

Education or Work: The Perceptions of Petra Locals about Tourism Child Labor

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Abstract

With the significant economic benefits of tourism to locals of Petra; many children are dropping out of school to work in this sector, which is perceived as being advantageous for the different languages and working skills these children learn, as well as gaining money. This research aims at exploring the perceptions of local community in Petra about child labor using a qualitative approach; structured interviews were done with forty six individuals working at the site, random purposeful sampling was used to ensure the credibility even with the small sample size. The results revealed that respondents were aware of both positive and negative consequences of child labor; this is not the case though for related legislative and educational issues. Recommendations were given to enhance the awareness of children and local communities about the consequences of child labor, also actions that can be taken by formal authorities to mitigate its negative impacts.

Keywords: Child labor; children's rights; perceptions of locals; Bedul tribe; Petra/Jordan

1. Introduction

Child labor is a major human rights' issue; 168 million children worldwide are still in child labor, 85 million of them are in hazardous work (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2013). This is due to different factors (mostly existing in developing countries) as poverty, unavailability of adequate and affordable schooling, high fertility (large family size), sickness or death of a parent or working sibling, high demand of labor by plantations, farms, factories, businesses and households; that is in addition to calamities as political/social unrests, natural disasters, migrations, and economic depressions (ILO, 2007).

Tourism is one of the sectors that highly attract children to work in; this is due to the quick and easy income, mixing with foreign people, emulating foreign cultures, leaving schools, and practicing unfamiliar behaviors like smoking (Magablih & Naamneh, 2010). Developing countries generally welcome tourists by providing them with cheap accommodation, transport and artifacts; this is achievable largely at the expense of exploited child labor (Black, 1995). About 10% to 15% of the entire labor force of tourism sector around the world is under 18 years (Cerda, 2011). Child labor in tourism is a serious issue since it exposes the child to different forms of exploitation (physical and/or sexual). Such jobs are usually of long working hours, unstable employment, low pay and poor working conditions (Ministry of Labor [MOL], 2006). Moreover, these children are more subjected to child trafficking (ILO, 2009). Children get enrolled in jobs such as (with examples of countries): making carpets (Tibet, Morocco and Egypt), making and selling clothes (Thailand, India, Mexico and Guatemala), making artifacts (Indonesia), serving as maids in hotels (India, Indonesia and Morocco), street peddling (Tunisia, Vietnam and Peru), producing food served in tourism facilities (Morocco and Tibet), transportation (India), mining coal to be used as electricity in large hotels (Colombia), recycling waste from hotels (as in Philippines), dancing and entertainment (India, Morocco, Indonesia, Cuba, Honduras and Panama), and prostitution (India, Thailand and Cuba) (Bliss, 2006).

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For Jordan, tourism child labor is an obvious problem at the site of Petra (as well as other sites to a lesser extent), where children (mostly from Bedouin tribe): sell souvenirs (as trinkets, ornaments, postcards, and colorful sandstone pieces extracted from the site's cliffs), leading tourists by camels and donkeys, serving in small refreshments' stands and rarely in filling bottles with colorful sand. Despite the great economic and social benefits gained by locals from tourism through job opportunities and cultural exchange, some negative impacts emerged; this is seen in the negative change of social values, where the young Bedouin try to imitate Westerners in dress and manners, also the commercialization of Bedouin culture (Shoup, 1985). It is estimated that around 350 children in Petra dropped out of school to work in tourism, this number rises up to 600 in high season (Bait Alanbat, 2015).

2. Tourism in Petra and Child Labour

Aside from previously mentioned jobs at the site, other job opportunities are provided by different tourism facilities; these include 40 hotels, 35 travel agencies, 37 bazaars, 6 restaurants, 5 rent a car offices and 1 youth hostel (Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities [MOTA], 2016). The total population of local tribes around Petra is 27,822 individuals who live in the villages of: Wadi Musa, al-Taiba, Rajif, Um Sihon, Dlagha, and Baidah (Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority [PDTRA], 2015). Of this total population, 1,813 individuals are working in tourism services: 1,164 in hotels, 171 in travel agencies, 48 in tourist restaurants, 15 in car renting offices, 73 in souvenirs shops, and 343 as horse guides (MOTA, 2016) (only horse guides and vendors work inside the site, while other tourism facilities are distributed in the area surrounding the site or in nearby villages, usually 80-100 of these working individuals are daily present at the site). No child labor is taking place in these facilities since regulations prohibit the employment of juveniles whose ages are less than eighteen years regardless of the type of work or its condition.

Most of the children working at Petra Site are from the villages of Wadi Musa, Um Sihon, and Baidah. Their ages are between 7 and 17, they come from big families with a mean size of 9.6 individuals, and their parents are usually of a low educational level. These children work for 6 or less days weekly (8 hours daily on average) with being exposed to sun for long hours, exhaustion, also to injuries caused by climbing rocks and animals used for navigating tourists within the site. Besides the loss of good education, they adapt negative behaviors as smoking, using obscene words, and tendency to make harmful jokes, they also gather in big numbers and compete each other's by offering different prices at front of tourists (Figure 1), this exposes them to negative reactions from other kids and tourists (Hilalat, 2003). Besides perceiving the exploitation of tourists and cheating as being acceptable, they are also exposed to underage alcohol drinking. Such labor is trans-generational; there is at least one older family member who has worked in tourism, they usually facilitate and encourage entering the industry. Most of the children are males, reflecting the social perception of males as a source of income for most of families in Jordan (Magabli & Naamneh, 2010). In most cases, the children are either illiterate or in elementary school stage, their monthly income could reach 301 Jordanian Dinars (JD) or more (1 JD = 1.4 US \$), this amount is high compared to money earned by children working in other sectors in Jordan (average of 86 JD monthly) (al-Khatib, 2012). Petra's children positively perceive their work, they assume that it: makes them respected by others, gives them and their families a good source of income, is a good substitute for education, and is an opportunity to get married in the future to a foreign female tourist to make their immigration easier (Hilalat, 2003).



Figure 1. Two children trying to sell postcards, after not being successful in selling them to these tourists, they started looking for others

The very few referred-to studies in this text focused on the attributes and behaviors of the working children (Hilalat, 2003; Magablih & Naamneh, 2010; Bait Alanbat, 2015); to the knowledge of the authors, no consideration was given previously in research to the perception of tourism employers and local community on such labor, these two groups usually encourage or force children to get enrolled in such work, there is a need to understand if their contribution to child labor problem is due to giving priority to economic benefits of such labor, or to the unawareness about its negative mental and physical impacts, or to the unfamiliarity to educational and labor legislations of the country, which is the aim of this study.

3. Methodology & Sample

Structured (20-30 minutes) interviews were done with 46 locals who work at the site of Petra. These interviews included open ended questions for their observations on: the type of children's work at the site, the size of their families, the number of individuals in their families who are working at the site, the type of their work, if the children they know go regularly to their schools, the number of weekly working days and hours at the site, the mobility means to reach the site, the advantages and the disadvantages of their work, if such work gives them useful skills to work in tourism in the future, if these children are exposed to any problems or threats while being at the site, their knowledge about child rights and if they are aware of compulsory education in Jordan. The answers of respondents were filled in forms especially prepared for this purpose. Other information as gender, marital status, age, education, and occupation were also recorded (see Table 1). This qualitative research is based on purposeful random sampling, which increases the credibility even with the small sample; the sampling was continued until having achieved informational redundancy or saturation (the point at which no new information is emerging from the data).

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents in the sample (Sample size = 46)

Characteristics		Frequency
Type of Work	Owners of souvenirs shops	9
	Escorting animal rides/horse guides	12
	Retailers in souvenir shops	15
	Supervisors from the management of the site	2
	Custodians	2
	Conversation staff	1
Total of valid answers		41
Gender	Male	45
	Female	1
Total of valid answers		46
Age	18 or less	5
	19-29	24
	30-40	14
	41 or more	2
Total of valid answers		45
Education	Elementary Education	25
	High School	16
	Community College	1
	Bachelor degree	3
Total of valid answers		45
Number of members of the family	5 or less	13
	6-10	22
	More than 10	9
Total of valid answers		44
Number of family members working at the site	None	21
	1-3	19
	4 and more	5
Total of valid answers		45

4. Results

Most of the respondents have their parents, sons, brothers, cousins or neighbors working with them at the site (an evidence of the trans-generational aspect of this kind of labor); six of them mentioned that some of these relatives did not reach the age of sixteen, they work as retailers and escorts of animal rides; one of them said: I have six brothers who take tourists on camels; all of them are under sixteen.

Twenty-three of the respondents in the sample said that child labor is widely seen at the site; some claimed knowing 40-70 children who are involved in tourism jobs. Nine of the respondents mentioned that some of these children are even working as beggars. When the locals in the sample were asked if these children go regularly to their schools; fourteen of them said that they go to school and spend the rest of the day at the site, while seventeen of them confirmed that these children rarely do.

For the perceptions of locals about the number of days and hours spent by working children at the site; nineteen of the interviewed individuals said that they observe these children during the whole week, while thirteen of them observe these children in the weekends (where most of the children spend not less than 7-9 hours when being at the site). Twenty-six of the respondents in the sample said that these children reach the site by riding animals and on foot (it takes 25 minutes on donkeys and about 40 minutes on feet to get from Um Sihon to Petra), five of the respondents stated that these children reach the site by riding cars or vehicles of their relatives.

Thirty of the respondents agreed that there are two benefits for the work of Petra children; having a source of income to support themselves and their families, also learning foreign languages. Fifteen of the respondents though said that they could not see any advantage in the work of these children. For the negative impacts of child labor in Petra, it was surprisingly obvious that these locals were aware of the problems caused by this phenomenon; such as: dismissing schools, adopting negative habits as smoking, family disruption, interrupting tour groups, destroying the site, imitating the tourists by wearing earrings, and having their hair longer and braided, competing souvenirs' shops, giving a bad image of the site since some of them are beggars. One of the respondents said: These children are giving a negative image, they are bothering tourists, many of the tour guides are complaining since they keep distracting them while giving commentary.

A local said: Children are dismissing their schools; they leave their families since they become financially independent, their parents gradually lose their authority on them, and they might learn bad things that contradict with our morals and values.

Another said: This problem is giving a bad and a wrong impression about Jordanians, it will make tourists think that we do not care about our children education or raising them well.

Most of the respondents in sample agreed that the work of children would provide them with some necessary skills to have better tourism jobs in the future (foreign languages and communication skills). Only few agreed that their school education must have the same priority as work. The respondents were asked if these children face any problems while being at the site, twenty-six of them observed problems as: fighting each others to sell their goods, having negative reactions from tourists when these children keep chasing them (Figure 1), also from police and supervisors when they try to stop them from bothering tourists and tour guides. None of the respondents mentioned anything about health issues or possible injuries caused by climbing or by animals used. When asking the respondents if they know anything about children rights or labor legislations; only eight individuals answered positively. They mentioned rights as education, being protected from violence, and health care. Others said that they have no idea or did not answer. The respondents were also asked about their general perception of tourism child labor; few of them said that the problem is in dismissing school by these children, they confirmed that such decision is made by the parents, not the children. Other respondents refused to answer this question.

The last question was if they know anything about compulsory education in Jordan; only ten respondents were aware that it is from the first to tenth grade (age of 6 to 16 years); while others did not know or gave wrong answers.

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

The results of the interviews indicate that most of the locals are aware of conditions and consequences of child labour, but not of relevant issues as labour legislations, children rights, compulsory education and international conventions of child labour. The Jordanian Labor Legislation (No.8/1996) defined the Juvenile in article 2 as "Every person, male or female, who reached the age of seven and not yet eighteen", article 73 prohibited the employment of juvenile whose age is less than sixteen years regardless of the type of work or its condition; education is free for all primary and secondary public school students, and compulsory for all Jordanian children through the age of fifteen (Abu Nejme & Qaddomi, 2009). Such legislations should be more enforced by some particular actions; the government (represented by Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities) as well as other local authorities (e.g. Petra Region Authority [PRA] & Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority [PDTRA]) all should contribute more to both formal and non-formal educational programs targeting parents of working children and owners of tourism business. These programs should focus on revealing the vital need for education and on the negative consequences of dismissing schools, also to increase awareness about legislations and conventions concerning child labour (these programs can be in the form of focus group discussions, exhibitions, seminars, workshops, conventions, and outdoor activities), such procedure must be supported by distributing informative material to local families and owners of different businesses.

Increasing the awareness about the negative consequences of child labour should be part of courses taught at schools during the compulsory education stage, as well as running special programs to re-educate children who dismissed their schools for long periods; these programs must focus on making these children aware of their rights and disadvantages of their labor. Such programs should direct students to vocational schools or specialized community colleges, where training is provided for careers in hospitality and tour guiding. Even in the case where the work of children is a necessity for the family, such work should be monitored by formal authorities for both its number of hours and conditions.

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