

Mining Black Gold from the Dark Tank: Child Labour in Asphalt and Oil Collection Central Java, Indonesia¹

Realisa D. Masardi

Staf Pengajar Departemen Antropologi, Universitas Gadjah Mada
Email: realisa.massardi@ugm.ac.id

Abstract

Artikel ini membahas kondisi dan perspektif pekerja anak yang bekerja di industri aspal dan pengumpulan minyak di Desa Banyusugih, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Melalui penelitian etnografi selama enam bulan di Desa Banyusugih, saya berhasil melakukan merekam 8 wawancara, 52 wawancara informal, 33 wawancara yang tidak direkam, dan 5 diskusi terpumpun. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi motivasi anak-anak, teknik kerja, pola pengeluaran pendapatan, serta keterlibatan orang tua mereka dalam keputusan anak-anak untuk bekerja di bidang pengumpulan minyak dari industri aspal. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa keterlibatan anak-anak dalam sektor ini bersifat sistemik dan hanya dapat dikurangi dengan memberikan mereka peluang yang lebih baik dan sesuai dengan kemampuan mereka.

Keywords: *Pekerja anak, Indonesia, pengepul residu, pekerjaan berbahaya, aspal*

Abstrak

This article discusses the condition and perspective of child labourers working in the asphalt and oil residue collection industry in Banyusugih village, Central Java, Indonesia. Employing ethnographic research for six months in Banyusugih village, I was able to conduct 8 recorded interviews, 52 informal interviews, 33 unrecorded interviews, and 5 focus group discussions. This study explores the children's motivation, working techniques, income spending and their parents' involvement in their decision to work in this dangerous area. This article argues that the involvement of children in this sector is systemic and can only be diminished by providing them with better opportunities that are feasible for them.

Kata Kunci: *Child labour, Indonesia, residue collectors, dangerous work, asphalt*

¹ This article is a republished work from a research report under International Research on Working Children (IREWOC) project conducted in 2008-2009. This research was supervised by Prof. G.K. Lieten and Dr. Gerben Nooteboom. No data is updated from the original version.

Introduction

Indonesian historical accounts show how children's contributions to the household have always been customary in Javanese culture. Some social scientists will even go so far as to say that children are an investment for additional labour. Kodiran said that there are three positive values attributed to children in Java: emotional, economic, and social. The economic value of a child is the support it provides to the domestic income, pension guarantee, and so forth (Kodiran 1986, 44). In village customs, children are deemed important because they can assure the pension of the parents, help to work in the fields, and perform household chores (Kodiran 1986, 48).

Hildred Geertz stated that Javanese values will not consider a person as a grown-up until she or he is able to responsibly carry out an adult's duties (Geertz 1983, 115). Geertz described how children, from the age of 5 or 6 onwards, will increasingly broaden their interactions outside the home. Girls are introduced to transaction processes so that they can shop alone for the family's needs or take over their mother's selling duties when necessary. Young boys are given the responsibility to care for the cattle and to help their elders in the rice fields. Boys and girls alike are taught how to continue their parents' duties in the future (Geertz 1983, 121). Furthermore, at home both boys and girls are expected to care for their younger siblings. If the age difference is large enough, older siblings will essentially take over the role of parent (Geertz 1983, 113).

Even though working at an early age is common in Javanese society, any labour that is deemed harmful to the child's development is not tolerated. In Banyusugih, in Central Java, many children were found working as oil and asphalt collectors—probably because their village is nearby a national oil refinery. These children are clearly child *labourers* if one takes child labour to refer to any harmful economic activity performed by a person 18 years and younger. The Department of Labour and Transmigration then defines a child as 14 years or younger but also places a minimum working age of 18 for certain hazardous occupations (White and Tjandraningsih 1998, 15). Indonesia (based on ILO Convention 138 Article 7) allows persons of 13–15 years of age to perform light work. However, the work of children collecting asphalt is in no way light work, and one would even suggest it to be a worst form of child labour. ILO Convention 182 Article 3d defines the worst forms of child labour as 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. The observations I made of these children were enough to convince me of the dangerous nature of their activities and the need for a study. I also discovered that no research had previously been undertaken in this sector.

Background and setting

Banyusugih lies in Central Java, one of the most crowded provinces of Indonesia. Even though Banyusugih's surroundings have developed into a crowded industrial area, it has maintained its village ambience. The inhabitants still live according to a system of reciprocity and are extremely well connected to one another. Totok², the village chief, felt

2 All names of people, companies and places have been altered for this article

that Banyusugih is neither a village nor a city³.

Banyusugih was established in 1970 after the Indonesian Government built the National Oil Refinery Sumbergara in Cigendhis, a village nearby. Only a few families used to live in Banyusugih; most of its unused land was owned by landlords living in Cigendhis. After the refinery was built, most people moved from Cigendhis to Banyusugih.

Banyusugih only has an area of 500x200 m², and in 2008 it had an estimated 1,794 inhabitants. The occupations of the inhabitants include fishing in the river, logging in the swamp, and collecting leftover oil and asphalt from the oil refinery tanks.

On average, around 20 asphalt and oil trucks come in and out of the 5th Gate of Sumbergara Production Unit to distribute their products every day. Trucks using the 5th Gate transport asphalt (Pen 60/70 and Pen 80/100), oil (Minarex A, Minarex B, Minarex H, Paraffinic oil 60, Paraffinic oil 95), and Slack wax. When trucks return to refill their tanks, the Banyusugih residents collect what they can from the dregs left in the tanks.

Retrieving asphalt and oil from the tanks significantly increases the daily income. During the 'golden years' of asphalt and oil collecting (1980-2000), residents could fulfil not just their daily needs, but also their secondary and tertiary needs. With a daily income of Rp100,000-300,000, they build concrete and brick houses, purchase motorcycles, purchase land for investment, and save money to expand their business as an asphalt collector. In Banyusugih, asphalt is referred to as 'the Black Gold'. The demand for asphalt is always high, and thus so too is its price. The Sumbergara refinery is the only producer of asphalt in Java.

Almost all Banyusugih residents also work in the informal sector; they are construction labourers, Pedi cab drivers, boat drivers, blacksmiths, charcoal makers, illegal loggers, fishermen, drivers, farmers, and migrant workers. The most obvious difference between the formal and informal sectors is the quantity of job opportunities. The formal sector offers fewer jobs; the informal sector offers more jobs, but at much lower wages, creating the condition named 'shared poverty' by Wertheim, or 'subsistent urbanisation' by Breese (McGee in Manning 1996, 38).

According to the monograph data of Banyusugih 2008, the education level in Banyusugih is extremely low, which the residents blame for their inability to find a job. Of 455 Heads of Family, only 247 finished elementary school, 124 did not even pass elementary school, and many of them cannot even read. Only 82 Heads of Family finished high school and 2 finished an undergraduate program.

Table 1: Education of Heads of the Family in 5 RTs, Banyusugih

Heads of Family According to Education Level				
Neighbourhood association/RT	Did not graduate from Elementary School	Graduated from Elementary and Junior High School	Graduated from Senior High school	Graduated from University/ equivalent
RT 1	30	39	28	1
RT 2	28	48	19	-
RT 3	19	58	19	-

3 Interview with Totok, 19th January 2009

RT 4	30	53	9	-
RT 5	17	49	7	1
TOTAL	124	247	82	2

Banyusugih's residents fall within the middle-low economic bracket. 70% of the houses are made of concrete/brick, and the rest are made of wood or plaited bamboo. 50% of the houses do not have plumbing. The houses are packed closely next to each other without yards. Banyusugih has 7 elementary schools, 2 junior high schools, and 1 health centre nearby⁴.

Research Methodology

In the heat of the day, when most people sought shelter from the sun, I saw four children out in the street, waiting for the truck that would take them to the oil refinery. They each held a small bucket and scraper in their hands. As the truck trundled past, the children hopped on board and jumped into the dark tank. It was a shocking sight as it dawned on me how dangerous their daily activity was. Whilst living in the village, I discovered more children involved in the oil industry. They work from nightfall to sunrise, do not attend school, and are engaged in several dangerous activities that severely harm their physical, mental and emotional development.

To get close to the children involved in asphalt collection, and to better grasp their points of view and context, I lived in Banyusugih for six months. The first hurdle was to gain the trust of the residents, who were afraid I was there to expose their illegal practices. They feared I was a reporter or even police intelligence. By gossiping with Banyusugih's women, attending the neighbourhood monthly meeting, and having conversations with men, I succeeded in convincing them that I meant no harm and was just curious about their lives. In that time, I had also gotten to know the children and had become close to them. I followed them daily whilst working in the street, waiting for the trucks to come, and joined them in their spare time whilst playing billiards. I was around the children every day so that they became familiar and comfortable with my presence.

By using participant observation, I learned about their work and lives. Later, I applied ethnographic interviews. I selected six groups of informants: child labourers, their parents, truck drivers, Sumbergara's security officers, big asphalt and oil collectors, and asphalt distributors. I also had informal conversations with residents who helped me fill the gaps in my data. In total, I conducted 8 recorded interviews, 52 informal interviews, 33 unrecorded interviews, and 5 focus group discussions.

History of children's involvement

In 1975, Dibyo (60), a fisherman in Banyusugih, and two of his friends discovered the use of collecting discarded asphalt. Dibyo consistently found lumps of asphalt floating in the river by his house. He blended it with phosphor and applied it to his sailing equipment; he then modified the blend for use on his roof. When the refinery started using large trucks, Dibyo discovered he could enter the tanks and remove the asphalt residue. He and his

4 Formal interview with village chief on January 19th, 2009

friends were able to collect 5 sacks of asphalt a day because at that time nobody else realised how much money asphalt could make them⁵

As incomes noticeably increased by selling oil and asphalt, more people joined in the activity. And slowly children started to join in as well. The government started to worry about uncontrolled activities and, in 1983, installed the Marine Corps to safeguard the oil refinery. This was a terrible time for asphalt collectors because the Marines often hit, shouted at, and punished them. The Marines patrolled Banyusugih for more than 10 years. In 1997, the 405th Infantry was installed. This army group was nicer than the Marines, and the number of children working started to rise again slowly. When the Head of Police was replaced in 2000, all illegal activities around Sumbergara were halted. The police arrested people stealing Sumbergara's products from within the refinery but still allowed them to collect the tank residue. The police presence made it increasingly difficult, and so adult oil and asphalt collectors slowly disappeared. They were afraid of being arrested, so they searched for other ways to earn a living. On the other hand, children and young adults without any responsibilities, who felt free to do what they liked, became more and more involved.

At the time of my research, I counted 16 children and 20 young adults working as asphalt and oil collectors. During my last visit in 2009, I found that the number of children and young adults was higher than the number of adults. Of the 100 adults only 30 rely entirely on this job. The others just work here occasionally when other jobs, such as construction, are unavailable.

SMA⁶ (Sekolah Mencari Aspal/ School of Asphalt Collectors)

In the village, I met 16 children aged 10-18 collecting asphalt alongside 20 or more young adults aged 19-25, all of whom began to work at the age of 10. They were all boys. In many cases of working children, the informal sector is the 'job field' for boys (White 1998, 22).

Girls are more interested in selling snacks and helping their parents take care of younger siblings. I only found a small number of girls helping at their family's food stall. I was told that more than 20 girls were working as labourers in other countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. Many of them were younger than 17, but the middlemen had provided fake identity cards. Secondary data collected from the village office showed the number of migrant workers from the surrounding district, 127 people had left the village to work abroad in 2007, in 2008 the number had risen to 137, and in February 2009 there were 12 people registered so far for the year. 80% of the migrant workers were women. At least 42 labour corporations were listed as brokers for migrant labourers.⁷

I asked the children whether they go to school or not, and they jokingly replied that they did indeed go to SMA (Sekolah Menengah Atas or high school), but with a different abbreviation: Sekolah Mencari Aspal (School of Asphalt Collectors). Most of them had

5 In-depth interview with Dibyo, 10th February 2009

6 SMA is a common abbreviation for Sekolah Menengah Atas or Senior High-School in Indonesia – the children use the same abbreviation to now refer to the "School of Asphalt Collectors"

7 Secondary data from Darmiah, secretary of Regan Regency on 4th February 2009

dropped out during elementary or junior high school, often because they lacked motivation rather than money. They believed that further education would not improve their chances in the labour market (White 1998, 24). Since most available jobs offered the same wages regardless of education level, neither the children nor their parents had strong incentives to continue their education (White 1998, 27).

Some children left school because their parents could not afford to educate all their children. The eldest child stopped their education at junior high school since their parents prioritised the elementary schooling of younger siblings. Parental education also influenced children's motivation, in which they could not provide the children enough encouragement to continue studying. Bourdieu emphasised the influence of family guidance, parental education, and financial resources on children's educational achievement (Bourdieu 1974, 39, cited in Harker 1990, 111). Children from working-class and middle-class families often faced greater difficulties completing their education than those from privileged backgrounds (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, 230). Similarly, McCulloch (2002, 291) linked family disruption, early motherhood, low maternal educational attainment, social housing, and limited economic resources to children's development.

After dropping out of school, the children usually stay at home to help the parents with the household work. Eventually, the children get bored and search for alternatives outside the home. The boys indicated that being jobless gives them a bad reputation; people will think they are lazy. It is always better to work, no matter what the job is.

“By collecting asphalt, I get money, and I also can be proud. It seems better for me to be seen by neighbours that I am working than just stay at home and doing nothing. They will think I am lazy (if I do not work)” (Teguh, 20th November 2008).

Climbing Onto Tanks and Jumping Into the Darkness

First Step: Clean the Oil Tank

Wisang (15), an asphalt collector, told me that usually children start their *career* by collecting oil before attempting the asphalt tanks. This is mainly because the oil tanks are lower than asphalt tanks, and so the children can easily jump out of the tank after collecting the oil. The oil trucks park in front of the 5th Gate between 3.00 am and 10.00 am. The oil products include Minarex A, Minarex B, Minarex H, Paraffinic oil 60, Paraffinic oil 95, and Slack wax.

There are three techniques that children use to collect the oil. First, the children turn the tap on the side of the tank and collect any oil that runs out in a bucket. Second, children jump into the tank. They scoop up the dregs of oil with their bare hands and collect it in a bucket. They then jump up out of the tank again; those who are not experienced yet normally need help from their friends to get out again. Third, if the tank's entrance is too small for them to pass through, then the children use old rags tightened with rope to wipe the sides of the tank clean. This method takes a lot of patience and precision.

After collecting oil in the buckets, the children pour each type of oil separately into 1.5-litre plastic bottles. They sell these bottles to “big” collectors. There are two big oil collectors in Banyusugih. Wasis (50) buys Minarex from the children for Rp6,500/bottle

(Rp4,000/litre). For Paraffinic oil, he pays Rp7,500/bottle (Rp 5,000/litre). Wasis then sells on the oil once he has bought large amounts from the collectors. He sells a big bucket (36 litres) of Minarex for Rp200,000 and a big bucket of Paraffinic oil for Rp230,000. Wasis also sells Slack wax for Rp600,000/drum, which he buys for Rp400,000/drum. Of course, these prices fluctuate depending on supply and demand. Another big oil collector told me that he can make a Rp50,000-150,000 profit per day.

Wasis explained that his customers use the oil for personal purposes or resell it. Demand is consistently high, and customers come from nearby areas and other cities; he rarely needs to seek customers because buying directly from the refinery requires larger quantities. If he cannot sell all his oil, he sells the remaining stock to Rudy (40), another major oil collector in Banyusugih. Rudy can continue his business even during long periods without sales since he has more capital and a wider customer network.



I asked Wasis about the children, but he explained that he doesn't employ anyone; they work independently. However, every Idul Fitri, he and other big collectors give the children *Tunjangan Hari Raya* (religious holiday allowance). The previous year, Wasis gave THR to ten collectors, including four adults and six children. He expected this number to increase as more children left school and joined the oil and asphalt collection business.

The work follows a hierarchy among adult and child collectors. Four adults have priority in cleaning the first two trucks that enter the refinery gates, while three children clean the third and fourth trucks. The remaining children assist the adults. When a truck arrives, children compete to claim it by climbing onto it and holding on until it parks outside the gate. Children who assist adults earn less than those who secure their own trucks. Adults usually leave around 10 a.m while trucks continue arriving until 1 p.m, children have more opportunities to claim trucks late in the morning. A child can earn about Rp 25,000-50,000 a day; this amount is a big motivation for boys to become oil collectors.

I encountered only one boy who combined school with his oil collecting duties. Unfortunately, his work interfered with his ability to complete his homework, and his performance was weak. The money he earned was spent on farm chickens and sometimes clothes.

Asphalt Drum's Seal Cleaner

After learning how to jump onto moving trucks and enter oil tanks, children often progress to collecting asphalt from trucks. This work becomes more competitive since it is difficult to wait for them to stop and to collect the asphalt while trucks are still moving. To manage the competition, collectors formed three main groups, two consisting of adults and one of youth aged 20-25. Each group has around 15 members from Banyusugih. However, children face fewer restrictions and can join anyone willing to let them participate, although they are not officially recognised as group members. They usually collect leftover asphalt from the drum seals using an iron scraper called a *colek*. The children work in team to gather the asphalt in buckets and sell it to major collectors then they share the profits.

The children will work on one truck for no more than 10-15 minutes; they jump off the truck again before it reaches the main road. A group of children can get 10-15 kilos of asphalt from one truck, which can earn them about Rp4,000/kg. Although this money is quickly earned, the children must sometimes wait a long time before the next truck comes out of the refinery again. Usually, the children collect oil in the mornings and then wait near the refinery to collect asphalt whenever a truck comes out; they do this until 3 pm, which is when the refinery stops loading trucks. The children will then go home, take a shower, sleep, and return in the evening to work again.

Most asphalt trucks have security teams preventing anyone from removing any asphalt from the drums. This is a result of complaints made by customers in the 1990s, when too much asphalt was going missing. However, Hartono still allows children to climb his trucks and clean the seals. Hartono is a successful Banyusugih citizen and Sumbergara's asphalt sub-distributor. In former days, Hartono too was a tank cleaner. Through hard and precise work, he succeeded in becoming the richest person in Banyusugih. He still relates to the situation the children find themselves in. Therefore, he allows the children to board his trucks.



Asphalt Tank Cleaner

More expert children will clean out the asphalt tanks as they drive back to the refinery to be refilled. This means, however, that the children must get onto the trucks as far away as possible, so that they have more time to work before the truck re-enters the refinery. They will travel quite some distance to be able to meet the trucks on their way back. They start their days very early, which is at 5 am. The children need to find the trucks by themselves, but more often, they have direct contact with the drivers who let them know where and when to meet them. In one night, an asphalt collector boy can earn Rp 50,000—100,000.

The asphalt collector children work for 12-14 hours a day. Although some will work in the mornings and afternoons, most of them choose to sleep during the hotter times of day. Usually, children work at night, come home at 7 am to take a shower, eat, and sleep. Then, at 1 p.m., they will go to Banyusugih Street to collect asphalt from the drum seals or just recover their energy to work the next night. This working schedule does not allow for study, play, or a social life. The children entertain themselves with TV, PlayStation, or betting on games, such as billiards. The town does not offer young people much entertainment, and people in general relax by 'people-watching' in the park on weekends.



Following the Path of Fathers and Friends

Children often become involved with this activity through friends and family already working as asphalt collectors. The children said that they do this job because there is nothing else to do and no other jobs available to them. The relatively high levels of potential income also influence their choice. White has shown that the earnings of street boys are higher than other jobs such as factory worker or market porter (White 1998:23). The term 'street boys' is what the boys call themselves. One boy told me that he earns Rp27,500 per day in construction, whilst children collecting asphalt can earn Rp50,000-70,000 per day. The money is the biggest motivation for them to work in this sector.

According to the children, collecting oil and asphalt is relatively easy if they can jump onto and climb into trucks. Cleaning a tank takes only 15-30 minutes, although they may have to wait for hours in the cold for trucks to arrive. The work also leaves them covered in asphalt. Regardless of these challenges, the children consider it an easy way to earn money quickly and enjoy working alongside their friends. Although asphalt collection was previously dominated by adults, with only around ten children involved, the number of young collectors has increased as they have motivated their friends to join. As a result, the activity has become common among Banyusugih's youth.

Even though asphalt collecting offers attractive financial benefits, not all children see it as a long-term occupation. A 20-year-old collector who had worked for four years wanted to

move into construction to gain new skills and improve his future prospects. Despite earning good money, he felt ashamed of his current job because it left him dirty and required him to jump onto trucks, sleep, and work on the streets. Antok (25 November 2008) asked not to be identified, explaining that residents often called the children “asphalt monkeys”, which is not something he is proud of. However, other young collectors, including Tony (14), Zaky (17), and Bowo (17), think differently. They valued the job because it provided quick income, allowed them to buy desirable items, support their families, and spend time with friends. As Tony explained, he enjoyed working with his friends and saw no reason to feel ashamed since what they are doing is not a sin, like stealing (18 November 2008). Although they were aware of their negative reputation, these children took pride in earning money honestly and enjoying their lives.

Spending money from collecting asphalt

The way in which the children spend their money is related to the reasons they work in the first place. Generally, they either want to earn money to afford luxury goods for themselves, or they work to support their families.

Children who work just for themselves tend to spend their money on snacks, cigarettes, cell phone credit, alcohol or even drugs. They also tend to bet a lot on billiards games. I met a 14-year-old boy, working already for the past 4 years, who was drunk every time I saw him. His body was so skinny, his teeth chipped and stained, his eyes always pale, and never able to speak to me coherently.

The children also use their money for food, or save up to buy bigger, more expensive items, such as clothes, cell phones or even motorcycles. Almost all the children have cell phones to contact the truck drivers. Despite their other needs, I found that having a cell phone is considered a vital object to own; it helps the children to identify themselves as fashionable people, or *gaul*. The children were obviously not content with basic phones; they all wanted the latest and the best. Wisang, a young asphalt collector, told me how he was saving for a cell phone costing Rp3.4 million. Featherstone and Bourdieu have both shown that cell phones in this scenario are no longer just functional objects, but symbolic in the consumer culture to indicate a higher social status (Featherstone 1998:37, Bourdieu 1984 in Featherstone 1998:46).

“Now, I am saving my money to buy a cell phone priced at Rp3.4 million. From collecting asphalt and helping my father on his business, I have got Rp2 million. I still need Rp1.4 million more.” (Wisang, 16th January 2009)

Teguh and Setyo, brothers working as asphalt collectors, bought a second-hand motorcycle on credit. It cost Rp4 million, and they pay instalments every month. A motorcycle is another must-have item for the youth in Banyusugih. Ben White has shown how the lifestyle and consumer culture pressures the children into needing more money (White 1998, 27).

Children have different priorities in managing the money they earn from collecting asphalt. While some spend it on their immediate needs, others save for the future or help support their families. Zaky, for instance, save money to build a house and pay for his future wedding. He also gives pocket money to his younger brother. Teguh, by contrast, gives all

his earnings to his mother to help cover household expenses, social obligations, and his younger sister's school fees. His father also worked as a casual labourer and sometimes collected asphalt, but the family continues to face financial difficulties. As Teguh explained, he understands that his father has limited income and therefore does not ask him for money. Simila to Teguh, Mulya began working at the age of 15 to support his parents. After his father died, he became responsible for helping his mother, his widowed sister, and her three children. When his sister remarried, he was finally able to save some of his earnings. Tony, meanwhile, uses his income for himself but gives money to his mother when he earns more than usual. He and his brother have also built a small house where they live with their parents and younger sister.

It shows that children's earnings serve different purposes depending on their family circumstances and personal goals. For some, the money provides a degree of independence and allows them to save for their future. Others think that it is essential to their family's survival. Their decision to work also appears to change the expectation placed on them by their parents. Once children begin earning money, parents often withdraw their financial support, even if they initially oppose their children's involvement in asphalt collection. As Juliarty stated, "Whoooi, don't you shame of yourself? You are working now, but you still ask money to your parents?" (5 January 2009). This suggests that earning an income not only give children greater financial responsibility but also leads their families to expect them to support themselves.

This attitude unwittingly supports the continuation of the child's 'employment'. Parents indicate quite clearly to the children that they are no longer responsible for them, and that they need to care for themselves. The children therefore are unlikely to stop working once they have started.

Impact of the Work on the Children

The children see their earnings as a major benefit of asphalt collection. The money allows them to buy things they want, socialize with friends, enjoy themselves, and support their families. However, earning large amounts at a young age can also expose them to risky behaviours. Since they earn their own money, their parents may find it harder to control how they spend it. Some children use their earnings to buy cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs, while others spend time at billiard halls and bet on games. Because asphalt collection was traditionally an adult occupation, it also exposes children to adult social activities that affect their behaviour and education.

The work may also lead to physical risks. The children often suffer scratches, bruises, and falls from trucks, which may cause severe injuries. Tony explained, "Everyone who works in this job must have fallen from the trucks" (13 October 2008). He himself experienced falling from heights, once after being struck by a telephone cable hanging across the street. His foot was broken. After only two weeks of recovery, he returned to work. For him, accepting the injury is a part of the job. Mulya also recalled being dragged by a truck after slipping from the top of a tank. In addition, two adult collectors had died after falling beneath the wheels of moving trucks. Regardless of these dangers, the children keep working, suggestion that the income they earn outweighs their fear of injury.

At the same time, asphalt collection exposes children to serious physical and

psychological risks. Asphalt must be heated to approximately 120 to 130°C to flow through the pipes, which often remains dangerously hot when the children begin working. As a result, they frequently suffer burns, leaving their skin red, raw and peeling. They also inhale oil and asphalt fumes, which can cause respiratory problems and lung disease. Working inside the tanks means it adds additional dangers, as the children must operate in complete darkness while the trucks may still be moving. This condition can cause dizziness, nausea, and loss of balance, increasing the risk of falling into hot asphalt or oil. Although many children are afraid of the darkness, they rely on their friends for support and continue working because of the income. As Teguh explained, "Actually, I am very afraid of darkness, but then I recall that there is money in the darkness, so I survive."

Beyond these physical dangers, the children also experience harassment from police and security officers who often chase them away and insult them. Such treatment makes them feel insecure and increases a negative perception of themselves. This work also disrupts their education. Although many initially combine school and work, they often leave school as they become accustomed to earning money. Returning to school becomes increasingly difficult as they grow older and feel ashamed of studying alongside younger children. Zacky described this dependence on work as an addition, "We cannot just leave the job because we get used to it. We do not want to go back to school anymore because we are too old. We are ashamed to be the same level with little children" (21 December 2008). Thus, even with the income they earn, they are exposed to significant health and safety risks while limiting their educational opportunities.

The activities involved with oil and asphalt collection are among the worst forms of child labour. According to the ILO definitions, the work can be considered to be hazardous work, and no child of any age should be involved. ILO Convention No.182 article 3d defines the worst forms of child labour as 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 (ILO 1994, 12)

The Parents' Role

Parents have different attitudes toward their children's involvement in oil and asphalt collection. Tejo (56), Tony's father, was ashamed of his son's work and preferred that he attend school although he believed Tony was too lazy to study. In spite of forbidding Tony from working, he was unable to stop him. Tejo also appeared to regard construction work more positively than asphalt collection, insisting that his older son work only as a construction labourer. In contrast, Karno (50) took a more neutral approach. His son left school because he struggled to keep up with lessons and later joined his friends in a small collection out of boredom. Having worked as an asphalt collector himself, Karno understood the risk and did not oppose his son's decision. Instead, he advised him to be careful, explaining that "every job has its own risk; people just need to work carefully" (15 December 2008).

The same goes with Setyo and Teguh's mother, who claimed not to worry about her sons since her Husband and brother also work as asphalt collectors and they can look after the children. She added that their family's financial condition and his unmotivated son not going to school are the reasons why she allows him to work in this sector. However, she also showed her concern that Teguh would fall from the truck. She continued, "But then I

recalled that he works with his uncle and father, so I felt more secure. I am proud of him for being willing to help our family's income" (Ida, 6 February 2009).

Hence, it illustrates how parents' experiences and perceptions of different types of work shape their responses to their children's participation in a spouse collection.

Parents who are content with their children's involvement are those who also worked as asphalt collectors in former days. They appreciate their children's willingness to earn their own money, instead of being jobless and staying at home. Tulus (48), Zaky's father, explained that working as an asphalt collector is better for his son than working as a casual labourer. Tulus had also once been an asphalt collector, but now he works as a casual labourer in construction, illegal logging, or fishing. Tulus has in fact tried all types of informal jobs, but he was always most proud of oil and asphalt collection, because he earned a lot of money with it. He felt that asphalt collecting was the best job for his son because it is quite easy and quick, and the money that Zaky can earn is a lot. Even so, Tulus hopes that Zaky can turn to a trading job in the future because it will provide a more stable income for Zaky when he is married.

"If Zaky works as a construction labourer, he must work under the sun the whole day. It breaks my heart to see him work like that; moreover, he will only get Rp20,000/day in construction. This (asphalt collecting) job is the nicest job for him." (Tulus, 8 January 2009)

Although many parents initially prohibited their sons from collecting oil and asphalt, they often give up over time. Parents may blame their sons' friends for encouraging them to work, but children are more often influenced by family members who are already asphalt collectors. My observation of lower-middle-income Javanese families suggests that the relationship between parents and children is relatively informal. Fathers and sons can argue openly while mothers and sons often have an even closer relationship. Children therefore may feel less afraid of challenging their parents⁸. The use of *ngoko*, the informal level of Javanese language, reflects this familiarity in families of peasants and labourers. In contrast, children in upper-class Javanese families are expected to use *krama*, the more formal and respectful level of Javanese, when speaking to their parents. The more formal interactions may encourage greater obedience and respect for parental authority (Subroto 2001: 63).

The Opinion of Others

Not only the parents, but other Banyusugih's citizens too have opinions about the children working. The wife of the neighbourhood association leader of area 1 (Pak RT 01), Bu Wati, feels that the children in Banyusugih are divided into two groups: children who go to school and children who work in asphalt collection. She added that asphalt collection children are bad, impolite, always drunk, non-pious and uneducated.

The wife of a cleric, whom we spoke to, called the children "asphalt monkeys". She was sure that the children would harass me during my research, as they are naughty, impolite, and rough; and warned me to keep a safe distance. Another citizen, a son of a landlord, understood that the children need money, which is why they work. Even so, he still felt that

8 In the Javanese context of parent-children relations, a certain level of fear implies obedience, respect, politeness and little willingness to resist the parents' wishes (Geertz 1983, 117)W.

they should instead go to school and the mosque. Most citizens who criticise the asphalt collection children come from middle-class families, and most from the wealthy areas RT 01-RT 02.

The residents of RT 03-RT 05 are mostly working-class and do not socialise much with people in RT 01-RT 02, the wealthier people. Many asphalt collectors live in RT 03-RT 05. In former times, almost all citizens in RT 03-RT 05 worked as asphalt collectors as a turning point from their occupation as fishermen. That is why asphalt collection is considered a normal activity in their area. The RT 01-RT 02 people are traditionally landlords, state employees, and teachers, although there are also some “big” asphalt buyers who have enjoyed an education because of their higher incomes.

Here we can see that Bourdieu’s theory about the influence of *habitus* on practice can be used. Children’s decision to work in asphalt collection is highly influenced by their conditions and resources, such as family condition, parents’ education, parents’ occupation, friends’ and fathers’ activities as a role model and society’s acceptance of these activities as the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984 in Harker 1990, 16). Furthermore, Bourdieu explained how children will mostly see the world with the same eyes as their parents and others who went before them (Bourdieu 1977, 167 in Harker 1990, 14). Children living in a middle-class in this area are seldom found working in this activity. They prefer to study rather than to work; in addition, their parents’ support in the educational process allows children in middle-class families to achieve better school results. Furthermore, the middle-class children are raised with the belief that asphalt collection is a dishonourable job and will be less likely to become involved.

Benefits and disadvantages

The most advantaged among the asphalt collectors are most definitely the big buyers. They do not have to produce anything or work hard to get a lot of money. By buying asphalt from the children for a low price and selling it again at Sumbergara’s prices, they can profit at least Rp400,000/drum. The demand for cheap asphalt is always high, especially among the street construction industry. Street constructors save money by bargaining with the big buyers and can buy smaller amounts than if they order directly from the factory. They can order 150 kg/drum or just 100 kg/drum; they can order just one drum if they wish, which is not possible when ordering from Sumbergara distributors.

Most Banyusugih citizens benefit from the asphalt factory. It is a continuous source of income; the trucks keep coming in and out of the factory, and demand for asphalt will always be high. They earn enough money to fulfil their daily needs and their children’s. Many Banyusugih citizens have a job through this industry; at least 30 young men work for big asphalt buyers, for whom they pack and load drums onto trucks to be delivered to customers. About 10 people work as drum fixers. 15 food stalls and 2 billiards centres are crowded with adult and child asphalt collectors. All these people benefit from the industry.

Truck drivers also benefit from collecting asphalt and selling it to big buyers. Drivers’ wages are not fixed, and they only get paid per asphalt delivery. One driver told me that he would not be able to support his family if he did not partake in asphalt collection. This situation implies that truck drivers might make deals with collectors and buyers and sell the asphalt in their tanks for extra income.

Even so, some people are disadvantaged by this activity. The distributors (18 asphalt distributors in total) are the most disadvantaged people. Demus, an asphalt distributor, explained that he does not mind if the children collect asphalt from the drums' seals or from the tank after the unloading process. The problem is the high demand from big asphalt collectors; it results in a number of illegal situations. The distributors often catch the children opening the drums' seal and taking asphalt from the full drums. To prevent this, they have to pay security officers to guard the trucks. "I often have to fix the tank because the inside has been scratched by the children's *colek* and sometimes they throw water or clothes inside the tank. Actually, I understand that children need money. But with this condition, I have to pay a lot of money to fix my tank" (Demus, 6th February 2009).

Other disadvantaged people are the customers. Customers will at times receive less asphalt than ordered because amounts have been stolen from the tanks. They can complain and demand a refund, but this process takes time and effort. Every product leaving Sumbergara is weighed, so any complaints after the trucks leave the Sumbergara gates are not accepted by the factory. The responsibility lies with the drivers and security guards.

Prospects

Even though the children seem to enjoy working as asphalt collectors, most of them expressed a desire to pursue different occupations in the future. They believed that the government or other institutions could help them by providing stable employment opportunities. In terms of their wishes for the future, their aspirations were shaped by role models in their immediate surroundings. Some wanted to attend automotive school to open their own workshop or work for machinery companies abroad, inspired by a local man who had secured a job with an automotive company in Japan. Others hope to become major asphalt buyers, after seeing an example of successful buyers in their neighbourhood. One boy wanted to become a marine like his uncle, who enjoyed a prosperous life in Surabaya, while others aspired to become police officers or business owners. It was also found that a boy wanted to sell chips in town but lacked the capital to start his business.

Despite their interest in pursuing better employment, the children rarely considered education a pathway to achieving their goals. Some of them expressed little interest in returning to school, even if there were no tuition fees required, and said they would continue collecting asphalt while seeking other work. Since 2009, the government has provided free education in public schools from elementary to high school, with exemptions for families unable to afford additional contributions (Department of Education website). However, the children are seen to be more focused on finding alternative sources of income than on continuing their education. Therefore, it reflects a desire for greater economic security, but their limited interest in schooling may restrict the opportunities available to them in the future.

Conclusion

Children work in asphalt collection mainly because it is the easiest way for them to earn relatively large amounts of money. Not only does it cover their daily needs expenses, but it also supports their desires for modern gadgets and luxury items. Since they cannot rely on

their parents to fulfil all their needs, the children feel the need to work. The phenomenon of children working in this area is expected to continue for as long as Sumbergara is still in production, and alternative income-generating activities are lacking.

Role models, such as fathers and friends, highly influence the children's decision to work. Fathers who object to the work are unable to argue against their children's involvement because they perform the same activity. Other parents, however, even support their children in order to raise the family income. Acceptance of children working in this sector is also built on the surrounding society's opinion that asphalt collection is a common job. Moreover, the children are not motivated to attend school, and so they have plenty of time to work. This lack of motivation comes from parents who themselves are uneducated and unaware of the benefits of schooling.

Even though child labour in this area is obviously dangerous, an impulsive response should be avoided. Simply forbidding the children from working in this activity will leave them and their families in a dire situation, and they are unlikely to survive. If actions are indeed implemented to stop the children from performing this activity, then it is vital for alternative income-generating activities to be offered.

Acknowledgement

We are indebted to Plan Netherlands and the supervision of Professor G.K. Lieten, the director of the research program that was held in 2008-2009, for providing research funding to investigate the situation of children who are involved in the worst form of child labours. This research was also conducted in Nepal and Bangladesh (<https://childlabour.net/>).

Disclosure Statement

The author is affiliated with the editorial team of this journal. To maintain editorial impartiality, the author was recused from all stages of the editorial evaluation of this manuscript. The author declares no additional competing financial or personal interests.=.

References

- Atkinson, Paul et al (ed). 2001. *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications
- Bodgan, Robert & Steven J. Taylor. 1975. *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*. Canada: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bourdieu, Pierre & Jean-Claude Passeron. 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: SAGE Publications
- Buchori, Mochtar. 2006. "Pendidikan Gagal Tanpa Partisipasi Orang Tua" in *BASIS: Siapa Peduli Filsafat Pendidikan* No. 07-08, Year-55 (Juli-Agustus 2006): 13-27.
- Featherstone, Mike. 2008. *Posmodernisme dan Budaya Konsumen*. Translated from English by Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar
- Geertz, Clifford. 2002. *Hayat dan Karya: Antropolog sebagai Penulis dan Pengarang*. Translated from English by Landung Simatupang. Yogyakarta: LKiS
- Geertz, Hildred. 1983. *Keluarga Jawa*. Translated from English by Hersri. Jakarta: Grafitipers
- Harker, R., Cheelen Mahar & Chris Wilkes. 1990. "Posisi Teoretis Dasar". In (*Habitus x modal*) + *ranah = praktik: Pengantar paling komprehensif kepada pemikiran Pierre Bourdieu*. Translated from English by Pipit Maizier. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra

- Harker, Richard. 1990. "Bourdieu- Pendidikan dan Reproduksi". In *(Habitus x modal) + ranah = praktik: Pengantar paling komprehensif kepada pemikiran Pierre Bourdieu*. Translated from English by Pipit Maizier. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra
- Haryatmoko. 2003. *Menyingkap Kepalsuan Budaya Penguasa* in BASIS: No. 11-12, Tahun ke-52, November-Desember 2003. "Edisi Khusus Pierre Bourdieu: Kritik Terhadap Neo-Liberalisme".
- Haryatmoko. 2008. "Sekolah, Alat Reproduksi Kesenjangan Sosial-Analisis Kritis Pierre Bourdieu in BASIS: Melawan Pendidikan Turbo No. 07-08, Year-57 (Juli-Agustus 2008): 12-22.
- ILO. 2008. *Child Labour: A textbook for university students*, presented at Child Labour Training Workshop, IREWOC, Bogor, Indonesia, August 2008.
- ILO. 1994. *Child Labour in Indonesia*. Geneva: ILO Publication
- Jenkins, Richard. 2004. *Membaca Pikiran Bourdieu*. Translated from English by Nurhadi. Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana
- Jensen, Peter & Helena Skyt Nielsen. 2009. "Child Labour or School Attendance? Evidence from Zambia". In *Journal of Population Economics*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 407-424 Published by: Springer, via JSTOR, accessed March, 2009.
- Kodiran. 1986. "Nilai Anak di Kalangan Masyarakat Jawa di Jawa Tengah". In *Nilai Anak dan Wanita dalam Masyarakat Jawa*, edited by R.M. Soedarsono, and Gatut Murniatmo. Yogyakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Nusantara, Bagian Jawa
- Lieten, Kristoffel & Ben White (eds). 2001. *Child Labour: Policy Options*. Amsterdam: Aksant
- Lieten, Kristoffel. 2008. "Child Labour: Towards a Common Understanding", presented at Child labour Training Workshop, IREWOC, Bogor, Indonesia, August 2008
- McCulloch, Andrew & E. Joshi Heather. 2002. "Child Development and Family Resources: Evidence from the Second Generation of the 1958 British Birth Cohort". In *Journal of Population Economics*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May, 2002), pp. 283-304 Published by: Springer, via JSTOR, accessed March, 2009.
- McGee, T.G. 1986. "Perombakan Struktural dan Kota di Dunia Ketiga Suatu Teori Involusi Kota". In *Urbanisasi, Pengangguran, dan Sektor Informal di Kota*, edited by Chris Manning & Tadjuddin Noer Effendi. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia
- Mercado, Cesar. 1977. *How to Conduct Social Science Research*. Manila: Singtala Publisher Inc
- Ritzer, George & Douglas J. Goodman. 2009. *Teori Sosiologi*. Translated from English by Nurhadi. Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana
- S.Menno & Mustamin Alwi. 1992. *Antropologi Perkotaan*. Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada
- Schaffer, Jonathan. 2005. "Perspektif Ekonomi Mengakhiri Kekejaman Buruh Anak" in *EJournal USA Departemen Luar Negeri Amerika Serikat* 10 No.2 (Mei 2005).
- Subroto, Ph & Suhardi. 2001. "Norma-Norma dan Kebiasaan Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat Jawa". In *Masyarakat Jawa dalam Keseharian* edited by Ph. Subroto. Yogyakarta: Fakultas Ilmu Budaya
- Unicef. 2003. *Pengertian Konvensi Hak Anak*. Jakarta: PT. Enka Parahiyangan
- Waldfoegel, Jane. 2009. "Parental Work Arrangements and Child Development". In *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), pp. 251-271 Published by: University of Toronto Press on behalf of Canadian Public Policy, via JSTOR,

accessed March, 2009.

White, Ben & Indrasari Tjandraningsih. 1998. *Child Workers in Indonesia*. Bandung: Akatiga

Websites

Department of Education Indonesia. <http://www.kemdiknas.go.id/> Last accessed May, 14th 2009