

Social Construction of Parents Against Child Labor in Tobacco Farming in Wakan Village, East Lombok Regency

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ABSTRACT

Child labor in the tobacco sector remains a critical problem in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. In Wakan Village, East Lombok, children are generally involved in tobacco farming due to entrenched economic pressures and local norms. This study aims to analyze how parents socially construct the meaning of child labor in tobacco farming. A qualitative case study approach is used. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with parents and community leaders, hands-on field observations, and documentation. These findings reveal that children aged 10-15 years are actively involved in three main stages of tobacco production: fertilization (berabok), leaf binding (begelantang), and drying (bejelok). These tasks expose children to risks such as exposure to chemicals, physical strain, and school disruptions. Economic needs shape parents' perceptions, inherited social norms, and the belief that early work builds responsibility. The results show that child labor is not only driven by poverty, but also by cultural constructions that normalize and legitimize children's participation in agriculture. This study demonstrates the importance of community-based empowerment approaches rooted in local values to reduce child labor practices. Collaborative efforts are essential to raise awareness, challenge traditional beliefs, and protect children's rights in rural farming communities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Child labour remains a serious global problem, especially in developing countries that face unresolved social and economic pressures. Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that about 160 million children aged 5-17 are involved in the workforce, and more than half are in hazardous jobs (Elsayed, 2024). The informal sector is the main land for child labour because of the lack of employment contracts and proper social protection, thus opening up opportunities for exploitation (Wahyuni & Sari, 2022). From 2018 to 2020, child labourers continued to increase, especially regarding excessive working hours and disproportionate wages (Das, 2022).

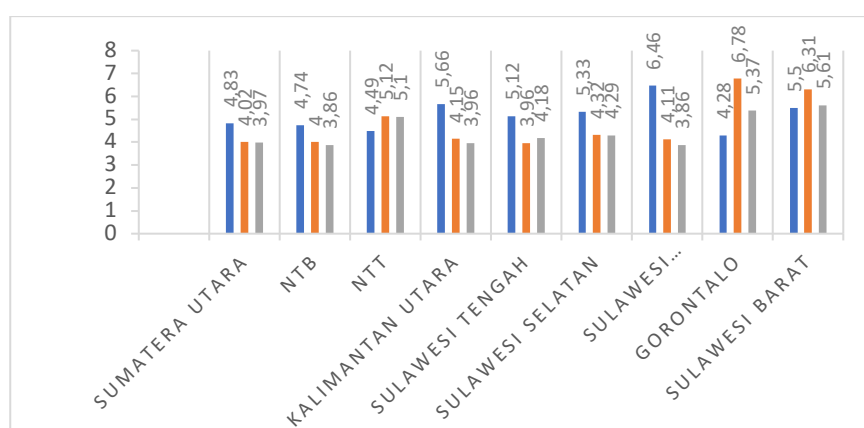
Children's involvement in work is inseparable from social, economic, and demographic factors. Bansu and Van (1998) stated that parents' decision to involve their children in work is a family survival strategy. Children become an additional source of income when an adult's income is insufficient. This

phenomenon is known as the Axiom of Wealth, in which children are only involved when the family economy is insufficient (Webbink et al., 2013), and the Axiom of Substitution, where children replace the role of adult labour (Ajefu & Massacky, 2023).

Legally, child labour is defined by various international conventions, including ILO Conventions No. 138 and No.182. The Convention sets a minimum working age and prohibits work that endangers children's safety, health, and morals (Kaur & Byard, 2021). UNICEF added that child labour is considered exploitative if it interferes with education and health or degrades the dignity of children (Elsayed, 2024). The risks include severe physical, mental, social, and moral disorders (Drydakakis, 2023).

Indonesia faces similar challenges. Based on data from August 2022, Sakernas, there are around 1.01 million children aged 5-17 years working, or around 1.74% of the total population of that age (Rafii & Muflih, 2024). The most significant proportion is in eastern Indonesia, including the West Nusa Tenggara Province (NTB). In the last three years, the NTB has shown a fluctuating rate of child labour: 4.47% (2021), 3.97% (2022), and increased again to 4.74% in 2023 (BPS, 2024). Most of these children work in the agricultural sector, including tobacco commodities.

Graph 1. Proportion of children aged 10-17 working by province in 2021-2023



Source: (BPS, 2024)

Graph 1 shows that NTB Province consistently recorded a high percentage of child labour compared to the other provinces. The increase in child labourers by 2023 confirms that this region needs special attention in the context of child protection in the agricultural sector.

Tobacco is a plantation commodity with a high economic value that plays a strategic role in the national economy. NTB Province is one of Indonesia's main tobacco production centres, contributing 16.9% of the national production (Herdiana & Hermawan, 2024). East Lombok, in particular, is known as the largest tobacco-producing region in the NTB and relies heavily on tobacco farming as a source of livelihood for the community (Azali et al., 2024).

However, behind its contribution to the economy, tobacco farming practices in NTB are inseparable from social issues, especially children's involvement in the production process. Farming families often involve children in the stages of production, such as fertilisation, binding, and drying of tobacco leaves. This involvement is often seen as natural because it is considered part of the family's responsibility and the child's socialisation process (Rivki et al., 2023). Several studies show that children who work in tobacco fields are at risk of developing health problems, such as decreased appetite, exposure to nicotine through the skin, and Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS) (Aryatika & Indrayani, 2023; Kartika et al., 2022).

Previous studies in various countries have shown that children's involvement in tobacco farming is detrimental. A Brazilian study showed pesticide exposure and musculoskeletal disorders in child labour (Fassa et al., 2021a). In Thailand, child labour in tobacco cultivation is associated with low parental knowledge and normalisation of practice (Phetphum et al., 2021). In Indonesia, similar cases have also

been found, but there are still few studies that specifically explore the social construction of parents towards child labour in local communities.

Parents' social construction greatly influences decision-making related to children's involvement in work. Study (Amalia et al., 2023) reveals that cultural values, poverty, and perceptions of family responsibilities shape the view that working from an early age is a positive thing. Therefore, it is important to understand how parents socially construct this reality.

This study aimed to analyse how parents in Wakan Village, East Lombok Regency, form social views on children's involvement in tobacco farming. By understanding this perspective, it is hoped that a more contextual approach can be found to reduce child labour practices and strengthen the protection of children's rights in rural agricultural environments.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen to delve deeply into the meanings, perceptions, and social constructs parents formed towards children's tobacco farming involvement. Case studies allow researchers to explore social phenomena contextually and holistically in real-life settings.

The location of this study was Wakan Village, Jerowaru District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. This village was chosen because it is one of the leading centres of tobacco production in the NTB and has a relatively high level of child involvement in agriculture. Most villagers work as tobacco farmers and seasonal farm labourers.

The research subjects consisted of parents who involved their children in tobacco farming activities and community leaders who understood the village's social and economic conditions. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, considering their direct experience and social relevance to the research topic.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. Interviews were semi-structured so that informants could explain their views flexibly while still focusing on the research topic. Observations were conducted to capture the direct interaction of children in tobacco work and the dynamics of social relations in the field. Documentation was carried out using photos of activities, field notes, and other related documents.

The data analysis used an interactive model from Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. The validity of the data was tested through source triangulation techniques and methods to ensure the consistency and accuracy of information obtained from various sources. In addition, credibility checks were carried out by empowering the activeness of researchers in the field and confirming data to informants.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in Wakan Village, East Lombok Regency, which is known as one of the tobacco production centers in West Nusa Tenggara. The community's dependence on the agricultural sector, especially tobacco, is a clear picture of the socioeconomic conditions of the countryside (Hifni & Rusdiana, 2024; Rivki et al., 2023). In this reality, children's involvement in agricultural activities is inevitable. Child labour arises from economic pressures and deep-rooted cultural and social legitimacy (Dumas, 2020; Habib et al., 2024; Kaur & Byard, 2021). As explained by (Musriana et al., 2024a), these values encourage individuals to follow certain behaviours considered natural by their community. Therefore, it is important to study this condition comprehensively because it impacts children's well-being from physical, social, and educational perspectives (Hifni & Rusdiana, 2024).

3.1 Conditions of Child Labor in Tobacco Plantations

Children in Wakan Village are involved in three main stages of the tobacco production process: berabok (fertilization), begelantang (leaf binding), and bejelok (drying). Each stage has a different workload and risk, putting the child in a vulnerable situation (Aryatika & Indrayani, 2023; Drydakis, 2023; Fassa et al., 2021a). This condition reflects the weak child protection system in the agricultural sector, which is still based on family power and traditional values.

Dusty (Tobacco Leaf Fertilization)

The initial activities involving children in tobacco production in Wakan Village were identified through dusting, namely, the manual distribution of fertiliser on tobacco land. Based on the results of field observations, boys aged 10-15 years were seen carrying sacks of fertilizer and sowing them directly between rows of plants. The activity was carried out without personal protective equipment, such as gloves, masks, or boots, and lasted for two to four hours under the hot sun.

Figure 1. Boys engaged in fertilization in tobacco fields



Source: Field documentation, 2025.

Figure 1 shows children working in open fields in makeshift clothes and direct contact with chemicals. This photo is not just a visualisation of field conditions but also a social artefact that reflects how children's work is framed as part of the fairness of family farming practices.

economic practices as legitimate and necessary (Yokying & Floro, 2020). This process represents a stage of externalization of reality, as described by Berger and Luckmann (1966), in which individual values become collectively accepted social structures. This process is essential to the social construction of reality, in which personal experiences and beliefs transform into shared norms and institutions (Muhammad Rifqi Andreanto et al., 2024; Valković, 2023).

The physical and health risks faced by children during the decay stage are very high. Research by (Fassa et al., 2021b) identifies that child workers in the tobacco sector are exposed to harmful chemicals that cause skin irritation, respiratory distress, muscle fatigue, and dehydration. Unprotected working conditions reinforce this vulnerability. The absence of safety tools shows that child labour protection has not yet become part of the local consciousness in household farming practices.

The visual narrative and the practice of violence indicate a deconstruction of the meaning that needs to be done to the concept of "child assistance" in the agricultural sector. Derrida (1978) emphasizes dismantling the dominant discourse that normalizes meaning inequality in social practice. What is considered a moral contribution by the family is, in reality, an unsafe work practice that magnifies the potential for hidden exploitation ("Justice, If Such a Thing Exists," 2020)

Children's involvement is seen from a physical point of view and as part of internalising collective values from generation to generation. Reid-Musson et al. (2022) explained that in peasant families, children are positioned not as laborers but as part of a moral work system that demands loyalty and contribution from an early age. This shows that child labour has become a symbol of social belonging and perseverance institutionalised in the local culture.

When child labour is considered commonplace, critical awareness of children's rights and occupational health becomes dull. (Freire, 1970) emphasised that critical awareness can only grow

when individuals understand the structural conditions that oppress them. The lack of knowledge about the risks of work and children's rights among farmers creates a situation in which child labour is not questioned, even justified as a form of character education (Baul & Ostermann, 2023; Nur Afifah et al., 2025).

The legal-formal approach alone is insufficient to answer the problem of child labour in the agricultural sector. Chambers (2020) emphasised the importance of community participation in the empowerment process, where local perspectives are not ignored but are involved in designing child-friendly solutions. Community-based education, which emphasises job safety and the future of children's education, can be a more transformative and sustainable intervention strategy (Agyemang et al., 2023; M Nur et al., 2023; Posso et al., 2021).

Begelantang (tobacco leaf binding)

The next stage of the tobacco production series in Wakan Village involves girls participating in begelantang activities, which involve tying tobacco leaves harvested before drying. This process demands high precision because the leaves must be carefully tied using a raffia rope so they do not tear and remain neat when sun-dried. Field observations showed that this work was conducted in semi-open spaces, such as the terrace of a house, shed, or barn. The children sat hunched over for hours on the ground floor with minimal lighting and without ergonomic equipment.

Figure 2. Daughter tying tobacco leaves



Source: Field Documentation, 2025.

Picture 2 shows a girl sitting cross-legged while stringing tobacco leaves into large bundles. Static sitting positions, long working durations, and lack of lighting indicate that this process impacts physical health and interferes with children's study concentration and rest time. Interviews with local farmers revealed gender-based preferences in this division of labour.

"Usually, the girls I tell tie leaves. They are more patient and meticulous, unlike boys who prefer to work hard in the fields." (Ibu Manis, tobacco farmer, 2025)

This view suggests a social construct that establishes girls as detail-and-domestic workers, unlike boys, who are associated with physical power in the land. This separation objectifies gender values when social norms are inherited and accepted as truth in peasant families (Badstue et al., 2020).

The begelantang activity not only reproduces gender-based household chores, but also shows how child labor is framed as "diligence training." (Abdullah et al., 2022) identified that girls' work in peasant families is often interpreted as positive character education. However, this perception masks the fact that children experience muscle fatigue, back pain, and psychological distress due to excessive repetition of manual labour.

The meaning of work as part of family loyalty tends to blur the line between contribution and exploitation. Derrida (1978) advocates that such practices be deconstructed, since the language of "help" and "learning to be responsible" often hides the inequality of power structures in the household. When children have no choice but to refuse or limit their working hours, the power relationship between

parents and children occurs in a symbolic form that is not always perceived as oppression. Critical awareness began to emerge from people who questioned the impact of work on children's education. As revealed by the Secretary of Wakan Village.

"They still have to go to school. If you keep working, you will be too lazy to learn." (Jinatih, Secretary of Wakan Village, 2025)

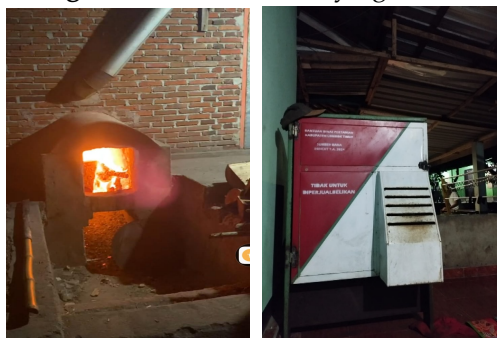
This narrative shows that there is growing cultural resistance to the normalisation of child labour, even though it is still minor. (Hossain, 2023), in his study in Bangladesh, noted that child work done at home is often more challenging to control because it is under the shadow of family values. This is also true in Wakan Village, where workspaces and living spaces are integrated, making separating study and work time difficult. This situation reinforces the urgency of a community approach that is not only educational but also intervenes in the division of domestic labour based on age and gender.

Efforts to liberate dominant value structures such as this require interventions based on equality of roles and awareness of rights. Chambers (2020) states that a just social transformation must include all voices, especially the youngest and most unheard. Girls in tobacco farming families are a double-affected group: as children and women, they experience a hidden workload that is often not recorded in formal narratives about agricultural labour (Galdo et al., 2020; Ravi et al., 2024).

Bejelok (drying of tobacco leaves)

The final stage in the tobacco production process in Wakan Village is bejelok, which is drying leaves that have been tied beforehand. This process is done by hanging tobacco leaves on bamboo shelves in a drying house (oven) or a wood-fired furnace room. Drying activities require intensive supervision to maintain temperature and humidity stability to maintain the quality of tobacco. Children are involved in this work, especially in lighting fires, guarding coals, and turning leaves periodically to avoid decay or discoloration.

Figure 3. Tobacco leaf drying device



Source: Field Documentation, 2025.

Figure 3 shows children near heat sources, with no physical protection or safety from exposure to fire and smoke. This condition indicates a high thermal risk and the potential for respiratory tract disturbances due to wood smoke accumulated in an enclosed space. Silent activities often occur at night, forcing children to stay awake until late without adequate rest.

"Children often help guard the fire. Tired indeed, especially when it is hot. But the results must not be damaged." (Rozi, tobacco farmer, 2025)

This statement reflects children's expectations of maintaining the quality of the harvest, even though this role is associated with high health risks. When a child is placed in the family system of productive responsibility, the boundaries between "help" and "workload" become blurred and are often not formally recognized.

Research by Santana, Santana, and shows that in the context of farming families, the involvement of children at the stage of processing results is often understood as a means of instilling the value of

maturity. However, this perception obscures the exploitative dimension of the workload that children carry out beyond their physical and psychological capacities. This experience illustrates the process of internalizing productivity values as a moral imperative from an early age.

The narrow drying room, lack of ventilation, and dim lighting add to the complexity of children's work risks. Study (Mugizi, 2025) indicates that exposure to high temperatures and combustion smoke in children directly impacts lung capacity, immunity, and sleep quality. When this kind of work environment is naturalised as part of "family responsibility", the social justification for child labour is further strengthened without critically evaluating its long-term impacts.

Social relations surrounding the practice of child labour cannot be separated from the value structure that places children as an inseparable part of the family's productivity chain. Berger and Luckmann (1966) explained that the process of internalising values takes place through social transmission, which absorbs the role of children into the production system without having to go through formal legitimacy. At this point, child labour has become a symbolic institution that is difficult to distinguish from the fairness of daily life (Mitra, 2020).

The need to deconstruct the meaning of children's work is increasingly relevant when children lose time to study and rest to maintain the dryer. Derrida (1978) views that every system of signs or social meanings contains contradictions, and must be dismantled to create a new, fairer meaning. In this context, unsupervised night work is not just the unconsciousness of the parents, but a reflection of a symbolic power structure that strengthens the child's position as a "risk-bearer" for the sake of the domestic economy.

A statement from a community leader, Badri (2025), opens up space for critical reflection on the situation: "Do not let their work interfere with school and health. There must be supervision." This vote indicates a shift in perspective at the community level, which could be the starting point for building a locally based social protection system. Only through a participatory community approach that values local values and opens spaces for multigenerational dialogue can a change in the meaning of children's work be built sustainably.

3.2. Parents' perception of child labor in tobacco farming in Wakan Village

Parents' views on children's involvement in agricultural work play a central role in shaping and sustaining child labour practices in Wakan Village. For most tobacco-farming families, the presence of children in the production process is considered an unquestionable form of normative involvement. Activities such as carrying fertilisers, tying leaves, and maintaining the drying process are interpreted as positive contributions to the survival of farming households.

"We do not tell them to work. They want to help themselves. Since I was a child, I have been used to following my parents in the fields." (Pahrudin and Tobacco Farm, 2025).

This saying suggests that child labour has been absorbed into the social structure as part of the family life cycle rather than as a separate rational decision. Children's activities are not considered formal work, but rather a form of loyalty to parents and an exercise in self-reliance that is seen positively.

This value structure does not arise spontaneously. It was formed through a long process of internalising agrarian culture, which placed children as an integral part of the household economy (Reid-Musson et al., 2022; Santana & Ristum, 2023). Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated that the internalisation of social values is a stage in which the construction of reality is no longer realised as a social product, but is accepted as an objective fact of life. Children's work in this context is not just a practice but a social reality that has been institutionalised culturally and emotionally.

The moral values attached to children's work often frame these activities to build character and resilience. Children involved in family work are considered to have higher social sensitivity, be more disciplined, and not be spoiled. This perception is reinforced by parents' experiences who have gone through the early work phase in the past (Jijon, 2020; Zaliznyak, 2022).

A study by (Wells, 2024) shows that child labour practices in peasant families in West Africa are understood as part of social reproduction, not as aberrations. The value of work is associated with maturity and not exploitation. A similar situation is seen in Wakan Village, where parents combine work and character education without distinguishing between social training and workload. Consequently, the spirit of productivity often marginalizes children's rights to study, play, and rest.

Subsistence economics also influences parents' attitudes. When household income depends on crops and the availability of seasonal labour is limited, children become a logical choice to meet additional labor needs. (Kaur & Byard, 2021) show that daily economic pressures make families reduce their children's age and working hours, especially in rural areas with weak protection systems. There is also an ambivalent dynamic in the elderly population. Some are beginning to realise that children's involvement, if not controlled, can hurt education. Sometimes, I ask my son to help, but if there is repetition tomorrow, I will not let him. The school remains number one."(Sarni, Parents, 2025).

This attitude shows the emergence of the seeds of critical awareness that re-question old values and begin to prioritise the child's future through education.

Freire (1970) called this condition the embryo of conscientizacao, a reflective awareness of reality that has been taken for granted. When parents ask whether their children's work impacts their educational future, the door to social transformation opens. This awareness can be a force for change if strengthened through dialogical, non-repressive community intervention (Nursahid et al., 2024).

It is not sufficient to transform parental perception through a legal approach alone. Structural approaches that do not touch on local values risk creating social resistance. (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024) underlined the importance of citizen experience-based empowerment, where the community itself is given space to reassess the practices that have been carried out. Strengthening parents' awareness of their children's rights will be more effective if it is built through a participatory process and appreciation for their cultural realities (Musriana et al., 2024b).

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that children's involvement in tobacco production in Wakan Village, including berabok (fertilisation), begelantang (leaf binding), and bejelok (drying), has been culturally and socially rooted. Each stage raises physical, psychological, and social risks, but is framed as fairness and moral contribution to the family, thus blurring the line between aid and exploitation. Field findings show that the values of productivity, loyalty, and maturity are internalized from an early age through cross-generational social transmission (Amelia et al., 2025). From the perspective of Berger and Luckman's social construction and Derrida's deconstruction, this meaning of "help" masks the symbolic power structure that limits the child's right to learn, play, and rest, despite the initial resistance of some community leaders and parents (Putro et al., 2024).

This study has limitations in the scope of the location, which only includes one village. The data collection period is limited to the planting and harvest seasons, and actors outside the family and children are not involved. These limitations allow follow-up studies to expand the region, engage more diverse stakeholders, and combine quantitative and qualitative approaches (Ihsan et al., 2024).

Theoretically, this study enriches the study of symbolic power relations, social construction, and gender dimensions in child labour in the agricultural sector. In practical terms, the results confirm the

importance of participatory and local value-based community interventions, so that child protection is based on a legal-formal framework and collective awareness (Amanda et al., 2024).

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