

THEORISING AGE AND THE LIFECOURSE: TOWARD MORE USEFUL CONCEPTUALISATIONS

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Concepts of age and lifecourse

transition singular fluid multiple
binary contextual universal
chronological

Starting point:

- Debating minimum ages for marriage and sexual consent
- UN General Assembly's anticipated 'General Comment on the Rights of Adolescents' – implications in relation to ages at which children are entitled to work

December 31st, 2015
Members of the
UN Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the Child
General Comment on the Rights of Adolescents in relation to Article 32
Attention: Monica Nascimento E Silva

Dear Committee Members:

As a group of practitioners and researchers closely involved with child rights and child protection programming, we have a particular interest in children's work. We have recently learned that a General Comment on the Rights of Adolescents is being prepared and this may affect the rights of working children in relation to Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We see this as an opportunity to improve the protection of children and adolescents who do work. In particular we strongly urge the Committee to avoid binding its recommendation on Adolescents to the Minimum Age Standards set out in ILO Convention 138 and instead reference ILO Convention 182 and the importance of protecting working children from exploitation and harm. Reference to ILO 182 would need to respect the full range of children's rights including their protective rights such as their right to education as well as their participative rights such as their right to information, their right to participate in decisions that affect them, and their right to organize, among others. Any application of ILO 182 in practice would need to take into consideration the local contexts where children work to ensure that children's best interests are always served. Should there be interest on the part of the Committee to convene a technical discussion of the issues raised here in relation to children's work we would be pleased to assist with such an endeavor.

Through our field programming and research with children, families and communities we have come to recognize that children can and do work to support themselves and their families. This work by children and adolescents takes place in a variety of cultural contexts and settings and in many instances allows children to learn technical, business and life skills that help them become productive adults within their societies. The work that children and adolescents perform however can have positive as well as negative effects. Children and adolescents may work in dignified situations that are neither harmful nor exploitative and support the realization of their rights, but there are other instances where children work in unsafe and unhealthy environments with little or no pay and find that they are unable to pursue their education and other rights.

We all agree that in all situations, including when children do work, they must be protected from harm and exploitation, but we have reservations about using ILO Convention 138 (Minimum Age Convention) to achieve that goal. Protection from any and all forms of exploitation is set out in Article 32 of the Convention on the



This workshop will consider:

- The value of universal concepts of lifecourses based on chronological age.
- The value of situated conceptualisations of lifecourse.
- Ways of theorising lifecourse that have political salience in a globalising world.

Through discussion of these issues, we will address two of the central questions of the workshop:

- How, if at all, do theoretical concepts relating to childhood research in the North transfer to various social, cultural and political contexts in the Global South?
- What challenges exist which may prevent the incorporation of theories developed by academics focusing on Southern childhoods into more dominant discourses surrounding childhood studies?

The value of universal concepts of lifecourses based on chronological age

Positives

Negatives

The value of situated conceptualisations of lifecourse

Positives

Negatives

Ways of theorising lifecourse that have political salience in a globalising world?



Areas for discussion

- Working
- Sexual consent
- Marriage
- Criminal responsibility
- Other?

Ways of theorising lifecourse that have political salience in a globalising world?

- How, if at all, do theoretical concepts relating to childhood research in the North transfer to various social, cultural and political contexts in the Global South?
- What challenges exist which may prevent the incorporation of theories developed by academics focusing on Southern childhoods into more dominant discourses surrounding childhood studies?