planting season 2004	Planting season 2005
1. Batang Kuis	√	sugarcane	√	√
2. Klumpang	√	√	√	√
3. Bandar Klip	√	sugarcane	√	√
4. Sampali	√	sugarcane	√	√
5. Saentis	√	√	√	palm oil
6. Helvetia	√	√	√	√
7. Klambir lima	√	√	√	√
8. Tandem Hilir	√	√	√	sugarcane
9. Tandem Hulu	√	sugarcane	√	√
10. Bulu Cina	√	√	√	√
11. Tanjung Jati	√	√	√	√
12. Kuala Bingei	√	√	√	sugarcane

Source: Taken from various sources

Table 3: Size of plantation areas and tobacco production in North Sumatra

Year	Community plantations		State plantations (PTPN-II)	
	Area (ha)	Production (ton)	Area (ha)	Production (ton)
2000	292	275	2,638	1,052
2001	257	144	2,577	571
2002	582	11,571	2,582	569
2003	272	22,530	4,737	555

Source: *North Sumatra in Figures*, 2003

The crop diversification resulted in a reduction of Deli tobacco. But there were other factors affecting the tobacco production. In 1960, the ethnic Malay inhabitants of the area who belonged to an organization known as Badan Perjuangan Rakyat Penunggu Indonesia (BPRPI)⁵ and were discontent with what they saw as the co-option of their land, staged an occupation of what used to be the PTPN-IX plantation, which then prevented the regular planting of tobacco. According to the BPRPI, before this land belonged to the Malay community prior to nationalization it was a nutmeg plantation. After nationalization, the state-owned tobacco company took over the property and proceeded to plant tobacco, even after their concession time expired. BPRPI began demanding the return of their land and still are making that demand (Popon and Tjandraningsih and Popon, 2002).

Further production declines have been a result of the urban expansion of North Sumatra's cities, such as Medan, Binjai and Deli Serdang, which has gradually reduced the land area available for planting tobacco.

The effects of land occupancy, city expansion, residential estates, industrial and freeway development, air and water pollution, climate disturbances, poor worker motivation for planting tobacco have contributed to lower production of Deli tobacco (Erwin and T. Sabrina, 1999).

According to 2003 statistics, PTPN-II produced merely 555 tons that year despite the 4.737 hectares of production area. During the same year, public plantations had managed 272 hectares of production area and generated 225.30 tons of tobacco.

⁵ BPRPI is a group of indigenous people of Melayu (Malay).

Communities within the tobacco plantations

More than 9,000 people (2,000 households) live in each of the communities within the four plantations used for this study. But only a small portion of them are directly involved in the plantation operations, either as contract workers or casual labourers. Most of the population are retired workers or descendants and relatives of the original contracted labourers brought over from Java at the time of the Dutch rule. As the plantations decreased production (due to closure of companies, diversification, loss of land, etc.), the workers and then their descendants remained in their homes but sought work in factories in and around the village or in construction jobs in the industrial areas of Medan and other cities.

Most (95 per cent) of the inhabitants within the four plantation communities in the study (Table 4) are ethnic Javanese; other residents belong to the ethnic groups of Malay, Batak Toba, Mandailaing, Minang and others who arrived in the past 15 years alongside the development of industries, schools and village infrastructure.

Table 4: Number of inhabitants and size of location in research areas

Research location	Inhabitants	Size (km ²)	Comparison of Javanese ethnic group with other groups in the research area			
			Javanese	%	Non-Javanese	%
Sampali plantation	16,993	23.93	16,384	96.40	609	3.6
Saentis plantation	9,293	24	8,785	94.53	508	5.47
Klambir plantation	12,732 (3,053 HH*)	25.58	12,158	95.49	574	4.51
Klumpang plantation	10,066 (2,417 HH)	21.8	9,258	91.97	808	8.03

* HH: head of household

Source: Subdistrict of Percut Sei Tuan and Hamparan Perak in Angka, 2002

As the Javanese are the dominant population group, the daily language is Javanese. Many customs and traditional ceremonies are strongly influenced by Javanese culture, although traditional dances such as *wayang*, *ludruk* and *jaran kepang* have almost

disappeared and have been replaced with modern modes of entertainment. For instance, keyboard music now is commonly played at wedding parties or on national holidays.

Tasks and stages in tobacco cultivation

The tasks in the plantation are carried out by a combination of people a) employed by the company as daily, or casual, workers (KHL) and paid on a daily basis and b) the permanent contract workers (KHT). The casual workers are recruited periodically when extra manpower is required and directly relates to the type of work required in that specific stage.

As Table 5 shows, the various tasks in tobacco cultivation entail:

1. Clearing the land, beginning in December, as it has been left to forest for five to six years. Then boundaries must be set so that a square plot measures 0.9 hectares. These square plots are entrusted to the contract worker. All tasks at this stage are executed by the permanent male contract workers.

2. The process of seeding begins with sowing (planting), followed by fertilizing and then watering. When the seeds are ready for planting, the land is finely cleared of rubbish, stones, wood and grass. It is at this point, known as *ngayap* or *ngepyak*, that the permanent workers are given a contract. These jobs are usually executed by the male workers and their children.

3. When the land is ready for planting, each contract worker receives around 19,000 tobacco seeds to plant in stages. It is a process known as “plan stop”: The first stage has 9,000 plants, the second 6,000 plants, the third 4,000 plants. Contract workers and their sons typically collect the seeds from the seedling sheds.

4. Workers must then dig holes 3–4 centimetres wide and 3–5 centimetres deep in rows in the field. Before planting, the seeds are removed from a plastic bag (used as a pot). This task typically is taken on by the contract worker’s wife with help from their children. Once the seeds are removed from the bags, the worker and his son(s) transport them to the fields for planting. In the planting season, family involvement increases heavily because the planting must follow a tight schedule and may only be

performed in the late afternoons to avoid the sunshine, which can make the seedling wither. The seedling that has reached a certain “age”, between 7 and 15 days old, needs to be promptly planted to grow well; the company determines the timing. Both males and females take part in the planting.

5. Once the seeds have been planted, the worker and son(s) immediately water them. Then the caring for the seedlings begins and requires diligence, including the routine replacement of any dead sprouts with new ones; this process is called *nyelip*.

Plants are watered every day at set times. The plants also are sprayed with pesticide at this point, from airplanes. According to many of the study’s respondents and residents in the area, workers *are not* notified when the spraying will be done. Often they are working and get sprayed along with the plants. This results in sore eyes, respiratory problems and hot/stinging sensations in the eyes as well as runny noses.

6. Plants also are sprayed manually and pests not killed by the pesticide need to be destroyed. Mostly it is the male contract worker who handles the spraying and female contract workers (female workers hired part time) search for pests, with help from their daughters. The females also usually perform the task of *cuci daun* (picking the dried or yellow leaves) before the harvest time. This period lasts from 40 to 50 days.

7. *Ngutik*, or tobacco harvesting, begins with the picking of the first leaves as early as possible in the morning and must stop before the sun is high in the sky. Sunshine hastens the drying of picked leaves, which results in a poorer quality of tobacco. In this harvesting period, as in the planting, the family’s involvement increases heavily to ensure that the picking can be finished on time. It takes six to nine days to pick a 9-hectare plot.

8. In the next stage, the male workers and their son(s) transport the picked tobacco leaves to the drying sheds where they undergo the process of *penyucukan*, which is the arranging and tying of the tobacco leaves in a set way so that each bundle consists of 42 leaves arranged so that they face front to front and back to back. Before they are hung on bamboo poles in the drying shed, the bundles are spread out (*dijereng*) in a lower place while waiting to be hung. Girls and their mothers work intensively from the piercing task to the hanging. The males hang the leaf bundles on the bamboo

poles, starting from the highest point for the first picked leaves and moving down in order of when the leaves were picked. The drying process takes about 28 days – when the leaves feel dry enough yet maintain a specific moisture rate.

9. The next stage requires moving the tobacco, now transferred to boxes, to a warehouse where leaves are selected on the basis of quality and colour. Then follows the curing, or fermentation, stage, which takes around six months. The final task is to package the leaves into specific bundle sizes, ready for export. Typically the female contract workers handle the sorting. While working they wear a white uniform blouse and a classical batik skirt, which must be the colour of the dried tobacco leaves. They are forbidden from wearing anything else because purportedly the colour of their clothes affects the colour of the tobacco leaves.

Table 5: Stages and tasks in tobacco cultivation

Type of work	Work system	Child workers	Time
Preparing land <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open the land ▪ Make ditches ▪ Make dikes ▪ <i>Ngayap</i> (clear the land of garbage, stones and roots) 	Except for <i>ngayap</i> , preparation work is done daily by KHT and KHL.	Child workers are generally involved in <i>ngayap</i> .	December–March
Seeding	Executed by KHL on a daily work basis.	No child workers.	January–March
Planting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Ngecer</i> (to spread tobacco seeds) ▪ Remove seeds ▪ Fertilize ▪ Make holes ▪ Plant ▪ Collect water and water fields 	Most tasks are contracted to a worker and all jobs are executed by the whole family.	Child workers are commonly employed at this stage.	February–March
Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Water ▪ Cover roots ▪ Search for worms ▪ Spray against pests ▪ Weeding/clearing of the grass 	Most tasks are contracted but the job of spraying and searching for worms is the direct responsibility of the company.	Child workers are generally employed to water, cover the roots and sun dry.	March–May
Harvesting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pick leaves ▪ Transport leaves to sheds 	Most of this is contracted and executed by the whole family.	Child workers are commonly employed at this stage.	May–July
Shed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pierce ▪ Spread leaves ▪ Hang on poles ▪ Dry/smoke 	Work is executed by the family of the contracted worker except the drying/smoking, which are done by the family. Drying and smoking are done by the worker in the sheds.	Child workers are commonly employed at the stage of piercing.	May–July
Warehouse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sort ▪ Cure/ferment ▪ Package 	Warehouse activities are executed by contracted permanent and temporary workers but this job is not part of the contract and not the responsibility of the permanent workers.	Child workers are rarely employed at this stage.	June–September

Source: FGDs and in-depth interviews, and enriched with research results from Tjandraningsih (2000)

CHAPTER III
FINDINGS AND OPINIONS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH CHILD
WORKERS, THEIR FAMILIES AND OTHER INFORMANTS

Most of the 100 child workers interviewed for this research lived on either Sampali or Saentis plantations; only seven respondents were from Klambir–V plantation and four from Klumpang plantation. As Table 6 indicates, most (60) of the child workers were male and their ages ranged from 5 to 18. (As pointed out previously, someone 18 is no longer a “child” by the UN definition; the researchers included eight 18-year-olds in their survey and they remain calculated into the figures presented here.) By age group, there were more children aged 13–15 among the respondents, and by sex there were little differences, although fewer girls younger than 13 worked.

Table 6: Ages of child respondents, by sex

Age (years)	Gender		Total
	Girls	Boys	
Younger than 6	0	1	1
6–9	0	4	4
10–12	8	18	26
13–15	16	20	36
16–17	12	13	25
18	4	4	8
Total	40	60	100

The researchers also interviewed 100 family members (a father, mother, a sibling or a close relative of each child worker). As Table 7 shows, 48 of the family member respondents were fathers, 44 respondents were mothers and six respondents were siblings. Only four respondents were close relatives, such as a grandmother or an uncle. Half of them were male; 42 respondents had only a primary school education, while three others had completed junior high school and nine had graduated high school. One sibling had graduated university and another sibling was still attending

university. Among the others, 26 did not graduate from primary school, nine dropped out in junior high, four stopped at the senior high level and six never attended school.

Table 7: Relationship of interviewed family members to child respondents

Family member	Frequency	%
Mother	44	44
Father	46	46
Sibling of child workers	6	6
Others (uncle, grandmother)	4	4
Total	100	100

Education of child respondents

As Table 8 shows, most (80) of the child workers interviewed were still students, either attending primary or secondary schools (junior high as well as senior high). While one child had not yet started school, 19 of them had dropped out. Among them, two respondents had not completed the first year of senior high, four had not completed junior high and 13 had not finished their primary education. Of those attending school, 49 were boys and thus 31 were girls.

Table 8: Status of child workers at school, by sex

Gender	Education			Total
	Not at school	At school	Not yet in school	
Girls	9	31	0	40
Boys	10	49	1	60
Total	19	80	1	100

Table 9 explains the composition of child workers (both those still enrolled and drop-outs) based on levels of education they had at the time of the interview.

Table 9: Child workers, by class and level of education

Grade	Level of education			Total
	Primary or Islamic school of primary level	Junior high or Islamic school of junior high level	Senior high or Islamic school of senior high level and vocational school	
Not yet in school	-	-	-	1
1	-	9	7	16
2	-	10	5	15
3	4	17	10	31
4	6	-	-	6
5	8	-	-	8
6	23	-	-	23
Total	41	36	22	100

Among the 19 who left school (Table 10), eight children mentioned economic difficulties, six said they were too lazy to attend, one person said he was afraid that the teacher would be angry with him because he rarely attended school and the others gave no explanation. These reasons are in line with comments made during interviews with other key figures who noted that low economic status was the main reason for children not attending school (unable to afford the school fee) and which thus required some of them to work on the plantation.

Table 10: Reasons for child respondents dropping out of school

Reasons given	Frequency	%
No reply	4	15.8
Lazy	6	31.6
Parents cannot afford fees	8	42.1
Afraid teacher will be angry because of extended absence	1	10.5
Total	19	100

As many as ten children reported not wanting to resume their studies while eight of them wanted to continue school (Table 11).

Table 11: Child respondents' aspirations for education

Desire to continue school	Frequency	%
No reply	1	5.3
Yes	8	42.1
No	10	52.6
Total	19	100

As Table 12 indicates, most child respondents still in school (64 of 80 children) thought that working in the plantation did not interfere with their studies. Only 16 of them said that their work *did indeed* make studying difficult.

Table 12: Child respondents' opinions of how working affects their studying

Plantation work disturbs studying?	Frequency	%
Yes, it is disturbing	16	20
No, not disturbing	64	80
Total	80	100

Just how their work interferes with their education is presented in Table 13, which indicates that generally they are too weary to keep up. Only three children said there is not enough time to do their homework.

Table 13: How working interferes with school

Types of disturbances	Frequency	%
Late to school	3	17.25
Tired and sleepy in class	6	37.5
Lack of concentration	4	25
Not enough time to do homework	3	17.25
Total	16	100

Family background of child respondents

Most of the child respondents come from plantation worker families. Thus the children are accustomed to plantation work and are easily available when their father finds meeting the contracted targets difficult.

The majority of the child respondents (96) are Javanese and are direct descendants of contracted workers who migrated there in the days of colonial rule. Among the four others, two were from the Sunda ethnic group of West Java province, one from Aceh and one from Minang, all areas where their parents still lived.

a. Parents' education

Most of the parents (45 men) and (53 women) have graduated from primary school only; the number of parents that did not even finish that level is high at 21 men and 25 women. Only 16 parents (11 men, 5 women) have a complete junior high school education. Only one father is a university graduate, and ten of the parents never attended school at all. The remainder (excluding three who gave no response), either graduated senior high school (only women) or dropped out at that level (Tables 14 and 15). A comparison of the education levels by sex indicates that more fathers (29) continued their studies beyond primary school than mothers (14).

Table 14: Education level of child respondents' fathers

Final education level	Frequency	%
No response	3	3
Did not attend school	2	2
Did not graduate from primary school	21	20
Graduated from primary school only	45	51
Did not graduate from junior high school	2	1
Graduated from junior high school only	11	11
Did not graduate from senior high school	4	15
Graduated from senior high school	11	0
University graduate	1	1
Total	100	100

Table 15: Education level of child respondents' mothers

Final education level	Frequency	%
Did not attend school	8	0
Did not graduate from primary school	25	25
Graduated from primary school only	53	53
Did not graduate from junior high school	2	2
Graduated from junior high school only	5	5
Did not graduate from senior high school	0	0
Graduated from senior high school	7	7
University graduate	0	0
Total	100	100

b. Parents' source of earnings

Based on the questionnaire results (Table 16), 75 of the child workers' fathers are employed primarily in planting tobacco and known as "planting workers". A few of the child respondents have fathers who work elsewhere in the plantation as a transport worker, an assistant administrator, a guard or a foreman. The other children's fathers earn from work outside the plantations, such as farming, in a card factory, construction or self-employment, but live inside the plantation.

Table 16: Sources of earnings for child respondents' fathers

Type of Work	Frequency	%
No response	3	3
Plantation		
Planting worker	75	75
Transport worker	5	5
Technical worker	1	1
Foreman	1	1
Security guard	1	1
Non-plantation		
Construction worker	4	4
Card factory worker	1	1
Pensioner from the plantation	2	2
Entrepreneur	6	6
Farmer	1	1
Total	100	100

As Table 17 shows, most of the child respondents' mothers were housewives, though a few have their own business as traders, gardeners, etc. or had job in the plantation.

Table 17: Occupations of child respondents' mothers

	Frequency	%
Unemployed/ housewife	76	74
Sales/trader	9	9
Making <i>lontong</i> paper	1	1
Factory worker	1	1
Assistant teacher	1	1
School guard	1	1
Gardener/permanent worker in the plantation	6	5
Field worker	1	1
Flower arranger	1	1
Office girl	1	1
Domestic worker	2	2
Total	100	100

At planting time, the family members who have jobs elsewhere double their work load by helping to finish the work in the contracted plot.

Most of the families of child respondents live as free lodgers in a house provided by the plantation owner. Some child workers and their families rent their home while a few own their house (Table 18).

Table 18: Residential status of the respondents' homes

	Frequency	%
Own home	10	10
Rent	3	3
Lodge without paying rent to plantation owner	87	87
Total	100	100

According to the child respondents (Table 19), the homes belonging to the plantation owner typically are not in good condition. The structures tend to be wooden huts (49) or semi-permanent structures, which have a 1-metre concrete base with a wooden upper half (40). Some houses were made of brick (9) while others (2) were made from canvas or other similar material.

Table 19: Condition of the child respondents' homes

	Frequency	%
Permanent	9	9
Semi-permanent	40	40
Wooden hut	49	49
Canvas	2	2
Total	100	100

The families rely on wells for their water supply; some wells provide clean water while others are open wall wells or artesian wells.

Based on the reported average monthly income of the child respondents' fathers, the families' economic level essentially can be characterized as low to middle class. Reported earnings for fathers ranged between 300,000 and 500,000 rupiah, as shown in Table 20.

Table 20: Monthly income of child respondents' fathers

Amount earned (rupiah*)	Frequency	%
No response	3	3
> 250,000	6	6
251,000–500,000	71	71
501,000–750,000	8	8
751,000–1,000,000	5	5
1,001,000–1,250,000	7	7
Total	100	100

*9,000 rupiah = US\$1

Some fathers also earn sideline income from raising chickens, goats or cows. Others earn extra money growing crops or as a small business entrepreneur, as Table 21 shows.

Table 21: Sideline work of child respondents' fathers

	Frequency	%
No sideline work	38	38
Motor cycle agent	1	1
Electrical engineer	1	1
Mechanic	1	1
Farmer	19	10
Contract worker	2	2
Warehouse guard	2	2
Trader	6	1
Worker	1	1
Public transport conductor	1	1
Builder/labourer	2	1
Home mechanic	1	1
Electrician	1	1
Ditch digger	1	1
Installation worker	1	1
Bird catcher	1	1
Garage assistant	1	1
Animal husbandry	20	1
Total	100	100

Some sideline jobs yield good earnings but typically only for a temporary period. According to the interviews, the extra income earned from a father's sideline job does not have any significant impact on the family's overall economic situation. Those who work as entrepreneurs or as cattle farmers generally earn more, but, again, only for a few months or a few years and only after the animals are sold.

Table 22: Monthly income from child respondents' father's sideline work

Amount earned (rupiah*)	Frequency	%
> 150,000	23	37.09
151,000–300,000	15	24.19
301,000–600,000	12	19.35
601,000–900,000	5	8.06
901,000–1,200,000	1	1.6
Total	62	100

*9,000 rupiah = US\$1

While 24 of the child respondents' mothers have regular employment, many also have sideline jobs, either as casual workers on the plantation or as farmers, as Table 23 presents.

Table 23: Sideline jobs of child respondents' mothers

Type of sideline job	Frequency	%
No sideline work.	74	2
Vegetable gardener	4	3
Daily contract worker	4	74
Trader	9	8
Animal husbandry (chickens and cattle)	4	1
Laundress	4	4
Masseur	1	1
Total	100	100

A mother's earnings do have significant effect on supplementing her husband's low wages but it does not have a significant impact on the family's welfare because it also is very low. Based on reports from the adult respondents, the mothers' average monthly income from their main job ranges from 151,000 rupiah to 600,000 rupiah.

Table 24: Main earnings of child respondents' mothers

Mothers total earnings (rupiah*)	Frequency	%
> 150,000	5	20.83
151,000–300,000	6	25
301,000–600,000	9	37.5
601,000–900,000	4	16.66
Total	24	100

*9,000 rupiah = US\$1

According to parents' comments, any sideline income that the mother brings in is too small to significantly boost the family's economic well-being. Average sideline income of the mothers was difficult to determine because it is so irregular.

Based on the interviews and questionnaire responses, family expenses, on average, range from 601,000 rupiah to 900,000 rupiah, with some families spending up to 1.2 million rupiah or more. As previously presented, a family with both parents working might earn somewhere between 800,000 to 1.9 million, without sideline income. Sideline income could add another 150,000 to 600,000. If a mother does not work, certainly a plantation family appears to have difficulty meeting expenses. If the amount is accumulated, the main income of the child workers' family looks high but the family's average expenses are also high. In general, the adult respondents in the study considered their lives to be economically difficult.

Table 25: Child respondents' family's monthly expenditures

Expenditures (rupiah*)	Frequency	%
≥ 300,000	0	0
301,000–600,000	26	26
601,000–900,000	41	41
901,000–1,200,000	21	21
> 1,200,000	12	12
Total	100	100

*9,000 rupiah = US\$1

b. Contribution of other family members to the household economy

Some of the family member respondents acknowledged that there were other adults living in the household who contributed income. Many families cannot cover expenses with only the parents' wages and need income that working children can contribute. However, as Table 26 indicates, most families (66) had no other working children to contribute income. Some of the adult respondents in the 34 households that had one or more children working said that their contribution often was not significant enough to ease the household expenditure burden.

Table 26: Child respondents' siblings contributing to household income

Males	Frequency	%
None	66	66
1 person	19	19
2 persons	9	9
3 persons	4	4
4 persons	2	2
Total	100	100.0
Females	Frequency	%
None	80	80
1 person	16	16
2 persons	4	4
Total	100	100

Family size among the respondents in the study averaged six persons, with many families having more boys than girls. Table 27 indicates that most families had two to five children.

The existence of working siblings (both older and younger than 18) does not always mean a contribution to the family's economy, as not all earnings are given to the parents. According to various family respondents, working siblings typically spend a portion of their income on themselves.

Table 27: Number of children per family

Siblings	Frequency	%
1	6	6
2-3	38	38
4-5	37	37
5-6	11	11
8-9	6	6
> 9	5	5
Total	100	100

Table 28: Number of child respondents' siblings younger than 18

No. of siblings	Frequency	%
None younger than 18	25	25
1 person	29	29
2 persons	21	21
3 persons	16	16
4 persons	5	5
5 persons	3	3
7 persons	1	1
Total	100	100

Work conditions and environment of child workers

a. Length of working and age of the child respondents

Most of the child respondents in this study live in villages surrounding the tobacco plantation. The community, including parents, do not regard their involvement in the plantation as a problem. The child respondents reported being either directly or indirectly engaged in some work activity on the plantation from an early age – nine respondents said they started working at age 4 or 5. Most of the respondents also reported having been working for more than two years at the time of the interview.

Based on the questionnaire responses as shown in Table 29, some 40 of the children had started working at least one to two years earlier. Only a handful (6) of them had

been working for less than one year, which means they started in the just-finished planting season of 2004. Some child respondents had worked more than ten years on the plantation.

Table 29: Length of time child respondents worked in the tobacco plantation at the time of the interview

Table 29: Length of time child respondents worked in the tobacco plantation at the time of the interview Years working	Frequency	%
Less than 1 year	6	6
1-2	40	40
3-4	28	28
5-6	10	10
7-8	11	11
9-10	3	3
More than 10 years	3	3
Total	100	100

Only four child respondents started working after the age of 16; most of them (36 children) began working in the plantations when they were 10 or 11 years old.

Table 30: Age when child workers first started working in the tobacco plantation

Age	Frequency	%
4-5	9	9
6-7	10	10
8-9	15	15
10-11	36	36
12-13	17	17

14-15	9	9
16-17	4	4
Total	100	100

Not surprising, most (88, Table 31) child respondents had no work experience prior to their employment in the tobacco plantation. Some 12 of them had actually worked other jobs, such as labourers on building sites, animal keepers, factory workers, furniture-making and soy bean curd production, as Table 33 shows.

Table 31: Previous work experience before working in the tobacco plantation

	Frequency	%
Had experience	12	12
No experience	88	88
Total	100	100

Table 32: Type of job performed by child respondents before working in the tobacco plantation

Type of Work	Frequency	%
None	91	91
Builder labourer	3	3
Animal husbandry	4	4
Furniture	1	1
Tahu (soy bean curd) factory	1	1
Total	100	100

Eight respondents, as Table 33 shows, who had worked elsewhere before the tobacco plantation left their previous job because it was tiring, boring, too far away or they were laid off.

Table 33: Reasons child respondents left previous employer

Reasons for moving	Frequency	%
No previous job	92	92
Tiring and heavy	2	2
Project finished	2	2
Far distance	1	1
Not enough orders (no work to do)	1	1
Cattle were sold (child hired to looked after cows)	1	1
Lazy	1	1
Total	100	100

b. Work conditions

The majority of child respondents in this study worked in tobacco production to help with their father’s contracted targets for planting and harvesting. None had a contract or wages paid by the company and none had any direct contact with the company. Child workers assisting their families are not even regarded as casual workers because they have not been recruited by the company. Casual workers receive a wage from the company in accordance with their term of work contract. However, information from the in-depth interviews with key figures revealed that some child workers are employed as casual workers, though reportedly very few. Because it was off season, they were not at the plantation and the research team tried to trace them in the village but were unsuccessful.

All contract workers are adult workers. The young people in this study work only when there is a need to help their parents – or in the case of young people whose fathers are not contract workers, they work for other families for a wage paid by them.

The maximum work contract begins in December and goes through September, though February to June the involvement of children is very high. During this period, the child workers help their family by performing jobs suited to their age and sex.

As well, the child workers' shifts usually are designed to accommodate their school hours and the nature of tobacco growing means work can only be taken up at certain times of the day. For instance, clearing the land (*ngepyak*) and caring for plants can be done any time from morning till late afternoon, and child workers can tend to those tasks whenever they are not at school. Seed planting can only be done from late afternoon, around 3 p.m., until evening to avoid the bright sunlight that weakens the seed. Again, young workers can tend to this when home from school.

Harvesting (leaf piercing) is performed very early in the morning, from around 4 a.m. till 10 a.m. and can be shifted to accommodate the weather. Child workers reported that they can adapt their work to fit in with their school schedule.

The job of pest spraying and fertilizing is not the responsibility of the contract worker and the company employs casual labourers to tend to it. Spraying is usually performed by male adults and women adult casual workers take charge of the fertilizing.

c. Children's perspective on working in the plantation

Most of the child respondents said their work hours in the tobacco plantation did not disturb their school work. However as Table 34 indicates, many (57) did feel that they were obliged to work and said that they would be punished in some way if they did not. Punishment included being scolded or chastised and some children said they had been beaten by their parents when they refused to work. Nearly half, 43 children, said they felt no pressure to work.

Table 34: Feelings among child respondents on pressure to work in the tobacco plantation

Pressure to work	Frequency	%
Obliged	57	57
Not obliged	43	43
Total	100	100

Although 57 children felt they were obliged to work in the tobacco plantation and nearly all thought they would be punished (scolded, chastised or beaten) if they did not work. Only five of them said they were not punished if they did not work.

Those who said they did not feel obliged to work also said they were not punished if they did not work.

Table 35: Child respondents who reported being punished for not working in tobacco plantation

Punished if didn't work?	Frequency	%
No response	29	29
Yes, received punishment	23	23
No, received no punishment	48	48
Total	100	100

Tjandraningsih and Popon (2002) in their research found that children were sometimes punished by parents, primarily the fathers, if they did not help with the work burden. In response to the questionnaire (Table 36), 49 child respondents noted that their father has the most influence, although 41 others said it was their mother who held the most influence on their life. The other respondents said that other family members, such as elder siblings, a grandmother or an uncle, held more sway on their life decisions. One respondent said that other child workers had more influence than his parents in making decisions affecting his life.

Table 36: People that most influenced the lives of child respondents

	Frequency	%
Father	49	49
Mother	41	41
Others	10	10
Total	100	100

d. Recruitment system and wages

Most children working in the tobacco plantations are there because their parents took them to work there. It is rare to find children working for a wage with other families. Survey results, as shown in Table 37, indicate that typically it was the parents (76) who introduced the child respondents to the plantation work; others included neighbours, friends, siblings, distant relatives, parents' friends, etc.

Table 37: People that took the child respondents to the tobacco plantation

	Frequency	%
No response	1	1
Parents	76	76
Siblings	2	2
Friends	2	2
Neighbours	4	4
Others	15	15
Total	100	100

Typically parents, close friends or neighbours taught the required tasks to the child worker. In general, a family member recruits young workers to speed up completion of the tasks to be done and thus reduce the need to pay external workers. Because the children are assisting their own families, they do not receive a wage. However, some child respondents said their parents give them pocket money and they considered that a kind of wage payment.

The child respondents whose parents gave them some remuneration reported receiving such varied amounts that it is difficult to group them into one category or time period. The amount of wages paid generally depends on the child's age and the intensity of their work. Primary school-aged children received pocket money ranging from 1,000 rupiah to 3,000 rupiah each day spent working. Some were paid weekly, in amounts ranging from 5,000 rupiah to 10,000 rupiah. Others among that same age group only received a wage after their parents were paid by the company for a completed job and their payment tended to be higher. Child workers of senior high

school age received what they called a wage (pocket money) from their family, ranging from 100,000 rupiah to 300,000 rupiah.

Children who did not receive a wage from their family said that their help compensates for the money spent on their school fees, books, clothes, etc. Other respondents acknowledged that they did not expect a wage from their parents because the money earned is needed to buy daily necessities for their family.

Hazards and effects of tobacco plantation work on a child worker's welfare

a. Risks and work safety

Working in the tobacco plantations can be accident prone (being wounded by a hoe or pickaxe when clearing the land or being pierced by thorns or needles in the shed) and even hazardous during the period of pesticide spraying for both children and adults.

A large number of the child respondents (57) said they were aware of the work risks; 43 of them claimed to not be aware of any dangers. Those who were aware described the risks as follows:

Wounds from a hoe, pickaxe, thorns, wood or needles

Based on answers from the questionnaires and group discussions it seems that the biggest hazard for child workers is being wounded by the equipment they use in their work or from sharp objects strewn around the plantation area. Mostly accidents result from the use of sharp equipment. The hoes are used to plough and level the land, make ditches or channels, dig wells, dig waste product channels, make planting holes for planting the tobacco seeds, etc. Axes or pickaxes are used to clear the young grass and weeds that grow around the tobacco plant. The needles are used to pierce the leaves for hanging in the drying sheds. There is also the likelihood of being wounded by thorns, wood and *jugil* (hard and sharp splinters of soil).

Pest bites or stings (poisonous centipedes, snakes or leeches)

The second biggest hazard for child workers is the risk of being bitten by poisonous centipedes or snakes, such as cobras. They also are exposed to blood-sucking creatures common to the area such as leeches, known as *pacet*. However, no child respondent reported experiencing or hearing of anyone bitten by any of these creatures.

Falling in a shed

The riskiest job for the child workers in the sheds is hanging the tobacco leaves on the poles because they need to climb unstable bamboo pillars reaching between 3 metres and 10 metres high. To make things worse, the sheds are poorly constructed of bamboo, which easily decays, and the poles are lashed together with whatever wire there is around. Many sheds deteriorate before they are a year old. Most of the hanging is performed by adults, or fathers of the child workers, but still the boys often climb up to help their fathers. None of the children respondents reported ever falling from a pole.

According to the focus group discussion with the child respondents, most boys working in the shed are older than 15; younger boys are forbidden by their fathers to climb in the sheds, though some climb the poles in play.

Falling into a well

Falling into a well also is considered a work hazard. Wells are dug in every contracted plot of land as a source of irrigation water. Most of the well openings are unprotected and dangerous to children when drawing water or even walking in the area. One participant in the children's group discussion reported that two years earlier a child worker fell into an open well and died because he was not immediately assisted.

Many of the parents (56) acknowledged awareness of these dangers, while the other 44 parents said they knew nothing of them (Table 39). In addition to what the children described as dangers, the aware parents also mentioned itchy skin from the chemical

spraying and getting burned from the disposing of garbage by fire when clearing the land.

Table 38: Parents’ awareness of the risks to child workers in the plantation

Parents aware of risks	Frequency	%
Known	56	56
Not known	44	41
Total	100	100

Based on the questionnaire results (Table 39), 33 child respondents had experienced a work-related accident. The kind of accidents most child respondents described involved the use of sharp equipment, such as an axe or hoe. Others reported non-serious injuries from wood splinters and thorns. None of the children reported being bitten by poisonous creatures or falling from a bamboo pole in a shed.

Table 39: Child respondents experience of accidents at work

Ever experience work-related accidents?	Frequency	%
Experienced	33	33
Not experienced	67	67
Total	100	100

Around 48 of the child respondents’ parents thought that the company adequately supplied safety work equipment for them. A small number of parents (18) thought that the supply was inadequate. There was no discussion on safety protection for children.

Table 40: Safety equipment supplied for adults

Work equipment supplied?	Frequency	%
Yes	48	48
No	18	18
Total	56	100

A total of 45 child respondents said they were aware that working in the plantation could harm their health and affect their education (Table 41). Health implications described entailed poisoning, getting colds, sneezing, becoming handicapped, dizziness, fever, headaches and lung ailments. These ailments mostly were experienced by the child workers when the plants were sprayed with pesticides. Typically the child workers and their families are in the fields when the aerial spraying takes place. The most protection they can manage is to shift to the edges of the field and cover their noses with their hats or a cloth.

According to participants in the parents' discussion group, some child workers enthusiastically chase after the airplanes while they spray across the fields.

Table 41: Child respondents' awareness of the dangers in the tobacco plantation

Aware of dangers	Frequency	%
Aware	45	45
Not aware	55	55
Total	100	100

The aerial spraying also often leads to an influenza infection among child workers and their families, as well as headaches, dizziness and coughing. Usually these ailments are treated with over-the-counter flu medicines, such as Panadol, Mixagrif and Bodrex. There have been no cases reported of children or an adult being hospitalized or dying as a result of the spraying. For this reason the child workers and their parents do not take the side effects of pesticide poisoning too seriously, as the following comment illustrates:

“When they are spraying ya, at the most we get flu, runny noses and fever, like that... It's enough to treat it with medicine from the market, it gets better...The long-term effect...well, all the workers here are descended from workers from the time of the Dutch and have worked and been exposed to pesticides. But in general they live as long as the village people. There are even some that live more than 80 years.” – *Suwarno, in an adult in-depth interview*

Based on group discussions with the child respondents and their parents, the company gives no notice of when the spraying (either manually or aerially) will take place. When interviewed, a company official said that they mark the areas that would be sprayed a day before the spraying takes place.

b. Social interaction of child workers with other workers

Bearing in mind that the child workers’ environment consists of close friends, it is very rare that interaction between them is negative. Still, there are some cases where the child workers feel they are badly treated. What was described during the research seemed as non-physical, and no examples of physical abuse were reported. Rather, the child respondents said they were scolded, chastised and criticized (Table 42).

Table 42: Types of bad treatment child respondents have experienced

	Frequency	%
Scolding	6	25
Reprimanding (by assistant foreman, parents and supervisors)	17	70.8
Criticizing	1	4.2
Total	24	100

Some 24 child respondents (Table 43) said the bad treatment came from adult workers: their fathers, other workers, the foreman and field assistants.

Table 43: Number of child respondents who reported experiencing bad treatment

	Frequency	%
Experienced	24	24
Not experienced	76	75
Total	100	100

The reasons why the children was reprimanded, scolded or criticized varied. The most common reason was that they were accused of ruining the seeds and/or the tobacco

plants. Other mistakes the child respondents' reported being held accountable for involved spreading the tobacco seeds and piercing, planting, cutting or arranging the tobacco leaves inappropriately. They may also be reprimanded for poor quality work, slowness, laziness, carelessness or disturbing other workers.

The child respondents reported that the criticisms and scolding mostly came from their parents – and that this was probably because the parents were likely to have been scolded by a foreman or an assistant whenever a child worker made a mistake in planting tobacco in the contracted plot.

The phenomena of child workers in the eyes of the child respondents, family members and plantation and community organizations officials

a. Children's responses to observing child workers in the tobacco plantation

In general, the child respondents expressed the view that children working in tobacco production are merely performing their duty to their parents. These children, who have been conditioned to think this way from an early age, see that helping their parents in the plantations is a way for their parents to complete their tasks speedily and therefore earn more money for the family. Children working in the plantations do not receive a direct wage but work for their parents who need their contribution so that they can earn more for the family. As Table 44 shows, many child respondents (78) thought this was acceptable while several others (22) disagreed and objected to having to work.

Many children (43) characterized the work as “tiring”, and yet a small majority of them regarded it as helping their parents (59 children). Others found working acceptable because it avoided boredom at home (3 children) or provided them with pocket money (4 children).

In addition to it being tiring, two respondents who objected to having to work believed they were too young and that it is better for children to attend school. Other complaints noted by only a few child respondents referred to exposure to a hazardous

situation and many “challenges”, though there were no further details on what that meant.

Table 44: Child respondents’ opinions on working in the tobacco plantation

Opinion	Frequency	%
No response	2	2
Enjoyable	27	1
Children become lazy to go to school	1	1
Good	2	2
Helps parents	12	10
Tiring	43	1
Too young to work	1	1
No problem	11	1
Gain more experience	1	1
Total	100	100

When asked, 68 of the child respondents expressed a desire to quit their plantation jobs, either not to work or to find other employment (Table 45).

Table 45: Opinion of child respondents regarding continuing to work in the plantation

	Frequency	%
Want to continue in tobacco production	32	32
Want to move away from plantation work	68	68
Total	100	100

Table 46 lists the employment ambitions of the child respondents who wanted to leave plantation work when they become adults. All the child respondents who said they wanted to join the police were boys and their response may be linked to their seeing cadet policemen training in their area because there is a police academy close by. Other children had ambitions to be teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, mechanics

and even the president of the country. A few of the respondents hoped to be general labourers, including continuing to work in the plantation.

Table 46: Child respondents’ job ambitions

Ambition	Frequency	%
Armed forces – army or police	26	26
Athlete	6	6
Worker (company, factory, garden, etc.)	8	8
Doctor	14	14
Teacher	15	15
Others	21	21
No answer	10	10
Total	100	100

b. Opinions of the child respondents’ parents on working children

Some parents admitted they felt pity when they see their children working. But because of the heavy workload and their low economic status they have little choice but to involve their children. Most of the adult respondents regarded children working as normal, especially as it helps the family’s economy. From all the data compiled, it seems seven parents (of the 100 family member respondents) did not know that their child worked.

Most parents had different views on child workers. However, they could be divided into two groups; those parents who supported children working and those parents who did not agree with children working.

The majority of family member respondents (79) agreed with and supported the concept of children working. As Table 47 indicates, they see it as good because it helps the parents, that it is “normal” and causes no problems. Those who did not like the idea of children working cited “tiring” as the main reason.

Table 47: Opinions of child respondents' family member on working children

	Frequency	%
Agree		
By working, children learn to be independent	2	2
As long as it does not disturb their schooling	1	1
Good, but it is preferred that children younger than 14 do not work	1	1
Good, they help their parents	48	48
No problem, it is normal	18	18
Work helps children gain experience	2	2
Good, as it is better than playing and being idle	6	6
It is alright as long as they get paid	1	1
Total A	79	79
Disagree		
Disagree because children should play	1	1
Disagree because it is tiring	16	5
Children must go to school	1	1
Children should not work even for economic reasons	3	1
Total B	21	21
Total A + B	100	100

The results listed in Table 47 indicate that parents have a powerful role in motivating their children to work. According to previous research (Tjandraningsih and Popon, 2002) and in the context of the plantation management system (contract work), parents have accepted a situation that fosters the use of child workers. A vestige of the Dutch colonial times, the contract system survives because of this acceptance, even though it is flawed and essentially exploitative because it does not provide a contracted worker with a decent wage. To earn the low wage it does offer requires the use of essentially non-compensated labour from wives and children. Contractually, only one worker is employed but the system in practice seems to employ “families”, not individual workers.

Oddly, however, the “child work is good” responses from many parents seem to contradict responses to a question regarding whether parents want their children to work or not (Table 48). As many as 67 family member respondents said they did not want children working in the plantation. Thus the issue for most parents seems to be not a matter of whether their children work or not, but *where* the children work. Following up in the group discussion, the parents explained that they did not want their children to work in the plantation – not because of the dangers or hazards – but because they did not believe it provided any job security, that the company may not always be operational.

Based on information received from workers, union members and the plantation manager at PTPN–II, the use of child workers is critical. In the past four years the company often has been late in paying employees’ wages, which remain below the minimum wage standard. The tobacco workers’ union demanded in 2004 that the company pay minimum wages. It agreed but could manage it only after some assets were sold. In addition, other benefits are below standard. For example, the pension rate for employees of 30 years’ or more service is only 30,000 rupiah per month. The company used to provide all employees a parcel of nine basic food commodities but that practice stopped a few years ago. Also a few years ago, the company, for quality reasons, placed a restriction of only 12 leaves that can be taken from each plant. This restriction automatically has reduced the planters’ income because the number of leaves they pick is directly related to the amount of money they earn. It is the combination of these conditions that apparently prompts the view among parents that the plantation work no longer holds any bright prospects for young people.

Table 48: Number of parents who want their children to stop working in the tobacco plantation

	Frequency	%
Yes	67	67
No	33	31
Total	100	100

When family members of the child respondents were asked how they could curb children from working in the tobacco plantation, some replied that children must go to school (Table 49). However, this solution is not so easy to apply in every family, particularly those whose household economy is weak. As the focus group discussion highlighted, sideline jobs, such as animal husbandry, helped strengthen family economies. But the family members responding to the questionnaire expressed hope that the plantation company would raise workers' wages and restore the perks and bonuses, such as the provision of basic commodities and health, transport and child allowances, that were stopped in the 1960s. Parents also expressed interest in opportunities for school drop-outs to pursue vocational training in trades, such as dressmaking for girls and mechanics for boys. They also commented that school should be free.

Table 49: Suggested efforts to curb the incidence of child workers

	Frequency	%
No response	29	29
The plantation company should forbid children from working	2	1
Children go to school	32	1
Children stay at home	3	1
Pay other adults to do the job in place of children	8	1
Work in other places	18	1
Advise and inform children of other choices	1	1
Return to school or look for work elsewhere	1	1
Raise wages of adults	5	1
Save money to pay for a child's education	1	1
Total	100	100

c. Perspective of a plantation union official on the incidence of child workers at the PTPN-II: Mr. Buyung, SP-Bun (union) Chairman

“SP-BUN recognizes that the collective contract system implemented in the tobacco plantations causes the workers' wives and children to work. But the issues of wages

and job description are agreed upon by a workers' representative, along with a representative of the plantation company. It is not a one-sided company decision. The problem of workers involving their children lies with the worker himself and in his ability to complete his target. If he feels unable to do the work alone, then he may bring along his family members or employ other people to assist him. This is the worker's personal decision. The company does not ask the worker to involve his family in the work, but if he cannot complete the work alone then the company does not forbid him to involve his children – this is entirely his right and his decision. On one hand, SP-BUN sees that involving his family benefits the worker; instead of taking seven hours to complete a task, it can be completed in a much quicker time. SP-BUN does not see that child workers in the plantation are in any way a problem because they benefit the workers.

“Most children working in the tobacco plantations only perform light tasks to assist the worker. They do not work for long periods and only in relation to their ability. If the work disturbs a child's schooling, then this is a matter for the children and the parents to sort out. Usually the children only work after school hours. If the parents are able to complete the job themselves, then there is no need to involve their children. Even if the children are involved, they are not burdened with a specific work load.

“Regarding the issue of work safety and hazards for child workers in the plantation, up to now there has never been a case of endangering a child. Usually the children are not involved in hazardous work such as spraying. Spraying is performed aurally and not by the workers. When spraying takes place, the children are not in the fields, and if they do happen to be there then they soon shift out of the area. The company takes full responsibility for any accidents that occur while the workers are working in the plantation. This also extends to include the workers' children. So there really is no problem.”

d. Perspective of a community organization official on the incidence child workers: Nelson Sinaga, staff member of LSM Handal Mahardika NGO

According to Mr. Sinaga, the use of child workers was first influenced by the work system, especially in the tobacco plantations where the collective contract system is applied. This system does not differ much from the one that the Dutch implemented, whereby a number of land plots were handed over to workers to cultivate. In practice, the land plot, which becomes the full responsibility of a single worker, cannot possibly be worked alone. Thus a worker involves his wife and children to help cultivate the tobacco – if he recruits another person then this automatically means that his earnings are reduced to pay those wages. Women and children related to the workers do not receive a wage from the company. The work system implemented in the plantation can be likened to a form of slavery.

This kind of contracted work system, explains Mr. Sinaga, is the plantation company's strategy to increase their income because they only pay one person to do the work of many, thereby economizing on production costs. From another perspective, allowing the children to be involved, the company is indirectly training a skilled work force for the future without having to pay any training costs. The child workers over a period of time become skilled labourers in the plantation and thus are prepared to take over from their parents when the time comes.

Mr. Sinaga points out that in light of these conditions, it is essential that the child workers, especially those in the tobacco plantation, receive legal advice. The advice should stress the faults of the contract work system and advocate its abolishment, as it only encourages the use of child workers in plantations. Apart from that, plantation owners should be obliged to pay wages to anyone working their fields, including children, and to provide health services or allowance, housing allowance, etc. for the workers. It is hoped that plantation owners can raise the workers' wages and reduce the size of a single worker's contracted plot of land. In this way, workers will not feel compelled to involve their family in plantation work and the children can go to school. Another issue that needs urgent attention, according to Mr. Sinaga, is the education of children in the plantation. An alternative education programme would be beneficial for the plantation's children.

Mr. Sinago noted that previous efforts to address the problem of child workers involved promoting the fact that plantations are categorized as one of the worst forms of labour, in line with ILO Convention No. 182. The inclusion of plantation work as a worst form of labour has been accommodated by the Local Government Regulation of North Sumatra (Perda) No. 5/2004, which was recently approved by the governor of North Sumatra.

Other efforts in progress but not yet successful involve applying pressure to the local government to increase its budget for education, especially in the plantations, and to pressure the plantation owners to improve the human manpower skills of the plantation community. Mr. Sinago commented that the plantation should set aside a portion of its profits to provide facilities for education in the plantation areas. The local government officers of Deli Serdang currently are negotiating to increase the number of teachers, and hopefully in 2004 and 2005, some of them will be located in the plantations.

e. Perspective of a plantation foreman on the incidence of child workers:

Mr. Suparman

Mr. Suparman noted that parents have been bringing their children to the plantation for as long as the plantation existed. Nowadays, he said, the issue is that parents take their children to work under the contract work system. Workers are given plots of land to cultivate, starting from preparing the land, planting the seeds through to picking the leaves. Because the work requires a lot of manpower, the worker brings his family to help him. If he had to hire another person he would then have to pay him out of his own pocket, which would automatically reduce his income. Thus, Mr. Suparman added, children work in the tobacco plantations to help their parents fulfil their contract and because the family cannot afford to pay another labourer's wage.

Mr. Suparman says the company never asks the workers to involve their wives and children. However, it does insist that the plot of land the workers have been assigned to yields on time. He did also note that the company does not actively forbid children from working in the plantation. Sometimes a field assistant will admonish a foreman for allowing children to help their parents, though that was described as never being harsh. Mr. Suparman also noted that the company always reminds the recruiter not to

employ any under-aged children and usually casual workers are recruited from outside the plantation. There are no set criteria for recruiting casual labourers, except that they must not be younger than the legal age.

Mr. Suparman believes that children should not have to work and that they should go to school. But because of their poor economic status, he said the children must work to help their parents. “We find many children whose schooling is disturbed and even some who have dropped out of school altogether. It is not a certainty that these children dropped out because of their work in the plantation, but it is a likely cause for some of them. Many children are lazy to go to school because their work in the plantations makes them tired and sleepy in the classroom. This is because a lot of the work in the tobacco plantation is performed early in the morning, around 5 a.m. Many children also are of the opinion that it is better for them to work than to go to school because even without going to school they can still earn money by working in the plantation.

“If we look at the problem of exposing children to the dangers of working in the plantation, there are a few risks for them. For example, they could be bitten by poisonous centipedes and snakes. This could happen because they are not equipped with safety boots when they go out into the plantation. However, this rarely ever happens. Another risk is they could get hurt using the hoes and axes, but then again, this rarely happens because most of the work using sharp tools is executed by the adult men. The child workers’ tasks are light, usually something like moving and planting seedlings into the holes and topping the plants.

“It is no use expecting the parents to overcome the problem of child workers. The least they can do is to reduce a child’s working hours. This would allow the child to study and enjoy some playtime. Apart from that, it is hoped that the children who have dropped out of school get a chance to work so that they may be able to earn a wage and help their families economically.”

f. An educator's perspective: Ibu Silvanawaty, headmistress of a primary school in Kelambir Lima Kebun

Mrs. Silvanawaty believes that it is a parent's duty to earn a living and school-aged children should not be working, as is often the case among families of the tobacco plantations. Her view is that children are obliged to study, and working in the tobacco plantation disturbs this process. She says that during the tobacco season there are children, admittedly only a few, who do not attend school because they are working in the plantation. And she adds that many children are yawning in class because they have been working since early morning before leaving for school. Some children are too exhausted to do their homework.

"In my opinion, children should not work. Let them study to become clever," added Mrs. Silvanawaty. "If they are clever, the parents are also happy. The education of children who are working is disturbed. Even though parents need their child's help, the child is still below the legal age for working."

Mrs. Silvanawaty's strong disapproval also relates to the dangers the children may encounter at work. She knows that the children are exposed to poisonous snakes because in 2004 an adult worker almost died after being bitten by one.

As a result of the poor school attendance among a few students during the tobacco season, her school has taken steps to call the parents to admonish them. She will tell parents, "School is important. Earning a living is your duty." By taking this approach, the number of children absent from school in the planting season has dropped considerably over the past three years. However, the children still help their parents when they go home from school.

Nowadays, the most common reason for children to not attend school or to drop out is because the family cannot afford the school fees and books. When a child is asked to pay the fees and book money, he or she will not return to school the next day or may even drop out altogether. However, this is not confined to the children of plantation workers.

According to the headmistress, the Government, NGOs, the plantation and other parties are doing nothing to abolish or at least reduce the numbers of child workers in the tobacco plantations. Nor is there any effort to improve the education level of children. The only activity conducted so far has been a health campaign in October 2004 to vaccinate children.

Regarding academic performance, there is no marked difference between the children of the plantation workers and those of other workers. However, Mrs. Silvanawaty noted that the highest academic achievements come from children whose parents are not plantation workers. The plantation workers' children typically graduate at the junior high school level with the excuse that their parents are unable to afford any further education – although some children have no desire to study and can not be persuaded by their parents to continue. According to Mrs. Silvanawaty, the economic status of parents living outside the plantation is better than the plantation workers. She said a factory worker earns more than a plantation worker, whose basic salary is only around 300,000 rupiah a month. Most of the workers outside the plantation are either builders or factory workers.

Mrs. Silvanawaty noted that the low average level of education of the plantation workers' children is not entirely due to the family's poor economy but it is also related to the parents' and children's attitude and awareness of the importance of education. "In this plantation, parent's awareness of the benefits of education is low. For instance, when it is time to pay the administration and school fees on report day, some students drop out – but not all of them are plantation workers' children."

**g. Perspective of a government-appointed village leader: Mr. Saptaji,
Secretary of Sampali village**

According to Mr. Saptaji, the tobacco plantations implement a collective contract system that was first applied by the Dutch. One worker is given the task of planting tobacco. This task is far too heavy for one person, so he asks his wife and children to assist him. Mr. Saptaji explained that the worker believes "this work is family work."

"I do not agree that children should work in the tobacco plantations because it violates their human rights," said Mr. Saptaji, speaking both personally and as a government

official. He believes that young children who work can be greatly affected. Some of the effects he mentioned are that the children become reluctant to study; they develop an “instant mentality” in the sense that they become adults before their time: “premature adults”. Another disturbing effect on the children is the emergence of a criminal tendency to experiment with gambling and drugs. This occurs because from a young age these children have worked and been given money from their parents, sometimes in excess. Because it is easy for them to earn money, they don’t feel any regret for extravagantly frittering it away, Mr. Saptaji commented.

“Children should live in their own environment; at this age, they should be fully involved in the world of education. They should also enjoy their childhood, playing and studying,” said Mr. Saptaji. He believes they should not be working in plantations because the work is too heavy for them. However, he noted that because the parents’ burden to cultivate the tobacco is so great, the family has to work together. One possible solution may be for parents to establish a sideline job, such as a small stall or cafe.

Although local government officials do not agree with the use of child workers in the tobacco plantation, the village administration does not have a programme specifically related to children working in the plantations. The village head is waiting for a programme from the subdistrict. Currently, the only programmes running are known as Kejar Paket A and Paket B, which provide free education to children living in the plantation district who have dropped out of school. Facilities and teachers are provided by the government and handled regionally by the Ministry of Education and at the local level by the village government administration office. In the first stage (2005/2006), Sampali village targeted 25 drop-out children. The government village office for the plantation districts also provides education and training programmes, including a bridal make-up course and dressmaking courses. However, these programmes are not offered to the tobacco workers’ children but to the women of the plantations in Sampali district.

h. Perspective of a religious figure: Mr. Sugito of Pondok Rawa village

According to Mr. Sugito, talking about tobacco plantations nowadays is very complex and that the party most talked about is the “small worker”. There are many rights that the worker is entitled to but does not receive, such as allowances and bonuses, and even wages are often paid late, he said. The absence and delays of benefits/wages occur because the officers at the plantation do not follow the rules as they should. Violations of a worker’s rights are everywhere, he said.

“The decline of this company started when the bosses were not transparent about the minimum standard wage. For example, cleaning ditches should be 12 HK, but workers only receive 8 HK, so 4 HK is stolen per person.” [HK refers to *Harian Kerja*, or the work rate per day, and 1 HK= 13,650 rupiah.] The result is that workers do not work well and therefore the quality of their work does not reach the standards set by the board of directors.

This also happens with the child workers, he added. They are affected by the work system applied in the plantation. The plantation implements a collective contract system whereby one worker is required to cultivate 19,000 tobacco plants during the tobacco planting season. This creates a huge burden and cannot be accomplished by a single worker. “If one batch is 2,000–3,000 plants, before the first batch is finished we have to clear the land [*ngepiak*] for the second batch. But before the second batch is ready, the first batch needs to be gathered, but we haven’t yet *ngepiak* for the final batch; one person is not enough.” These conditions force the worker to involve his wife and children. Without involving the family, he has no choice but to pay another labourer to help him. This means that he spends money, which automatically reduces his own income. This is why children, even those younger than the legal age, work in the plantations.

This attitude also relates to the violations that take place in the plantation. “If the procedures are correctly followed, then the workers are comfortable. For example, the Dutch ruled that a contracted worker was entitled to an assistant whose wages were paid by the company. But because of games, games, games, well, the assistant disappeared. Despite the fact that the assistant in no way causes losses to the

contracted worker. Another example is digging wells, which should be counted as 7 HK but now is counted as 3 HK.”

Situations like this trap the workers and they carry a great burden at tobacco season time, said Mr. Sugito.

According to Mr. Sugito, children do not have to work hard. For example, while watering the plants, the children love to play in it – although it is polluted. This results in their skin becoming itchy and they develop skin diseases. “If the Dutch system is still followed, then the women do not have to water the plants. But nowadays, out of love for their husbands, the wives do the watering and are followed by their children.” Working in the tobacco plantation also affects the children’s daily life in many ways; for instance, children become unmotivated to study or read the Quran because they are always tired. “Children here cause concern, because they are working so early in the morning and by afternoon they are too tired to learn the Quran or study anything.” Other affects observed are the poor levels of education of the child workers as a result of their low motivation and parental lack of education. More concerning is the fact that many of the children can no longer be controlled by their parents. They mix freely and there have been cases of pregnancy out of wedlock, noted Mr. Sugito.

Sometimes the parents are uncomfortable in admonishing them because they feel that the child has worked hard in the plantations. “Because her parents were so tired, they couldn’t supervise her properly and consequently the child did as she wanted.” Some children have no interest in education. “They say, ‘What’s the point of schooling? Working in the plantations makes money’”. Mr. Sugito believes that, in general, children view school as a burden. “If the children were asked to study, they would be scared and cry.”

Mr. Sugito also does not approve of children working in the tobacco plantation because of the hazards. Although children may only sustain minor injuries, the accumulated affect could result in a physical handicap, he said. “For example, if the thorny spinach comes into contact with the skin, it can leave a long-time scar, like a growth. Even if it is surgically removed, it grows back. Other risks are being bitten by poisonous centipedes or snakes. Working in the tobacco plantations, ya, they get injured by the axes or when covering the roots they get pricked by thorns. They may

even get bitten by poisonous centipedes. I have experienced that, ya. If we treat the wounds then we have to pay money... In fact, all of these risks need not occur because we hope that children can enjoy their childhood, they can play and, most importantly, they can study. Children must study and go to school so that their lives will be better than their parents.

“To overcome these problems, we and all plantation workers hope that the plantation directors will enforce the regulations that forbid children to work. If these procedures are applied, then workers will feel better. Aside from this, the plantation should raise the workers’ wages.”

Another temporary solution, explained Mr. Sugito, is to create sideline work in animal husbandry. Even though the plantation forbids caring for animals in the area, more and more workers are beginning to take this up and “have become clever at playing cat and mouse” with the plantation supervisors. But the sideline work is necessary, said Mr. Sugito, because workers have been oppressed by the plantation directors and this is the only way they can earn more money? “In fact, if the plantation owners did not violate the rules, then the status of the workers would be fine. Because they feel cheated by the company, they don’t work as well as they could, they are not punctual, they care for animals in the plantations even though it is forbidden. All of this contributes to the poor quality of their work. However hard a job is, if it is performed with joy it becomes light. There is the saying that however light a job is, if it is performed with bad feelings because the worker feels he has been ‘cheated’, it will become a heavy job.”

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The information taken from the interviews with child workers in tobacco plantations indicates that there are indeed risks but few injuries and that most children go to school. The greatest health concern is their unprotected exposure to pesticides and fertilizers. Of equal concern is the nature of remuneration for the fathers of the child respondents. The contract system enforced by the plantation officials seems to be unfair in the amount of wages paid or in the size of plot a worker is assigned, which ultimately “requires” him to rely on unpaid assistance from his wife and children to reach the contracted target of production.

Except for a few children hired by other families as part-time workers, children (and most wives) working in the tobacco plantations are regarded as helping their parents and have no position or status within the plantation company’s structure. Thus they receive no wages, though many parents may pay them pocket money.

The contract system was practised in the Dutch colonial time, though children often received some menial wage back then. Children’s involvements in tobacco plantations are encouraged by parents and very few children were found to have offered themselves for work. The majority of children interviewed (78) stated that they worked to help their parents and even thought it was their obligation.

The 100 child workers interviewed for this study were aged 5–18 years old (only one person younger than 10 and eight were 18). Most of them were still in school (80). Those who left school did so for economic reasons or laziness. The research informants said that the parents’ low awareness on the significance of education for their children is another contributing factor.

Almost all child respondents came from the villages surrounding the plantation company; 75 are from families whose father is a worker of the company. The child

respondents admitted that they have directly and indirectly been involved in the tobacco field activities since their early childhood. The ages at which the highest number of child respondents first started working were 10–11 (36). The mothers of child labourers typically are housewives, but when the planting season arrives, they will automatically help their husband to achieve his contract targets or to be a part-time worker.

The livelihood of child respondents' family (generally with three to four children) can be categorized as a low to medium economic level. Their fathers' income ranged from 251,000 rupiah to 1.2 million rupiah, with most families earning around 500,000 rupiah, which is typically not enough to cover their basic needs. Most parents had a primary school education only: 78 mothers, with 53 finishing primary school and 66 fathers, with 45 finishing). However, more fathers (29) went on to higher education than mothers (14).

Most of the four key figures interviewed considered that in terms of children, working in tobacco plantations offered a high risk for accidents – though there were few reports of actual injuries. The majority of parents or other family members (56) and most child workers (57) interviewed said they were aware of the risks or possible accidents. However, the heavy work load of the father and the economic reality of their family made involvement necessary. A child's help in cultivating the tobacco helps the family's livelihood and thus has become standard practice. Most parents with a child worker (79) approved of the situation, especially for the purpose of helping the family and because they claimed to not have experienced or heard about any problems. This indicates that parents play a very important role in pushing their children's involvement to work and thus perpetuate the unfair contract system legacy of the Dutch colonial system.

The child respondents described safety risks as:

- Injuries from hoe, thorns, wood flakes, harrows, sharp splinters of earth or needles
- Animal bites (centipedes, snakes and leeches)
- Falling in the shed
- Falling into wells.

Around 45 per cent of the child respondents said they were aware that the work at the tobacco plantations endangered their health and that the work may expose them to poisoning, colds, sneezing, high fever, headaches and lung problems. Some 33 of the child respondents have had a work-related accident and 24 said that they have been treated badly, such as being scolded, shouted at by their parents, supervisors or a field assistant.

Most children said that the work in the fields has never been in conflict with their learning process or studies at school. However, some of the research informants believed that the work in the plantations has negative impacts on children: They tend to feel too tired to study after helping their parents and child workers receive money from their parents and use it for illegal things (gambling and drugs). Those research informants believed that children have the right to learn and play and should not be working because of the dangers.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are submitted as ways to resolve the child worker issues in plantations:

- a. Advocacy to promote changes in companies' policies regarding the contract system. There is a need for a system that is more just and appropriate for the workers' capacity. The contract system must be abolished because it opens opportunity for child involvement. Advocacy needs to be directed toward policy changes within the company to increase the workers' wage and reduce the size of area for them to work. This way the workers can keep their children in school and will not find any need to involve them in the plantation tasks.
- b. Increased income of families with a child worker can be attained through other income-generating activities. Research findings show that most parents have sideline jobs though they do not significantly impact the overall economic status of the family, partly due to poor management. There is a big potential in the following activities: growing vegetables and keeping goats and cows in "resting" areas (the

tobacco field, after harvesting season and before the next planting season). Advocacy is needed to lobby the company for permission to use the “resting” area for vegetable growing and animal husbandry.

- c. An effort to build parents’ awareness on the importance of education for their children’s future is essential. This requires changing the perceived value of children as economic assets. Or use advocacy efforts to play up that children are indeed economic assets whose worth and income-earning potential can only be realized with an education and that it actually increases with the more education they get. This action should go hand-in-hand with efforts to encourage local government to increase the education budget, especially for plantation areas. Plantation companies should be required to give attention to local human resource development. For instance, they should set aside some of their profit to provide education facilities. Village authorities need to be more active in keeping district authorities informed on the nature of child workers in their area. Their assessment can be the basis for the district authority to actively develop policies and not just wait for a government programme. Stakeholders’ awareness on eliminating the use of child workers in tobacco plantations is needed to move forward with child worker advocacy in which these people can be actively involved.

- d. Local Regulation No. 5/2004 on Prevention and Tackling the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which was recently ratified by the North Sumatra governor, refers to the issue of children’s work in plantations and can be used as a legal foundation in tackling problems associated with child workers in plantations, especially in North Sumatra.

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