

**MORTGAGING CHILDREN'S LIVES THROUGH WORK:
A CASE STUDY OF CHILD ENTERTAINERS IN THE
TOURISM INDUSTRY AT THE KENYAN NORTH COAST.**

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ABSTRACT

Kenya has a long Coast line with beautiful sandy beaches that are very attractive mostly to tourists. In a bid to attract and retain more people who come, different types of entertainment activities mainly directed to tourists are carried out. This has seen children increasingly involved in acrobatics, singing, dancing and other activities like massaging and sexual deeds considered as part of entertainment to the tourists.

The study examines the factors that drive children to become entertainers, their role as child entertainers in the tourism industry and how this practice affects formal schooling of these children in the Kenyan North coast. This was based on frequent observations that child labour is rampant in the tourism industry along the Kenyan coast. The general objective of the study was to unearth the underlying factors of child entertainment and its impact on formal education. It therefore highlights various factors that lead to child entertainment such as poverty, parental negligence, peer pressure and belief of talent among child entertainers and the community at large. Theories of child labour such as human capital accumulation and human capabilities theory were explored to establish the relationship between the above factors and child entertainment in the tourism industry.

The research design was correlational so as to enable the researcher to study the interrelations between variables, describe characteristics of the child entertainers and make specific conclusions based on the themes and sub themes of the study. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through face to face interviews and focus group discussions at Mtwapa, one of the towns in Kilifi

district along the Kenyan North coast which is a well known hub of tourism activities. The target population was child entertainers from which a sample of forty (40) which constituted 50% of the target population was drawn. Questionnaires and focus group discussion guides were employed to collect data. The questions asked in these data collection tools were based on the objectives of the study and therefore gave a guideline on the various themes and sub-themes such as child entertainers' bio-data, household characteristics, working conditions, causes and effects of child entertainment. The data collected was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The findings of the study established that poverty is a major factor that makes children become entertainers though it may not be the exclusive factor causing the involvement of children in entertainment activities in the tourism industry. In addition the study found out that child entertainment affects formal schooling by encouraging absenteeism and poor grades as it takes a lot of time which children would otherwise use for studying. The child entertainers work under poor conditions which include sexual harassment, low pay, and other environmental hazards which affect the children negatively in their present and future lives.

Based on the study findings the following recommendations have been made: Awareness campaigns should be undertaken to sensitize the community about the dangers of child entertainment/labour. For effectiveness and sustainability of these campaigns, all stakeholders i.e. the police, government officials, parents, children, NGO officials and religious leaders should fully participate. The study further suggests that relevant

stakeholders should make school interesting and attractive to children so as to retain children in school as most of them are primary school going children. This can be done by starting projects which benefit even children from urban poor families such as school feeding programmes as Mtwapa schools currently are not in the school feeding programme agenda. This study is of great importance to policy makers and human rights advocates as it will enable them to decide on possible interventions which can be taken to support child entertainers or reduce child entertainment in the tourism industry at the Kenyan North Coast.



Figure 1: Big papas group sharpening their acrobatic skills. This is the group with the oldest members, that is, from age 15-17 years. Notice the lack of safety measures hence these children are prone to physical injuries.