

MEKELLE UNIVERSITY



COLLEGE OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

DEPARTMENT OF CIVICS AND ETHICAL STUDIES

THE IMPACTS OF CHILD LABOR ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT:
WITH A FOCUS ON TRADITIONAL MINING IN YECHILA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVICS AND ETHICAL STUDIES IN
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis, titled "The Impact of Child Labour in Mining on Educational Achievement: The Case of Yechila Woreda," is my original work. It has not been presented for a degree in any other university and all sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

This research was conducted under the supervision of Leake Aregawi, Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, Mekelle University.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of child labor in the mining sector on the educational achievement in Yechila Woreda, Tigray. The research explores the nature of this labor, its underlying socio-economic drivers, and its specific effects on children's education. Adopting a qualitative, phenomenological research design, the study drew data from a purposively selected sample in three mining-prevalent kebeles: Jijike, Gira, and Emba Rfael. Data was collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 25 child laborers, three focus group discussions (FGDs) with 18 child laborers, and key informant interviews (KIIs) with 17 government officials, teachers, and community leaders. The findings reveal that child labor in Yechila's mines is a brutal and hazardous reality, predominantly affecting boys aged 14 and younger. The work is characterized by extreme physical hardship, constant danger, psychological trauma, and economic exploitation. The study concludes that this crisis is a direct consequence of the war, which acted as a catalyst, transforming chronic poverty into an acute survival crisis by systematically destroying traditional livelihoods, devastating family structures, and causing the total collapse of the educational system. The educational impact is catastrophic: a staggering 97.7% of the child miners in the study had either never attended school or had dropped out completely. Mining systematically dismantles education by making school attendance physically impossible, causing severe cognitive impairment that renders learning ineffective for those who try to attend, and psychologically eroding the children's aspirations for an educated future. The study recommends an urgent and integrated response focused on post-conflict recovery. Key recommendations include: immediate humanitarian interventions such as food aid and cash transfers to alleviate household poverty; programs to restore and diversify livelihoods; a trauma-informed rehabilitation of the educational system through the creation of flexible learning centers and the reconstruction of schools; and the establishment of community-based child protection committees to rebuild social safety nets. This research highlights the creation of a lost generation and underscores the need for immediate, comprehensive action to restore children's fundamental right to education and hope.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASM: Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

IDI: In-Depth Interview

ILO: International Labor Organization

KII: Key Informant Interview

LSAO: Labor and Social Affairs Office

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NPPO: Non-Participatory Personal Observation

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

UN-CRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

WCAO: Women and Children Affairs Office

WFCL: Worst Forms of Child Labour

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Child labor is a pervasive global issue, fundamentally rooted in socio-economic challenges that affect the most vulnerable populations (Save the Children, 2003). International conventions provide a clear definition of a child; both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC, 1989) and ILO Convention No. 182 define a child as any person under the age of 18. Despite these conventions and national laws designed to protect children from economic exploitation, the practice continues to be a significant part of economies worldwide (Assefa, 2000).

The scale of the problem remains immense. A 2021 report from the International Labor Organization (ILO) revealed that 160 million children were in working conditions, a significant number of whom are in hazardous situations. This deprives children of fundamental rights to education, healthcare, and safe development. Even with the universal ratification of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, the issue persists as a major social and economic challenge (ILO, 2010). Child labor describes an exploitative situation involving work at too early an age, full time, requiring exertion, under bad conditions, with inadequate pay, too much responsibility, denying access to education, undermining dignity and self-esteem, and detrimental to full social, and psychological development (Boyden, 1998). It is growing phenomenon especially in developing countries. However, it has been very difficult to get the exact figure of children engaged in labour in many countries partly due to the hidden nature of the problem (Kebebew, 1998). ILO defines all those under 18 as children. According to it, labour is defined as economically active, when a person works on a regular basis for which he/she is remunerated or that results in output destined for market. But in the Ethiopian context where labour market is missing, this definition is too restrictive.

The persistence of child labor in Africa is a chronic obstacle to achieving universal education, a key component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Target 8.7). Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, faces a severe child labor crisis that directly threatens human capital development (Mahendra, 2013). The practice forces children to drop out of school or renders the learning process ineffective, as they miss crucial lessons and fall behind academically (Ravinder, 2009; Udry, 2003). The drivers of this crisis are multifaceted. While household poverty is a primary

cause, forcing families to engage their children to make ends meet, other factors like limited access to quality schooling also play a significant role. When education is inaccessible or perceived as low quality, parents may see child work as a more practical path for their children's future (ILO, 2006).

Like other developing African countries, child labour is severe in Ethiopia; where children below the working age are exploited for the sake of earning minimum wage for their long hours working. Ethiopia is one of the developing countries with high incidence of child labor; the work participation rate of children is one of the highest in the world. Children start participating in work activities at a very young age and spend longer hours on various housekeeping and/or other productive activities. This indicates the extent of child labor in the country at the cost of schooling (Beliyou, 2003). A national survey indicated that 52 percent of children aged 5-17 were economically active, with a staggering 85 percent involved in economic or housekeeping activities that prevented or impeded their school attendance (ILO, 2010).

For many families, pushing children to work is a matter of survival, a necessity driven by the deep-seated poverty where the need for labor assistance and the desire to supplement household income are the most important drivers (Matt, 2014; ILO, 2010). This has a profound impact on human capital, as a significant portion of children are working to support their families instead of attending school (Abebe, 2014). The mining industry, in particular, is noted as one of the most dangerous sectors for child laborers in the country (Pine, 2009, as cited in Gebremedhin, 2013).

In Tigray region, this has become a repetitive culture, embedded in communities struggling with economic immaturity and low parental education levels particularly due to the devastating war (UNICEF, 2016). This study is concerned with the child labour, particularly in hazardous sectors like mining.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

There is a fundamental conflict between the established right to education and the economic realities that drive child labor. The international community, through frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Ethiopian government, through its own policies, have declared that education should be accessible to all children to ensure the full development of their potential (FDRE, 2007; UNICEF, 2007). This contradictory becomes acute when considering the reality of child labor exploitation, which is not merely work but any activity that

is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by depriving their opportunity to attend school (ILO, 2013). The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has made efforts to improve educational access as a cornerstone of human resource development (FDRE, 2017), yet this exploitative reality persists.

However, the situation on the ground presents a stark contrast to these goals. Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of child labor in the world, with an estimated 27% of children aged 5-14 involved in work that severely impairs their ability to attend school and learn effectively (UNICEF, 2014; Bisrat, 2014). This issue is deeply rooted in poverty, creating a devastating cycle where child labor is both a result of current poverty and a cause of continued poverty for the children who sacrifice their education in order to work (Udry, 2003). This issue is particularly acute in rural areas, where household poverty often compels parents to utilize their children's labor for subsistence activities at the expense of schooling (PINE, 2009).

This practice has devastating consequences for human capital formation. Child labor not only forces children to drop out of school but also makes the learning process ineffective for those who try to combine work with education, ultimately perpetuating poverty into the next generation (Ravalizon and Wodon, 1999). This national crisis is reflected at the local level in regions like Tigray, where education officials face significant challenges with student access, academic quality, and high dropout rates (UNICEF, 2016). Data from the Yechila Woreda Education Office unambiguously illustrates this problem. In the 2015 E.C. academic year, of the 50,159 primary school students enrolled, 2,139 did not complete the year and 1,312 dropped out entirely. The situation did not improve the following year (2023), when 8,974 children who were expected to register did not enroll in school, and a further 1,416 of those who did register failed to complete the year. The woreda's own report identifies the primary reasons for this failure as involvement in "different work activities particularly day labour, herding, mining and unknown reasons" (WWEOR, 2023). This is a clear example of this phenomenon, where high school dropout rates are explicitly linked to children's involvement in various forms of labor.

While several studies in Ethiopia have confirmed the negative relationship between child labor and education (Abebe, 2014; Solomon, 2006), a significant research gap remains. Existing literature, while valuable, often focuses on major urban centers like Addis Ababa and Mekelle or examines child labor in a general sense within rural households (Getinet and Beliyou, 2007;

Dawit, 2010). More recent studies on child labor and exploitation (Gebremedhin, 2013; Temesgen, 2015; Yodit, 2021) have continued this trend of examining general educational impacts without delving into the unique context of specific hazardous sectors. Critically, these studies have not adequately investigated the holistic socio-economic, psychological, and health-related impacts of child labor within the uniquely dangerous artisanal mining sector.

Therefore, the central problem is a critical lack of specific, in-depth research that holistically examines the impact of child labor within the artisanal mining sector of Yechila Woreda. While general causes like poverty are acknowledged, the unique dynamics, working conditions, and the precise educational, health, and psychological consequences related to child involvement in mining in this specific locality have been systematically overlooked. This study is therefore necessary to fill this critical gap by providing targeted, phenomenological evidence on a particularly hazardous form of child labor and its comprehensive impact on the lives and futures of children in Yechila Woreda.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objectives

The main goal of this study is to investigate the impact of children's involvement in mining activities on their educational achievement in Yechila Woreda.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- ✓ To examine the nature of child labor in the mining sector within Yechila Woreda.
- ✓ To assess the effects of engagement in mining labor on the educational performance of children in study area.
- ✓ To identify the key socio-economic factors that contributes to child labor in the mining work in their early age in the study area.

1.4. Research Questions

Based on the above general and specific objectives, the following researcher questions was prepared:

- What are the prevalent forms and real conditions of child labor in the mining sector of Yechila Woreda?

- How does involvement in mining activities affect key educational performance of children in the study area?
- What are the primary socio-economic drivers that lead children to involve in mining in the Woreda?

1.5. Scope/Delimitation of the Study

To ensure the research is focused and manageable, this study is clearly delimited in terms of its geographical, thematic, population, and methodological scope. The geographical focus of this research is Yechila Woreda within the Tigray region. To allow for a more detailed and in-depth investigation, the research concentrated on three specific kebeles where mining activities are prevalent: Jijike, Gira, and Emba Rfael. While child labor is a widespread issue across Tigray, conducting a region-wide study is not feasible due to logistical and time constraints. Therefore, Yechila Woreda was purposively selected as the study area.

Thematically, this study is specifically concerned with assessing the impact of child labor in the mining sector on educational achievement. It acknowledges that child labor has broader implications for health, psychological well-being, and social development. However, these important aspects fall outside the scope of this thesis in order to maintain a clear focus and ensure the study's feasibility within the available timeframe. The study's participants are delimited to children within the 6-17 age groups who are involved in, or directly affected their educational performance by child labor in the mining activities within the three selected kebeles.

This study is methodologically delimited to a qualitative phenomenology research approach. The primary data collection instruments were Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KII) and In-depth Interviews (IDI). Consequently, the selection of participants was guided by non-probability sampling techniques, specifically purposive and snowball sampling, to effectively identify individuals and groups who can provide rich, relevant information for exploring the impact of child labour mining on educational achievements in the study area.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The researcher acknowledges that this study is subject to certain limitations that must be considered when interpreting its findings.

First, the study is thematically focused on the impact of mining labor on educational achievement. While it will touch upon the socio-economic drivers of this work, it will not conduct an exhaustive investigation into all related consequences. A comprehensive analysis of the long-term psychological trauma, detailed physiological health impacts, or the moral development of the children involved would require separate, specialized studies and are thus beyond the scope of this research.

Second, the findings of this study are context-specific. As a qualitative case study concentrated on the mining sector in three selected kebeles of Yechila Woreda, the conclusions may not be directly generalizable to the entire woreda or to children engaged in other forms of labor, such as agriculture or domestic service, whose experiences may differ significantly.

Third, the reliance on a qualitative methodology, while providing depth and rich data, means the findings are not statistically representative. The sample is purposefully selected to gain insight, not to make statistical claims about the entire population of child laborers in the region.

Finally, the sensitive and often illegal nature of child labor presents a potential limitation. Despite assurances of confidentiality, participants may have been reluctant to share complete and honest information due to fear, shame, or social desirability bias. While the researcher made every effort to build trust and rapport, this potential for underreporting is an inherent challenge in this field of study

1.7. Significance of the Study

The primary merit of this research is for the requirements in partial fulfillments for the Master of Arts degree in Civics and Ethical Studies.

Further, although child labor is greatly prevailing in Ethiopia, there is little full-fledged empirical evidence about the scope, nature, and as it hinders children to attend school, to score good grade and forced to drop out from school. Child labour is a serious social problem for both ones country's future human resource formulation and the development, health, physical, emotional and educational performance of children. Thus, the study would give insights to fill the gaps in the existing literature concerning the issue.

The issue of child labor has got due emphasize in all over the world today. In Ethiopia, child labor also becomes a burning issue because it contravenes human rights of children including

education achievements. The study tried to assess the impacts of child labor in education achievement in Yechila woreda in relation to the challenges that hinder children their academic accessibility. The study also tried to extract intensively all possible motives that obliged children to engage at work and dropout their education. Moreover, the recommendation of the research may help other researchers and professionals to undertake a research on the issue and identify the responsible bodies and their tasks specifically.

1.8. Operational Definition of Terms

Child is a person below the age of 18 years who by virtue of age is disadvantaged and needs protection by law.

Child labor is as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development (ILO (2013)).

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge and aiming to promote personal development, strengthen respect for human rights and freedoms include enabling every person to be active participant and responsible.

Economic activities are actions that people involve in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services at all levels in all society.

Human Rights are inviolable and inalienable rights. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

1.9. Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five distinct chapters.

Chapter One provides the introduction to the study. It outlines the background of the research, presents the statement of the problem, and details the general and specific objectives, along with the corresponding research questions. This chapter also discusses the significance, scope, and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two is dedicated to the review of related literature. It defines key terms and concepts, discusses the theoretical frameworks that underpin the research, and presents a comprehensive review of empirical studies relevant to child labor and its impact on education.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology employed for the study. This section details the research design and approach, the procedures used for selecting the study area and participants, the data collection instruments, and the methods used for data analysis. It also addresses the ethical considerations that were maintained throughout the research process and the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter Four presents the core findings of the research. This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis, and detailed discussion of the data collected from interviews and focus group discussions.

Finally, **Chapter Five** concludes the thesis. It summarizes the key findings, draws conclusions based on the research objectives, and puts forward actionable recommendations based on the study's results.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study. It begins by defining the core concepts of the child and distinguishing between child work and the hazardous child labor that is the focus of this thesis, with a specific emphasis on the context of mining. The chapter then outlines the key theoretical frameworks including Human Capital Theory and the Child-Centered Perspective that guided the analysis of the relationship between child labor and educational outcomes. Subsequently, it examines the global and Ethiopian context of child labor, its documented impact on education, and the legal and policy frameworks designed to combat it. Finally, the chapter synthesizes the literature to identify the specific research gap that this study was designed to address.

2.2. Conceptualizing the Child and Child Labor

The definition of a child is consistently established in international law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), and the ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) all define a child as any human being below the age of 18. This legal consensus underscores the understanding that individuals in this age group require special care and protection to ensure their healthy and holistic development.

It is critical to distinguish between child work and child labor. The former, often referred to as child work, may involve children helping their parents with light household responsibilities or family business activities that are not harmful and do not interfere with their schooling (Dachi and Garrett, 2003). In contrast, child labor refers to work that is exploitative and detrimental to a child's development. The ILO (2013) defines it as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

This study is specifically concerned with one of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL), as defined by ILO Convention 182. This includes work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children. Artisanal and small-scale mining is universally recognized as one of the most hazardous sectors and falls

directly into this category. It exposes children to immediate physical dangers, long-term health problems, and severe disruption to their education, making it a critical area for investigation.

To be more specific, the ILO defines hazardous work as activities that jeopardize the health, safety, or morals of young person's, and explicitly lists mining, quarrying or enduring long hours as prime examples (as cited in Edmonds, 2008). This is distinct from permissible light work, which is defined as work that is not harmful to health and, crucially, does not prejudice school attendance (ILO Convention No. 138, Article 7). Therefore, any work done by children in the mines of Yechila, by its very nature, falls into the category of hazardous child labor and is in direct conflict with the child's right to education.

2.3. Theoretical Frame work of Child Labor

Around the world, several tens of millions of people work in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). Traditional ASM involves using primitive tools such as picks, shovels, gold pans, etc. to mine accessible metals, precious stones, colored stones, and industrial commodities such as sand, coal and more (Schwartz et al., 2020). Worldwide, such mining has gone on for centuries or even millennia. Compared to modern industrial mining, ASM is inefficient and labor intensive. A single miner can only process a small quantity of material, limiting the capacity for resource recovery. However, because thousands or tens of thousands of people work a single deposit, the production of gold, diamonds or cobalt can comprise a significant fraction of a country's total production. Artisanal mining is usually a legal activity. As the scale and intensity of mining increases through mechanization (pressure jets, backhoes, and dredges), and use of teams of workers in small-scale mining operations, there is an increasing risk that this kind of mining is illegal. Illegal behaviors might include breaking of environmental laws, working in restricted areas, displacement, and smuggling large quantities of valuable commodities, and funding of criminal enterprises. Other criminality can include extortion by intimidation or violence to gain mining areas and to expand claims, or problems such as unfair market practices, illegal taxation, or government corruption (Sovacool, 2019).

The general perception is that ASM comes with many health risks. These are understood in general terms (Stewart, 2020; WHO, 2016) but not in specific detail. This lack of visibility is part of the data problem around ASM, exemplified in part by recycling of old information (World Bank, 2019). Studies of health are especially difficult because mining sites are often

located in poorly accessible sites, chronically underservice in terms of health facilities, and because of security problems related to control by criminal and violent actors (Schwartz *et al.*, 2020).

The list of potential health problems in ASM is long and comprehensive, and includes occupational, environmental, and human/social determinants (Stewart, 2020). Occupational determinants include exposure to hazardous chemicals, dust, the grueling nature of the work, and lack of safety training and equipment (Stewart, 2020; WHO, 2016). There are risks of accidents from improperly constructed excavations and mines, and of death from suffocation, asphyxiation, or drowning. Environmental determinants also create risks, such as mosquito-borne illnesses related to unintended ponding of water in placer mining (Yelpaala & Ali, 2005) or diarrheal diseases due to poor sanitation (WHO, 2016). What is surprising is how common diseases are in terms of health emergencies at artisanal sites (Schwartz *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, problems can end up magnified by combination of remote locations and an absence of medical services, which typically preclude timely treatments (Peters *et al.*, 2008).

Human/social determinants of health are poorly studied as well. These include lifestyle risks, leading to problems like sexually transmitted infections, comorbidities around silicosis, HIV, and tuberculosis, and risks around poverty (Stewart, 2020; WHO, 2016). The category also includes topics around children working and violence. The dominant narrative is that of developed countries, namely that the participation of children in the mining effort is a worst form of child labor and an activity worth eliminating (ILO, 2005). The arguments are commonly based upon health risks related to the incomplete physiological development of children and susceptibility to accidents given their lack of experience and judgment (ILO, 2011). More pragmatic arguments support a case for children working given that the hard work they do is comparable to traditional work, for example agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (Hilson, 2010). Such paying work, while at odds with Euro-American sensibilities, may be preferable to much worse alternatives (Powell, 2014a).

Public discourse on child labor uses the phrase to refer to child time in activities that are somehow harmful to the child. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) emphasizes the importance of protecting children from: "work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or

physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development" (1989, Article 32). Child labor exploitation that hinders their education is harmful to the child's future welfare and therefore, the question of whether work is harmful encompasses the question of whether work interferes with education. It is important to be precise about what harmful means. The possible interpretation of harmful is that the work entails an opportunity cost in terms of other activities that might be beneficial for the child or the child's development. To the extent that there's non-satiation in the returns to time in child development oriented activities like school, study, and play, there will always be an opportunity cost to time spent outside of these activities. All work is harmful under this interpretation (Edmonds, 2008).

2.4. Prevalence of Child Labor

These are only estimates because the existing statistics are largely inadequate and unreliable for various reasons (ILO, 1995; ILO, 1996a). During surveys employers are not willing to expose that they have hired children because it is formally illegal everywhere. Common problems in census and the mobile nature of their activity, for example, street workers, are also factors that contribute to incomplete statistics. Recent surveys done by the ILO have led to estimates that about 250 million out of the 2 billion children of the world are child laborers (Bequele & Boyden, 1988; ILO, 1996a; ILO, 1996c; ILO, 2002; IPEC 1994). The most recent survey showed that there are 167 million child laborers between the ages of 5-14 years (ILO, 2006). The world's estimated 90% child laborers are assumed to be in Africa, Asia and Latin America (ILO, 1996b).

Although it has become a history in the developed countries, North America and Europe still have some child laborers. This reflects that child labor is not exclusively linked with poverty (Cooper & Rothstein, 1995; UNICEF, 1996). A survey conducted by the ILO in selected urban and rural areas of Ghana, India, Indonesia and Senegal showed that every fourth child is engaged in an economic activity (ILO, 1996a). Although majority of child laborers are in Asia, the incidence and prevalence is said to be higher in Africa.

A similar recent census conducted in Ethiopia indicated that more than half of the children were involved in a productive activity; this is higher than the previous estimate of 41% (Admassie, 2000; Central Statistical Authority, 2001). According to Tesfay (2003), who analyzed an 11-year panel data from ILO, UN and World Bank for 75 developing countries, there has been no

significant change in the Ethiopian child labor force. Assuming an annual economic growth of 2.74%, there would not be a noticeable steady decline of child labor for another 90 years (Tesfay, 2003).

2.4.1. Hazardous Forms of Child Labor

Hazardous forms of child labor is defined by the (ILO/IPEC, 2002) based on the conventions NOs.138 and 182 ,as any activity or occupation which, by its nature or type has, or leads to, adverse effects on the child's safety, health (physical or mental), and moral development. Hazards could also derive from excessive workload, physical conditions of work, and/or work intensity in terms of the duration or hours of work even where the activity or occupation is known to be non-hazardous or safe.

The ILO Convention No. 182, article 4, the determination of what constitutes hazardous child labor is shall be determined by national laws or regulations or by the competent authority, made nationally in a government-led process Taking account of national classifications of hazardous child work, international labor organization in the recommendation No.190 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor laid down the following criteria about Hazardous work:

- i. Work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse:
- ii. Work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces.
- iii. Work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads.
- iv. Work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health.
- v. Work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer.

2.4.2. Unconditional Worst Forms of Child Labor

Pursuant to Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182, the unconditional worst forms of child Labor include:

- a. All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of Children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment, of children for use in armed conflict.
- b. The use, procuring or offering a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances.
- c. The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties.
- d. Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

2.5. Determinants of Child Labor

2.5.1 Poverty and Child Labor

Child labor is basically considered to be the consequence of persistent poverty. The poor households use child labor to transfer income from the future to the present (Mazhar, 2008).

Poverty is deep-rooted and natural calamities, man-made disasters (war and civil strife), illiteracy, powerlessness and the lack of viable options further exacerbate the deprivations confronting poor parents who feel compelled to put a child to work. Poverty is not, however, the only factor in child labors and cannot justify all types of employment and servitude (ILO, 2004).

According to (Rena, 2009) hundreds of thousands of children, due to the poverty, are forced to work as laborers before they ever enter school and many must leave school in the middle of a course of study to become laborer. Once children are snatched from school and put to work, they are cut off from their communities. The problem of child labor is closely related with poverty and underdevelopment. It is often pointed out that poverty is the main cause for child labor in general. As in all the developing countries including India, china, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Papua new Guinea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, Malawi, Sudan, and Chad, the prevalence of poverty is high and therefore, child labor in these developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, does exist to a higher extent.

2.5.2. Economic Shocks

In (Brown, Deardorff, and Stern, 2002) economic shocks set as one of the determinants of child labor. It can affect household decision-making through a number of channels. On the one hand, a

decline in economic activity that reduces current employment opportunities relative to the future may lower the opportunity cost of an education relative to its future payoff. Thus, families may decide to increase educational attainment. However, for families that are credit constrained or lack access to employment insurance, the impact may be the opposite. Children are withdrawn from school and put to work in order to span the economic downturn. Indeed, there is considerable evidence derived from many countries shows that economic shocks are a significant contributor to the rate of child labor. (Priyambada, A., Suryahadi, A. and Sumarto, S., 2003) also argued that when household income drops (Rena, 2009).

2.5.3. Family Characteristics and Child Labor

In most societies, the family is both the child's immediate emotional influence and its introduction to living in society, and then its first avenue of contact with the outside world. Most Children start work by helping their families, before they go out to work for others. They do so partly because of poverty but also, in many societies, because cultural values and expectations view this as a natural and "right" way to introduce a child to the roles and responsibilities linked to being a member of a family and to growing up. This occurs throughout the world in millions of agricultural families. If the family owns land or works on the land of others, the child will start by spending the day in the fields alongside its parent, doing very easy jobs at first and then progressively more demanding ones (ILO, Child Labor, 2004).

2.5.3.1. Household Size

According to (Rickey, 2009) Size of the household is important in determining children's labor activities and educational opportunities. High fertility rate is positively correlated to the incidence of child labor. It is no wonder that large families often also have serious child labor problem as children make good economic sense in the context of economic hardships. Other scholars have also shown the economic advantages of poor parents having many children in South Asian countries. In the context of poverty and basic survival needs, children are considered as preferred commodity by their parents compared with other goods because of their economic utility. High fertility increases the chances that children from large families have to do work to support household income.

In a study by (Akarro, R., and Mtweve, N., 2011) household size was examined as an important in determining children's labor activities and educational opportunities. It has been argued that

high fertility rate is positively correlated with the incidence of child labor, high fertility increase the chance that children from the large families to do work to support house hold income. In the context of poverty and basic survival needs, children are considered as preferred commodity by their parents compared with other goods because of their economic utility.

2.5.3.2. Parental Educational Level and Attitude

Parental education plays a persistent and significant role in lowering the incidence of child labor, above and beyond the impact on family income. Educated parents have a greater appreciation for the value of an education, whereas uneducated parents may simply want to believe that the human-capital decisions made by their own parents were correct (Brown, Deardorff & Stern, 2002). (Rickey, 2009), found that in rural India the children of mothers with less than primary education are significantly to be in full-time work as compared with full time study, and having a mother who completed middle school reduced the probability of combining work and school as compared with full-time study, while the father's education has no significant effect. Ravalizon & Wodon (1999) also found negative effects of the mother's and father's education level on child labor in Bangladesh. In Vietnam (Rosati & Rossie, 2003) that years of father's education have no effect on child labor but mother's education has a negative impacts on the probability of work (full-time and part-time) as well as on the probability of being neither in work nor school.

2.5.3.3. Family Assets

In the study (Brown, Deardorff & Stern, 2002) household assets are important in the absence of access to formal capital markets. Households that want to borrow against the future may be able to tap internal assets. The presence of the father in the household, the presence of an older sibling in the household (particularly a brother), the capacity of the mother to engage in market work, or property associated with a family enterprise can all be thought of as assets that can be drawn upon even if the family has no access to formal capital markets. For this reason, the presence of such household assets might be expected to lower child labor. Consequently, gender, birth order, the presence of older siblings, the mother's work opportunities, and the presence of a family enterprise are also important determinants of whether a child works, the type of work undertaken, the number of hours worked, and whether part-time schooling is an option.

2.5.4. School Related Factors

As (Siddiki, 2012) schooling problems also contribute to child labor. Many times children seek employment simply because there is no access to schools (distance, no school at all). When there is access, the low quality of the education often makes attendance a waste of time for the students. Schools in many developing areas suffer from problems such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and apathetic teachers. As a result, parents may find no use in sending their children to school when they could be home learning a skill (for example, agriculture) and supplementing the family income. The education attainment is low because of limited opportunities of schooling, such as inaccessibility of schools, inability of parents to afford schooling costs, irrelevance of school curriculum to real needs, and restrictions on girls' mobility in most parts of the developing countries (Mazhar, 2008).

Several studies point to the importance of school quality as an important determinant of schooling and work. However, school quality is virtually never measured directly. At best, some studies have evidence on the integrity of the school structure, whether or not the school is open most days of the week, and other services available to the general community such as running water or electricity (Brown, Deardorff & Stern, 2002). (Mazhar, 2008) Education system in developing countries is featured with weak infrastructure and ineffective to attract and hold the children. A lot of studies about education and work trade off in developing countries highlight the problem of poor schooling or the irrelevance to future market requirements.

Parents are discouraged to send their children to school when direct costs of books, uniforms, writing materials, transportation to school, need to be covered by families. Immediate and direct costs of schooling also lower the likelihood of the child ever entering school (Akarro, & Mtweve, 2011).

2.5.5. Socio-Cultural Factor

In the traditional societies children are being considered as social assets expected to assist and work with their parents in their household chores. Children have been put in apprenticeships to learn the trade of their ancestors and to keep family tradition alive. And, these traditional and cultural values occasionally form the conditions for child labor (Mazhar, 2008). The cultural aspect for household's head gives the adults authority over children. Parents may demand labor

from any employing firms and individual employers and send their children to work because they are considered as innocent, docile and less troublesome (Akarro & Mtweve, 2011).

2.5.6. Demand-Side Factors in Child Labor

There is a market demand for child labor since children are generally docile, obedient, hired at cheaper rates than adults, and dispensed with easily if labor demands fluctuate. They incur no long-term investment on the part of industry in terms of insurance or social security and low paid child labor may be perceived as a significant element for industries wishing to maintain a competitive edge in national and international markets. Children are unprotected, powerless and silent as far as their rights as workers are concerned (ILO & IPEC, 2002).

Children are often preferred in industries that are labor intensive, function with rudimentary technology and require laborious/repetitive work for long hours. Although largely disproved, the myth persists that in certain industries, such as carpet making or flower-picking, children are needed because of the dexterity of their small fingers. Child labor persists because the laws that do exist are not strictly enforced and because social and political commitment is weak (Ibid).

Earlier introduced, the supply side of the market in child labor consists of all the forces leading households to offer their children's labor, while the demand side refers to the factors that induce employers to engage children as workers. Together, the supply and demand sides influence the amount of child labor. The more pressure is exerted on the supply side (i.e. the more households offer child labor), the less productive and remunerated this labor will tend to be. The more pressure is exerted on the demand side (i.e. the more uses for child labor are generated), the more productive and remunerated it will be. Both sorts of pressures will tend to increase the overall amount of this labor being performed (ILO, 2004).

The bulk of the research has focused on the supply side. The entire question of poverty, for example, is concerned with the role that lack of income plays in convincing households to put their children to work. Similarly, the analysis of family structure is intended to explain which children from which households will be instructed or encouraged to work. Nevertheless, demand side factors should not be slighted. The manner in which a society's production is organized can have a profound effect on the prospects of its child. An initial question to be asked is whether the tasks assigned to children are similar to those performed by adults, or whether there are few opportunities to substitute the labor of one for the other. This is of great importance, since only if

the potential for substitutability is high, it will be relatively easy to phase out child labor. Moreover, in such situations the presence of children in the workplace can have a depressing effect on the demand for adults - even their own parents. Thus, the costs of child labor are greater and the barriers to eliminating it are less. But if children perform specialized tasks, there may be less impact on adult labor markets, and the withdrawal of child labor may result in economic disruption (ILO, 2004).

2.6. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by a combination of complementary theoretical frameworks that help explain the dynamics of child labor in mining and its effect on education.

2.7.1. Human Capital Theory

First articulated by economists like Becker, Human Capital Theory posits that education is an investment in an individual's skills, knowledge, and health. This investment increases a person's productivity and future earning potential (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). From this perspective, child labor represents a profound loss of potential human capital. When a child in Yechila Woreda is sent to work in a mine instead of attending school, they are deprived of the opportunity to accumulate the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for higher-wage employment in the future. This not only traps the individual in a cycle of low-wage labor but also deprives the community and nation of a skilled future workforce.

2.6.2. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

While Human Capital Theory explains the consequence, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework helps explain the cause. This framework analyzes how households make decisions based on their available assets (human, financial, social, physical, and natural) within a context of vulnerability (poverty, shocks, trends). For impoverished families in Yechila Woreda, sending a child to work in a mining is not a preferred choice, but a desperate coping strategy in response to extreme vulnerability and lack of other viable assets. The immediate though it is minimal, financial income from the child's labor is prioritized over the long-term, comprehensive uncertain benefits of education.

2.6.3. The Labor Market Perspective

This perspective, also relevant to the study, argues that the presence of child labor negatively impacts the entire community's economy. Because children can be hired for cheaper rates, their participation in the labor force increases the overall supply of labor, which can depress adult wages and increase adult unemployment (Bachman, 2000). In the context of Yechila, the availability of a cheap child workforce in the mining sector may make it harder for adults to secure work at a fair wage, deepening the very poverty that drives child labor in the first place.

2.6.4. The Child-Centered Perspective

This approach, which is central to this study, puts the child's rights, well-being, and voice at the forefront (Boyden, 1998; Myres, 2001). It argues against viewing children merely as economic units or passive victims. Instead, it frames the issue around the denial of their fundamental rights to safe development and education. This study adopts a child-centered lens by seeking to understand the lived experiences of children in Yechila and how mining labor directly infringes upon their right to achieve their full potential through education.

2.7. The Impact of Child Labor in Mining on Educational Achievement

The negative relationship between child labor and education is well-documented, but the context of artisanal mining exacerbates these impacts in several specific and severe ways.

2.7.1. Health, Safety, and the Impossibility of Learning

The physical and psychological toll of artisanal mining directly impacts a child's ability to learn. As outlined by Stewart (2020) and WHO (2016), occupational determinants include exposure to dust, grueling physical work, and the risk of accidents from improperly constructed excavations. Children involved in such labor suffer from extreme exhaustion that makes classroom concentration impossible. Furthermore, as a study from Brazil showed, child laborers often exhibit higher rates of behavioral disorders (Benvegnu et al., 2005). A review by Woodhead (2004) points to significant psychosocial problems and internalizing disorders (anxiety, emotional symptoms) which are profound, though often invisible, barriers to effective learning.

2.7.2. The Poverty-Driven Nature of Artisanal Mining

The literature strongly counters any notion that families enter mining to "get rich quick." Instead, scholars like Hilson & Garforth (2012) have developed a "poverty narrative," showing that the

decline in agriculture across sub-Saharan Africa has forced families to diversify into non-farm activities like Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) as a survival strategy. Sovacool (2019) describes how ASM for minerals in the DRC provided a "lifeline for poor refugees and migrants." This context is crucial for understanding the situation in Yechila, as it frames the choice to send a child to the mines not as a disregard for education, but as a desperate measure driven by intense poverty and a lack of viable alternatives.

2.7.3. Social Disruption in Mining Communities

ASM boom towns are often associated with significant social challenges that indirectly impact a child's education. Studies from mining communities describe issues of alienation, competition for jobs, despondency, and the exacerbating factors of alcohol and drug abuse (GSS, 2013). This unstable and often violent social environment is not conducive to a child's development or the consistent pursuit of education. Risk factors for violence against children, such as poverty and large population turnovers in a community, are often magnified in isolated mining towns (Krug et al., 2002).

2.8. Education and Child Labor

Sakurai (2006) argued that poverty is the root of child labor and its relation to education is considered two sides of the same coin, meaning that poor children are more likely to work in 16 developing nations and, if children have to work, then they are less likely to attend primary or secondary school, resulting in a pervasive cycle of poverty that spans generations.

(Ravalizon & Wodon (2000) argued that although schooling typically raises future earnings, yet one finds relatively low enrolments amongst currently poor families, the explanation behind that is the low current incomes of their families keeps poor children out of school and thus perpetuates their poverty into the next generation. However (Cockburn, 2000) stated that it is generally assumed that as household wealth increases children will be progressively withdrawn from labor activities in favor of schooling. According to the study done by (Bunnak, 2007) on child workers in brick making factories in Cambodia, showed that many child workers (55.6% of brick factories children) were not in school. About three fourth of them quitted school more than two years due to several reasons such as economic hardship , family debt , lack of money for school supplies and personal reasons (poor grade, negative attitudes towards schooling, wanting

to be with friends who work, wanting money for personal needs, or wanting to stay away from parents who frequently quarreled).

Even when work activities do not prevent a child from participating in school, they may shrink study time or tire the child to the point of impairing concentration and learning. Using information on school performance from exam results appear to be worse for children with multiple work activities and long school day and weekend hours (Cockburn, 2000). Mavrokonstantis (2011) also found that child labor has a large adverse impact on educational attainment for children in urban areas of Vietnam, as employment opportunities in the formal labor market are more prevalent in urban areas which are not compatible with schooling (Ersado, 2003). In his study the improved labor market condition for adult household member in rural areas of Nepal and Peru leads to higher school enrolment rates and less employment of children and also higher wages for adult women in rural Zimbabwe are associated with a low prevalent child labor. And the educational levels of both the highest educated man and women in the family, rural infrastructure and higher average educational expenses at community level, significantly improve child education and decrease the likelihood of child labor in all three countries and in rural Nepal and Zimbabwe access to credit has positive effect on child schooling and negative effect on child labor.

2.8.1. Education and Child Labor in Developing Countries

Child labor is widespread in developing countries. Most of working children, about more than one in five children in the world work live in poor countries (Edmonds, & Schady, 2011). As states in (Rammohan, 2002) study in developing countries, children make substantial contribution to house hold income and also considered as a gantry at old age security, ether by performing in house hold tasks in rural areas or employed in formal sector in urban areas. However these two economic benefits from children are linked as parents face a tradeoff between present and future consumption.

In the sub Saharan Africa and South Asian countries typically school enrolment is low and child labor is wide spread. The children in these areas work in contracts as plantation work, tender arrangements, bounded labor and sub controlled piece work. And child labor in these countries affects school performance as children miss important lessons and fall behind academically.

2.9. Child Labor and Education in the Ethiopian Context

The challenge of child labor in Ethiopia is not new; it is historically and culturally embedded. Pankhurst (1990) describes how, for centuries, children from the age of seven or earlier would work tending livestock or performing menial tasks to support their families. While the context has changed, the underlying economic pressures persist. More recent data from the CSA (2001) showed that over half of children aged 5-14 were engaged in productive activity, and according to a study cited by USAID, nearly 27% of Ethiopia's youth population currently participates in the labor force, placing it among the countries with the most severe child labor problems in the world.

Household poverty remains the most significant driver, forcing families, particularly in rural areas, to rely on their children's labor for survival (Gebremedhin, 2013). While the FDRE government has committed to achieving universal primary education, a persistent implementation gap exists between policy and reality (Government of Ethiopia, 2007). The national challenge is reflected at the local level. Studies in Ethiopia have consistently found that child labor negatively affects school enrolment, attendance, and performance (Abebe, 2014; Solomon, 2006).

2.10. Legal and Policy Frameworks against Child Labor

A robust legal framework exists to protect children from labor exploitation and guarantee their right to education.

International Framework: The UN-CRC (1989), under Article 32, explicitly recognizes the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with their education. The ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) sets the general minimum age for employment at 15 years, while the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) calls for the immediate elimination of hazardous work, such as mining, for all persons under 18. Ethiopia has ratified these key conventions.

Regional Framework: The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) reinforces these protections, stating in Article 15 that children must be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

National Framework: The 1995 Constitution of the FDRE is the supreme law of the land. Article 36 directly addresses the rights of children, stating that every child has the right "not to be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education, health or well-being." This provides a strong legal basis within Ethiopia to challenge the practice of child labor.

Despite this comprehensive legal architecture, the continued prevalence of child labor in hazardous sectors like mining in Yechila Woreda points to significant challenges in enforcement and implementation.

2.11. Summary of Literature and Identified Research Gap

The literature reviewed clearly establishes that child labor is a global and national problem rooted in poverty and that it poses a significant barrier to educational achievement. International, regional, and national laws explicitly prohibit hazardous child labor and guarantee the right to education. However, a critical gap in the literature remains.

While previous Ethiopian studies have confirmed the negative correlation between child labor and education in general terms (e.g., Gebremedhin, 2013; Abebe, 2014), most have focused on urban centers or treated rural labor monolithically. There is a marked scarcity of in-depth, qualitative research that investigates the specific dynamics of child labor within the artisanal mining sector at a localized level in Ethiopia.

Therefore, the precise ways in which children's involvement in mining in Yechila Woreda affects their educational attendance, performance, and aspirations, and the specific socio-economic factors that drive this phenomenon within the community, have been under-researched. This study was conducted to address this specific gap by providing a focused, qualitative exploration of the impact of child labor in mining on educational achievement in Yechila Woreda.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Description of the Study Area

Yechila is the administrative center of Abergele woreda, a low-lying district in the Central (Maekelay) Zone of Tigray. The economy is overwhelmingly dependent on agriculture, with the majority of households engaged in a combination of crop farming and livestock rearing. Despite being the primary livelihood, agriculture in the region is precarious. Abergele is known to be drought-prone and is considered one of Tigray's chronically food-insecure woredas. For many poor households, income from farming is insufficient (Gebrezgi *et al.*, 2015). According to the census conducted in 2007, the total population of the area was 55,000 (CSA, 2007).

The Tigray region has historically been a major center for mining in Ethiopia, particularly for gold. Yechila woreda is located in an area known for its gold and other base metal resources. Following the recent conflict, there has been a notable boom in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) as many farming households turn to mineral extraction in the face of economic stagnation and high unemployment.

The war has caused a dramatic increase in poverty across Tigray. One analysis estimated that the poverty rate in the region surged from 27% in 2016 to 45% in 2022. The conflict severely disrupted all forms of economic activity, particularly non-farm and wage-based labor, leaving many households with diminished or completely lost sources of income. The woreda has been historically described as remote and having underdeveloped social services, including health and education infrastructure. The education sector in Yechila woreda and the wider Tigray region faces a severe crisis, creating an environment where child labor can thrive at the expense of schooling.

This convergence of a collapsing agricultural livelihood, the economic pull of artisanal mining, extreme poverty, and a shattered education system creates the specific socioeconomic conditions that make Yechila woreda a critical area for studying the impact of mining child labor on educational achievement.

3.2. Research Approach

To conduct the thesis, the researcher used qualitative research approach. The reason behind selecting this approach is that it helps for examination of attitudes, views and experiences of

research participants (Kothari, 2004). Likewise, it is important to understand in detail about the impact of child labour in mining on educational achievements. Thus, it helped participants to explain their experiences in their own words. This shows the relevance of incorporating the voice and experience of children's who involved in mining activities. Hence, qualitative approach is preferred to achieve the purposes of the study through exploring the experiences of child labourers.

Further, it helps to be aware of the real context and settings on the ground regarding child labour condition and nature (Creswell, 2002). It also empowers participants by creating an opportunity to share their perception and experience about the impact of mining on educational achievement. Further, it reveals people's attitude and perception towards the study matter. Given that, the research questions of this study could not answer through applying quantitative methods, this thesis, the researcher intentionally employed qualitative approach to get in depth insights from study groups and stakeholders.

With the objective to develop concepts that enhances understanding about the conditions of child labour mining, with due emphasis on the meanings, experiences and views qualitative approach is highly valuable (Neergaard & Parm, 2007). Thus, it is very important since fewer people take part in the research to share the experience and attitudes of participants deeply (Dawson, 2002). Moreover, this helps to stay longer with these people to explore the impact of child labour mining on educational achievements.

Since the researcher seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behavior, how they interpret situations and what their perspectives are on the issues, qualitative approach is very appropriate (Woods, 2006). In support to this Polit et al., (2001) added that, qualitative studies are undertaken when a new area needs to be investigated or when little is known about an area of interest. Because previous researches have not addressed the impact of child labour mining on educational achievements, the researcher used this approach.

Further, qualitative research places emphasis upon exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem Creswell (2014; cited by Holliday, 2007). Supplementary, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe this approach as gaining a perspective of issues from investigating them in their own specific context and the meaning that

individuals bring to them. In qualitative methods, the data collected from participants would be consisted an insider's viewpoint (Rovai et al., 2014).

3.3. Research Design

According to Hakim (2000) research design is mainly concerned with aims, uses, purposes, intentions and plans within the practical constraints of location, time, money and others. Creswell (2014) believed that, researchers must reflect upon the strategies they intend to use within their study that informs their methods, and how they collect and analyze the information from research participants. The researcher used qualitative design as it's important to develop concepts that enhance the understanding of social phenomena with due emphasis on the social and economic experiences and views of study participants to (Neergaard & Parm, 2007). It also allows associations that occur in people's thinking or acting and the meaning these have for people to be identified (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Thus, for the purpose of this study, phenomenological qualitative research design was employed. Phenomenology is a research design concerned with exploring and understanding human experience (Langdrige, 2007). It is a method of investigation when researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants of the research. It involves studying a small number of subjects through deep and extended engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meanings and concepts (Creswell, 2009). Further, phenomenology focuses on how people experience a particular phenomenon and construct their meanings of the experience.

In this design, the goal and role of the researcher is to get into the experience of the participants and see it as they see it (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). In this sense, the researcher and the research participants are co-researchers. The phenomenological researcher begins with narrative data, reduces the stories and descriptions to their essential themes, and engages in a systematic analysis of the words and concepts used to describe the phenomenon. Thus, the ultimate goal of the researcher is to create a better understanding of a specific phenomenon by highlighting the interpretations of those who actually experience it (ibid).

From the phenomenological design types, the researcher applied an interpretative technique. This design is an approach of qualitative research concerned with assessing the impact of child labour mining on educational achievements (Smith, 2004). It also connected with the core principles of

phenomenology through paying respectful attention to child labour experience by encouraging research participants to tell their own story in their own words (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Therefore, for the purpose of this study interpretive phenomenology design was employed because it is important to investigate new phenomena in-depth and gives a great opportunity to look at things from the perspective.

3.4. Sampling Techniques

To conduct the study, the researcher employed non-probability sampling techniques. Then, with consideration to the qualitative nature of the study purposive, convenience and snowballing sampling techniques were used to select research participants in the study area.

3.4.1. Purposive Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to select Yechila woreda as a study area owing to personal experience of the researcher and the need to make the study more manageable. The seriousness of the issue in the woreda, accessibility and social contact of the researcher with the city were the criteria used to select the study area from other areas of Tigray regional state.

First, purposive sampling technique was used to select the key informants deliberately from governmental organizations and other stake stakeholders. This sampling technique is well suited for qualitative research, which intends to generate ideas and experiences from the research participants (Kothari, 2004)). Moreover, this sampling technique is one of the most common sampling strategies to select participants who could give relevant information to a particular research question and objectives stated before (Woods & Namey, 2005). In other words, under this technique the researcher purposefully employed the particular units of the research participants on the basis that the small mass that they would be selected out of a total target population which could be given appropriate data regarding the impact of child labour in mining on educational achievements.

As Bryman (2012) states that purposive sampling is desirable to select participants in a strategic way since the sampled ones are more relevant to the study than others are. Thus, due to the nature of the problem under study and research questions, purposive sampling was used (Bloor & Wood, 2006). To achieve the purpose of the study, an interview was employed with 18 key informants.

3.4.2. Snowball Sampling

The researcher employed linear snowball-sampling technique to select the study participants from child labourers in mining in the study area. This is a technique, in suited for the researcher to recruit a single participant, while the second nominee recruits the third participant. The chain continues to refer linearly up to the end of the sampling (Etikan, et al., 2016). It also applies by initially contacting a few potential respondents and then by asking them whether they know of anybody with the same characteristics (Elmusharaf, 2012).

One advantage of snowball sampling is the ability to grow a network of participants by taking advantage of your relationship with the current participants. This is helpful for hard - to - reach groups. Another related advantage of this technique is that it allows the researcher to focus on people who have particular characteristics of interest to the issues (Vanderstoer & Johnston, 2009). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher used this technique to select an IDI and FGD from child labourers in mining to be participated in this research.

3.5. Sample Size and Sampling Criteria of the Study

The target population of this study is child labourers in mining only. According to Pilot, Beck, & Hungler (2001), sampling criteria is developed from the research problem, purpose, design, and conceptual definitions of study. The total sample size for this study was 60 participants. This included:

- ❖ 25 Child labourers involved in mining for IDI.
- ❖ 18 Child labourers in mining for FGDs (3 groups of 6 members each).
- ❖ 17 key informants from relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, which is the point at which no new themes or significant information emerge from the data collection (Aldiabat and Navenec, 2018). The concept of theoretical saturation refers to the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling, analyzing data until no new data appear.

Inclusion criteria for veteran participants:

1. Must be child labour who involved in mining during the post-2020 war in Tigray.

2. Must be currently residing in Yechila woreda.
3. Must be willing to voluntarily share their experiences.
4. Both male and female child labours were included to ensure a gender perspective.

3.6. Source and Methods of Data Collection

A data collection tool helps researchers to collect information and data about the objects of the study in scientific way. In the collection of data, if any data is collected arbitrarily, the research questions may not be answered effectively and the objectives of the study cannot meet (Elmusharaf, 2012). In qualitative research, information could be obtained from a relatively small group of participants. Therefore, this study involves detailed, verbal descriptions of characteristics, cases, and explanations of the child labourers related with its impact on their educational achievement (Creswell, 2007).

The data collection method in qualitative study drew multiple sources of information (Ibid). Consequently, for the purpose of this study the researcher used both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was gathered through IDI, FGD and NPPO as triangulations of the data and information. Further, the researcher was gathered information from available published and unpublished secondary sources like journals, books, magazines, articles, websites, research findings, policy document, manual and other relevant materials.

3.6.1. In-Depth Interview (IDI)

This method involves repeated contacts and extended length of contact time spent with research participants. Thus, it is assumed that the rapport between researcher and informant was enhanced, and understanding and confidence between the two will lead to in-depth and accurate information. According to Taylor and Bogdan,(1998) in-depth interviewing is defined as:

“A repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words.”

Thus, the researcher employed in-depth interview as a main data-gathering instrument. Whereas other methods were used as a method to enrich, the data acquired through the in-depth interviews and triangulate the results.

In this study, in-depth interview was carried out based on the beforehand designed interview guidelines. Primarily, the researcher was contacted the research participants. Then, in the first meeting, the researcher made a brief explanation to the study participants about the purpose of the study. Accordingly, based on mutual consensus between the researcher and the study participant/s, time schedule was prepared to meet up for the actual interview. Following confirmation of the participants to share their life experiences, interviews were conducted when participants feel comfortable and safe. Indeed, the interviews was conducted according to the each participant's preference of place selection. As much as possible the researcher provided suggestions for participants to make the interview in their working places, in hotels or in their home to make the research participants more of dedicated and feel comfort in the study. The interview sessions were ranged from thirty minute up to one and half an hour (45' up to 1:30') and interviewee was recorded on a tape recorder based on the full consent of participants.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher employed face - to - face interview. The core reason behind selecting this tool allows a wider channel of communication between the research participants and the researcher. Furthermore, this technique offered the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on participants' responses to previous questions. This allows deeper exploration of the impact of child labour mining on educational achievements in the study area (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

3.6.3. Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Another method used by the researcher was KII. According to Kothari (2004), gaining adequate qualitative data requires that research participants pre-selected, based on their level of knowledge and experience. The key informant interviews employed to gather data from those who have knowledge and hence, key informants who their work is related with child labour protection and responsible for child learning were interviewed.

Based on that, this study enabled to get all possible information from the key informants' experiences. Thus, the researcher collected data from 18 key informants i.e. LSAO, Women and children Affaires Office (WCAO), Yechila Education office Heads, Kebelle administrators in the three Kebbelles, Wereda admins purposively.

3.6.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The researcher employed FGD as a second method of data gathering tool. It is more effective for gathering information about the variety of views (Kothari, 2004). Supplementary, it helped the researcher to triangulate data that collected via an IDI. Moreover, it also allowed group interaction in which participants are able to discuss each other's ideas that provide better insight to the issue under investigation that is not easily attainable through individual interview. This method which offered the researcher the opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings on the impact of child labour mining on educational achievement (Bryman, 2004).

Thus, the FGDs were conducted with eighteen (18) participants who were not participated in the IDI. The participants in group discussion grouped in three separately and each group had six (6) members. The reason for restraining the members of the discussants in to six (6) in one group is to make the discussion hot and more involved with the issues at hand.

3.6.3. Non-Participatory Personal Observation (NPPO)

The researcher employed NPPO tool pertaining to the research objective stated to examine the conditions of child labour in mining in the study area. As Kothari, (2004) explained, NPPO would have the following merits: if it is done accurately, subjective bias will be eliminated. Further, the information obtained under this method relates to what is currently happening on the ground and it is not complicated by either the past behavior or future intentions research participants. Moreover, this method is independent of respondent's willingness to respond.

Thus, for the goal of this study, the researcher used an event sampling that involved recording all or a proportion of the specific instances of the behavior of child labours in the study area (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

3.7. Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedure

By taking into account the nature of the research, this study employed thematic qualitative data analysis methods. Hence, the objective of this study is to gain insight and knowledge from data gathered. The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns or themes evident in several cases to present experiences, perceptions and feelings of child labours in mining (Dudley, et al., 2005).

The data that collected from the sample of research participants was provided and analyzed qualitatively. Similarly, it incorporates preparation of data for analysis, reading all the data redundantly, organizing related segments of data into categories, generate a description of the context, identifying key themes, creating connections between different themes, and interpret the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). The interviews and FGDs were conducted in Tigrigna language and Amharic (for those who are unable to understand Tigrigna). In addition to the recording and transcriptions of data that collected using FGD, the researcher took field notes.

In an effort to analyze the data that gathered through all tools, first, the researcher carefully transcribed the recorded interviews. According to Bryman (2012), transcribing recorded data by the researcher is important because it brings the researcher closer to the objectives data through identifying the key ideas, as well as the differences and similarities in explaining and expressing the experience of research participants. Second, after transcription of all the interviews and FGDs, the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts without taking any notes. Third, after frequently reading and understand the transcribed data, the researcher started preparing general notes that found very appropriate and helpful to specifically address the research questions of this study by considering interpretations and analysis of the data in a thematic way. Fourth, the researcher translated the data into English from Tigrigna and Amharic version, and put under each theme.

Next, the researcher started to write the most relevant transcribed data to separate papers. After having the most relevant data, the researcher provided, analyzed and interpreted through statements and explanations in a thematic way. After description and presentation of the data, the researcher focused on key themes to understand the complexity of the issue on hand. The next step is searching for common themes and interpretation of the meaning of information on hand (Yin, 2003).

Moreover, documents related to the impacts of child labour in mining on educational achievements was analyzed and examined to give meaning about the issue under investigation.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

The researcher was avoided any contravention to the laws, values, social principles, and norms of the society under investigation. Research participants were participated entirely based on informed consent about the purpose and nature of the research. Their informed consent also

acquired before starting the interviews and FGDs. In addition, to ensure the degree of confidentiality names of the participants changed by code numbers. The code used to conceal the identity of participants and to protect their privacy, as it is an important part of protecting research participants' anonymity (Marvasit, 2004).

Further, the researcher respected professional integrity through exclusively including study participants views and experience as they express in the interviews. Factual accuracy also ensued by avoiding suppression or misinterpretation of data. The interpretation of the data made carefully to respect the validity of the findings. The data collections were carry out strictly being in line with research ethical principles that included the following:

- ✓ Adequate information and explanation given to all participants about the whole purpose and intent of the study, actual and potential benefits of the research;
- ✓ The informed consent of each of the participants secured prior to engaging the participants in the research;
- ✓ All participants informed that as they have the right not to take part or withdraw from the research at any stage without any implied deprivation or penalty for their withdrawal action.
- ✓ All participants were duly informed on their right to anonymity and confidentiality of the personal information they give during the interview and the fact that the information they give shall be recorded by sound recorder and pseudonyms was used to refer to the data of specific participants and not actual names;
- ✓ The potential participants was duly informed about the utmost care to be taken in keeping the recorded and written information;
- ✓ Participants informed that they have the right to be notified the ultimate research findings.

3.9. Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Study

Morris (2006) defined trustworthiness as the assessment of the validity of a piece of research using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Credibility refers to methodological procedure used to keep synchrony between what study participants said

and what researcher presents about them (ibid). The researcher given high emphasis in the presentation about the objective of the study, persistent engagement constant observation, iterative questioning, and review of the previous studies in the area are the methodological procedures to increase credibility.

Dependability, also termed as reliability, which maintain through clear and in-depth methodological description that allows the study repeated. Another strategy is internal validation or conformability, which used to keep trustworthiness of the study. In other words, it is the way of eliminating potential threats in the given research. To do so, the researcher has to do important tasks throughout this research. Good rapport would build; objectives of the study explained briefly, and issues of confidentiality would be informed. These tasks would avoid bias (researcher and participants) and reactivity potential information distortion because of the researcher presence on the behaviors and beliefs of participants. To minimize the researcher's bias earlier assumptions putted aside. Further, triangulation strategy (test) used for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings by using different data collection tools. Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods (Patton, 2002). The advantage of the triangulation of different procedures lies in the fact that the flaws of one are often the strengths of another. By combining procedures, techniques, the researcher was utilized the strengths of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter presents the in-depth analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data collected to explore the impact of child labor in mining on the educational achievement of children in Yechila Woreda, a region grappling with the profound aftermath of a devastating conflict. The findings are derived from first-hand accounts gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 25 child laborers, key informant interviews (KIIs) with 17 community leaders, teachers, Health officers and LSAO, Women and Children Affairs (WCAO) and 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) with child laborers.

4.1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Child Labour Participants

Table 4.1. The backgrounds of child laborers in mining in Yechila woreda

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (N=43)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	33	76.7%
	Female	10	23.3%
Age (years)	7-10	14	32.6%
	11-14	21	48.8%
	15-17	8	18.6%
Educational Level	No Formal Education	26	60.5%
	Primary (Incomplete)	16	37.2%
	Primary (Complete)	1	2.3%
Orphanhood Status	Single or Double Orphan	19	44.2%
	Living with Both Parents	24	55.8%

Survey, 2025

This table gives us a clear picture of the 43 child miners who participated in this study. The numbers tell a powerful and troubling story about how child labor in the mines is affecting

education for children in Yechila Woreda, especially in the aftermath of the devastating war in Tigray.

First, we can see that the vast majority of the child workers are boys, who make up 33 of the 43 participants (76.7%), or more than three out of every four. In the difficult times following the conflict in Tigray, many families lost their farms and livelihoods. They now see mining as one of the few ways to earn money for food. This hard, dangerous work is often seen as a "boy's job. As a result, it is the boys who are being pulled from their homes and sent into the mines, which directly takes away their chance to be in school. The ages of these children are also very worrying. The largest group consists of children aged 11-14 (21 children, or 48.8%), with another large group aged 7-10 (14 children, or 32.6%). Combined, an overwhelming majority of the children 35 out of 43 (81.4%) are 14 years old or younger. These are the most important years for learning to read, write, and build a foundation for the rest of their lives. But because of the crisis created by the war, their childhood has been replaced with difficult labor. This shows that the problem of mining is stealing their education right from the very beginning.

The clearest impact is seen when we look at the children's schooling. The numbers are heartbreaking: a staggering 42 out of 43 children (97.7%) in this study have either never been to school or had to drop out. More than half 26 children (60.5%)—have received no formal education at all, while another 16 (37.2%) left before completing their primary education. This is the strongest evidence for our research. It proves that being a child miner in Yechila means giving up on school. The war may have damaged or closed the schools, but the daily pressure to work in the mines is what keeps these children from learning. It shows a direct and destructive link between this labor and their educational failure. Finally, the table shows that a very large number of these children 19 out of 43 (44.2%) are single or double orphans. This is a tragic consequence of the conflict in Tigray, which took the lives of many parents. Without a mother or father to protect and provide for them, these children are the most at risk. They are often forced into dangerous work simply to survive and feed themselves. For these children, the most vulnerable victims of the war, the dream of an education is almost impossible.

In general, this information paints a very clear picture for our study. It shows a direct path of tragedy: the war in Tigray created terrible poverty and left many children without parents. This desperation has pushed them into the dangerous work of mining. This work, in turn, has

destroyed their opportunity to get an education. The data tells the story of a lost generation in Yechila whose future is being sacrificed for survival today.

4.2. The Nature and Conditions of Child Labor in Yechila's Mines

While various forms of child labor exist in Yechila Woreda, the informal mining sector has become a focal point of extreme exploitation, particularly in the desperate economic landscape following the Tigray conflict. The collapse of traditional livelihoods has pushed families to seek income from any available source, and the unregulated, often illicit, nature of small-scale mining provides a ready, if perilous, opportunity. For children aged nine to seventeen, this work is far more than a simple job; it is a brutal, all-consuming reality defined by conditions that systematically destroy their bodies, minds, and futures. The nature of this labor is characterized by severe physical hardship, a pervasive atmosphere of fear, and a structure of exploitation that makes escape nearly impossible.

A picture that express of the conditions of child labour in mining in Yechilla



4.2.1. The Body as a Machine: Relentless Physical Work

The fundamental condition of child labor in Yechila's mines is one of intense, repetitive, and physically disastrous manual labor. Children are not supplementary helpers; they are the primary

engines of production. Their work involves several stages, each carrying a significant physical burden on the extraction and carrying. These children are often forced to descend into narrow, unstable pits to dig out rocks and mineral. They then carry sacks weighing many kilograms on their backs, repeatedly climbing up steep and slippery inclines. This task alone leads to chronic back pain, muscle strain, and potential spinal damage. In line to this, the most commonly cited activity is the manual processing of rock. Lacking any form of machinery, children spend hours smashing large rocks into smaller, manageable pieces using crude tools like metal bars or heavy hammers.

This physically devastating reality was captured by a 14-year-old boy in Jijike, whose body already bore the symbols of two years of this labor. He described his experience with a deep sense of tiredness:

"Every day is the same. I carry the heavy sacks of rock from the pit. Then I sit for hours with a metal bar, smashing the rock into small pieces. My hands are full of sores, and my back... my back feels like an old man's. At night, I am too tired to even eat. I just fall down and sleep."

This evidence reveals a critical condition of the work as it is all-consuming. The physical exertion is so total that it leaves no energy for any other aspect of life, including play, social interaction, or the mental focus required for education. Likewise, in FGDs, children consistently used intuitive language, describing "stabbing troubles," "emotionless hands," and a feeling of being "always heavyweight." This physical ringing is not an unfortunate side effect; it is the very essence of their contribution, leaving them physically broken and educationally disengaged.

4.2.2. An Atmosphere of Constant Danger and Psychological Trauma

The physical hardship is compounded by the psychological stress of working in an environment of constant and serious danger. The mining sites in Gira and Emba Rfael are not structured or regulated operations. They are precarious, hand-dug pits and tunnels, prone to collapse without warning. They are, in essence, dangerously unstable holes dug into the earth. There are no safety protocols, no protective gear, and no emergency procedures. This condition of pervasive fear was a dominant theme in the children's narratives. A health extension worker in Emba Rfael, who treats the injuries from the mines, described the sites as nothing less than "*death tricks*." Her clinical assessment was hostile:

"These are not mines; they are death traps. There is no support, no ventilation, and no safety equipment. We see deep scratches, broken bones, and respiratory problems daily. But the real fear is the total collapses. It has happened... These are not structured mines; they are just holes dug into the earth. It is a miracle more children have not been killed."

This professional overview was tragically substantiated by the children's own lived experiences, where the fear of being suppressed alive is a constant companion. During an FGD in Gira, the memory of a past tragedy continued to haunt the community, serving as a powerful symbol of their daily risk stated by child labourers in FGD as follows:

"Everyone is scared of the depths. Last year, my friend's brother was trapped when the ground fallen. He was only a little older than me. We all heard the shouting. For weeks after, no one could sleep properly. You think about it every time you go near the holes."

This expert view is tragically mirrored in the children's own lived experiences. The fear of a mine collapse is a constant, shared trauma that haunts them. This account demonstrates how singular traumatic events create a lasting, collective anxiety. The emotional work of managing this fear is a core part of their labor. In a confidential IDI, one 15 years old boy articulated the deep psychological damaging this environment inflicts:

"I don't worry about the pain in my hands anymore. I worry about the silence. When digging of the hole and hammering of the rocks stops, we listen for a echoing sound. We are always listening. I have dreams where I am buried and cannot breathe. That fear is worse than the work."

This testimony reveals a state of hyper-vigilance consistent with post-traumatic stress. The nature of their work is thus defined as much by this psychological terror as by the physical hardship. This environment of fear is the antithesis of the safe, nurturing space required for healthy childhood development and learning. The story of an accident becomes a cautionary story that shapes the emotional landscape for every child. A 13-year-old girl in Gira recounted an event that had deeply affected her and her peers:

"Everyone is scared of the depths. Last year, my friend's brother was trapped when the ground fallen. He was only a little older than me. We all heard the shouting. For weeks after, no one could sleep properly. You think about it every time you go near the holes."

This reveals a crucial condition of child labors. It includes the immense emotional work of managing constant fear. This psychological stress is as devastating as the physical strain. It fosters an environment of anxiety and hyper-vigilance that is fundamentally incompatible with the sense of security required for healthy childhood development and learning. Furthermore, children are not just working; they are surviving, minute by minute, in the shadow of potential disaster. This persistent state of fear fundamentally shapes their worldview and erodes their capacity to imagine a future beyond the mines.

4.2.3. The Chains of Exploitation: Economic Bondage and Social Isolation

The brutal working conditions are not mitigated by fair compensation. Instead, the children are caught in a system of economic exploitation that is both a cause and a consequence of their labor. A key informant from the local Women and Children Affairs Office (WCAO) outlined the systemic nature of this exploitation:

"These children are trapped in a cycle. They are paid by the sack, often just enough for that day's meal for their family. The brokers and adult mine operators know this. The children are seen as cheap, disposable labor. If one gets sick or is injured, there are ten more desperate enough to take his place. There is no contract, no rights, and no accountability."

This expert view confirms that the children's worry, magnified by the post-conflict economy, is actively leveraged against them. The children themselves are acutely aware of their powerlessness within this system. In a focus group, they expressed a shared sense of injustice:

"We do all the hardest work, but the men who own the trucks get all the money. They come at the end of the day and weigh our sacks. They always tell us our rocks are not good quality, or the weight is low. They always find a reason to pay us less than they promised."

This economic bondage has a profound social impact. It isolates the children from their peers and severs their connection to community institutions like schools. An IDI child labour aged 16-year-old, who had spent three years in the mines, reflected on this social detachment during his interview:

"I don't have friends in the village anymore. They are in school; they talk about things I don't understand. My friends are the other boys at the mine. We don't talk about school or the future. We talk about how to get enough money for the next day."

This emotional statement reveals the ultimate condition of their labor. It creates a separate and isolated social world. By removing them from the very institutions designed to foster their development, the mining life not only damages their bodies and minds but also locks them into a social sphere where survival is the only shared goal, and education is a forgotten, irrelevant dream.

4.3. Drivers of Child Labour Mines in Yechila Woreda

One of the specific objectives of this study sought to understand the complex socio-economic drivers propelling children into the hazardous mining sector. The findings reveal that this phenomenon is not the result of a single cause; rather it is a disastrous merge of overwhelming push factors. These drivers pre-existing poverty, the devastating of family units, and the collapse of educational alternatives were catastrophically amplified by the recent conflict in Tigray. The war acted as an accelerant, turning chronic hardship into an acute crisis that has forced children to become the primary fuel for a desperate, informal economy.

4.3.1. The Collapse of Livelihoods

The universal backdrop for child labor in Yechila is extreme household poverty. However, participants across all groups drew a sharp distinction between the manageable hardship that existed before the war and the absolute desperation that now defines their existence. The conflict systematically dismantled traditional livelihoods, leaving families with no safety net.

In an IDI in Jijike with child laborer, a young boy articulated the non-negotiable mandate placed upon him, framing his labor not as a choice but as a direct response to his family's hunger:

"My father's crops failed again. We had no food. He didn't ask me, he told me, 'Go to the mines with your cousins. Whatever you bring back is what we will eat.' It is not a choice. If you don't work, your little sister cries from hunger. What would you do? I have no choice rather to go in to the mining"

This the above powerful statement illustrates how the burden of survival has been transferred directly onto the children. A key informant, a Kebele administrator in Gira, contextualized this individual story within the wider economic devastation created by the conflict:

"Before the war, there was hardship, but there were other ways. People had their oxen, they could trade, they could find day labor. The war took everything. The oxen were looted, the businesses closed, the farms were destroyed. The war turned poverty into desperation. For many, mining is now the only employer left in Yechila. It is a disaster economy, and the children are its primary fuel."

The WCAO officer supported this, explaining the specific pressure this economic collapse places on parental decision-making, forcing them to adopt negative coping strategies. The officer stated that, we speak to mothers who are discharging their sons to the mining when they tell us. They know the danger that can their child may be faced. But they say, *'do I watch my child starve, or do I watch him work?'* The war has presented them with an impossible choice. The immediate, tangible need for food today will always win against the long-term hope of education tomorrow. This triangulation of data reveals a clear pathway: the war destroyed traditional economic systems, creating a state of acute household food insecurity. In this vacuum, the informal mining sector emerged as the sole, albeit perilous, source of income, forcing parents to send their children into hazardous labor as a last-resort survival strategy.

4.3.2. The Devastation of Families

For a significant number of the children interviewed (11 out of 25 in IDIs), the tipping point was not just generalized poverty but a specific and catastrophic family crisis. The data overwhelmingly links this household disintegration directly to the violence of the conflict, which created a new generation of orphans, widows, and children forced into premature adult roles. A 17-year-old boy in Emba Rfael, who had been a top student before the war, emotionally explained how the conflict instantly redefined his identity and obligations:

“When my father was alive, I was first in my class. He was killed in the fighting. Suddenly, I was the man of the house. School was a luxury I could no longer afford. My duty was now to feed my mother and my siblings. I had to leave school to become a miner. My childhood ended with the war.”

This evidence powerfully demonstrates how child labor is a direct consequence of the war’s violence destroying families apart. This is not an isolated experience but a widespread social phenomenon. A respected community leader elaborated on this societal shift elucidated as follows:

“We have a saying, 'A child should carry books, not the weight of a family.' The war has inverted this. We now have countless households run by children. They have become the breadwinners overnight. The loss of a father is not just an emotional tragedy; in our context, it is an economic collapse for the entire family.”

The children themselves expressed a shared understanding of this burden. In a FGD with child laborers, several boys who had lost their fathers made all the discussants feel bad and shocking when one said:

"When you are the oldest boy and your father is gone, you don't get to be a child anymore. The other men in the village have their own families to feed. No one is going to save you. You must go and work. It is a matter of honor and survival. We do it for our mothers."

The data from these varied sources converges on a powerful conclusion: the conflict basically reordered family structures and social obligations. It thrust children into the role of primary providers, forcing them to trade their own educational futures and personal safety for the immediate survival of their fragmented families.

4.3.3. The Collapse of the Educational System

The final driver is the absence of a viable alternative. The "push" of poverty and family crisis is met with the "pull" of a near-total collapse of the educational infrastructure, creating a vacuum of opportunity that the mining sector readily fills. For many children, school is not an option they are rejecting; it is an option that no longer exists for them. A teacher in Jijike, who remains in the

area despite his school being largely non-functional, described the dire state of the educational system:

"How can we ask children to come to school? My school has no roof. The books were burned. Half the teachers fled during the conflict and have not returned. We have no materials, no support. We are a ghost of a school. The children see this. They know there is no real learning happening here."

This assessment from the supply side is mirrored by the children's perceptions on the demand side. When asked about school, a 15-year-old girl in an IDI expressed a sense of weary realism:

"My mother talks about me going back to school one day. But what school? The building is just a shell. The road to get there is not safe. It feels like a dream from a past life. The mine is real. The money I earn, even if it is small, is real. It buys us salt and grain. The school offers only empty promises right now."

This stark cost-benefit analysis is rebounded by parents and community members. A KII from LSAO officer representative explained the pragmatic, if tragic; choice families are making a parent has to make a choice based on reality. The reality is that an hour in the mine produces a few birr. An hour in the school produces nothing tangible today. When your survival is measured day-by-day, the choice becomes painfully logical. The failure of the education system has effectively eliminated it as a competitor to child labor. Eventually, the collapse of the educational system serves as the final nail in the coffin. It removes hope and makes the dangerous, short-term gain of mining appear to be the most rational and pragmatic choice in a landscape devoid of other meaningful opportunities. This space ensures that once a child is pushed toward labor by poverty and family crisis, there is no institutional force left to pull them back.

4.4. The Systematic Dismantling of Education by the Mining Sector

The central objective of this study was to explore the impact of child labor in mining on educational achievement. The findings from Yechila Woreda are unequivocal: mining does not merely hinder or complicate education; it actively and systematically dismantles it. This process functions through three interconnected mechanisms: it physically and logistically forces children out of the school system; it cognitively impairs those who attempt to remain; and it psychologically erodes their very aspiration for an educated future. This destructive process was

massively accelerated by the complete collapse of the education system during the Tigray conflict, which created a vulnerable, idle population of children that the informal mining economy readily absorbed.

4.4.1. School Dropout and the Creation of a Lost Generation

The most immediate and irreversible impact of mining on education is the phenomenon of the school dropout. For the vast majority of children involved, entry into the mines marks a definitive exit from the classroom. Of the 25 children interviewed individually, 18 were complete school dropouts, with the remaining seven attending sporadically at best. Their indications reveal that the complete logistics and physical demands of the work make school attendance impossible. A 15-year-old girl from Jijike described this impossibility:

"How can you go to school? You leave for the mines when it is still dark and come back when it is dark again. Your body is covered in dirt and pain. There is no time to wash, no time to eat, no time to study. School becomes a memory from a different life."

This physical barrier was exacerbated by the systemic collapse of the education system during the conflict. A primary school principal in Gira detailed how the war created a lost generation that was channeled directly into the labor force. The schools were closed for three years because of the war. Three years later, when we finally reopened, many children never came back. They were too old for their grade, or they felt too far behind. During those three years without school, they had found the mines. The war didn't just make them drop out; for a long time, there was no school to drop out from. Thus, the mines became their school. This context highlights how the supply of child labor increased dramatically because the educational alternative was obliterated. For children who have been out of school for years, returning carries a heavy social stigma. This was a recurring theme in a FGD with older boys:

"I am 16 now. How can I go back and sit in a class with 10-year-olds? They would laugh. My hands are hard from work, not soft for holding a pen. We are men now in the mines; in the school, we would be seen as failures. It is better to stay where we are."

This triangulation of data demonstrates a powerful cycle. The physical demands of mining make school attendance impractical, the war-induced school closures created a large pool of out-of-school youth, and the social shame associated with returning after a long absence solidifies their status as permanent dropouts.

4.4.2. Impaired Cognitive Function and Classroom Failure

Even for the few children who attempt to manipulate irregular school attendance with work, the findings indicate that meaningful learning is impossible. The intense physical labor directly degrades their cognitive capacity. A teacher in Gira School lamented the state of children who come to her classroom after working:

"They are physically present but mentally absent. You see them sitting at the desk, but their eyes are vacant. They fall asleep. They cannot follow a simple instruction. The body is in the classroom, but their mind and spirit are still in the dark and dust of the mine. How can a child learn when their entire being is screaming from exhaustion?"

This observation of cognitive impairment is supported by health professionals. A Health Officer who treats children from the mining communities explained the biological reality: He stated that learning requires energy. It requires proper nutrition and a rested brain. These children are chronically exhausted and often malnourished. Their bodies are in a constant state of stress and repair. They simply do not have the biological resources necessary for cognitive tasks like memory retention and problem-solving. We are witnessing a generation suffering from profound cognitive neglect.

The children themselves are aware of this mental struggle. During a confidential IDI, a 14-year-old boy who still tried to attend school described his frustration:

"My head feels full of noise and mist. The teacher is talking, but the words just drift away. I try to listen, but all I can think about is how much my back hurts and that I have to go back to the mine after school to earn money for dinner. You cannot learn when your body is in pain and your mind is worried."

This demonstrates that even when a child is not a complete dropout, the impact of mining on their educational achievement is absolute. It renders them incapable of learning, leading to poor

performance, frustration, and eventual, inevitable departure from the school system. Parents also witness this daily depletion, expressing a sense of helpless concern. A mother whose son works in the mines and attends school sporadically shared her observation during a parent focus group:

“He comes home from the mine, covered in dust, and falls onto the mat. He is too tired to speak, let alone open a book. I ask him what he learned in school, and he just shakes his head. The work takes all of him. It leaves nothing for the books.”

This triangulated evidence proves that measuring educational impact by attendance alone is deeply misleading. For child miners, the school becomes a place of passive presence rather than active learning, reinforcing their sense of failure and ultimately pushing them further toward the one place where their efforts yield a tangible, if meager, result: the mine.

4.4.3. Erosion of Educational and Future Aspirations

Perhaps the most insidious impact of mining is its effect on the children's psychology and future aspirations. The work does not just remove them from school; it fundamentally changes how they see themselves and their place in the world, replacing long-term educational goals with the short-term imperatives of daily survival. A community leader in Gira spoke sorrowfully about this shift in values he has witnessed. The greatest danger is losing the value of education in the community's eyes. A boy with a few birr in his pocket from the mine is seen as more successful today than a boy with a book. The quick reward is killing the long-term vision. The mine teaches them that their hands are for crushing rocks, not for writing their future. Such kind of erosion of aspiration is internalized by the children. Their identities become attached with their labor. A 15-year-old child, who once had clear ambitions, illustrated this psychological transformation as follows:

“I used to dream of being a doctor. I was good at science. Now... I dream of finding a large rock with a good vein of mineral. That is my future now. The mine is my life. What use are a doctor's dreams to a boy who breaks rocks?”

This powerful statement reveals that the impact goes beyond attendance records and test scores. It is an assault on a child's sense of possibility. The mining sector does not just take their time and energy; it takes their dreams, replacing them with the grim realism of their daily struggle. This psychological shift is the final lock on the door, ensuring that even if opportunities for

education were to reappear, the children may no longer possess the hope or ambition required to walk through it.

Perhaps the most insidious and long-lasting impact of mining is the psychological one: the systematic erosion of a child's future aspirations. The relentless, high-stakes focus on daily survival fundamentally reorients a child's worldview, replacing long-term dreams of education and professional careers with the immediate, narrow goal of the next day's earnings. A respected community elder in Emba Rfael lamented this profound shift in community values, a direct casualty of the post-conflict struggle:

“In my day, every parent dreamed their child would become a teacher or a doctor. Now, after so much loss, the dreams are smaller. Survival is the only dream left. They see a child bring back a few birr from the mine and they are relieved. The hope for education is dying because the hunger of today is shouting louder than the dreams of tomorrow.”

This external observation of dying hope is tragically reflected in the internal transformation of the children themselves. Their identities become fused with their labor, and their former ambitions feel like they belong to a different person from a different lifetime. When asked about his future, a 17-year-old boy in Jijike offered a statement that encapsulates this death of aspiration:

“I used to tell my teacher I wanted to be a pilot. That was before the war. That boy is gone. Now... now I just hope to find a bigger stone tomorrow. That is my future. My life is here.”

This psychological shift is also recognized by local officials who struggle to promote education against the powerful, tangible lure of the mines. All KII participants commonly mentioned the challenges. They are fighting against a powerful mindset. The mine gives a child a role, an identity as a provider. It offers an immediate, visible result for their labor. School offers a distant, abstract promise that is hard to believe in when your reality is so harsh. The work changes their perception of what is possible for them. They stop seeing themselves as students and start seeing themselves only as miners.

Ultimately, this evidence reveals the most devastating impact of child mining on educational achievement. The mining sector does not just steal a child's time and energy; it fundamentally alters their psychological landscape, destroying the internal motivation, hope, and self-belief required to pursue an education. It closes the door to the future from the inside out, ensuring that even if external conditions were to improve, a generation may no longer possess the aspiration to seek a different path.



CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary of Findings

This study explored the impact of child labor in mining on educational achievement through a phenomenological case study of Yechila Woreda. The findings, drawn from the lived experiences of children and community members in Jijike, Gira, and Emba Rfael, revealed three core truths. First, the nature of child labor in the mines is defined by grueling physical hardship and a pervasive environment of fear. Second, the primary driver is an existential household poverty, critically catalyzed and deepened by the recent war, which shattered alternative livelihoods and disintegrated family structures. Third, and most critically, this labor has a corrosive impact on education by making school attendance impossible, rendering learning ineffective, and destroying children's future aspirations, a process that was massively accelerated by the multi-year collapse of the education system during the conflict.

5.2. Conclusions

Based on the findings, this study draws the following conclusions:

Child labor in the mining sector of Yechila is unequivocally one of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, operating in a context where protective systems have completely failed. The current child labor crisis in Yechila's mining sector is not only but also it is a direct consequence of the post-war reality. The conflict acted as a catastrophic catalyst, transforming chronic poverty into an acute survival crisis and creating a large, vulnerable pool of out-of-school children by destroying both the agricultural economy and the education system.

The impact of mining on educational achievement is absolute and terminal. It is an impenetrable barrier, fortified by the physical and psychological traumas of both the labor and the preceding conflict. The educational system is not just competing with the mines; it is trying to rebuild itself from ruins in a community where survival has superseded aspiration.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the stark conclusions of this study, the following integrated and urgent recommendations, tailored for a post-conflict environment, are proposed:

- 1. For Government and NGO Partners (A Post-Conflict Recovery Focus):**

- ❖ **Immediate Livelihood Intervention:** Implement targeted and unconditional cash or food transfers specifically for families with children working in or at high risk of entering the mining sector. This must be framed as part of an urgent post-conflict humanitarian response.
- ❖ **Economic Diversification and Agricultural Support:** Launch programs that provide households with viable economic alternatives to mining, focusing on rebuilding what was lost in the war, such as restocking looted livestock and providing seeds for destroyed farms.

2. For the Woreda Education Office (A Trauma-Informed Rebuilding Strategy):

- ❖ **Healing and Learning Transitional Centers:** Establish flexible education centers within the three kebeles that adopt a trauma-informed approach. These centers must integrate Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) with accelerated learning programs to address the dual traumas of the war and hazardous labor.
- ❖ **Rebuild and Resource Schools:** Prioritize the physical reconstruction of schools in Jijike, Gira, and Emba Rfael, including re-roofing classrooms and restocking libraries. Simultaneously, ensure all hidden costs of schooling are eliminated to remove economic barriers.

3. For All Stakeholders (A Coordinated Community Response):

- ❖ **Establish Community-Based Child Protection Committees:** Create committees comprising elders, teachers, health workers, and religious leaders in each kebele to identify and monitor at-risk children and connect them with support services. These committees can play a vital role in community healing and rebuilding social safety nets destroyed by the conflict.

4. For Future Research (Informing Long-Term Policy):

- ❖ **A Longitudinal Health and Social Study:** A follow-up study is urgently needed to track the long-term health consequences (e.g., respiratory disease) and life trajectories of the children identified in this research, paying special attention to the compounding effects of war trauma.

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Appendixes

MEKELLE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

DEPARTMENT OF CIVIC AND ETHICAL STUDIES

Appendix Consent Form

THE IMPACT OF CHILD LABOR IN MINING ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF YECHILA WOREDA

My name is **KEWANI TADESSE GEBREHIWOT** and I am a graduate student conducting research for my Master of Arts (MA) degree. I am inviting you to participate in a study that seeks to deeply understand the lived experiences of children involved in mining in Yechila Woreda and how this work impacts their education, particularly in the aftermath of the recent conflict. The purpose of this research is not to count numbers, but to listen to and understand your personal stories, perspectives, and experiences.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time without any negative consequences. Your decision to participate or not will not affect any services or support you may receive. If you agree to participate, we will have a conversation that will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I will ask you open-ended questions about your life, your work, your experiences with school, and your perspective on the challenges in our community. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our conversation to ensure I accurately capture your valuable insights.

The information you share will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Your real name will never be used in any report or publication. I will use a pseudonym (a different name) to protect your identity. The audio recordings will be stored securely and will be deleted after the thesis is completed. Only I, the researcher, will have access to the original information.

A. Interview Guide for Key Informants (KIIs)

Introduction: Thank you for your time. This research aims to understand the impact of mining on children's education in our community. Your expert perspective is invaluable.

A. Questions Related with the Nature and Context of Child Labor in Mining

1. From your perspective, how would you describe the situation of children working in the artisanal mining sites in this kebele (Jijike/Gira/Emba Rfael)? What does their daily work look like?
2. How has the situation changed since the war? Has the number of children involved in mining increased or decreased? What are the key differences you observe now compared to before the conflict?
3. What are the most significant health and safety risks you believe these children face in the mines? Can you share any anonymized examples you have encountered in your work?

B. Questions Related with Socio-Economic Drivers

1. In your view, what are the primary reasons families in this community allow or send their children to work in the mines?
2. Let's talk specifically about the war's impact. How did the conflict affect the livelihoods of families here (e.g., loss of livestock, farming disruption)? How has this directly contributed to the child labor problem we see today?
3. Beyond poverty, are there other social or family-related factors (e.g., orphanhood, family breakdown) that push children into this work?

C. Questions related to the Impact on Educational Achievement

1. Could you describe the impact of this mining work on a child's ability to attend school regularly?
2. For the children who do try to attend school, what have you observed about their performance and behavior in the classroom? Can they learn effectively

3. The schools here were closed for several years. Can you describe the challenge of bringing children back to school after such a long gap? How many have you lost to the mines permanently?
4. In your opinion, how does this work affect a child's aspiration or hope for a future beyond the mines?

B. In-Depth Interview Guide for Child Laborers (IDIs)

Introduction: Thank you so much for talking with me today. I am here to listen and learn from your experiences. Your story is very important. There is no right or wrong answers.

Part 1: Understanding Your Life and Work (The Lived Experience)

1. Could you tell me about a typical day for you, from the moment you wake up to when you go to sleep?
2. Can you describe the work you do at the mining site? What does it feel like physically? What are the hardest parts?
3. What do you think about when you are working? What are you hoping to find?
4. Are there times you feel scared or unsafe at the mining site? Can you tell me about that?

Part 2: The Path to the Mines (The Drivers)

5. Can you remember the time you first started this work? How old were you? What was happening in your life and with your family at that time?
6. Was this before, during, or after the war? How did the war change things for your family?
7. What made you decide, or what made your family decide, that you should start working in the mines? Was it a choice or did it feel like you had to?

Part 3: School and the Mines (The Impact)

8. Tell me about your experience with school. Did you enjoy it? What was your favorite subject?
9. What is your school situation now? Are you attending?
 - (If not attending): What led to you stopping school? What do you miss most about i
 - (If attending): What is it like to go to school after working? Is it hard to concentrate or stay awake? Tell me about that experience.
10. When you think about your future, what do you see for yourself? What are your dreams or hopes? Has this work changed those dreams?

Part 4: Reflections

11. If you had the power to change one thing about your life right now, what would it be?
12. Is there anything else you think is important for me to know to understand your situation?

C. Focus Group Discussion Guide (FGDs) with Child Laborers

Introduction: Thank you all for coming together. Today, we are going to have a group conversation about your shared experiences. Everyone's perspective is valuable, and I encourage you to listen to each other respectfully.

Icebreaker: Let's go around the group. Can everyone share one thing that makes them feel happy and one thing that is very difficult about life in our community right now?

Theme 1: The World of Work

1. Let's talk about the work at the mines. What are the different kinds of jobs that children do there? Which jobs are the hardest? Why?
2. What are some of the dangers that everyone knows about at the mining sites?
3. Many things have changed since the war. For young people like you, what are the biggest challenges now that were not there before?

Theme 2: Why you Work in mining

1. Why do you think so many young people in our kebele are working in the mines today? Let's brainstorm all the reasons we can think of as a group.
2. Let's discuss the pressure from family. How do our families depend on the work we do?

Theme 3: School vs. The Mines

1. Let's have a group discussion. What makes it so difficult to go to school when you are also working in the mines? Let's share our experiences.
2. For those who have tried to do both, what is it like inside the classroom? What challenges do you face that other students might not?
3. As a group, do we feel that education is still important for our future, or does earning money today feel more urgent? Let's debate this.

Closing Question:

1. If you, as a group of young people, could send one message to the leaders of our woreda about our situation, what would that message be?