USE OF THESES

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'Child labour' the state of play. A case study of Changwat Khon Kaen: Thailand

Simon Baker

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University

October 1998
Except where stated this thesis is my own work carried out during my PhD study at the Australian National University.

Simon Baker

October 1998

Canberra, ACT
I wish to thank all those people who have provided assistance and encouragement to me in my endeavour in writing this thesis. First of all, I wish to show my gratitude to the children of Changwat Khon Kaen who made this thesis possible. Next I must thank my two supervisors, Professor Gavin Jones and Dr Terry Hull, as well as to my adviser, Dr Philip Guest. Their insights and ideas were valuable in challenging my thoughts. Also at the Australian National University I wish to thank three other academics. First, I must thank Arjan Preecha Juntanamalaga who gave me special Thai lessons to improve my reading and writing skills. Next, I wish to thank Professor Peter Warr whose discussions with me encouraged me greatly. Finally, I am indebted to Wendy Cosford who kindly agreed to edit this thesis. I greatly appreciate her efforts.

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Glossary

Isarn words used in the thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isarn word</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bakham noi</td>
<td>boy with little scrotum, indicating a young boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dai</td>
<td>white string</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dek noi</td>
<td>little child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dek sai</td>
<td>boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dek sao</td>
<td>girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>het</td>
<td>to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i-nang</td>
<td>little girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i-nang noi</td>
<td>little girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luk on</td>
<td>baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nati</td>
<td>duty (same as Thai but with a different tone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wiak</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you ban su su</td>
<td>just staying at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Thai words used in the thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai word</th>
<th>English meaning</th>
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<td>Amphoe</td>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arjan</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baht</td>
<td>Thai currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ban</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bao</td>
<td>servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bun</td>
<td>merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bun banfai</td>
<td>a festival where Isarn people send rockets into the sky calling for the rains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bunkhun</td>
<td>gratitude</td>
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<td>Changwat</td>
<td>Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>dek</td>
<td>child</td>
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<td>little child</td>
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<td>unripe</td>
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farang
jiip
kan pattana
kathoei
katin

Kheewphansa
khon
khon dip
khon suk
Krungtepturakit
Luk Isan
mai chop
Mathayom Suksa
molam
Muang
muban
nang
nang sao
nati
nay
ngan

ngan khu ngern, ngern khu ngern,
banda suk
ngan sop
ngan wat
nong
Orkphansa
pee
phu yai
raeng ngan dek
rai
rong ngan narok
sai sin
sala

samkhan mak ti sut
samphat
sao
shiwit lambaak
soi

Western person
to make a move on someone
development
a transsexual
a day to make special offerings to all the monks
in a temple, usually in November
beginning of Buddhist lent, a religious holiday
person
an unripe person (a child)
a ripe person (an adult)
Name of a Thai newspaper
Isarn child A Child of the Northeast
don’t like
Year 9
a traditional form of Isarn music
city
village
Mrs
Miss
duty (same as Thai but with a different tone)
Mr
to work, this word has a broader meaning than
in English as discussed in chapter 3
work is money, money is work, this brings
happiness
work connected to a death
temple fair
younger one, i.e. younger brother or sister
ending of Buddhist lent, a religious holiday
older one, i.e. older brother or sister
adult
child labour
unit of area equal to 1,600 square metres
hell factory, sweat shop
white string
a shelter with no walls, found by the side of the
road
most important
interview
Miss
difficult life
lane
song taew

Songkran
suk

suk natrao

suk tam

suk tam boon

suk tambon

suk tambon nai Muang

tarok

tobtan bunkhun

wai run

Wan Dek Haeng Chat

Wan Pra

wat

Witalie

a vehicle with two benches running along its sides where passengers sit

Thai New Year

ripe

a game similar to volleyball, except that no hands are used

to do

make merit

sub district

sub district in the city

baby

repaying gratitude

young person, close in meaning to teenager

National Children's Day

Monk's Day

temple

Abbreviations used in thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMW</th>
<th>The name of the car</th>
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<td>BNJ</td>
<td>Ban Nam Jai</td>
</tr>
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<td>BNS</td>
<td>Ban Nam Suiy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPI6</td>
<td>a data entry program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPP</td>
<td>Gross Provincial Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID card</td>
<td>Identification card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRCT</td>
<td>National Research Council of Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSO</td>
<td>National Statistical Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>Si Liam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splus</td>
<td>a name of a statistical computer package</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSR</td>
<td>Soi Shiwit Rantod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDSC</td>
<td>Thai Development Support Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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The problem is not one of age but of exploitation (Morice 1981:157)
Chapter 1

Why the interest in ‘child labour’?

Children could be portrayed in largely negative terms: as dependent, needy, abused, wounded, and as having truncated personalities, poor school records and ill health. As a corollary, the Thai middle and upper classes would be expected to show mercy, compassion and charity. The other way is to highlight the strengths of children: they are resilient and ingenious and they cope in many ways. The message to the Thai people would be that these children have a right to better opportunities for children.

(Ageros 1996:11-12)

‘Child labour’ 1 is a controversial issue particularly in Thailand where reports have highlighted cases of exploited children. Images of young children being exploited, however, have coloured many people’s views on the lives of Thai children. Dubious reports, from international and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), claiming that the situation of ‘child labour’ (including child prostitution) is deteriorating, have influenced the debate on ‘child labour’. They argue that urbanisation is removing increasing numbers of children from their villages into the factories and brothels fuelling the booming Thai economy and satisfying the desires of sex tourists who believe younger prostitutes are AIDS-free.

Reality, however, is far more complex than the reports and statements that have coloured our views of children in Thailand. Their lives, and this includes most children in the workforce, are divorced from the sensational portrayals. The majority of children are not dependent, needy, abused or wounded, but instead resilient and ingenious.

Reports can clearly exaggerate the extent of ‘child labour’ in Thailand, while other studies take the phenomenon out of its context further creating negative images of the situation. There is a need to examine Thai children’s work. This thesis does this by

1 The term ‘child labour’ is problematic as many people associate it with only certain types of children’s work. Accounts of children working during the Industrial Revolution in mines, as chimney sweeps, and in textile factories have shaped many people’s views of ‘child labour’. Recent images of children in developing nations working in appalling conditions have reinforced this. The term has become associated with children working in sweatshops. Yet, as this study will show, such views are stereotypes and do not help in our understanding of working children. The term ‘Child labour’ does not cover many types of children’s work such as in agriculture and children who combine schooling with paid work. Given the problem with this term, I write ‘child labour’ when referring to the ‘child labour’ literature or when other authors refer to ‘child labour’ as sometimes it is unclear what they mean by this term.
analysing how Thai children’s work has changed resulting from social developments, why some children do not work while others do, the various types of work carried out by different children, and the changes in the numbers of children involved in these tasks.

Major changes to the lives of Thai children have taken place over generations, but particularly since 1988 with the onset of an economic boom, resulting in many children no longer working in the rice fields or in factories but in their main occupation: study. Lives of most Thai children today differ greatly from those of their grandparents, parents and even older siblings. They are fewer, as a proportion of the total population, than at any previous time, as a result of the sharp fall in fertility beginning in the late 1960s. They are also healthier, and excluding their main form of 'work' - study - they are less likely to be in the paid or unpaid workforce.

This thesis not only explores the nature of Thai children's work but it also investigates the dramatic changes that have occurred to the lives of Thai children. These changes have and will continue to result in major benefits to Thai society. A smaller proportion of children working on activities other than studying will lead to a better-educated society. The thesis examines the effect economic developments, new laws, the introduction of new technology, changes to the environment, changing school enrolments and the Thai demographic transition have had on the lives of Thai children.

Many of the findings of this study are based on data collected from four different communities in Changwat Khon Kaen: two villages, a city site and a slum within the city site. The data collected are unique to these settings and should not be generalised to the whole of Thailand. However, changes transforming these four communities mirror many of the changes that have taken place in the nation as a whole, as indicated by national labour force and education data. It is by studying small communities that we can better understand the causes of change taking place throughout Thailand. National trends are the sum of changes at the local level. Understanding why children in the four communities are working, both paid and unpaid, and why fewer are doing so over time provide important insights into the same events throughout Thailand.

This chapter first details some of the myths associated with working children in Thailand by illustrating some stereo images of children in the Thai workforce. Second, the chapter calls for the unmasking of Thai 'child labour', as there is a need for detailed academic work to discover the realities faced by working children. Finally, the chapter details the objectives and then the organisation of the thesis.

1.1 Myths about ‘child labour’ in Thailand

... a noted child labor activist, estimates that up to 1.4 million children work in Bangkok’s underground manufacturing economy, mostly in the unlicensed manufacturing sector.

This claim appeared in the US government’s report *By the Sweat and Toil of Children: The use of child labor in American imports*. It creates the image that Thailand has a huge ‘child labour’ problem, with large numbers of children working in illegal enterprises. Yet this claim is clearly a massive exaggeration. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) (various years) in 1993 there were only 231,200 children aged 13-14 living in Bangkok: that is in the age group most likely to be working. If all children under 15 in Bangkok are considered the total was close to 1.7 million. In other words nearly every child younger than 15 would have had to be employed in Bangkok’s underground manufacturing economy for this statement to be true.

### 1.1.1 Kader toy factory fire

In May 1993 the world’s worst factory fire (Chandravithum 1995:5) took place in Nakhon Pathom, a province near Bangkok. One hundred and eighty-eight workers died while working at the Kader toy factory. Most of those killed were women and girls, many of whom were around 13 years of age (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions 1995:33; Paul 1995:4). Survivors reported that locked doors and barred windows prevented many of the victims from escaping (Paul 1995:4). An internet article by ‘Don’t! Buy! Thai!’ titled *Terror in Toyland* claimed that

> The toy companies have embraced the Far East sweatshops for the same reason as other industries: There is an enormous supply of semi-slave laborers, including legions of poor and ignorant women and young girls, who will work for grotesquely low wages in disgusting and extremely dangerous conditions (Herbert 1998).

This tragedy has become a beating rod for some, such as those proclaiming ‘Don’t! Buy! Thai!’, who are critical of ‘child labour’ in Thailand. Statements mentioning the death of many 13-year-olds, locked doors and barred windows create the image that the factory was dependent on children working against their will.

This fire was clearly a disaster for those involved as well as their families. It is, however, not so clear that the event was a case of ‘child labour’ exploitation. Media reports clearly indicate young workers were victims of this disaster. A 16-year-old girl, recovering from injuries received during the fire, said that many students approached the factory for work during the summer holidays. This was because they paid 125 baht per day, equal to the salary paid to long-term employees (*Bangkok Post* 1993b:3). Further, a mother was searching for her 14-year-old daughter who applied for the part-time job at the factory using a false age of 15 (*The Nation* 1993:2). Fifteen was the admissible age for factory work in Thailand at that time (Roongshivin & Thanaphibul 1986:376; Udomsakdi 1986:40).

My attempts to go beyond media reports and secondary information concerning the Kader factory fire were difficult. Conversations with police officials, connected to the case, met with discouragement and misinformation. A Thai assistant of mine, who personally knew the police officials involved in the case, was first told that information concerning Kader was a state secret. During a second inquiry, over the telephone, the police officers told her that there were 188 deaths: 16 men aged between 17 and 30, and
172 women aged between 17 and 25. The officers, however, refused to send the information by fax from the police station. The police stated in a third conversation, when my assistant was visiting Bangkok and wished to check the data herself, that they had removed all files connected to the case from the station.

NGOs in Bangkok were willing to offer information connected to the fire. Data collected by government offices and those from NGO sources, that I was given permission to see, indicated that 188 people did die, including two girls aged 14 and five aged 15. There were, however, no reports of girls aged 13 injured or killed as a result of the fire.

The case of the Kader factory fire indicates the problems of accepting reports of 'child labour' at face value. Somehow those worried about 'child labour' are using misinformation concerning the disaster for their cause. Reality is far more complex than the picture created by reports on the Kader toy factory fire. Under aged workers were certainly at the factory but it is unlikely that they were forced to work against their will. It is more likely that they lied about their age to gain employment because of the wages the company was offering.

1.1.2 Child prostitution

Thailand is infamous for child prostitution. It is a great concern for Thai governments, NGOs, academics and Thai citizens. In November 1992 the then Thai Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai, declared 'war' against child prostitution (The Nation 1994:17). Despite Thai government concerns about child prostitution its efforts to combat the problem have been inadequate for some people. A campaign has been organised to boycott Thai products as a means to pressure the government. Part of this campaign is the 'Don’t! Buy! Thai!' internet site which claims:

What we need are warriors committed to force Thailand to change its ways. And our weapon of choice is BOYCOTT ... We want Americans to boycott anything made or manufactured in Thailand. Thailand sells its children like products. It traffics in the flesh of its own babies. For money. And the only thing that will stop it is the loss of money (Vachss 1998).

The ‘Don’t! Buy! Thai!’ efforts have created strong feelings both for and against the campaign. The Thai government has responded (Amatayakul 1998), arguing that the attacks represent double standards as the sexual exploitation of children occurs in other countries. Further, according to this source, the campaign does not recognise Thai government efforts in combating the problem and it ‘reinforces very offensive, damaging, and untrue stereotypes about Thai women and girls’.

A response by Thai American students (Thai American student alliance at Southern Oregon State College 1996) is more outspoken in their counter attacks. They questioned the accuracy of the claims, challenging the campaign as racist. They took
offence at an assertion made by ‘Don’t! Buy! Thai!’ that there were 200,000\(^2\) child sex slaves in Thailand. They also rejected the claim that Thais tolerate this situation as it is supposedly so ingrained that selling children into prostitution has become part of their culture.

Dubious images of Thai children exist elsewhere apart from the internet. Serious works, by those concerned with ‘child labour’, reinforce the belief that many Thai children are victims of child prostitution. Ennew and Milne (1989:171) in their book *The Next Generation: The Lives of Third World Children* claimed that ‘The widespread sale of daughters of rural families into the special services sector is an indicator of the status of women in Thai society’.

Child prostitution does exist in Thailand but to suggest there is a widespread sale of daughters in rural areas is an exaggeration. I do not deny that some Thai parents, like parents in other countries, have sold their daughters into the sex trade nor that some communities in Northern Thailand do so, but I did not come across even one such case in my study.

1.2 Unmasking Thai ‘child labour’

Child labour too has come to be depicted through stereotypical images that misrepresent its character and mask its complexity. (Brasted & Wright 1996:54)

To gain a true awareness of ‘child labour’ we must understand the term in its specific cultural and historical settings. Most studies in Thailand (Chapter 2) take a snap shot of a society. They are ahistorical, giving no indication of the extent of change taking place. These studies give indicators of how many child workers exist within a community or within an industry and the conditions under which they work. Yet usually we are unable to establish how the situation compares to the past. We need a measure of change to ascertain whether the number of working children is increasing or decreasing. It is a concern that there were 199,700 children aged 13-14 surveyed in the Thai labour force in 1996. Yet this figure is not so alarming once it is realised that in 1984 the comparable figure was over one million (National Statistical Office various years).

Understanding children and ‘child labour’ in particular is a problem, not only because of the ahistorical approach but also because children themselves in many studies have been silent (Prout & James 1990:8). This is because children are

... the invisible group *par excellence* in our society. They are invisible not only in statistics, but in many other types of social accounting as well; indeed social sciences like sociology, economics and political science simply neglect children (Qvortrup 1990:81).

\(^2\) A 1998 study by the Population and Social Research Institute, Mahidol University, indicated that there were under 18,000 child prostitutes in Thailand (Bhatiasevi 1998).
To this list of academic fields demography should be added. The discipline focuses on infants, while they are under the age of five, losing interest in them totally, but then regaining interest in females when they reach the age of childbearing when they turn 15.

Until recently academic work has provided limited and contradictory information on the causes and consequences of ‘child labour’. In part this has been because

For most academic researchers the a priori orientation was that child work was harmful, and research design often leaned toward proving this point rather than weighing alternative interpretations (Hull 1981:48).

A growing interest in both children and ‘child labour’, however, has brought positive changes. Increased interest results from numerous international initiatives, in particular ‘The Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (Bequele 1995:4; Bessell 1995:6; Black 1993:8; Black 1994:7 and 26; Boyden 1990:193; Boyden & Myers 1995:1; Mhatre 1995:1; Wilson 1995:1). The International Labour Office (ILO) – initiated International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour has led to recent work on ‘child labour’ (Bessell 1995:6). This organisation has funded numerous programs in developing countries to tackle the problem of ‘child labour’ as well as producing many reports on ‘child labour’ throughout the world. Thailand has participated in this program since 1992 (Banpasirichote 1995: 19; Women and Child Labour Division 1995 :8).

1.3 Objectives

The primary objective of this thesis is to examine the lives of Thai children. The nature of ‘child labour’, in this study, is a measure of their their well-being. The alternative side of the coin ‘child labour’ is education. Those not in the labour force are usually studying. I do not argue that all children should be in school or that children working are necessarily a problem. I believe, however, the well-being of Thai children increases as more of them participate in their main form of ‘work’: schooling (Chapter 9).

The secondary objectives of the thesis are twofold. The first is to show that ‘child labour’ is constantly changing. Thai society has been adjusting to major economic developments, technological advances, fertility declines, and new attitudes towards education. Consequently definitions of a ‘child’, ‘work’ and thus ‘child labour’ have altered. The second objective is to show that images of exploited children have distorted our understanding of the phenomenon ‘child labour’. This image of the exploited child is true for some, but is not true for most Thai children or even for most working Thai children. This thesis questions the media reports, both Thai and international, in portraying Thai children as victims, as suggested by Ageros in the opening quote of the chapter. The thesis finds that Thai children, along with their families and friends, have a major role in shaping their own lives.

To address these objectives five central questions must be answered:
1. What is a ‘child’?
2. What is ‘child labour’?
3. Which children are working?
4. What differences exist among working children?
5. What developments in the Thai society have reduced the number of Thai children in the workforce?

1.4 Organisation of the study

This thesis, in examining the lives of Thai children and answering the five central questions, has 10 chapters scrutinising the factors influencing the lives of children. Although these influences are multifaceted, with an interplay between factors, the various chapters concentrate on certain key factors.

Chapters 2 and 3 detail the methodology and settings of the research. Chapter 2, ‘Studying “child labour”’, details problems of past ‘child labour’ studies in Thailand and then explains the microdemographic community study, with the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods that I have used. The chapter reviews only the ‘child labour’ literature related to Thailand and as such the thesis does not contain a ‘literature review’ chapter. Instead the ‘child labour’ literature is divided and discussed throughout the thesis, on the grounds that it is better to discuss the literature relevant to particular issues at the points at which these issues arise in the thesis. Chapter 3, ‘Children in and around Khon Kaen’, describes not only the geographic settings of the research, but also the social changes that have taken place and how these have affected the lives of children in these locations.

The next two chapters of the thesis, chapters 4 and 5, define the terms ‘child’, ‘work’ and ‘child labour’. This is important because as Brasted and Wright (1996:55) stated,

Above all, the terms “child”, “work” and “labour” are not timeless, uniform concepts but definitions subject to change and variation. Much of the confusion in the entire child labour debate results from inconsistent use of these terms.

Chapter 4, ‘Changing Thai “childhoods”’, tackles the question ‘what is a child?’. The thesis does not define the term ‘child’ but shows that there are many different definitions of this term and that they are constantly changing. International definitions can differ from national ones, which in turn can differ from how adults and children construct this concept. All these definitions have changed, influencing how these groups see ‘child labour’. Although there are many different definitions of a ‘child’, I have used the international one, of those under 18 years of age, when collecting data for this thesis.

Chapter 5, ‘What is “child labour”?’ illustrates that the concept ‘work’ like the term ‘child’ is defined differently by various groups and that it has changed over time and as a result so has ‘child labour’. This chapter does not attempt to determine what types of children’s work is or is not ‘child labour’ but to show how different
stakeholders have conflicting views of what 'work' is and thus differing views of 'child labour'. The chapter explores the lives of Thai children, and in particular those in the research sites, by examining their 'work'.

The following two chapters tackle the questions 'who among the children of the research sites are working?' and 'what type of work are they undertaking?'. Chapter 6, 'Which children are working?', analyses the different types of work performed by children and determines who is working. Special emphasis is given in determining which children are undertaking paid work. Chapter 7, 'The dynamic nature of children’s paid work', analyses the paid work performed by children. This chapter determines the differences between the children based on their age, sex and location in their types of work and conditions.

Chapters 8 and 9 answer the fifth question, 'What developments in the Thai society have reduced the number of Thai children in the workforce?'. The two chapters give details of the socioeconomic transformations that have taken place during the memory of the residents of the research sites and the implications for children. Chapter 8, 'From paddy fields to “hell factories” and into the schools', details the major changes affecting the lives of children throughout the nation. This chapter concentrates on legal, technological, environmental, and economic factors that have brought these changes. Chapter 9, 'Education is children’s main occupation', details the dramatic changes related to education that have taken place in the last decade.

The thesis ends with Chapter 10 'Conclusion', which reviews the previous nine chapters and discusses the findings of the thesis. It also examines the consequences for Thai children of the economic crisis that hit Thailand in 1997 and the likely future scenarios for Thai children.
Chapter 2

Studying 'child labour'

I believe that the combination of personal experience, of quantitative data and in-depth anthropological methods, and of the reinterpretation of written sources, has enabled me to shed some light on the world of those who, though they hold the future, have been left in the dark too often.

(Nieuwenhuys 1994:7)

This chapter highlights methodological problems of 'child labour' studies, particularly those based on Thailand. It then details the microdemographic approach that I used, arguing the advantages of this type of study over those relying solely on surveys. The chapter then discusses the selection of the research sites, followed by the procedures in collecting quantitative, qualitative and secondary data.

Throughout the chapter, while detailing methods used, I describe the full range of the emotions that I felt from the surprises, delights, and sorrows of working with children and their families. It was an honour to enter their lives. Crucial to my methodology was being there, taking part in the life of my research communities, and interacting with the children and adults with whom I came in contact.

2.1 Problems of 'child labour' studies

'Child labour' studies are fraught with difficulties. Gaining access to children in their workplace is problematic as legislation classifies their activities as illegal. Also, when the topic is mentioned government officials refuse to speak, claiming that it is too sensitive, while employers deny the existence of such a problem at their place of employment. I experienced this often, as have other researchers (George 1992:7). Some working children, or their relatives, realising that what they are doing is against the law, deny that they are working or lie about their age. This was a difficulty that I also encountered.

Gaining access to children is only part of the problem. Definitions of a 'child', 'work' and 'child labour', as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, are major problems. Many researchers are outraged by the fact that children work, which influences their investigations:

Child labour confronts researchers with the need to re-examine a number of ingrained assumptions and also moral attitudes which are difficult to overcome, and which tend both to cloud the analysis and to lead to recommendations for action which are often
unrealistic, unenforceable or counterproductive. Research is often motivated by moral outrage at the iniquity of child labour itself, an outrage which is in many cases inspired by a twentieth century Western ideal of childhood as a time of dependence and innocence to be prolonged well into the teens, during which the child should be protected from work and responsibility (Goddard & White 1982:466).

2.1.1 Studies of ‘child labour’ in Thailand

A body of work has been established analysing ‘child labour’ in Thailand. These works, although useful in building our understanding of working children in the country, have flaws. As many studies, moral attitudes have clouded the work on ‘child labour’ in Thailand. Many of these studies have been ahistorical: they have taken snapshots of children’s working conditions isolated from past and present changes shaping children’s lives. Also, past studies concentrate on children’s paid or forced work without investigating children in their totality. These snapshots focus only on certain activities, because the traditional method of investigation has been the survey, often using “accidental” sampling frames. They question only children they find in factories or other places of work leaving other working and non-working children out of their studies. Surely researchers must make comparisons between children working and those not working to truly understand the lives of working children. Finally, most of these studies have concentrated on working children in urban areas, leaving the lives of working and non-working children in the countryside unanalysed.

An influential work on ‘child labour’ in Thailand was Banerjee’s (1980) study, *Child Labour in Thailand*, for the Anti-Slavery Society. This work with its case studies and polemical writing set the tone for writers attacking Thailand on this issue; motivated by moral outrage, it creates a highly negative image of working children in Thailand. Another study that has taken a strident stand against the situation of working children in Thailand includes the work of the TDSC Staff (1989: 19) which claimed Thailand had the third highest level of ‘child labour’ in the world. This claim is based on a 1971 study of working children consisting of only 14 countries and includes the US and a number of European nations. Even as late as 1987 this study was said to show Thailand as having the third highest level of ‘child labour’ in the world (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions 1987:35). These negative views of working children in Thailand are constantly reinforced by horror stories in the media (*Bangkok Post* 1996a:6; Charoenpo 1996:3; Prakan 1996:2; Sharples 1993: Outlook 1; *The Nation* 1996b:2; Trakullertsathien 1996: Outlook 1 and 8).

Other studies have attempted to avoid sensational reports by detailing the working conditions of children. A series of such studies mainly used surveys. The first by Panpeng and others (1986:135-136) undertook a major study by interviewing 325 children aged 12-15. Using a stratified random sampling framework, they selected 145 work sites that were employing children in Bangkok. Following on from this study, Rajah (1987:4) carried out a survey of 10 industries and found that in five industries children aged 12-14 were in the workforce. The following year Chavalitnitikul (1988)
made a similar study of the working conditions of children in provinces close to Bangkok. These studies provide details of the working lives of the children interviewed: conditions, hours, and wages. Yet, as the authors saw these children in isolation from other Thai children, we are unable to understand how typical or atypical they were.

A number of studies have not solely focused on working children in Bangkok and its surrounding provinces: one focussed on the origin of working children in Bangkok by analysing the living conditions of two villages in Buriram (an Isarn1 province) (Wun’Gaeo 1983). This work shows why and how children entered the Bangkok labour market. The study, although based on two villages, focused on how working children entered the capital; we do not learn about the lives of other children from these two villages. A second study based on working children outside of Bangkok was carried out by Richter and Ard-am (1989) who focused on the fishing industry. Yet, by doing so they were unable to compare the lives of non-working children with those who were involved in this industry.

Two further studies on working children located away from the nation’s capital were based on Khon Kaen2. Both, however, have concentrated only on children working in the city and not the rest of Changwat Khon Kaen. The first study, by Ayuwat and Srisontisuk (1993:4, 46-47), used ‘accidental’ random sampling by going to factories, petrol stations, restaurants, shops and construction sites. They interviewed 169 working young people between the ages of 11 and 19. There were 43 boys and 126 girls, nine aged 11-13, 82 aged 14-16 and 78 aged 17-19. The second study, carried out by Tongyu (1996:8) used a similar technique to that in Ayuwat and Srisontisuk’s study. Tongyu, with assistance from Non-Government Organisation (NGO) officials working on ‘child labour’, surveyed 85 children in paid employment by going to locations known for having working children. These two studies did not collect information on children working in unpaid work or children working in agriculture, the most common form of children’s participation in the Thai labour force (Chapter 8). Tongyu’s (1996:47) study collected health statistics on 60 working children; with no information on non-working children, however, it is difficult to determine whether children’s health problems were due to their work or to their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Important studies portraying the lives of children in the Thai workforce in the 1990s were by Banpasirichote and Pongsapich (1992), by Banpasirichote (1995) and by Falkus (1997). The first work, focusing on children involved in hazardous work, reflects

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1 Isarn is one of four regions in Thailand, covering the Northeast of the country. In this thesis I spell ‘Isarn’ in this manner as this was the first way I ever saw it spelt; it can, however, be spelt Isan, Esam, or Esan or even called the Northeast of Thailand. These other spellings appear in the thesis when I quote other authors.

2 In Thai Khon Kaen can either refer to the city of that name or the province of the same name. For clarity, throughout the thesis I write Khon Kaen for Muang (city) Khon Kaen and Changwat Khon Kaen for the province.
the International Labour Office (ILO) shift from advocating the total abolition of ‘child labour’, to preventing children from working in hazardous occupations. Boyden (1990:194) argued that this change was forced on the ILO because children need to work occurring to the overwhelming poverty in the South. In Banpasirichote and Pongsapich (1992) the authors focused on child workers in manufacturing, construction, and deep-sea fishing, and on child scavengers. In Banpasirichote (1995), an overview of ‘child labour’, is excellent in detailing the problems and complexities of working children in Thailand.

Falkus’s (1997) work is also important as it makes a historical review of the development of ‘child labour’ in Thailand. Falkus (1997:154-156) also tackles the ‘Myths about Thai child labour’ by examining misconceptions of the extent about working children in the country and a belief, held by some, that Thais themselves are not concerned with this situation. As important as these studies are, their focus has been on children in the labour force; accordingly, detailed comparisons between children in and out of the workforce were not made.

2.2 A microdemograph community study

This study uses a microdemographic community approach as firmly established in demography with the landmark book Micro-Approaches to Demographic Research (Caldwell et al. 1988). Such an approach has been described as

... eclectic and ambitious, combining ethnographic field research with surveys and even censuses of villages or small areas in an attempt to arrive at a holistic understanding of demographic behavior and change within a broad historical and sociological perspective (Knodel & Pramualratana 1987).

In particular, this study has used the framework established by Axim and others (1991:190) in their paper ‘The Microdemographic Community-Study Approach: Improving Survey Data by Integrating the Ethnographic Method’. They combined a structured survey with intensive ethnographic investigation throughout the data collection process.

Immersing myself into the communities that I was studying, I have combined quantitative, qualitative, and secondary data to gain a holistic view of the lives of the children I was studying. Combining these types of data give a greater understanding of the lives of children in Thailand and the dramatic changes that were happening to them. Further, it is only by living in communities and taking note of change that we can gain an historical understanding of childhood and the forces that have resulted in some children working in the labour force while others do not. By talking to both old and young people we can form a picture of the lives of children in the past and present. We can determine whether children’s lives have improved or deteriorated over time, whether there are more or fewer working children and the changes in their type of work.
2.3 Where were all the children?

This thesis, probably like most others, changed as I struggled to determine what I wanted to say about working children. There were false starts and other frustrations that I now know actually added to the topic by forcing me into directions that I had not considered at the beginning of my research.

One false start was my unawareness, while writing my proposal, of changes that had taken place in Khon Kaen. I originally decided to look at working children in Khon Kaen, with a focus on the Friendship Highway, a road running through the city, from Bangkok to the Thai-Lao border. I intended to look at all child activities taking place along a five-kilometre stretch of this road.

In Canberra, this seemed an ideal topic as the stretch of road, in my mind at least, encompassed many stratifications of Thai society. I believed that within the proposed site there would be clear divisions between the poor, the middle class and elements of the Thai rich. These divisions I felt would reflect different child activities: for example, between children at school and those in paid work.

I planned to use the highway as a metaphor, with my original thesis title being 'Highway to Where? Child Labour Along the Friendship Highway, Khon Kaen, Thailand'. The aim was to study the paths that led children into their various socioeconomic settings along the Friendship Highway and their likely futures. I wanted to know why and how some children found themselves in what is called 'child labour' while others did not? What kind of life journey were they likely to make along the Friendship Highway? Would they go far enough to gain the skills to succeed in Bangkok or were they destined for poverty?

The problem with my proposal, and its focus on the Friendship Highway, was that I wrote it using past perceptions. I based the proposal on my experiences between 1989 and 1991 while I was a volunteer teacher at Khon Kaen University. Between the middle of 1991 and December 1995, when I started my fieldwork, a great change had taken place—not a gradual change, but a massive one, resulting from the rapid economic growth in Thailand (Chapter 8).

Returning to Khon Kaen I was able to recognise the road, but the extent of change rendered my original plans useless. The children on whom I had hoped to focus on were no longer there in their previous numbers. There were still slum areas, but the growth in town houses for the middle class had transformed the highway. Changes in non-residential areas had been even more striking. Two private hospitals, show rooms for new cars, a Nissan centre for the region, a large insurance company, and a department store had all appeared since I was there as a volunteer. From 1991 to 1996 land prices along the highway increased by 350-500 per cent (pers. comm., government officials, Khon Kaen).
Where were the working children I had come to study? They had not totally disappeared from the highway but their numbers had declined dramatically. Had they moved to the periphery or had their numbers been reduced as a result of changes in Thai society? I believe that some children moved from this highway to work in other locations, where the land was less expensive, while others entirely left the workforce.

The decade before I started my research Thailand had the world’s fastest growing economy and this brought massive changes to the lives of Thai and Changwat Khon Kaen children. No longer could I use the highway as a metaphor for child activities, but instead the road represented the booming changes to both the Thai and Khon Kaen economies (Chapter 8).

2.4 Selection of the research sites

The changes along the Friendship Highway forced me to alter my plans. I realised also that no one site would capture the complexities of child activities. Thus, I decided to select four different sites: a village close to Khon Kaen, a second village further away, and a city site. Within the city site there was a small slum, socially and economically separate from the rest of the community, which constitutes the fourth site.

These four research sites provide a unique setting for this study as its focus was not on Bangkok. This is because many previous 'child labour' studies in Thailand have focused on rural migrants to this city, particularly in the manufacturing and service sectors (Richter & Ard-am 1989:5). As location influences the extent and form of children’s work, this thesis by concentrating on another urban locality and its neighbouring regions provides new understandings of this phenomenon.

Changwat Khon Kaen is important because it is in Isarn, the area of Thailand with the greatest levels of poverty (Chapter 3). Changwat Khon Kaen, even though it is located in the poorest region of the country, from the mid-1980s had been developing rapidly reflecting the boom conditions within the Thai economy. Its economic progress has enabled the study to investigate the relationship between working children, poverty and economic development.

Having both rural and urban communities is also important because the nature of children’s work differs greatly between these regions (Chapters 6 and 7). It is important to investigate the phenomenon in a city as it is claimed that working children in urban areas tend to be exploited more and undergo greater privations than their counterparts in rural sectors (Boyden & Holden 1991:118; Mendelievich 1979:36).

In turn, it is important to have rural communities in the study, since the majority of Thais live in these areas. The need for two villages is that in Thailand a process of urbanisation is taking place, changing the relative importance of both urban and rural regions in Thai society. Until the 1980s agriculture had been the leading sector of the Thai economy; manufacturing took over this role, and agriculture now appears less
significant for the country (Siamwalia et al.1993:81). This change and the increasing mechanisation of agriculture have displaced people, forcing them to nearby cities in search of better lives. This phenomenon is likely to augment the numbers of children in the urban labour force:

The rural population is becoming unstable due to permanent and temporary migration. Villages are becoming de-populated, and may increasingly be seen as unattractive places to live. Young people who have experienced urban life may be reluctant to stand in paddy fields transplanting rice on the family farm. It has been argued that the strong cultural links with the rice producing ‘home farm’ will weaken and disappear within another generation (Duncan 1996:6).

This process of urbanisation has affected villages differently. The village close to Khon Kaen could be classified as semi-rural, and the lives of children there have been influenced by developments in the city. They are close to employment opportunities and other services within the city. Children in the second village, however, must migrate if they are to use facilities located in Khon Kaen.

2.4.1 Selection of Ban Nam Jai

A major force influencing my selection of my first research site, Ban Nam Jai, was a local NGO, Friends of Children, Khon Kaen. This NGO, established by two Thai men, was exploring the lives of working children in Changwat Khon Kaen. With financial support from the ILO, they selected 40 communities in and around the city to determine the number of working children in these areas and the best ways to solve the resulting problems. Discussions with these two men and other workers of the NGO further convinced me that I had to change my original proposal. I realised that a major source of working children for Khon Kaen was the surrounding villages, with children commuting daily to work.

At this point it is useful to discuss briefly how the NGO selected its 40 communities. Asking the two men who had established the NGO how they selected the 40 communities, I was given two completely different answers. One told me that they selected communities with a ‘child labour’ problem. The second man told me that they selected the communities because they had contacts there, ensuring success in data collection. This man had worked on child issues for many years before establishing Friends of Children, Khon Kaen, often living in different communities learning about the needs of children.

The way the NGO officials selected the 40 communities seemed to me to be a mixture of the two different answers. They selected some communities, including slums and squatter settlements in Khon Kaen, because of a perceived ‘child labour’ problem.

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3 All place names, except for the major centres and two major highways mentioned in the thesis, are pseudonyms. Bangkok, Isarn, Khon Kaen, Ubonrat Dam and the names of a number of provinces are real, but centres smaller than these I have given new names to protect their anonymity.
With financial difficulties it is not surprising that there were many children in the workforce from such locations. However, other communities within the 40, such as Ban Nam Jai, were outlying villages of the city and were places where the second man had lived. These villages were no more or less typical than any other place, and were selected as he had established a network of contacts that he and the NGO workers were able to use. From my observations of living in Ban Nam Jai and visiting numerous other villages, it was clear that this village had no greater number of working children than other local villages.

After deliberations with Friends of Children, Khon Kaen, I selected one of their 40 communities, Ban Nam Jai, for a number of reasons. It was one of the first communities I visited while travelling around Khon Kaen with the NGO. There I met a villager who was a volunteer of the NGO, a man called Dara. Our relationship quickly developed to a stage where we considered each other as brothers and consequently he became one of my chief informants. It was close enough to the city to allow children to commute to the city to work. Finally, I selected this village because it was part of the NGO’s 40 communities, enabling us to provide each other with assistance and information. Selecting Ban Nam Jai influenced my choice of my other research sites. I needed other communities that were of a similar size to this village.

2.4.2 Selection of Ban Nam Suiy

The criterion for selection of the second site was that it was so far from Khon Kaen that it was impossible for children to commute daily from their village to the city. I also wanted a village that had a population of an equivalent size to that of Ban Nam Jai. Further, I wanted a community that was ‘typical’ of the wider Isan community. It could not be particularly successful, such as villages that had marketed themselves as silk weaving centres, nor did I want a village that was struggling financially.

From Ban Nam Jai I journeyed to different districts within Changwat Khon Kaen looking for possible sites. I rejected these places as they were too large, too small, or because they spoke another dialect that my assistants and I found hard to understand. Or I rejected them as I, or Thai friends helping me select the new site, would claim "mai chop" (do not like), as we took a dislike to these places.

In the end I selected Ban Nam Suiy, a village located around 80 kilometres from Khon Kaen. I chose it for three main reasons. First, was its distance from the city. The 80 kilometre distance and the slow public transport made the journey to Khon Kaen difficult and even with private transport the journey was still time-consuming. Secondly I chose Ban Nam Suiy because one of my ex-students from Khon Kaen University was a teacher at the local high school. I believed that having such a contact was important as she would be able to introduce me to the community and also be a key informant. The third reason for choosing this village was because of the friendly welcome that I
received there. The villagers were not just polite as in other villages but were openly friendly and keen for me to carry out my research within their community.

2.4.3 Selection of Si Liam and Soi Shiwit Rantod

The selection of the third and fourth sites was straightforward. The sites needed to be in the city. One concern was to ensure that they did not have an excess of one group of children over others: for example, there are locations within Khon Kaen that have high concentrations of students; certain pockets of Khon Kaen have student quarters with boarding houses and hostels catering for them. I wanted to avoid these areas as I believed that the extra students would distort the findings.

In the end I selected Si Liam, a community bordered by the two main highways; Maliwan Highway on its southern border, and the Friendship Highway to its east. I selected only a small proportion of Si Liam as I needed an equivalent number of children to those living in the two villages. Apart from being more typical than those with a mass of students, Si Liam’s location next to the Friendship Highway allowed me to tie my study to my original proposal of concentrating on the Friendship Highway.

Within Si Liam a small slum existed. The socioeconomic conditions were different from the rest of Si Liam and thus to analyse the data I classified it as a separate site. This I named Soi Shiwit Rantod.

2.5 Quantitative data: a census of children

The quantitative data, based on a census of children aged 8 to 17, detail the lives of children in the four research sites. They are specific to these communities. From these data an understanding of the extent children from these communities worked and studied is gained.

2.5.1 Questionnaires

I developed a child and an adult questionnaire for the census in Australia but made alterations after I tested the questions in the field. Before delivering the questionnaires I spent one and a half months living in Ban Nam Jai reflecting on the questions. In this time I removed irrelevant questions connected to the Friendship Highway and added others reflecting the change in my plans. Further, with a greater understanding of Isarn life after living in a village, I changed other questions in accordance with Thai and Isarn cultures.

With assistance from Thai friends and colleagues at Khon Kaen University, I translated the text into Thai. As I was administering the questionnaire to children we attempted to ensure that the language was as simple as possible. A second reason for the simplicity was that although I wrote it in Thai, on most occasions the interviewers had to translate it into the local dialect, Isarn, which has no written script. The interviewers
had to decide whether to ask the questions in Isarn, as was the case for most respondents in the two villages, or in Thai for some respondents in the city.

I used the child questionnaire (Appendix 1) for all children in the selected age group (2.5.2), while using the adult questionnaire (Appendix 2) for one adult in the child’s household. If the child was living without an adult, I asked a series of extra questions within the children’s questionnaire. These extra questions were intended to collect socioeconomic details that the adult’s questionnaire covered.

2.5.2 Census: all children aged 8-17

As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, ‘childhood’ is a culturally and historic specific concept. This makes defining the age that individuals become adults difficult. Despite this I carried out a census of all children in the four research sites aged 8-17.

It was difficult to choose the younger age limit. There are past examples of children as young as three to five having limited economic roles (Kanbargi & Kulkarni 1991:137; Milne 1996:4; Vlassoff 1991; White 1976:273; Zelizer 1985:4). I felt, however, that collecting data from children as young as this would be extremely difficult. I used Thai assistants to administer the questionnaires, in part to ensure the process was less threatening for younger children. Even with Thai assistants, I think it unlikely that we could have administered a questionnaire to children as young as five. I conducted in-depth interviews with children under 12 but the experience of interacting with a farang (a Western person) was too much for some as they were shy.

I chose the upper age 17 for four reasons. First, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Thailand has signed, defines a child as every human being under 18, unless national laws recognise an earlier age (UNICEF 1997). Second, 18 is the age of legal entry into adulthood in Thailand in that Thais are able to vote. Further, as it was illegal for children under 15 to work in most occupations, selecting an age older than this gave me greater access to those children working below the legal age. A researcher interested in all children 17 and younger is less threatening than a researcher only concerned with those children illegally working. George (1992:7) found that one of the biggest problems she faced when researching working children in Malaysia was the withdrawal by various people in authority upon the mention of the term ‘child labour’. The final reason for selecting the age 17 was that by interviewing those aged 15-17 I was able to obtain their work history, shedding light on the future working prospects of those children aged under 15.

Another attraction of limiting the study to those aged between 8 and 17 was that I had a 10-year age group to use in my analysis. I divided this 10-year period into three groups. I selected the first group, 8-12, as this is within the compulsory age of education. At the time of my research Thai children had to study until they completed primary school, which occurred when they were 12 or 13 years old. My selection of the second group, those aged 13-14, corresponds to the youngest age group on which the
National Statistical Office (NSO) collects labour force data. Further, these children were legally restricted from certain types of work. The final group, those aged 15-17, were distinct from younger children. They all had Identification (ID) cards, which Thais gain once reaching 15. Further, there were fewer legal restrictions on performing different types of work.

2.5.3 The respondents of the census

My assistants and I administered the child questionnaire to 767 children, 395 (51.5 per cent) boys and 372 (48.5 per cent) girls (Table 2.1). At the same time we administered the adult questionnaire to 506 adults. In many households there was more than one child, accounting for the lower number of adults interviewed. There were 35 children living without a related adult. Some were living with an employer, while others were living with siblings aged under 18 or by themselves. For these children there was no corresponding adult questionnaire, and despite extra questions asked in the child questionnaire, there were small amounts of information not gathered about them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si Liam</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Nam Jai</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Nam Suiy</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soi Shiwit Rantod</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Ban Nam Suiy, the site with the largest number of children, all children in the answered the questionnaire except for one girl who refused and a small number of children from the village who were not there at the time. Parents and siblings informed me and my assistants that they expected children to return during our stay. Many villagers, including children, from Ban Nam Suiy spend long periods of time in Bangkok or other employment centres. They return home, if convenient or possible, during major holidays. Although we collected data over Songkran, the Thai New Year, some children did not return to the village.

In Ban Nam Jai we administered the questionnaire to all children except one 17-year-old boy, who, according to his mother, was courting a girl in a neighbouring village. My assistants and I were never able to find him as he left early every morning and returned late at night. Only four girls aged 16 were interviewed. It is not clear, however, if there were only a few girls of this age or whether other girls of their age had left the village to work or study. This lack of girls aged 16 in Ban Nam Jai partly explains the difference in numbers between boys and girls of this age (Figure 2.1).
In Si Liam and the slum, Soi Shiwit Rantod, my assistants and I did not receive the same cooperation as we had in the two villages. On occasions people refused us access to children, including those at a restaurant where girls were living and working as waitresses. On one occasion, the police questioned me: while walking with a group of children, two police officers drove up on their motorcycles, and asked who I was and what I was doing. The tension was broken once I explained that I was a researcher concerned with working children and showed them an ID card provided by the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) to prove this was the case. Things further improved when more children arrived to tell me where one of my assistants was. This satisfied the police officers that I was a researcher and they promptly drove away.

Levels of migration have influenced the age-sex structure of the children in the study sites. We collected data only on family members who were living in the household at the time of the interview and thus it is not possible to indicate the level of out-migration. Levels of in-migration to the various communities, however, are measurable. There was a statistically significant higher level of migration at the P<0.05 level\(^4\) in Si Liam and Soi Shiwit Rantod compared to the two villages. Above 30 per cent of the children had migrated into the slum from outside Khon Kaen and a quarter of children had done so into Si Liam. The level of migration into Ban Nam Suiy was 13 per cent and it was 2 per cent for Ban Nam Jai. There was no statistically significant difference in levels of migration for boys and girls or among the different ages. Despite this, the highest level of migration for any one age group by sex was for boys aged 16 and 17 in

\(^4\) This thesis, when using Chi-square, always uses P<0.05 as the level of significance.
Si Liam. Close to half of such boys had migrated into Si Liam, and this partly accounts for the larger number of boys than girls for these two ages.

Data bias is a possibility in this study. We collected data only on children that were in the four research sites at the time of the survey. Children not currently living in the research sites could have been absent because they were in the labour force or studying. If they were in paid work, their conditions of employment may have been inherently different from those conditions experienced by the children of this study.

2.5.4 Selection of assistants and their effect on the study

To administer the two questionnaires I employed six assistants. I gained them by informing students in the Department of Community Development at Khon Kaen University that I was seeking to employ people. This department trains students to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Apart from wanting students skilled in data collection techniques, I also desired assistants fluent in the local dialect, Isarn. All except one were native Isarn speakers while the other had become fluent in the language.

Another requirement, which restricted possible applicants, was the need to spend two weeks in Ban Nam Suix over Songkran. This restricted those who were able to work, as most students returned home for this celebration.

In the end I employed five third-year students who met the above requirements. They included three females, one male, and one kathoei, a member of the ‘third sex’ in Thailand (Jackson 1997:170). Jinny, the kathoei, was a woman in a male body, which was slowly being transformed into a female one. She was taking the contraceptive pill, with packets being consumed at a great rate, to develop more feminine features. As a result, breasts were being developed and she was gaining a desired lighter complexion. A sixth member, another female student, was added when the male assistant was unable to join us at the second site.

These assistants were excellent; they were professional in collecting data and wonderful in developing a rapport with the residents of the different communities. The social interactions that I and my assistants experienced enhanced the data collection and added to the relations that existed in these communities. The reaction was the greatest in Ban Nam Suix where we first collected data.

We entered the village just before Songkran and stayed over two weeks. The villagers of Ban Nam Suix were in a festive mood. Residents returned from Bangkok and other places where they had been working. Some returned after years away as they and their family members were holding a ngan sop (merit-making work for a dead person). Others returned to see their children for the first time since the last major holiday. Often unable to take children to Bangkok or wherever they were working, parents had to leave them in the village.
It was a time to see family, friends, and to celebrate the arrival of a new year: a time to drink and be merry. Some men were in a drunken stupor the whole time that I was in the village. On many occasions one drunk man followed me as he attempted to be my guide. Others saw it as a time to be sexually more liberal. Men told me that it was all right to *jiip* a women during this period. That is, to attempt to establish a romance.

It was into this environment of alcohol and possible romance that I took my assistants. From the first day they had an effect on the locals. Referring to a group of eight male teenagers I wrote in my diary:

> They [the eight teenagers] are having a great summer holiday, they have the beach, their boats, and lots of land to go hunting. They are having a ball. On top of that I have arrived with three attractive women just a few years older than them (4/4/96).

Right through my stay in Ban Nam Suiy men asked me about my assistants. Did they have boy friends, would it be all right for them to *jiip* my assistants and so on. I must point out that many men were interested in Jinny, the *kathoei*. Jinny was clearly the most successful, in terms of romance, during our stay in the village. She seemed to have a different young man to take her out each night.

Before arriving in Ban Nam Jai I was slightly concerned about taking a *kathoei* into a small rural community. Having watched the Australian movie ‘Priscilla, Queen of the Desert’, and seeing a group of Australian *kathoei* leaving the security of Sydney and fearing for their safety on entering rural communities, I was wondering what would happen. All fears evaporated when I saw Jinny interact with the villagers. Jinny charmed the men, and women compared notes with her on issues of beauty, while the children volunteered information to her. She was a hit.

### 2.5.5 Training and Pre-test

I had a training session for all students interested in helping (this included students that I did not employ). I introduced the questionnaire and then asked the future assistants to interview each other using the two questionnaires. I tested the questionnaires and the language, stressing the need to pitch it at a level that children could understand. During the next stage my assistants and I pre-tested the two questionnaires in a village just north of the university campus. This pre-test demonstrated problems with the coded handbook that I had written. It became clear that it was impractical for the interviewers to fill in a four-digit code for occupation during the interview. We decided that it was far more practical for the assistants to write the name of the occupation on the questionnaire and for that piece of information to be coded later.

### 2.5.6 Mapping

To carry out the census successfully we needed maps of the different sites. In Ban Nam Suiy the head of the village gave us a professionally produced map of the village. Although it was a couple of years out of date, from it we created our own map, adding
any new houses that had since appeared. In Ban Nam Jai we were unable to obtain a map from the village authorities. Instead, we created our own map, showing all the streets, lanes and houses. For Si Liam and Soi Shiwit Rantod I obtained a map from the city authorities.

These maps were of great importance allowing us to know to what extent we had successfully interviewed the children. My assistants and I determined how many children aged 8-17 lived at each house. If a household had no children between those ages, we marked it on the map as a household to which we did not need to return. If there were children at a house we marked the map once we had completed the adult questionnaire and then again when we had interviewed all the children. In this way we had an idea which children we had to interview.

2.5.7 Data entry

I entered the information from the questionnaires using the data entry program EPI6. This is a specialised program allowing internal checks to reduce entry errors. I entered the data myself when my assistants handed me the completed questionnaires, as I wanted to gain an understanding of the data, and was able to check for errors. On discovering mistakes, I was able to ask my assistants the causes of the errors; if we could not fix the problem, the assistant went to ask the relevant questions for a second time.

Entering the data personally was trying and time consuming; but it was worth the effort as I have a better data set than if someone else had done it. I do not believe others entering the data would have been so concerned by ‘minor errors’ as my assistants claimed they were. It was only by doing the work myself that I could see the ‘minor errors’ and the misunderstandings of my assistants in asking questions. We fixed these problems after discussions at the various meetings that I called whenever I felt there was a need to solve problems.

2.6 Qualitative data

The qualitative methods used in this study give a voice to the children (Prout & James 1990:8), allowing us to see them as social actors in their own right (Alanen 1988:60). It is only by talking to children themselves, both those who are and those who are not in the labour force, that we can gain a true understanding of working children. We must hear the reasons for and consequences of entering the labour market given by children who do this work, as well as the stories of children who do not.

2.6.1 Interviews

During my field work I undertook numerous interviews and through these gained an understanding of the opinions of different groups about working children. I interviewed
those involved in NGOs and international organisations concerned with 'child labour',
those working in employment agencies, trade union officials, employers, teachers,
grandparents, and parents. The main people that I interviewed, however, were children.

These interviews took two forms, the first being informal conversations that I had
in noodle shops, on the back of minibuses, in backyard factories or anywhere else that I
happened to be. As a result of living in my field sites for a year, this represents a
massive amount of data. The conversations, however, were just that, and thus I did not
record them. Nevertheless, if I had a conversation, which provided me with general
information, a new insight, or anything of use, I wrote down what I could remember at
the earliest moment.

The second type of interviews was in-depth interviews for which I gained
permission from the respondents to tape the interview. In my view taping did not
aversely affect the conversations. Quickly, the tape recorder was forgotten, except by me
as I was constantly concerned about whether it was working. There was one occasion
when the recording of the conversation had an impact. That was when I interviewed a
young male prostitute in the central park of Khon Kaen. He had agreed to the interview
being recorded but while the tape was on the conversation went nowhere. Turning off
the machine, I was able to have a far freer conversation about him and his work.

Students at Khon Kaen University transcribed and then typed into Thai the
recordings. This process was complex as many in-depth interviews took place in Isam
rather than Thai. Isam is basically Laotian, but with slight variations from that spoken
across the border. Writing in Laotian could have been logical as it would have been a
truer representation of the spoken word. However, most Isam people, including the
students transcribing the tapes, cannot read or write this script. This forced those
transcribing and typing to use the Thai alphabet, which led to debate about how best to
do it without creating confusion.

Throughout the thesis, while presenting information from taped interviews I use
pseudonyms for the people interviewed. I gained permission from the Australian
National University Ethics in Human Experimentation Committee and the NRCT for
this research only on condition that I concealed the identity of my informants. With this
in mind I decided to randomly assign each informant a Thai nickname.

While presenting this form of data I have also indicated the age, sex, profession
(when appropriate) and the date of the interview. Sometimes, when interviewing old
people, I did not ask their age as I felt it was not appropriate during the interview. In
these cases I indicate their age by stating the respondent was an old man or woman.

My being a non-Thai seemed to add to the willingness of most adults to be
interviewed. First, for many there was a desire to speak and also to be seen to be
speaking to the farang. Second, most of the interactions started off with me being
interviewed. I had to tell them what I was doing, whether I was married, how many
siblings I had, and so on. At times, these conversations lasted for hours. As I had been
interviewed, and they often used *samphat*, the Thai word for interview, it was seen as fair that I could then interview them in exchange.

Interviewing children was not as easy. Most children were in no real position to *samphat* me because of the hierarchic nature of Thai society, which places so much importance on age. Some children were too shy to interview. This often forced me to invest time preparing for an interview. The interviews with children often took place after some activity in which I and the children were involved. One common activity was English lessons. Children, some independently and others pushed by their parents, were keen to learn English. I held regular lessons in both villages as well as giving lessons in various primary and high schools. These lessons often took place in people's houses, under a *sala* (a small shelter with no walls) or even in the street. Other activities included assisting in their chores, learning how they worked, picnics, hunting, swimming, playing cards, and watching videos. Through such activities I gained the confidence of the children and was able to interview them.

### 2.6.1.1 Focus groups

Unlike many Thai demographic studies using qualitative data, this study has not relied on focus groups. The focus group has become a common tool in Thai demographic studies (Knodel 1994:99-100; Knodel et al.1987; Pramualratana et al. 1985; VanLandingham et al. 1994; Wolff et al. 1991), and thus I must explain why I have not relied on this method.

I carried out two focus groups but was disappointed with the results and questioned their practicability as a tool for me. The first focus group consisted of girls aged between 12 and 16. The focus-group moderator was a female academic trained in focus groups; as well as myself, there was a third-year university student recording the events. In some ways it was a textbook case of how not to do focus groups. Not only were the girls there but their mothers and grandmothers also arrived to watch.

The girls were asked during the focus group if they were working, had ever worked, or were going to in their school holiday, which was just about to start. The discussion greatly surprised me as they claimed that they had not worked and nor were they going to do so in the holiday. This was surprising as only the week before I had discussed this topic with most of these girls during a lunch break at their school. In my diary that day I wrote:

> There was a group of girls sitting near the ping pong table. We got talking together. All eight of them were saying that for the summer holiday break they will go and work in the fish-net factory. These were Year 8 and Year 9 girls. Not only were they going to do this but they had all worked there before. One Year 8 girl was saying as a 13 year old she had worked there during her holidays (6/3/96).

What happened in the focus group? Why was it possible that these girls who had been so open about working in the past in a fish-net factory and who were planning to do so for their school holiday were not willing to admit this in the focus group? Was it
that the first girl responding to this question had not worked and that her reply set the
pattern for the other girls? Maybe they did not want to be seen to be different from each
other. Or was it that the adults around the girls thought it was not appropriate for them
to be saying that they had worked and were going to work at the fish-net factory? This
seems strange to me, as it was common knowledge who was working there because a
company truck came each morning to take the workers from the village and dropped
them in the afternoon. It should be noted that other studies have found differences in
respondents’ answers depending on the use of in-depth interviews or focus groups
(Heititzer-Allen et al. 1994:76).

A further reason why I did not use focus groups was that I was staying in the field
for an extended time, enabling me to use other techniques. An advantage of focus
groups is that they can gain a lot of information in a short time (Murphy et al. 1992:37).
Knowing that time was not crucial, I used my microdemographic community approach.
Two proponents of focus groups Knodel and Pramulratana (1987:4) claimed that
microdemographic techniques permit

... far greater in-depth analysis of linkages between demographic behavior and
socioeconomic and cultural underpinnings in the context of local communities than is
possible with a focus groups study.

I must note, however, that some of my in-depth interviews ended up with me
listening to a group of people. Within the two villages friends of those I was
interviewing often joined the discussion. I found myself starting with an in-depth
interview but ending up moderating groups of four to six people. These interviews have
been described as ‘natural’ focus groups (Scrimshaw & Hurtado 1987:15).

2.6.2 Participant observations

Another form of data collection that I used was participant observation. This technique
has been described as central to effective field work, as it enables researchers to check,
monitor and evaluate data collected through specialised techniques (Pelto 1970:91-92).
During the year I observed many events. I always tried to participate with those under 18
as much as possible. I tried to partake in their sports, their chores, their education and
their work. Being with and watching children interact among themselves and with adults
gave me many insights about Thai and Isan concepts of what children, work, ‘child
labour’ and childhood are. On experiencing or seeing anything that gave me any new
insight or reinforced old perceptions, I attempted to record it as soon as possible.

While living in Thailand I took on many roles. For some children I was the
farang, a man from another country and culture who was living in their community. For
them I was a curiosity and thus at times I became like the Pied Piper with children
following every step I took. For other children I was an arjan (a teacher) and was to be
respected. Other children still saw me as a friend and would include me in their
activities. Finally, for those children with whom I lived I was seen as an older brother.
With these different roles, however, I was able to interact with a wide variety of children who allowed me to enter their worlds.

Being an adult and an outsider was both advantageous and disadvantageous. First, I was constantly allowed to ask what Fine and Sandstrom (1988:17) call ‘ignorant’ questions. Children and adults were willing to explain facets of their lives, which might not have been the case if I was a member of their community. There were times, however, when children excluded me from their activities. Children hide behaviour that adults object to, especially when engaged in socially deviant acts, retreating to private locations (Fine & Sandstrom 1988:16). An example, in my study, was drug taking. I saw a male teenager pull out speed tablets from a pocket and announce to his friends that they would not sleep if they took these. This group marched off to a paddy field, out of sight of adults’ gazes, and, I assumed took these tablets.

2.6.3 Texts and images of working children

... it [is] a reasonable hypothesis that children’s books have an effect upon children’s views of the world and can contribute to their conception of their own place in society.

(Bradely & Mortimer 1979:4)

Popular images help build appropriate behaviour. Work carried out by boys and girls is influenced by what they read and see in their daily lives. They learn from an early age what work is suitable for them. For this reason this thesis uses images portrayed within Thai books, particular primary school readers, and stamps. Thai primary school books ‘...are a very important part of the culture of the nation-state, reflective of the ‘dominate mentality’, at least as seen and interpreted by government and bureaucracy’ (Mulder 1997:26). The stamps were created for Wan Dek Haeng Chat (National Children’s Day) and portray popular images of childhood and children’s work.

For the purpose of my study I have limited my analysis to the Mana and Mani primary school readers, a series that has been recently replaced. I concentrate on this series as that is the set of books that all children in the ages of 8-17 have used, as well as many adults. It is only recently that a new series has appeared. Present primary school children are using a new series, but I noticed that every primary school that I visited still had the Mana and Mani books in their libraries as well as in the class rooms.

Mana and Mani are siblings and, along with their friends and animals, are the central figures in the textbooks. Following these characters and seeing what they do adds to our understanding of Thai concepts of childhood, work, and ‘child labour’.

2.7 Secondary data

In addition to quantitative and qualitative data I use secondary data which include education figures, particularly from Changwat Khon Kaen, and the NSO Thai Labour Force surveys. By using provincial and national data I can generalise findings from my
own micro-study to developments within Thailand. Through these data I present a macro-perspective of the lives of children in Thailand by showing historical changes in children's education and working patterns.

2.7.1 Can we trust statistics on child workers?

Government statistics in this field seldom address questions essential for policy planning such as where and how long children work, what they do, how they are remunerated, who employs and supervises them, their state of health and development, where they live, whether they attend school and how they perform there, and what their aspirations are.

(Myers 1989:322)

Determining the exact number of working children is next to impossible. First, as shown in Chapter 5, there are problems defining 'work'. What activities are included in any survey partly determines the number of children that are seen to be working. A second problem in measuring the number of working children is that it is in the interest of all concerned parties to conceal it (Fyfe 1989:2; Goddard & White 1982:466; Kittidokkul et al. 1989:5; Mendelievich 1979:28).

'Child labour' in Thailand is a very controversial issue. Because it is illegal to employ children, usually underpaid or even unpaid, many employers are keen to hide that they are employing children. Some parents and children are also keen to hide from authorities that they are working. They are aware that participating in certain types of work under age is illegal and to protect their income will lie about their age or even disclaim that they are working.

One further possible reason why there is a lack of accurate figures on working children is a lack of desire by government authorities to estimate the real extent of the phenomenon. It may not be in the interest of governments to disclose how many children are working. Thailand has been criticised extensively for the extent of 'child labour' in the country (Chapter 1). If governments produce accurate and higher figures they would only be helping to condemn themselves.

A clear example of the lack of accurate data concerning Thai working children is that information is collected only on those 13 years of age and older. It was the law that children under this age (Chapter 5) cannot work; so authorities do not collect any data on them. Up to 1988 NSO collected data for those aged 11 to 12 but this policy was discontinued.5

5 A new 'child labour' law took affect in August 1998 restricting children under 15 from working. As a result of this law it will be a major concern if the Thai government decides to discontinue collecting data on working children aged 13-14 as it did in 1988 for children aged 11-12.
It should be noted, however, that problems determining the extent of children working are not unique to government authorities but include all those investigating the issue. A youth in my study articulated the difficulties faced by researchers:

**Surin:** If there is someone who is working like you, Arjan Simon, who goes to check a factory or at a work place where the boss is forcing kids to work he will make the kids lie about their age. For example, kids aged 11 will say they are 18. If an NGO checks on a work place with kids 10 or younger they will arrest them. I tell you the truth, NGOs that enter the work place will not find the problem child labour as the kids would not tell the truth. Some NGOs would enter the work place by gaining permission through the boss and thus would not be able to meet the kids directly (17-year-old boy, Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

### 2.7.2 Secondary data illustrating the trends

Given that obtaining statistics on working children is problematic, it is inappropriate to use them to ascertain exactly how many children are working. Instead, they must be seen as guides to what children are doing. Trends can be determined: whether the number of working children is increasing or declining and in what occupations these children are working.

In Thailand there are four main national surveys measuring the number of children in the workforce. The first is the census carried out once every 10 years; the second is the Children and Youth Survey carried out once every five years. The third source is the Report on Industries and Workers and the final source is the Labour Force Survey (Falkus 1997:157). Data presented in this thesis are based on the Labour Force Survey as it is carried out three times a year, providing the most up-to-date information. Throughout the thesis I only use Round 3 data. This is the period with the highest number of workers in the labour force and the data other 'child labour' studies in Thailand use (for example Banpasirichote 1995).

Although not directly connected to children in the labour force, educational data provide further information on the number of such children. Increasing student enrolments are an indication of a declining youth workforce (Chapter 9).

Despite accuracy problems, the Labour Force Survey does indicate the trends of employment. Assuming that it is impossible to gain an accurate number of working children, because of the inadequacies discussed above, the general trends are important in determining what is happening to children in Thailand. Using these secondary data I have been able to illustrate the changing working and educational patterns of children.

### 2.8 Concluding remarks: a children's study and new relationships

The children I was studying greatly helped my fieldwork by their cooperation and assistance. I was delighted by the desire of many children to participate and help. Word travelled quickly among the different sites, and in the two villages particularly, about what my assistants and I, the farang, were doing in their communities. We had come to
do research into their lives, not the lives of their parents or some other group, but
themselves. We were showing an interest in what they were doing and what they
thought.

Our interest in the lives of the children was matched by their willingness to be
involved in the study. Groups of children took it upon themselves to be our guides. They
helped us determine the accuracy of our maps, informed us if houses had children and
where they would be at any time if we could not find them in their homes. Others helped
me enter data into the computer.

A joke quickly developed that I was creating a form of ‘child labour’, as the youth
of the different sites chose to help me and my assistants. The joke came from my
assistants, from the adults and from the children themselves as they saw the irony of my
researching working children while at the same time having young children working for
me.

The youth of the different sites who were our guides in their communities became
far more than just this as my assistants and I, taking breaks from work, would sit and
talk, play music, sing Thai songs or take afternoon dips in a lake with them. From these
interactions friendships grew and bonds formed. My assistants and I returned to the
villages to see our friends, to be there for birthdays or for important rituals, such as
when an older brother of one of our guides entered the monkhood. The children and
some of the parents from the different sites would contact my assistants and me to
discuss future plans, or would even visit us in Khon Kaen.

Through my research I developed special bonds with some children. In both
villages the children of the families we lived in became close. I would go to school with
them, go on adventures, hunt for animals, watch television, and play their sports. Every
time I returned to see their families I would bring presents for them. To my surprise, I
gained a new sister. In Ban Nam Suiy towards the end of our data collection, an 18-year-
old woman, who had been helping us, asked if she could be my daughter. I was shocked
by the request, how could I have a daughter, I am not even married and she was only 18
years younger than I! Taking this role would have involved numerous responsibilities. I
decided it was wiser if I agreed but only if we could be siblings and thus I would take a
role that I felt I could fulfil.

As I had hoped, studying children gave me new insights into their lives. Yet, I
gained far more than this. The children’s spontaneous involvement in the study enriched
the process and me as a person.
Chapter 3

Children in and around Khon Kaen

Children’s work is influenced by where they live. The type of work, whether paid or unpaid, differs by location. Children in Bangkok can be employed in factories while children in rural areas are mostly involved in agriculture. Some children’s work, however, such as studying, which is universal throughout the country, will differ in quality. City children are likely to gain a better education than village children. The geographical settings of children, where they live, work, study and play must be detailed so as to understand their lives.

This chapter details the settings of children’s activities. The discussion starts with Isarn, the region of Thailand where I carried out my research. Secondly, the chapter describes both Changwat Khon Kaen and the city Khon Kaen. The chapter then depicts the four research sites starting with Si Liam located in Khon Kaen, followed by the slum community, Soi Shiwit Rantod. Finally, the chapter reports on the two villages, Ban Nam Jai, the closer of the two to the city, and then Ban Nam Suiy.

3.1 Isarn

Isarn is the poorest region of Thailand. In Bangkok, the very word ‘Isan’ is almost a metaphor for poverty (Kepner 1988:8). Absolute poverty in Thailand is a rural phenomenon concentrated in Isarn (Warr 1996:2). Despite accounting for 35 per cent of the country’s population in the early 1990s, it produced only 13 per cent of the country’s GDP (Duncan 1996:4). In 1997 per capita income in Isarn was only US$700 ($A900), while in Bangkok it was US$7000 (Richardson 1997:24).

Krongkaew (1995:63) established that Isarn has been poorer than the rest of Thailand since average incomes were first measured. Further, the disparity between Isarn and Bangkok, the richest area of Thailand, has been growing. The average annual income of Bangkok has grown from 2.4 times that of Isarn in 1962-63 to 4.6 times in 1995 (Figure 3.2).
Figure 3.1 *Changwat* Khon Kaen and the research sites
Causes of this relative poverty are political and economic factors combined with the unfavourable physical conditions. London (1980:86) argued that initially Isarn's standing was

... a reflection of the region's extreme inaccessibility and relative natural poverty. Separated from the rest of the nation by the rugged terrain of the Korat Plateau, there is neither a river to facilitate access to the center as in the North, no contact via coastal shipping routes as in South. In addition, a long dry season and relatively light fall during the rainy season make this the climatically least-favored region in the nation.

Isarn, because of its poverty, has been the greatest source of working children in the country. Poor Isarn children join the labour force, as they cannot afford schooling expenses (Prachankhadee et al. 1978:38). Praditwong (1990:79) argued that poverty shapes the lives of Isarn youth, often forcing them to participate in the Bangkok labour markets. Thai 'child labour' studies invariably pinpoint Isarn as the major source of working children in the country. In 1982 Bond (1982:3) claimed that employers exploited Isarn children more than other Thai children, because of their inability to speak or understand Thai fluently. Employers could easily manipulate them because of their ignorance and fear. Isarn children represented 93 per cent of all children freed after government raids of illegal factories, between 1977 and March 1981 (Wun'Gaeo 1983:3). Dhongchai (1984:5) in 1984 stated that in 1978 there were over 1,350,000 children in the labour market and that the majority came from the poverty stricken areas of Isarn. Archavanitkul and Havanon (1990:21) in 1990 claimed that the majority of
working children in Bangkok were from Isarn. In 1993 the government planned to tackle 'child labour' as they expected 200,000 Isarn children to migrate to urban areas that year (Bangkok Post 1993a:1). Finally, Falkus (1997:165) referring to an article in Matichon, a Thai magazine, stated that in 1989 over 64 per cent of working children in Bangkok factories came from Isarn.

Despite its poverty the region experienced increased levels of development from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s; this brought changes to the lives of the children of the region. Huge improvements in infrastructure and services have occurred. In 1994, for example, over 99 per cent of villages in Changwat Khon Kaen had electricity (National Statistical Office 1996). Also the level of poverty in Isarn has declined. In 1975/76 just under 45 per cent of the population was living in absolute poverty, declining to 13 per cent in 1995 (Krongkaew 1995:63) (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Level of absolute poverty in Isarn, Bangkok and Thailand as a whole

Note: Figures for 1995 are estimate from poverty trends for the 1988 to 1992 period.

Isarn clearly has been the poorest part of Thailand, resulting in the majority of working children in Thailand coming from this region. Since the mid-1980s, however, national economic growth has benefited the lives of Isarn children (Chapter 8). Following chapters will show that a growing number of Isarn children have continued with their education and not entered the workforce.

3.2 Changwat Khon Kaen

Changwat Khon Kaen’s economy has grown rapidly. Calculations based on Gross Provincial Product (GPP) for each Changwat in Isarn (Office of the National Economic
and Social Development Board 1994) reveal that between 1989 and 1994 Changwat Khon Kaen’s economy grew the fastest.

After a decline in the economy in 1984 and a relatively slow recovery in 1985-86 Changwat Khon Kaen’s economy grew dramatically from 1987. In 1991 the growth rate was over 14 per cent (Figure 3.4). This economic growth dramatically increased Changwat Khon Kaen’s per capita income, rising from 15,296 to 39,139 baht between 1989 and 1994, an increase of 156 per cent (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board 1996; Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board 1998).

Figure 3.4 Changwat Khon Kaen’s economic growth rates: 1982-96

![Graph showing economic growth rates](image)

Note: Based on constant 1988 prices.

Manufacturing fuelled the economic growth, as it more than doubled its share of GPP from 11.1 to 22.6 per cent between 1987 and 1996 (Figure 3.5). At the same time agriculture declined from being the most important sector to only the third most important. From 1981 to 1985 agriculture accounted for around a quarter of the GPP. Manufacturing did not become more important than agriculture until 1992.

The rapid increase in manufacturing was not evenly spread throughout Changwat Khon Kaen; it was concentrated in or close to Khon Kaen. Children’s working opportunities in these areas were far greater than for children elsewhere. Children from more rural communities who wished to work could do so in agriculture or they had to migrate from their communities. In 1996 Changwat Khon Kaen had 22 amphoe (district), yet over 70 per cent of all registered manufacturing was in only three amphoe...
Opportunities for boys and girls also differed as male and female employment was unevenly distributed throughout the province. In 1996 13,778 men and 10,830 women were employed in registered factories. Men were employed in a far greater range of employment types; women, while concentrated in fewer sites, tended to be in larger establishments. In the industries that reported their costs of establishment being less than one million baht over 80 per cent of the workers were men. In establishments costing between one and 10 million baht over 60 per cent were men, but in establishments with set up values of more than 10 million baht women accounted for close to 55 per cent of all workers. In 1995 the largest factory in Changwat Khon Kaen employed 1832 workers of whom 1800 were women. The second largest factory employed 1100 workers and 1000 of them were women (Samnakngaan utsaahakaam Changwat Khon Kaen samnakngan pladkrasuang krasuang utsaahakaam 1996).

3.3 Khon Kaen
Khon Kaen is an unofficial centre of Isarn. First, its Isarn’s educational centre. It has the leading Isarn university, technical colleges and numerous high schools, two of which
have such good reputations that children will migrate from neighbouring provinces to attend them. One student who had migrated to Khon Kaen to study stated:

Gob: I thought here in Khon Kaen the schools are better than in other provinces.

Simon: What, in other provinces there are no good schools?

Gob: Yes, there are but here they have a good reputation. Such as for taking the exam to enter the university. Here they get many students into the universities (16-year-old girl from a neighbouring province at a coaching school, Si Liam 24/11/96).

Second, Khon Kaen is a health centre with a university hospital, which even attracts patients from Laos (pers. comm., hospital doctors). There is a second major government hospital and also a growing number of private hospitals.

The economic expansion of Changwat Khon Kaen was based on the city, Khon Kaen, which was expanding rapidly up to 1996, the time I carried out my research. Between my first stay in 1991, when I was a volunteer teacher, and my return in 1996 dramatic changes had taken place to Khon Kaen. The major highway running through the city (Chapter 2) and the city’s skyline were transformed. Two five-star hotels appeared in my absence and three more hotels were under construction. Five new major shopping complexes had been or were being built.

The dominance of Khon Kaen over the rest of Changwat Khon Kaen was similar to Bangkok’s dominance over the Thai economy. Throughout Changwat Khon Kaen in 1996 there were 912 industrial centres; 427 of these factories were located in Amphoe Khon Kaen (the city’s district) (Samnakngaan utsaahakaam Changwat Khon Kaen samnakngan padkrasuang krasuang utsaahakaam 1996). During my research a local radio station changed the saying ‘Bangkok is Thailand and Thailand is Bangkok’ (Phongpaichit & Baker 1996:146) to ‘Khon Kaen is Bangkok and Bangkok is Khon Kaen’, suggesting that Khon Kaen had social facilities and money-making opportunities to match Bangkok.

### 3.3.1 Children’s Lives in Khon Kaen

As in any city there were a whole range of groups of children based on age, sex, class and interests. These ranged from street children and child prostitutes to teenagers driving Mercedes Benz cars (Chapter 8). These groups had their own meeting places and forms of entertainment.

One place where children would ‘hang out’ was one of the city’s bus stations. This was the non-air conditioned station, for the cheapest buses in Thailand, and thus it was where many villagers first arrived in Khon Kaen. This included street children who used the station as a place to stay. An attraction for them was the covered area where they could sleep and the toilets where they would sneak in free. According to an NGO worker the problem of street children was widespread in Khon Kaen:

Nai: There are more homeless children now. There are two types. First, they may flee from their families because of poverty and they may have been severely abused. They
escape to travel. These children can survive by themselves by begging and working. Secondly, the kids may come from well off families, but they will be lonely because their families don’t look after them well. They will just wonder around doing whatever they like. They may rent a place to live and move from place to place. They don’t really live as street children because they still have money (NGO ‘child labour’ worker, Khon Kaen 19/9/96).

The bus station was also a place of entertainment for some children. There were cheap restaurants and snooker halls attracting young people. One girl from Soi Shiwit Rantod told me that was one place where she would spend time with friends. When I asked what she and her friends did there she said:

Mot: We have motor bike races there. ... We go there to meet our friends and we will then race each other on the bikes (14-year-old girl, Soi Shiwit Rantod, 7/10/96).

Some of these children meeting at the bus station were prostitutes. Next to the station was a park where young male prostitutes employed themselves at nighttime. After interviewing two boys under 18, I took them and six of their fellow workers to a noodle shop for dinner. This group ranged in age from 15 to 20, with the oldest claiming he had been selling his body for the last 10 years.

The market for female prostitutes was more developed than for males. There was a hierarchy of outlets including girls selling their bodies at discotheques to high-class escort agencies offering services at the largest hotels. An NGO ‘child labour’ worker stated:

Nai: They are from the villages. Some of them have never been involved in other forms of child labour, but just go straight to this kind of job [prostitution]. Many of them have already had sexual relationships. Some of the other kids are from the middle class families of the city. They have their gangs and will have the attitudes of the gang. They will have to have expensive jeans. They go out together with their gangs. Some of them get their money from being prostitutes. Some of them don’t intend to be prostitutes, but they have to do so as to be accepted into the gang. There would be more child prostitutes now, far more, but the form of prostitution has changed. ... A lot of them are 14 to 16 and only a few of them would be 18 (Khon Kaen 19/9/96).

It should be noted that not all girls that have worked as prostitutes in Khon Kaen have come from the local region. In 1995 the Bangkok Post (1995:6) reported that a police raid of a night club in Khon Kaen discovered 10 Burmese, Chines Haw and Tai Yai child prostitutes, all under the age of 18. Some of these girls were unable to speak a word of Thai. A Thai girl, one of 23 prostitutes discovered at the club, claimed that the girls had been told that they would be murdered or their homes burnt down if they went to the police. If such practices continued while I was collecting the data for this thesis I am unable to say.

A major social problem among the youth of Khon Kaen and throughout the Changwat was glue sniffing. Khamjan and Klaychoteklong (1996:13) and Bunnag (1996:13) described this practice as being common among street children in Thailand. Podhisita and Pattaravanich (1995:81) claimed that in the 1980s Thailand, and Isarn in
particular, experienced an epidemic of solvent sniffing. My observations and interviews indicated that the problem was not confined to street children:

*Chai:* They are at the age that they want to try things, they want to have new experiences, this is natural for them. The drugs are cheap so the kids buy them. Another cause is pressure from advertisements to persuade them to accept materialism. They want to be fashionable, they want to have new clothes, they want to try to fulfil the perfect child image that society projects on them. This makes the kids feel alienated from society, feel cut off from the rest of society. Psychologically they will feel hopeless so that they will find things that will give them happiness. The values of society have left them behind as society has changed so much. The kids are far from the rest of society, they are out of the social boundaries. They have a lot of pressure. Their parents have no time for their children, they have to work, they are in a hurry, they are also under pressure. The kids are under stress which makes them aggressive, they are pushed, they are not happy or cheerful. Kids feel they are alone so they reach out to friends and these friends will introduce them to drugs (NGO ‘child labour’ worker, Khon Kaen 16/9/96).

It must be stressed that not all children in Khon Kaen were street children, prostitutes, or addicted to drugs. The great majority did not take part in any of these activities. Instead they studied and had hopes and aspirations that ensured that their lives were divorced from such activities.

3.4 Si Liam

Si Liam, the main city research site, means four angles. I gave it this name as the site was contained within four different roads in a suburb of Khon Kaen creating a rectangle. I selected only a proportion of a suburb as it had to have a similar number of children as the two villages. Also, with three other research sites, two villages and a slum community, this was my fourth angle among my research sites.

3.4.1 Background to Si Liam

For most of its history Si Liam was a leper colony: many lepers in Isarn came to Si Liam as there was a hospital and a Catholic church catering to their medical and spiritual needs. According to older residents of Si Liam many in Khon Kaen feared to enter Si Liam because of the disease:

*Jew:* Most of the normal people, those who didn’t have leprosy didn’t come to Si Liam.

*Simon:* Why, what were they thinking?

*Jew:* They were scared of the disease, it was scary. If you mentioned the name Si Liam they would say it is where the lepers live (Catholic lay worker at an aged persons’ home, Si Liam 5/10/96).

Development of Si Liam was hindered until the lepers left. They were moved to another village in Changwat Khon Kaen but at sufficient distance that a cynic might say ‘out of sight out of mind’. Although the leper colony moved, there were still a few
lepers living in the area, with their families or in an aged persons’ home run by the Catholic church.

A woman indicated that the removal of the lepers brought change to Si Liam. Those without leprosy were willing to enter the community and buy cheap land left by the lepers:

Ploy: Before, there were many people with leprosy. They had no arms or legs. There were many like that. Now they have gone, now there are rich people around the Catholic church, all the way until the university.

Simon: Why did the rich people want to live here in Si Liam?

Ploy: Before the land was cheap, you could buy it for 7,000 to 8,000 baht and you could live here. We had no money so we had to rent. We didn’t have the thousands or tens of thousands needed. They came from elsewhere. They had lots of money and they could get lots of land (56-year-old woman, Si Liam 1/10/96).

3.4.2 Si Liam today

In 1996 Si Liam was a suburb of Khon Kaen encompassing a rich diversity of social backgrounds. There were both people who had been in the area for a long time, and recent arrivals. The new arrivals included two extremes, the very poor living in Si Liam’s slums, and the growing middle class attracted to Khon Kaen’s economic prosperity.

Si Liam in many ways was a town planner’s nightmare. It developed not to a blue print, but haphazardly on its own accord, reflecting the economic realities of the region. It was an urban area with a patch work design. Banks and specialised motor show-rooms constituted the top of the economic range. These were next door to back yard garages and makeshift localities catering to the informal sector.

The economic diversity had created a mish-mash of housing, of different ages and quality. Bamboo huts typically found in villages, and quickly-built shelters in a state of decline as in Si Liam’s slums, represented the poorest-quality housing. The other end of the scale included townhouses built to a standard architecture with imitation Greek columns, and ostentatious houses of the upper middle class.

These houses, whether belonging to the poor or rich, were in close proximity to industrial sites. Located in Si Liam were numerous industries from medium to very small, varying from a large ice cream factory and a cosmetic factory to backyard meatball production by family members.

Adding to the town planner’s despair, no recreational facilities existed, nor were there any green spaces to enhance the area. There were, however, open spaces left in a state of ruin, but these were pockets of land owned by land speculators who were waiting to sell them.
3.4.3 Children’s lives in Si Liam

Simon: How is the life of kids today?

Noi: It is good, as a result of the good economy (17-year-old seamstress, Si Liam 7/10/96).

The rapid economic growth of Khon Kaen was benefiting many children in Si Liam. Like increasing numbers of Changwat Khon Kaen children they were staying at school longer (Chapter 9), and for those who wished to gain paid employment there were numerous opportunities.

3.4.3.1 Work and Si Liam

At the beginning of 1996 tambon nai muang (subdistrict in the centre of the city) Khon Kaen had 213 registered industrial centres, employing 3089 men and 1817 women. This was where Si Liam and Soi Shiwit Rantod were located. This subdistrict accounted for half of all factories in Amphoe Khon Kaen and close to a quarter of all factories within Changwat Khon Kaen (Samnakngaan utsaahakaam Changwat Khon Kaen samnakngan pladkrasuang krasuang utsaahakaam 1996).

Si Liam is at the crossroads of two major highways, the Friendship highway, running from Bangkok to the Thai Lao border, and the Maliwan highway that connects Northern Thailand with Isarn. This was a focal point of activity, as each morning and evening truck loads of workers, including those aged under 18, were being dropped off or picked up. The villagers were the labourers who were fuelling the Khon Kaen economy. They included villagers from Ban Nam Jai who were working in the fish-net factories and on the city’s construction sites. One observer of this daily movement of workers from neighbouring villages wrote:

At seven or eight o’clock on any morning a casual observer can watch a steady stream of pick-up trucks and motor cycles carrying farmers and their sons and daughters from nearby villages to pour concrete or serve in super-markets in Khon Kaen ... (Duncan 1996:7).

3.4.3.2 Schooling and Si Liam

The children of Si Liam had a wide range of educational facilities from infant schools to a university. As it was part of the city, distance was not a problem for access to these services. They were close to two of the best high schools in Isarn. Also there were two coaching schools, one in the research site and the other in the remainder of the suburb.

Most children in Si Liam, however, were unable to afford or did not receive high enough grades to go to the best schools. Reflecting the socioeconomic conditions of Si Liam some children attended the better schools, others attended the local Si Liam high school, while others still were unable to afford any high school education.
3.4.3.3 Entertainment in Si Liam

Children in Si Liam had access to many centres of entertainment. Within the research site was a department store, where many children would go window shopping, enjoying the air-conditioning. Children with money could also eat *farang* food, by going to American doughnut shops or to various large fast-food outlets. Apart from shopping, children in Si Liam could also visit cinemas, discotheques, and sporting complexes such as public swimming pools, soccer fields, and basketball courts.

3.5 Soi Shiwit Rantod

The second city site, Soi Shiwit Rantod, was a slum physically located in Si Liam, but socially and economically cut off from it. I choose to call the slum Soi Shiwit Rantod after interviewing a girl (14-year-old girl, Soi Shiwit Rantod 7/10/96), who described life in the *Soi* (lane) as *shiwit rantod*, ‘the lane of despair’.

It was relatively easy not to notice Soi Shiwit Rantod as it was partly hidden from the rest of Si Liam. There were two entrances to the community – the beginning and end of a lane. Unless one was walking a short distance along the lane the slum remained concealed. The lane opened up into a large open space with brick walls or the backs of other buildings around it. In this space was a series of houses that comprised the slum.

Entering this community produced many shocks and surprises. On my first visit one drunk man assumed I was a missionary from the Catholic church around the corner. That was a logical explanation for a *farang* (a western person) entering his community. He welcomed me by singing the hymns that he had learnt, he claimed, from the last *farang* that had entered his life. Informing him that I was not a missionary but a researcher he told me that he had been a Catholic for a while but had decided to return to being a Buddhist. He then promptly left me.

The housing was in poor condition and the social environment was extremely depressing. Every time I entered this lane I was struck by the sense of hopelessness. Many men were unemployed and were in a state of stupor from alcohol or other drugs. Nearly every time I tried to interview children I had drunk men persuading me to interview them instead. In their efforts they often physically fell on me and the child that I was talking to.

There was no community organisation attempting to develop Soi Shiwit Rantod. In contrast to other slums, that I had visited in Khon Kaen, there were no community leaders active in improving the living conditions. The reason for this, I suspect, was that all the houses were to be pulled down in the middle of 1997. The removal of the residents would enable the owner to build townhouses adding to the gentrification of Si
Liam\(^1\). Thus the residents lacked attachment to the community or desire to enhance their environment.

The lack of community spirit resulted in the area being squalid. The houses on the edge of the slum were in better condition than those in the centre: the houses out of sight of the populace of Khon Kaen were in need of major repairs. Within the centre of the community a garbage tip had formed where the residents threw their waste.

Only six of the 39 children (15 per cent) lived in houses claimed to be owned by their parents. This may be an overestimation, as my understanding was that the whole community was to be demolished. It is possible, however, that these children came from houses on the outer edge of the community and that these were not due to be removed. This figure, despite this doubt, is much lower than for other sites. Si Liam, the site with the next lowest proportion, had a house ownership rate of over 50 per cent.

Soi Shiwit Rantod had the highest rate of immigration of the four research sites: close to 30 per cent of parents had migrated from elsewhere to the community. This figure in reality would be higher. From my data I am unable to determine whether those living in Soi Shiwit Rantod and born in Khon Kaen had migrated to the slum from other parts of the city.

An indicator of Soi Shiwit Rantod's poverty compared to the other research sites was that it had the lowest rate of television ownership. In Soi Shiwit Rantod 15 per cent of households did not have a television; this was over twice the rate for the next most deprived site. The slum had the highest rate of black and white televisions, outnumbering colour televisions; and, Soi Shiwit Rantod was the only site that did not have any video machines.

**3.5.1 Children's lives in Soi Shiwit Rantod**

*Simon:* How is the life of children, do you like it?

*Bern:* No, I don't like it, sometimes they swear at me and hit me (9-year-old boy, Soi Shiwit Rantod 7/10/96).

The children of Soi Shiwit Rantod were disadvantaged in many ways. Although, they were physically as close as children from Si Liam to the educational and employment facilities they did not have the same access because of their socioeconomic backgrounds.

A major problem in the slum was drug taking. The most common drug use among children was glue sniffing: one resident claimed that children as young as 10 were high on glue. After asking one girl why there was such a problem, I was told:

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\(^1\) According to a lecturer at Khon Kaen University the slum still existed in September 1998 (pers. comm.). As a result of the economic downturn to the Thai economy and the oversupply of housing stock, the construction of new townhouses remains unlikely.
Aoi: Because their families have problems. The father would have a minor wife and would be drinking alcohol. The mother would have a new husband and would kick out the children to live by themselves. But mostly the mothers would send the kids back to their fathers, but the new wife will have problems (15-year-old girl, Soi Shiwit Rantod 2/10/96).

A woman talking to me about the behaviour of children sniffing glue said:

Kat: They are empty, they will sit and will harp on ad nauseam. They are bad kids. Their parents will talk to them but they don't understand a thing. They wonder around and are influenced by their friends (20-year-old woman, Soi Shiwit Rantod 7/10/96).

A second woman, when I asked what adults do when seeing children sniffing glue, claimed:

Moi: We tell them off, but they don't listen to us. We tell them off and tell them off again, we will hit them and hit them again, but nothing. ... The kids just sit there and then they start sniffing glue again (54-year-old woman, Soi Shiwit Rantod 7/10/96).

Some of the boys and girls from the slum were prostitutes. I base this claim on discussions with residents of Soi Shiwit Rantod and Si Liam, and discussions with young male prostitutes. When I asked a woman how she felt about prostitutes from Soi Shiwit Rantod, she told me:

Kat: I don't feel anything, it is normal because they don't have anything to eat. Their parents have separated and are not interested in them. They have no money to use. They have younger siblings to look after. If they didn't sell their bodies I wouldn't know what they could do. If they work for a month or more they will have enough to eat for a while. They have to do this. Being a prostitute is normal, but sniffing glue I can't accept it (20-year-old woman, Soi Shiwit Rantod 7/10/96).

Some children from the slum faced social problems, which even led to their arrest. Two children informed me that they had been arrested. For one of these two going out and having fun led to problems:

Mot: There are two types of teenagers. One group will just go out for fun and not misbehave. Those who misbehave, they sniff glue and they are hooked on gambling, alcohol, cigarettes, and they race on motorbikes. This group is on the way to hell but I am not involved with them.

Later she said:

Mot: I go with my friends, we like to go out, I think I shouldn't be in this condition. Not like this, I shouldn't misbehave. I shouldn't be a delinquent because my parents went through a lot to raise me. If I go out it should be just a little (14-year-old girl, Soi Shiwit Rantod 7/10/96).

The social problems of Soi Shiwit Rantod had created for it a negative reputation among the residents of the rest of Si Liam. The conversation below shows the disdain and distrust of other residents for those in Soi Shiwit Rantod:

Jit: The kids from Soi Shiwit Rantod are from the slum. They steal things, sniff glue, take speed tablets and smoke marijuana. This is true, I saw it myself when I was as old as Od [an eight-year-old boy]. My bicycle, a brand new one, was stolen. You can't go into that soi. My parents have forbidden me to enter that soi. They are waiting behind
the bushes just to take necklaces off those going by (12-year-old girl, Si Liam 1/10/96).

3.6 Ban Nam Jai

Ban Nam Jai, as its English translation, ‘Village of Kindness’, would suggest, was a friendly community. I selected this name as I felt that the respondents taught me the Thai meaning of the word ‘kindness’. I had spent two years as a volunteer in Thailand working on a university campus but never received the hospitality that I did while I stayed in Ban Nam Jai. I was well looked after, always being fed no matter what the time, and there was always a place to stay if I desired.

3.6.1 Economic status of Ban Nam Jai

The economic position of Ban Nam Jai was improving. The village was benefiting from Khon Kaen’s rapid economic expansion as it was only 18 kilometres from the city. Its population was situated close enough to gain employment in the city whenever they wanted. A sign of improving economic conditions within the village was that many residents were building new houses. The living conditions of Dara, one of my chief informants in the village, surprised me greatly the first time I met him. He, his wife and two children were living in a makeshift shelter. At first I thought they were extremely poor. I soon discovered, however, that he had pulled down his old house and was building a new one.

A second sign of Ban Nam Jai’s relative wealth was its wat (temple). Thais have told me that an indicator of a village’s wealth is its wat as residents have to maintain the wat and feed the monks daily. The larger the wat the greater community resources needed to maintain it. If the wat is used as an indicator of prosperity, Ban Nam Jai was better off than Ban Nam Suiv, the other village in this study. Moreover, the villagers were supporting a second wat that they were building in a community forest. Residents from Ban Nam Jai were able to raise money for its construction while still upgrading their village wat, and they were able to support two sets of monks who each morning passed through the village receiving alms.

3.6.2 Future of Ban Nam Jai and land speculators

The future of Ban Nam Jai is tied to the development of Khon Kaen. The urban influence is likely to increase. More villagers are likely to gain employment or attend schools in the city. The village is unlikely, for a long time yet, to be turned into a suburb of Khon Kaen. The growing middle class, however, would move closer to the village with the development of new middle-class villages, which have appeared on roads leaving Khon Kaen. These villages are reconstructed Western suburbia appealing to middle-class desires for modernity, convenience and safety. Security guards control
entrances and for the elite there are recreation facilities such as community swimming pools. On the road to Ban Nam Jai there are such villages.

Land speculators had reached the village: its being off the highway had not stopped speculators from purchasing parcels of land around it. Speculators had cleared and subdivided land around Ban Nam Jai for the time when the Khon Kaen wealthy would demand it. The residents of Ban Nam Jai frequently discussed whether to sell their land. The villagers could make a large profit, but many of them were aware that their land was the base of their lives, and were unsure what they could do without it. Despite this concern some of them had sold some of their land:

Simon: These days are there people selling their land around here? What do you think about this?

Dara: I feel it is a pity that their grandparents took care of the land so that those who were born after them would have no problems. The reason why they are selling the land is so that they can buy a motorbike for their kids to ride.

Simon: Are there people selling their land so their kids can study?

Dara: No, there isn't anything like that, if there was I would agree (44-year-old man, Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

3.6.3 Children’s lives in Ban Nam Jai

Simon: Life of kids these days, how is it?

Yong: Lots of fun (13-year-old boy, Ban Nam Jai 17/11/96).

The life of children in Ban Nam Jai varied greatly from child to child. Not all children had lives full of fun, yet while I stayed in the village it seemed that life for the majority of children was improving. Although they were individuals their lives as a group were being shaped by the economic developments in Khon Kaen and its surrounding areas. As families gained greater wealth the extent of children’s work, schooling and entertainment were being influenced.

3.6.3.1 Children, work and Ban Nam Jai

Ban Nam Jai’s location meant the children and adults led a semi-rural life. Many adults had permanent jobs in Khon Kaen; some households had song taew (a vehicle with two benches running along its side where passengers sit) and gained their livelihood by working the private bus routes in the city. Older women worked during weekdays as cleaners at the university. Others moved in and out of employment depending on their desire for work and their farming commitments. Many of these people were construction workers.

A dominate feature of work in the village was the making of fish-nets. Young women and girls worked in fish-net factories located around Khon Kaen. Older residents, mainly older women and girls, repaired fish-nets at home as one factory delivered broken nets to the village. Some residents called Ban Nam Jai a fish-net
village. This brought benefits to the village. Asking a villager when the fish-net factories established, I was told:

*Mim:* They arrived four to five years ago. Before the young women didn't have anything to do, they just stayed at home. Now there is the fish-net factory and the textile factory, in our village the young women started to work about four to five years ago.

*Simon:* Do the fish-net factories and the textile factories provide benefits for the village?

*Mim:* Yes, because the young women before just stayed at home, they had no work to do. Now they have work to do and the can get money. They don't have to work the rice fields. Their parents grow the rice, but if they have money they can pay workers to help their parents with the rice. Those who have daughters are lucky as the daughters can go and earn money, the factories are close by. Things are convenient as there is a company vehicle to pick up the women. We don't have to face difficulties (31-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 23/3/96).

Within Ban Nam Jai's local tambon in 1996 there was only one registered industrial work place, employing 24 men but no women (Samnakngaan utsaahakaam Changwat Khon Kaen samnakngan pladkrasuang krasuang utsaahakaam 1996). A small number of men from Ban Nam Jai were working there as labourers. Being only 18 kilometres from Khon Kaen, Ban Nam Jai was situated within Amphoe Khoo Kaen. Thus villagers had access to the large number of positions that were available throughout the amphoe.

Not all villagers had employment in the city as many were still farmers, growing their annual sticky rice crops. However, if these people were not supplementing their income through employment in the village or in Khon Kaen they had other family members doing so. Like their parents', children's paid work varied between those farming and those working in the city (Chapter 7).

### 3.6.3.2 Schooling in Ban Nam Jai

The educational facilities within Ban Nam Jai were the poorest of the research sites. There was a small primary school, which was adequate, but the local high school was very poor. This high school was a make shift construction made by the villagers 10 years earlier. The school consisted of three class rooms none of which had walls. Attached was a bamboo construction that acted as the staff and store room. According to one of the teachers:

*Mu:* ... this school can't be called a proper school. The school doesn't have enough students and the positions of the teachers don't belong here either. We teachers really belong to another school. Schools along the highway and Khon Kaen they get a budget, but we don't get one. We made this building ourselves, we helped each other to build it. The villagers gave the wood for the building and other things such as scholarships were donated (high school teacher Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

The future of the school was bleak as enrolments were declining. The neighbouring village's primary school had just been extended to include Year 7 and this attracted children from Ban Nam Jai away from their own high school. Each year the
other village’s school was to gain an extra grade, until it was teaching up to Year 9. It seemed that the hopes of the villagers to have their own high school were going to fail.

During my stay in Ban Nam Jai there seemed to be a divide between those who were sending their children to their local high school and others who refused to do so. At the main highway, some four kilometres away there was a large high school that some children from Ban Nam Jai attended. While giving after school English lessons to children in Ban Nam Jai I discovered that all my students of high-school age were attending the school at the highway. Not one of the local high school students took the opportunity to learn English free of charge, perhaps because they were uninterested or their parents saw no need to push them. Those learning from me claimed that the local high school had too low standard for them to attend:

Yong: I think the facilities are not good enough, they don’t even have a computer (13-year-old boy, Ban Nam Jai 17/11/96).

For those families with the financial resources there was another possibility to educate their children and that was to send them to Khon Kaen. One grandfather said that he wanted to send his granddaughter to a preschool in the city as he felt she would gain a better education. This attitude reflected changing values of education among the villagers (Chapter 9). A mother who was sending her two children to Khon Kaen to study explained why she did not send her children to the school by the highway or in the village:

Da: At first, my son was studying at the highway, but as soon as he finished year 9 we wanted him to study Year 10 at Khon Kaen Witalie [students from around Isarn are attracted to this school]. As it is a school with a good reputation. I want my children to study very well.

Simon: How is the school in Ban Nam Jai?

Da: Now I don’t know, but when my daughter was studying there the teacher didn’t give her encouragement to study. There was no quality at that school. The kids who finish at Ban Nam Jai don’t get enough marks to get into anywhere. They are not good students (33-year-old mother, Ban Nam Jai 25/11/96).

The adults attempting to send their children to Khon Kaen seemed to be wise, as the quality of education there was better, as claimed by a high school teacher at Ban Nam Jai:

Mu: The kids in the city are likely to be better as they have better facilities. They also have the special coaching schools (high school teacher Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

3.6.3.3 Entertainment in Ban Nam Jai

Like the children’s work opportunities their recreation was shaped by the semi-rural nature of the village. They were close enough to enter Khon Kaen and enjoy facilities there. They also had traditional forms of entertainment within the village.

One form of entertainment that the children of Ban Nam Jai enjoyed was shopping in Khon Kaen. During my stay in Ban Nam Jai two large shopping malls opened in
Khon Kaen and the children of the village were keen to visit them. The mobility of some children to visit these and other shops surprised me. One 13-year-old boy told me that he rode his motorbike the 18 kilometres to the city so he could shop. He had been doing this over the last year (diary 17/11/96).

Older children desired to visit the discotheques of the city. This was more difficult, particularly for the girls, to arrange as it meant that they had to do this at night, when parents preferred them to be back in the village. Teenage girls assured me, however, they occasionally went to the discotheques without their parents realising:

Saeng: Our parents keep an eye on us girls at night. They don’t let us go out. If we go out at night, we must go to a house of someone we know. Our parents don’t want us daughters to go out at night. But we manage to go out to other places than they think. The parents don’t know that we go [to the discotheques] by ourselves [laughter] (17-year-old girl, Ban Nam Jai 8/2/96).

Within the village the highlights for the children were festivals and religious events. Ngan sop (a work to make merit for a dead person, see Chapter 6) usually resulted in outdoor movies at the wat or in the paddy fields, or in a performance of local music, molam. These were great events for the children. They could stay up late and as they took place at night boys and girls tended to mix. The children of the village knew when such events were occurring in neighbouring villages and often managed to participate. The children that I talked to all said they preferred molam music to that they could hear in discotheques.

Usually, however, there was little entertainment in the village. Apart from talking to friends the children had little to do. This led children into activities frowned upon by adults, such as motorbike racing. Increasing numbers of children with motorbikes indicates the growing wealth of the villagers. Asking a woman what will happen to Ban Nam Jai if a sealed road reaches the village, I was told:

Ying: Things will change, there will be those speeding on their motorbikes. There will of course be more accidents. At the next village they close the road on weekends to race each other. Great fun for the teenagers but hell for us parents (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

A second child activity disapproved of by their parents was drug taking. A high school teacher claimed:

Mu: The kids have nearly every type of drug problem, such as sniffing glue, smoking, marijuana, alcohol but mostly it is alcohol. ... They would be mainly males, I feel that there wouldn’t be many females. ... It is a problem because to fulfil their needs they have to have money. If they don’t have money they will start to steal the animals. The villagers have their animals stolen or they will suffer break-ins and they are loosing their belongings (high school teacher, Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

3.7 Ban Nam Suw

I named my second village Ban Nam Suw, which translates into English as the ‘Village of Beautiful Waters’, to reflect the beauty of the lake next to the village. The beauty did
not lie in the village itself, as it was a typical Isarn village. It consisted of houses of various standards from poorly built huts to newly built houses. The poor-quality huts had walls made from leaves; newly built houses, on the other hand, were of two storeys and made from bricks. These houses were constructed from the earnings of those working in Bangkok or even as far as Japan, Hong Kong, Brunei and the Middle East.

The beauty of Ban Nam Suiy was its location on the edge of a lake created with the construction of Ubonrat Dam in 1969 (Chirawatkul 1992:112). The distance from the village to the water varied depending on the rains and the amount of water released for irrigation. It was only a short walk to where the villagers kept their fishing boats. In a second direction there was a beach nicknamed ‘Pattaya the Second’ by the locals. It had this name not because of similarities with the commercial sex trade for which Pattaya is notorious, but for its beach, the water and the views.

Ubonrat Dam brought major changes to Ban Nam Suiy. First, it dramatically altered the regions’ environment; forests were chopped down or drowned. From this land villagers could no longer farm or collect food to add to their diet. However, villagers could easily catch fish, adding to the food stock and providing a major form of employment. Asking a villager if the dam was good for the village, I was told:

_Ek_: There are two sides to that question, the first side is it is good in terms of fishing. The bad side is that we in Ban Nam Suiy lost land. It is now under water and we can’t produce rice. We have to go and buy rice to eat as our land is under water. And there is the water for irrigation but we can’t use it. We have to rely on rain water (30-year-old man, Ban Nam Suiy 16/8/96).

Fish were important to Ban Nam Suiy. In Ban Nam Jai people made fish-nets but in this village they used them. While staying in the village I ate little but fish. Each morning as the fishing crews, often including boys, returned there was a small market, as villagers bought their fish for the day. If they missed this market they could go to one of the local stores where there was always a supply of fish.

3.7.1 Out-migration

A dominant feature of Ban Nam Suiy was out-migration as villagers, including children, migrated to seek non-agricultural employment. The economic expansion that had benefited Khon Kaen and villages close to the city like Ban Nam Jai had not helped Ban Nam Suiy to the same extent.

Agriculture dominated employment in Ban Nam Suiy. Within the village’s tambon there was no registered industrial employment at all. Children and adults who wished for non-agriculture employment, or the few positions running family shops, construction, or school teaching, had to travel out of the local area. Even within the local amphoe there were only 14 registered factories employing 314 men and 48 women (Samnakngaan utsaahakaam Changwat Khon Kaen samnakngan pladkrasuab krasuang utsaahakaam 1996). Commuting to any of these would have been difficult for those living in Ban Nam Suiy.
Out-migration has been a long-term feature of Isarn rural life. Originally the movement was to search for new or better lands (Duncan 1996:5). Land pressures forced families to leave their lands and establish new villages. The village head told me that this is how Ban Nam Suiy was established, as the original villagers arrived from Mahasarakham (a neighbouring province) seeking more suitable land.

In recent times, however, villagers have migrated out from their villages in search of seasonal or permanent work, particularly in Bangkok (Duncan 1996:5). Fairclough and Tasker (1994:23) claimed that in Isan few villages are irrigated effectively, dry-season unemployment is high and labour migration has become deeply entrenched. When children in Isan, ... reach their teens, armies of them must strike out on the road to seek work, often going overseas. During the dry season, villages empty as working-age people flock to the capital and elsewhere leaving only the old and the very young.

The above description illustrates life in Ban Nam Suiy. For most of the year there were missing generations with school aged children and grandparents living there. The young and the aged dominated the village. The missing were those aged 15 and above up to their fifties:

*Ann:* They all go, all of them, the housewives and the daughters will even go. We are the ones who are left. It is us mothers and fathers. We mothers have to bring up the grandchildren, as our son-in-laws and daughters are there [Bangkok]. ... If they stay at home there is no work to do. They have to go and earn money, if they stay here they will die as there isn’t enough to eat. Growing rice is no good (old woman, Ban Nam Suiy 15/8/96).

During holidays life in the village changed. When I first stayed there, over *Songklan* (Thai New Year) the village population started to grow. Whole families with children in their teens or younger returned from Bangkok or from the sugar fields in central Thailand. By the end of the holiday, however, the village started to shrink. Below is what I wrote in my diary on seeing a group leaving the village.

*Sai sin* [pieces of white string] in Thai or in Isarn *dai* were being massed produced at our house. The summer holiday is coming to an end. Tonight coming back from our swim I saw a truck with the construction workers working for the Italian Thai company leaving. It was such a reversal to their arrival. There was such joy and spontaneity last week when they entered the village. The truck’s horn was announcing their arrival, with drums being beaten and the passengers in the back of the truck cheering adding to the festive nature of their arrival. Tonight the truck slowly departed, no drums, no cheers, but only tears for those being left behind. The last person to climb in to the back of the truck was the mother of a two-year-old who was being cuddled by his grandfather. This was the last the baby would see his mother for maybe a year when his parents made another return visit to their village. It could be for the New Year [1 January], or more likely for next year’s *Songklan*. All of this was too much for the young boy and he broke down in tears as the truck turned the corner and took his parents away.

The *sai sin* will be tired around the wrists of those departing. It will bring good luck to the wearer, who will wear the string for three days or longer depending on convenience. It will be a reminder of family and friends back in the village (16/4/96).
3.7.2 Children’s lives in Ban Nam Suiy

*Simon:* What is the life of kids like these days?

*Tat:* We study and play, we don’t have work to do (16-year-old boy, Ban Nam Suiy 1/9/96).

School dominated children’s lives in Ban Nam Suiy. This was their main work (Chapter 9). Out of school hours, however, many played. I saw children playing soccer, takrao\(^2\), volleyball, badminton, the guitar, singing, swimming, riding bikes, watching television and videos, and just being with friends. They also worked, particularly domestic work, fishing and looking after farm animals. The extent of this work varied by their age and sex, but it tended to be secondary to education (Chapter 7). The few employment opportunities in the village limited this work. The lives of children who had migrated out of the village to work, however, tended to differ greatly. They lives were centred on earning money.

3.7.2.1 Children, work and Ban Nam Suiy

The lack of local employment opportunities shaped children’s employment. They worked in fishing and agriculture, or they migrated out of the village to seek employment elsewhere. The working patterns of children from Ban Nam Suiy, with its divide between those living in the village and those not, are discussed in Chapter 7.

3.7.2.2 Schooling in Ban Nam Suiy

Education in Ban Nam Suiy for many that I interviewed (Chapter 9) was *samkhan mak ti sut* (the most important thing). The local high school was larger and better then the one in Ban Nam Jai. It was larger as it was the feeder school for a number of villagers enabling it to provided Year 7 to Year 12 education. The school was equipped with computers, for the administrators, and contained a sizeable library. There was even a school bus to and from Ban Nam Suiy each day.

Although Ban Nam Suiy’s local high school compared favourably to the school at the other village, the quality was poor compared to that offered in Khon Kaen. The school resources were inadequate. There was no school telephone, so contact with teachers was difficult. The school was also over crowded: my ex-student who was an English teacher there had on occasions over 100 students in her classes.

A further problem for the children of Ban Nam Suiy was that there were no local coaching clinics. Nevertheless, one 14-year-old boy drove his motorbike on weekends around 20 kilometres to the nearest town so to attend computing lessons. Two or three children of government officials living in the village spent some of their holidays in Khon Kaen at coaching clinics.

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\(^2\) *Takrao* is a game similar to volleyball, except that players must not use their hands and there are only three players on each team.
3.7.2.3 Entertainment in Ban Nam Suiy

Entertainment opportunities for children living in Ban Nam Suiy were restricted when compared to the other research sites. They did not have access to city life and missed out on the window shopping, special foods, or discotheques. They had to entertain themselves. Asking a teacher from Ban Nam Suiy, who had visited Si Liam many times, if life for children in the two locations was the same, I was told:

*Porn:* It isn’t the same. Kids in the city, as I have noticed from my nephews and nieces have videos, games, they have all these things to play with, not like here in our village. They go off with their friends to the night spots. They go to the department stores, kids here they have no where to go. They have the village, the water, the waterfall and nature (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

The children seemed to spend more time playing games than the children in the other village, yet this did not disguise deep-rooted problems for the children.

Motorbikes had influenced the children of Ban Nam Suiy like the other children in this study. A high school teacher noted a dramatic increase in the number of children using motorbikes:

*Rot:* In the five years I have been here, in the first year nearly 100 per cent of the students would ride bicycles to school. By the third or fourth year the amount of motorbikes had increased and the number of bicycles had decreased (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

The motorbikes gave children greater mobility, allowing them to visit school friends in other villages. They could interact with whoever they wanted to see, instead of being restricted to Ban Nam Suiy’s social setting.

Motorbikes also enabled children, and in particular boys, to race each other. These races, regrettably, have sometimes ended in disaster. I was told of villagers who had been killed as a result of racing friends. One of the 17-year-old boys that we interviewed died after losing control of his motorbike; he had been drinking.

These motorbike fatalities indicated that there were problems in the children’s lives. Some parents migrating to the employment centres of the country left their children in the village. Most children stayed with grandparents, but others lived by themselves or with other siblings without adult supervision for months on end.

*Rot:* Another group of our students that have problems is those kids whose parents have left them. The parents have left them so they can go and work in other provinces. These kids will often go and work and not study. Their parents have no time to take care of the kids and the kids will believe their friends more than their parents (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

The lack of entertainment facilities, economic hardships, and the disruptions caused by family separations were among the causes of a drug-taking problem among the children of Ban Nam Suiy. Apart from the dominate drug of the village, alcohol, boys and some girls were sniffing glue. Among the research sites this problem seemed to be second only to that of the slum Soi Shiwit Rantod.
3.8 Conclusion

Children’s lives are influenced by where they live. Work, schooling, and leisure are partly determined by the facilities available, which differ by geographical settings. Recently, each of the four communities in this study has been adapting to the economic changes that have occurred throughout Thailand (Chapter 8). These developments have transformed the lives of children, influencing the extent and type of work that they undertake.

These changes, to the lives of children, have influenced Thai and Isarn understandings of ‘children’ and ‘childhood’. The following chapter illustrates how perceptions of these two terms have changed over time, and how this has influenced children’s work.
Chapter 4

Changing Thai childhoods

It is likely that a significant change has been taking place over the last generation or two with regards to the way parents view children and their roles in the family economy. This is undoubtedly related to the spread of schooling and the transition from having many to having few children. Indeed it may be one of the most significant social changes taking place in response to the overall modernization process permeating all corners of Thai society.

(Knodel & Havanon 1992:17)

Attitudes about children in Thailand have changed dramatically. Views on how children should behave, what work they should do and the time they should spend in educational institutions have all changed. Causes of these changes are multifaceted with views on children and childhood shaped by the Thai demographic transition, economic development, the expansion of the Thai education system, changing legislation and new cultural values. Although these causes are synergistic, this chapter focuses mainly on the changes caused by the demographic transition and changes in cultural norms. At the same time the effect of the economy, education, and legislation on Thai childhood is mentioned.

This chapter first discusses childhood as a social construction, showing that it is neither natural nor universal. Instead, it is culturally and historically specific and thus constantly changing. For three reasons the focus of this part of the chapter is on the development of the dominate Western idea of childhood: children should be studying and not in the workforce (Davin 1982:639; Fyfe 1989:2; Goddard & White 1982:466; Humphries, Mack & Perks 1988:30). First, most historical studies have centred on the experiences of children from developed nations. These countries have long historical records providing details of children’s lives in past centuries. Second, the Western concept of childhood has been transferred to the developing world (Fyfe 1989:2) thus

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1 I use the term Western even though predominantly only using examples from Great Britain and the US, because I have focused on the English-language literature. Nevertheless, the earliest childhood regulation took place in Western Europe and the US (Boyden 1990:194). This occurred when Germany, France and Great Britain were faced with increasing numbers of working children in factories (Pradhan 1995:2). Further, threats by non-English speaking European nations and particularly Germany to boycott products made by children in developing countries (Bessell 1995:7; Poudyal 1994:5) demonstrate their support of the Western ideal of childhood.
influencing Thais in their thinking of how children should live. Finally, the Western concept of childhood has shaped the ‘child labour’ debate (George 1990:11; Goddard & White 1982:466; Hewitt 1992:40). According to Hoyles and Evans (1989:10),

Our present myth of childhood portrays children as not being political or sexual, as depending wholly on adults, and never engaged in serious activities such as work or culture.

The chapter then explores the changes that have taken place in the Thai concepts of childhood. It details the demographic transition and changing cultural values that have influenced the lives of children, in the memory of the residents of the research sites.

4.1 Changing childhoods

Over historical time, the upper age limit of “childhood” in terms of concern for childhood protection and development has risen. It is now normally set at 18, as laid down in the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child. This change in perception as to the age of arrival at adulthood stems from many social, cultural and economic factors. But the predominant factor is the prolongation of economic dependency. As the demand for a professional and qualified workforce increases, and the length of time needed for education and training extends, young people are tending to assume later and later in life the responsibilities of earning a living, marriage and childbearing.

(Black 1995:87)

Childhood is socially constructed, differing among societies and over time and also according to class and sex (Goddard & White 1982:468; Macpherson 1987:64; Prout & James 1990:8). Given present societal norms it now seems shocking to learn what children were once expected to do. It is unthinkable that a leading politician of today would suggest that young children should work. Yet, the British statesman William Pitt in 1796 recommended that children supported under the Poor Law be sent to work at the age of five (Davin 1982:637), while John Locke in 1817 argued that children aged three should be put to work, with a bellyful of bread daily, supplemented, if it be thought needful, by a little warm water-gruel (Cunningham 1990:129-130; 1995:138). Beliefs that children should work were common in the nineteenth century: in the US it was both legitimate and legal to employ nine-year-olds (Zelizer 1985:75).

Alterations in the treatment of children have been demonstrated by historians. Changes in children’s work and the development of the education system have all been documented. Nevertheless, there is debate over the concept of childhood, whether it has been created or whether it has always existed but has been constantly changing.

An influential contribution to the debate on childhood was Ariès (1962) with his book *Centuries of Childhood*. He argued that childhood is a constructed concept that has been invented. His analysis suggested that in the Middle Ages, and for a long time after that among lower class families, children were accepted as adults when they were
considered capable of doing without their mothers or nannies, which was at about the age of seven.

Ariès’s idea of the creation of childhood has influenced many authors. Qvortrup (1987:14) saw the development of childhood resulting from the combination of industrialisation, the demographic transition and the introduction of universal schooling. Hoyles and Evans (1989:13) believed that the construction of childhood as a completely separate state began in the towns with the change from feudalism to capitalism and it was accompanied by the growth of schooling. They suggested that the first modern children were middle-class and male, while Macpherson (1987:64) argued that the divide came essentially with industrialisation. For Hendrick (1990:40), children working in textile mills, in mines and as chimney sweeps and the resulting campaigns by philanthropists were among the first steps towards a universal childhood.

The idea of Ariès and others that childhood was created have been criticised. The most important work rejecting this idea was by Pollock (1983), who demonstrated that from 1500 onwards a concept of childhood did exist. The Oxford English Dictionary (1978:343) provides further evidence that the concept of childhood has existed longer than the work of Ariès suggests. The earliest recorded mention of childhood in the English language was in the year 950.

4.1.1 Changing attitudes about children

The debate about childhood should not be whether the concept was created but about the evolution of this concept. Within the childhood literature there is a view that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries major changes occurred, with Western children beginning to be seen as special and substantially different from adults (Davin 1982:638; Degler 1980:72; Hopkins 1994:1-2).

There has been a transformation in the way children have been valued, which reflects changes in the idea of childhood. Zelizer’s (1985:11) thesis was that as children spent more time in schooling they lost their economic importance, becoming economically useless but emotionally priceless. In this progression children went from being active members in the workforce to being excluded from it: ‘Properly loved children, regardless of social class, belonged in a domesticated, nonproductive world of lessons, games and token money’.

Evidence of changing attitudes towards children is manifold. According to Degler (1980:66) the most notable change was that children began to be perceived differently from adults as they were seen to be more innocent. Zelizer (1985:25) claimed that in colonial America, although parents were never indifferent to the death of their children, there was a degree of detachment. By the nineteenth century, however, a dramatic revolution in mourning for dead children took place. The death of a young child, for the upper-and middle-class families, became the most painful and least tolerable of all
deaths. Degler (1980:71) claimed the decline in the practice of naming children after parents and the marked reduction in the use of corporal punishment of children reflected the increasing importance given to them.

Changing attitudes towards children were matched by an emerging ideology about the family. In the first half of the nineteenth century the growing ideal of the middle-class family consisted of a male breadwinner, dependent housewife and children. Progressively, the children and the wives were exempt from wage labour and also partly or wholly from domestic labour (Davin 1982:638-39). This in turn coincided with the creation of the ideal woman. Degler (1980:74) suggested that the emotional attention given to children within the family and society increased the importance of women as they were seen as most directly and ‘naturally’ concerned with children. Degler believed that the growing importance of children helped create the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’, as exalting the child went hand in hand with exalting the domestic role of woman.

4.1.2 Legislation, childhood and ‘child labour’

A century that began with children having virtually no rights is ending with children having the most powerful legal instrument that not only recognizes but protects their human rights.

Carol Bellamy, UNICEF Executive Director quoted in (UNICEF 1997:1)

Legislation by governments and international bodies has been important in shaping the concept of childhood as a time in which children are in educational institutions and out of the workforce. Governments, through anti-‘child labour’ legislation (Chapter 5) combined with compulsory education (Chapter 9), have attempted to move children out of the paid workforce; Chapter 8 details how affective such legislation has been. Commitment against ‘child labour’ from international bodies plus conventions for children have all helped to influence our modern image of childhood.

Important in the development of the Western childhood was the struggle against ‘child labour’. Emerging from the British campaigns against ‘child labour’ in the 1830s and 1840s was the view of the ‘innocent child’ who should be in the classroom and not in the workforce (Fyfe 1989:2). In the US the conflict over ‘child labour’ between 1870 and 1930 involved a cultural disagreement over the economic and sentimental value of young children. For those campaigning against ‘child labour’, true parental love could only exist if the child was defined in terms of sentiment rather than as an agent of production (Zelizer 1985:72).

Before the anti-‘child labour’ campaigns age was an unimportant criterion in the legitimacy of the employment of children. Zelizer (1985:75-76) argued, however, that as a result of efforts by reformers age slowly became accepted as a measure of legitimacy.

2 It must be noted that Pollock (1983:141-142) has challenged this idea by arguing that parental reactions to their children’s deaths have not changed through the centuries.
Between 1879 and 1909 the number of states in the US with age limits restricting children from entering the labour force increased from seven to 44. This age limit increased from 10 to 12 and then 14.

With time, the period of childhood has been extended. No longer are 10, 12 or even 14 seen as desirable ages to restrict children from the workforce, or as when childhood ends. For the International Labour Office (ILO) the notion ‘child labour’ covers working children younger than 15 (Thijs 1994:6). Further, internationally, 18 is seen as the ending of childhood, as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child lays down this age as the upper limit of childhood (Bonnet 1993:372; Fyfe 1989:14; UNICEF 1997:1).

4.1.3 How universal is the Western childhood?

We should be conscious of the dangers of imposing our Western values on other societies, in particular our notions of ‘normal’ childhood and child development. This often leads outsiders into ‘shock-horror’ reactions to child work in developing countries and resultant over-idealistic and impractical recommendations for action. (Fyfe 1989:5-6)

Many children in developing nations as well as some children in developed nations have been unable to live the ideal Western childhood. Lack of educational facilities and poverty have forced many children into the workforce. Their reality has been different from that of the Western children who have been able to spend their youth studying.

Rivera (1985:14) argued that to understand the phenomenon of working children in developing nations it is necessary to debunk Western moralistic assumptions about childhood being a time of innocence and dependence. She pointed out that in the Philippines poor children have to work and are unable to live the ideal Western childhood. Hasnat (1995:422-423) argued:

In reality, different societies have different thresholds for defining childhood. In some societies, fulfilment of certain social rites and obligations may be important in differentiating between “adult” and “child” status. In others, integration of childhood to adulthood may be so smooth and gradual that it may be virtually impossible to distinguish the different life phases. In still others, biological characteristics such as puberty or “when the boy is strong” or “when the girl is married” may be the sign of adulthood. Thus, what we have across societies is a social notion of childhood, not calendar based childhood.

4.2 The Thai context: changing childhoods

Simon: The meaning of childhood 30 years ago and today, are they the same?

Porn: No, they aren’t really the same. Kids before lived with nature, that was how kids were, we lived with nature and played all these traditional games. All these facilities and services didn’t exist. All these toys, videos, tapes and all those other things didn’t exist. And they say they are good fun. Some things come along these days and change the behaviour of children a lot (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suay 9/11/96).
As noted above there have been dramatic changes in the lives of Thai children. Accompanying this change, new attitudes about childhood have developed. The concept of childhood in Thailand, as in the West, has constantly changed as children and their families have faced new realities. The Thai idea of childhood has changed as growing numbers of children have continued with their education. Many adults and children whom I interviewed thought a good child was an educated child.

4.2.1 The Thai demographic revolution and children in Thailand

The Thai demographic transition from high to low fertility and mortality levels has been called a revolution (Knodel et al. 1987). From 1970 to 1990, within one generation, total fertility levels dropped from six or seven children per woman to below replacement level (Hirschman et al. 1994:82). This revolution has brought major changes to the lives of children in Thailand, which in turn has further decreased fertility levels.

Figure 4.1 Percentage of population 14 and under and those older; Thailand 1950-95

![Chart showing percentage of population 14 and under and those older in Thailand from 1950 to 1995.]


Figure 4.1 reflects the fertility reductions in Thailand. Each year from the early 1970s families on average have become smaller, and the proportion of Thais aged 14 or younger has declined. This has reduced the group of children likely to be working in the labour force. It has become easier for national governments and individual families to ensure that children do not participate in the workforce.

The decline in fertility, the reduction in the proportion of children, and the eventual decline in absolute numbers of children in Thailand continue to provide benefits for individuals and the society as a whole. First, it has allowed greater social and economic investment in individual children (Hirschman et al. 1994:87). No longer
does the State have to recruit and train the large number of teachers, build new schools or produce new textbooks as was the case while the proportion of children was increasing. The Thai government by the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1982-86) was predicting decreasing primary school enrolments of some 0.5 per cent per annum, allowing the government to improve educational quality and expand enrolments at the secondary and tertiary levels (Jones 1990:3 and 39-40).

Families and individual children have been more able to use the increased educational facilities provided by the government as family sizes have decreased. With fewer children, on average, in each family it is easier to pay educational costs. It is becoming less common for older siblings to sacrifice their education to enable younger siblings to study. The interview below illustrates the difficulties faced in the past by families with many children:

**Somjet:** If I had studied when I was a kid I would have reached level C8 [a rank in the Thai public service]. I had a friend who reached this level, he studied at the temple school. He got 750 baht a month when he started work. He was a teacher but I only received 400 baht as a wage earner. But when I grew up my parents had nine kids.

**Simon:** Nine!

**Somjet:** Yes, nine kids, there were lots of us kids. My parents didn’t have any opportunity to send us to school. Living and finding food was difficult (45-year-old man, Ban Nam Suiy 31/8/96).

The demographic transition, apart from helping increase educational standards, has helped improve health conditions. As was the case for Thailand as a whole, people in the research sites were living longer and healthier lives and there have been dramatic improvements in infant mortality levels. In the twenty-year period from 1978 to the writing of this thesis life expectancy in Thailand increased from 61 to 69 years. In the same period the infant mortality rate decreased from 89 to 25 (Population Reference Bureau 1978, 1998). Asking an old woman what the health of the village was like 30 years before, I was told:

**Ann:** In the past it wasn’t like now. Whatever we got, we died quickly. We died like poultry. That was especially the case for children. Now there are doctors to protect us, we can be cured, there is medicine. Children now as soon as they get sick they go to see a doctor. But in the past if you got diphtheria you wouldn’t recover, you would die, now there is also a health centre nearby (Ban Nam Suiy 30/8/96).

Villagers said that improved roads, resulting from economic development, had enabled access to increased levels of medical services, which in turn decreased infant mortality. It should be noted that improvements in education and health are mutually reinforcing (Jones 1990:1). Increased levels of education would have resulted in greater awareness of the need for public and private sanitation, assisting in the decline in infant mortality. Healthier children can study better. Thus there has been a synergistic relationship between economic growth, declining fertility and mortality levels, and education.

The fertility reductions that Thailand has experienced are predicted to continue. Medium forecasts indicate that the proportion of children aged 14 or under is likely to
decline from under 28 per cent in 1995 to under 20 per cent by 2020 (Human Resources Planning Division National Economic and Social Development Board 1995). This decline is a continuation of the trend that started in the early 1970s.

With fertility predicted to remain below replacement level, the number of children likely to enter the labour force will continue to decline. This has implications for the campaign to tackle this issue. With declining numbers of children, and maintaining other factors constant, namely economic conditions, the education system, infrastructure facilities and the environment, it will be easier to reduce the numbers of working children.

4.2.2 Todtan bunkhun (paying gratitude) and wealth flows

The Thai demographic revolution has changed expectations about children's behaviour and in turn this has further reduced fertility levels. Caldwell (1976, 1980) argued that the shift in a population from high fertility to low fertility occurs when the flow of wealth between parents and children changes direction. In a high-fertility situation parents benefit from having children. Through modernisation, with increasing costs of education, the wealth flow is from parents to children. I explore these ideas in the Thai context by showing how the Thai concept of todtan bunkhun, paying gratitude to parents, has changed and its implications for Thai children.

*Bunkhun* is an important idea in Thai society. Limanonda (1992:110) explained that the essence of Thai kinship relations lies in this concept. Parents have obtained a great amount of bunkhun by giving birth to a child, a debt that must be repaid. Children's support to their parents is an obligation and can be understood through this concept. The process of repaying this obligation, according to Knodel and others (1987:145), starts when the children are old enough to be useful and continues even after the death of the parents. Archavanitkul and Havanon (1990:11) have even suggested that daughters sold to brothels by their parents would often accept their situation to repay their bunkhun, while Tongyu (1996:6) mentioned this concept as a reason why children in Thailand enter the workforce.

During my fieldwork the importance of todtan bunkhun was constantly demonstrated. For example a 14-year-old girl, working at a restaurant just out of Khon Kaen, claimed that she was there to todtan bunkhun to her parents. Her parents had brought her from Kalasin (a province close to Khon Kaen) to the restaurant four months previously. Seven days a week she started work at nine in the morning and worked until 10 at night. For her efforts she received 1200 baht per month. Of this she sent to her parents a total of 1000 baht, leaving her only 200 baht to live on. This was possible as she received free food and accommodation (based on diary 20/1/96).

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3 200 baht in 1996 was equivalent to $10 (Aus).
Ways of *todtan bunkhun* (to pay back your debt of gratitude) have been different for males and females. Males can more easily *todtan bunkhun* to their parents than females as they can enter the monkhood (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:10; Limanonda 1992:110). Being ordained into the monkhood is a man’s major merit-making act (Kirsch 1996:21):

**Chai:** In Buddhism men will be ordained before marrying. It is a way to *todtan bunkhun* to their parents. This is especially the case for mothers who gave birth to their sons. If their sons are ordained they will be able to grab onto the saffron robes and reach heaven. This is a belief (NGO ‘child labour’ worker, Khon Kaen 16/9/96).

While *todtan bunkhun* has been an important concept in Thai society, it has been changing. According to old people I interviewed, the traditional way to show gratitude to parents was to assist in their daily activities, particularly when they were old. The expansion of the market system in Thailand, however, has led to growing numbers of Thais in paid employment, often far away from their parents. Unable to assist in the daily chores of their parents, Thais have been able to *todtan bunkhun* by sending remittances to them. Knodel and others (1987:146) observed this monetisation of the repayment process. Many respondents in my study were aware of this change:

**Chai:** Before, the society had everything you could want, but now everything is to do with money. Before, to *todtan bunkhun* you had to be a good person, you had to believe what your parents told you. When you went to work in the fields you had to find food for your parents. You wouldn’t let your mother work the fields when she was old. But these days you go and earn money for your parents as there is this market system (NGO ‘child labour’ worker, Khon Kaen 16/9/96).

However, a more recent change to *todtan bunkhun* is taking place, reflecting the growing importance of education and the position of the Thai child. For a small proportion of those whom I interviewed, both parents and children, a form of *todtan bunkhun* was to be a good student. The people expressing these views tended to be from the city and were more affluent than others. In one interview, asked how children have to *todtan bunkhun*, one mother stated:

**Bom:** Well, they have to study and be clever. Also help with work to be of assistance (42-year-old woman, Si Liam 20/9/96).

Being a good student as a means of *todtan bunkhun* has not replaced the more traditional means of repaying gratitude to parents. As the following interview suggests, it has been added to the way children should behave towards their parents:

**Simon:** How do you think you will *todtan bunkhun* to your parents?

**Gob:** We are determined to study as well as possible. If we work for money we will give it to our parents so they are comfortable. We don’t want them to work, our parents should be happy (16-year-old girl from a neighbouring province at a coaching school, Si Liam 24/11/96).

When children study and are not in paid work, the period of wealth flow from parents to children is extended. As more Thai children study and for longer periods the wealth flow from parents to children will be greater, a factor in further reducing future
fertility levels. Studying, however, increases children’s potential in later years to *todtan bunkhun*. They are likely to gain better employment than those children not continuing with their education.

### 4.3 Thai paths to adulthood

Are the markers of childhood determined by biology, say starting when the child starts walking and ending on reaching puberty? Or are the markers determined through legalistic definitions resulting from state interventions. Does childhood end when children finish compulsory education, when they gain Identification (ID) cards or when they have the right to vote. In the case of Thailand, when I was doing my research, this was when children turned 12, 15, and 18 respectively. Or is adulthood determined through socially structured norms with individuals passing through rites of passage such as entering the monkhood for men or marriage for women? Or do people become adults by adopting new forms of behaviour? Below, the chapter explores the progression and the events that Thai children take in their journey to adulthood. It also shows how these events have changed.

#### 4.3.1 Biology

In some societies biological characteristics such as puberty are a sign of adulthood (Hasnat 1995:423). However, biology is unimportant in Thailand in differentiating between childhood and adulthood.

One biological marker for women is the first menstruation. In a study in Isarn Chirawatkul claimed that

> No special practice, celebration of ceremony is held for first menstruation and it is granted minimal attention. A woman who is menstruating normally continues her daily life (Chirawatkul 1992: 116).

In my own study area this was the case. The women stated that the first period was unimportant. For example, asking a 60-year-old woman if a woman having her first period was a special occasion, I was told:

> Ang: No, it isn’t important, whoever has her period will have her period (60-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 11/9/96).

#### 4.3.2 Thai children and the state

The Thai state has directly and indirectly influenced the lives of the nation’s children. Here, only two interventions by the government on the lives of children are analysed. The first intervention reviewed is the introduction of *Wan Dek Haeng Chat* (National Children’s Day) and the images of Thai childhood that are created from this day. This day has helped shape concepts of how children in Thailand should behave. Next, the need for an ID card and the implications for children is discussed. ID cards have been used by Thai governments to restrict children from activities regarded as only suitable
for adults. Two other important interventions by the Thai government, anti-‘child labour’ and compulsory education legislation, are reviewed in following chapters.

4.3.2.1 Wan Dek Haeng Chat (National Children’s Day)

_Wan Dek Haeng Chat_ is a national holiday celebrating children. The holiday was introduced in 1955 after a call by the United Nations to create a day for countries around the world to highlight problems and rights of children (Siam Rat 1993:13; Watngam 1994:7).

The purpose of the day according to Watngam (1994:7) is twofold. First, it is to ensure that adults see the importance of children, to be interested in their upbringing and that they will give special attention in supporting children. Second, it is to ensure that children know their duties, to be disciplined and good.

For _Wan Dek Haeng Chat_ the government produces a catch phrase as a moral guide for children. Examples of these phrases include: ‘Thai children are the heart of the nation’, ‘Prosperous children love to study and do good often’, ‘Good children support the dignity of the nation, clever children strengthen the nation’, and ‘To hold on to democracy, children must devote themselves and conserve the environment’ (Watngam 1994:7).

The importance to the day, however, lies not in the catch-phrases that appear each year, but the images that are created of Thai childhood. The celebrations, discussions of the day at school, in the family and through the media create an image of childhood. To celebrate the 1997 _Wan Dek Haeng Chat_ the Thai postal service produced two stamps, illustrated below, which provide an interesting portrayal of Thai children. The representation of the first stamp is rural with Thai children picking vegetables and catching fish. The desired image is not of children studying or playing but of children working in the fields. The moral of the stamp, seems to be, is that good children help their parents with farming. The first stamp is also interesting as it shows in part a Thai concept of ‘child labour’. Many Thais do not consider children working on farms as ‘child labour’; often they do not think such children are even doing work but merely their duty. Such Thais consider only children in factories to be engaged in ‘child labour’ (Chapter 5).
The second stamp is of Thai children showing their respect to past national heroes. The images in the background of the stamp are rural with village scenes. From these two stamps it would seem that the Thai child is located in a rural setting, working and showing respect to Thai concepts of nationhood.

4.3.2.2 ID card

Another way the Thai state influences the lives of children through the issuing of an ID card; in Thailand every individual 15 and over is meant to have one. Having a card has implications for what children can do. The importance given to the ID card, however, varies from person to person and to the extent that it is policed.

For some people having an ID card marked the end of childhood. When a high school teacher was asked what a child is she said:

Porn: Children are people who are young, they don't have responsibilities. For Thais their age would be 15. At 15 you get your ID card if they haven't reached 15 they are boys and girls. If they are older than 15 they are called Mr and Miss (Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

Many children that I interviewed, however, did not see the gaining of an ID card as a crucial event in their lives. The common view expressed was that gaining the ID card was not a marker of entry into adulthood. Asking a 16-year-old boy how he felt when he got his ID card, I was given a typical response:

Tat: It wasn't anything special. It is your responsibility to go and apply for your ID card (Ban Nam Suiy 1/9/96).

Having the card, however, meant children gained access to activities classified as unsuitable for children under the age of 15. A woman from Khon Kaen, when talking about the age of children going to a popular discotheque, claimed:

Nang: Those 14 years old, in year 7 and 8, they know about Hi-tech [a popular discotheque], but they will not be allowed in. If the kid is under 15 they will not be able to enter. They are students and it would spoil their reputation. If they don't have an ID card they can't enter (56-year-old woman, Si Liam 30/9/96).

4.3.3 Cultural rites of passage

It used to be that everyone knew when a young person became an adult. Enrolling to vote, enlisting for war, getting married or being handed a silver key with 21 inscribed in the middle—the signposts were all there. But the old rites of passage have lost their meaning. The lines between adolescence and maturity have become blurred.

A shrinking youth is our market; increasing numbers of young people staying on at school and university; delayed marriage and child rearing; a dramatic rise in part-time work; high levels of youth unemployment; and the trend towards earlier sexual activity all redefine the way the years 15 to 24 are lived.

(Gunn 1997: 7)
The above passage describes changes that have occurred in Australia, yet Gunn could have as easily been describing Thailand. The shrinking youth labour market (Chapter 8), the increasing numbers of young people staying on in the education system (Chapter 9) and delayed marriages (4.3.3.2) have blurred the line between childhood and adulthood. As a result old rites of passage into adulthood have lost their meaning.

For many residents of the research sites biological and legalistic definitions were less important in determining when individuals reached adulthood than was the passage through cultural events of significance. Below I discuss two traditional rites of passages, being ordained as a monk for men and marriage for women, that have been important for many Thais as indicators of adulthood. I show how they have changed and declined in importance as indicators. I then discuss two events, birthdays and graduation, that are now growing in importance as indicators for some children in their journey into adulthood.

4.3.3.1 Monkhood

For Thai men, entering the monkhood has been a traditional rite of passage into adulthood. Males doing so lose their child status *khon dip* (unripe person) and gain an adult status, *khon suk* (ripe person). This traditionally occurs at the age of 20; if ordained younger, the person is regarded as a novice (Podhisita 1994:376). Entering the monkhood gives men a new status. Asking a man about his life before marriage, I was told:

*Pai:* When I was 15 to 18 I liked to play around. When I turned 20 I became a monk. As soon as I was *suk* I left the monkhood and I became a soldier (28-year-old man, Si Liam 4/10/96).

Fundamental to the Thai understanding of the world have been the teachings of the Buddha and the practice of the *dharma*, most notably by members of the order of monks, the Sangha (Keyes 1984:223). Young men are strongly encouraged to spend time in the monkhood, which is believed to transform their characters from *dip* to *suk*, thereby enhancing their desirability as potential husbands (Kirsch 1996:14).

The number of men becoming monks and the period of time that they stay in the monkhood have been changing. Social commentators (Keyes 1984:226; Phongpaichit & Baker 1996:127; Podhisita 1994:376) have noted that the number of men willing to be ordained has declined. Phongpaichit and Baker (1996:127) argued that for men in urban areas entering the monkhood has become increasingly less relevant to their lives. Podhisita (1994:376) found that only 46 per cent of men had entered the monkhood before the age of 31. Comparing his study with an earlier one, he showed that this was a dramatic decline from 1984 figures showing that about four out of five men in rural

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4 I discuss ID cards and their influence on children's working patterns in Chapter 5.
communities, in the central region of the country, had been ordained before they married.

Not only has the number of people entering the monkhood declined but also the length of time that they spend as monks. In the following interview the increasing importance of money is given as the reason why men are spending less time as monks:

Simon: How long are men usually ordained for?
Somjet: These days, they don't spend more than 15 days.
Simon: 20 to 30 years ago how long did they spend as monks?
Somjet: 30 years ago men would be monks for one year. Many men did this.
Simon: Why has it been reduced?
Somjet: It has been reduced because of their work. In their work they have to struggle to earn money. When you are a monk you have no money. If you study or if you work you will get money. When you are a monk you are wasting time, but before many people would be ordained (45-year-old man, Ban Nam Suwi 31/8/96).

Further, the reason for being a monk may have changed. Podhisita (1994:373) concluded from his study that many people believed that a majority of Thai men entering the monkhood did so out of tradition rather than for serious study and spiritual training.

An even more substantial change has been changes to the novice system. Previously it was common for boys to be novices. This practice, however, has declined dramatically because of developments in the education system. Piker (1975:101), as early as 1975, reported that, in a village in central Thailand, the practice of boys becoming novices had largely fallen into disuse. In the two villages that I stayed in the practice was non-existent. The reason for this demise is the development of education throughout the nation. Becoming a novice was a means for boys to gain an education. Generally, each village had a temple where boys could be educated, but it was less likely that the village would have a school. With the spread of schools it became unnecessary for boys to become novices to gain an education. Asking a 36-year-old woman from the village where I was the temple boy (Chapter 6) whether in the past there were children who were novices, I was told:

Ying: Yes, but these days there aren't any. Before there were many. The kids who became novices had the opportunity to study (Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

4.3.3.2 Marriage

A second major rite of passage in becoming an 'adult' in Thailand has been marriage. If the monkhood is important for men to become suk then marriage is important for women to do so. Whittaker (forthcoming) argued that, as females cannot be ordained, the way they become suk and reach adulthood is through marriage and the birth of a child. Women I interviewed supported this view. One woman, asked when she started to think that she was no longer a child, said:
Nang: When I got married. When I was 15-16 I was sleeping with my mother. I was still a child, I still didn’t know things. It was as soon as I got married and left my parents and came to live with my husband that I became an adult (56-year-old woman, Si Liam 30/9/96).

Although being married and having children are indicators of adulthood, these rites of passage are changing. The changes have been twofold; first, the age of marriage has increased, and secondly what people must be able to do before they can get married has changed. Each of these changes had been a response to the modernisation process under way in the country, and in particular to the development of education.

The average age at first marriage in Thailand has risen. Between 1960 and 1980 for women it rose by over one year from 21.6 to 22.7 years and under half a year for men from 24.5 to 24.9 years. There was a rural-urban divide as women, on average, married over three years later and men over two years later in urban areas (Knodel et al. 1987:73-74). Between the last three censuses, from 1970 to 1990, the age at which women have married has continued to rise, increasing by one and a half years. By 1990 the average age of first marriage for women had risen to 23.5 years (Knodel et al. 1996:315). The main reasons for this trend of later marriages have been urbanisation, increasing female labour force participation in non-agricultural production, and education (Limanonda 1982:83).

Although marriage is clearly an important rite of passage for Thais in reaching adulthood, it is becoming less accurate as an indicator. Not only are Thais marrying later, but there is a growing proportion never marrying. Jones (1997:52-53) has demonstrated a marked increase in the proportion of women remaining unmarried in Thailand. Between 1960 and 1990 the proportion of single women aged 30-34 increased from 6.7 per cent to 14.1 per cent. At the same time in Bangkok the proportion of single women of the same age increased from 11.9 per cent to 29.4 per cent. With marriage occurring later, and for many never at all, it no longer indicates the arrival of adulthood for all women.

The skills needed to be considered a good partner have also changed. Skills that were once considered crucial before marriage have become irrelevant. In Isarn women traditionally had to be able to weave in order to get married. The view that a woman needed to be able to weave before she could think about marriage was widespread throughout the region. Such views can be found in literature, such as in the novel A Child of the Northeast, where a young woman who is being teased about being of the age of marriage claims that she ‘... didn’t know how to spin silk yet, or raise silkworms on mulberry leaves, so she shouldn’t be thinking about husbands’ (Boontawee 1988:157).

This view, that it was important for women to be skilled in weaving before they could marry, was further reinforced by the women of the research sites:

Simon: There are some people who say if you couldn’t weave you couldn’t marry.
Ying: In the past that was the case. They use to say if you couldn't make clothes for your children and husband it proved you were very stupid, a very terrible person (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

An older woman claimed:

Ang: For women 30 years ago if we couldn’t weave we couldn’t become adults, if we couldn’t do housework, if we couldn’t collect mulberry leaves, if we couldn’t cook then we weren’t women. ... Before if a woman couldn’t weave, she couldn’t get married. If she couldn’t do anything around the family home, if she couldn’t cook, if she couldn’t weave, if she couldn’t spin silk, if she couldn’t spin clothes, then she couldn’t get married. These days when women get married they don’t even wash plates (60-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 11/9/96).

Weaving was a skill passed on from generation to generation. Women that I talked to claimed that they learnt by watching their mothers weave. This is not the case any more. Weaving as a skill is not being passed on to young women to nearly the same extent, one reason being that young girls do not have time to learn. Spending their time in the classroom has removed the opportunity for them to sit by the older women and learn. After being asked if her daughter could weave, a woman stated:

Nang: No she can’t weave. When she was a child she wasn’t interested as she was studying at school (56-year-old woman, Si Liam 30/9/96).

A second woman whom I asked if girls today could weave also felt that the problem was because of schooling:

Uut: They can’t do it as they have never learned. Kids today don’t know how to weave as they go to school and once school is finished for the day they go off visiting friends (48-year-old woman, Ban Nam Sui 30/8/96).

A second reason, and probably a more important one, why girls are not learning to weave is that the skill has increasingly become irrelevant. Earlier women needed to know how to weave, before they could marry, because there was no clothing market. Today, however:

Gulap: You can buy clothes, there are others who make it and sell it. Before there was no one making clothes to sell. We had to weave for ourselves. Nowadays there are people who come to sell and if you have money you can buy clothes (30-year-old woman, Ban Nam Sui 11/9/96).

As a result the need to weave has disappeared:

Simon: These days if you can’t weave can you still marry?

Ying: Yes you can, these days we don’t believe that any more. There are some who have never cooked rice in the mornings to give to the old people to eat and they can get married (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

Instead of being able to weave, respondents suggested that today the amount of education had become important. The more education both females and males have, the more desirable they are for marriage:

Simon: Would you want a man [as a daughter-in-law] who had only finished primary school?
Gulap: If I could choose I would want a daughter-in-law who had finished a degree. ... Yes, if I could choose, but it is necessary for me to accept the one that my son chooses (30-year-old woman, Ban Nam Sui 11/9/96).

4.3.3.3 Birthdays

A new rite of passage, marking the steps from childhood to adulthood, is the celebration of birthdays. The significance of birthdays is not as important as, say, in Australia, yet the popularity of this celebration is increasing reflecting the growing importance of the child in Thailand.

In the West birthdays have not always been as important as they are now. Degler (1980:71) argued that children began to gain recognition as individuals in their own right in the nineteenth century and as a result the celebration of birthdays began. Similarly, as the Thai child has gained recognition as a special person, the practice of celebrating birthdays has increased.

From interviews it is clear that birthdays have become more important over time, and the extent of the celebration varies between social classes. Many residents of the research sites had never celebrated their own birthdays. When I asked a 60-year-old woman in Ban Nam Jai if there were birthdays 30 years before, she said:

Ang: No, there weren't any birthdays. There were some people who couldn't even remember when they were born (11/9/96).

In the city, and particularly for those who were rich, birthdays were celebrated. A woman who grew up in Khon Kaen and said that her upbringing was very comfortable, I was told:

Bom: Yes I had birthdays, they were large events. When I was a small kid I didn’t think my birthday was important, but once I grew, when I was about 10 years old, I started to realise that my birthday was important.

Simon: What would your parents arrange?

Bom: I would give food to the monks, and in the evening I would have a party with my friends. They were friends of the family, about 20 of us (42-year-old woman, Si Lian 20/9/96).

The extent to which birthdays were celebrated varied between individuals, with social class determining to what extent and if it was carried out at all. For most people, particular those who were poor, the birthday was a special day to make merit, by giving food to the monks. A 15-year-old girl attending a molam training school5 stated:

Bu: I go to the temple, donate food to the monks and make merit (4/10/96).

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5 Molam is a traditional form of Isarn music often accompanied by dances. At this special school girls and young women were training to gain employment as molam dancers.
The wealthier the people, the more likely that their children were to celebrate their birthdays. A 13-year-old girl, whose family at the time was planning a holiday to Australia, told me where she went to eat for her birthday:

*Waan:* We went to the Sofitel Hotel [a five-star hotel in Khon Kaen].

*Simon:* Who did you go with?

*Waan:* The whole family went. After that, late at night, we went to Hi-Tech [a popular discotheque] with my older sister and younger brother (Si Liam 8/10/96).

### 4.3.3.4 Graduation and the King

The graduation ceremony has become a new and important rite of passage into adulthood, but only for a select few. It is not a rite of passage based on tradition, such as entering the monkhood, but its importance has grown, reflecting changes to the Thai society. With the growing importance of education, graduation is not just a passage into adulthood but also an entry into employment.

For the small number who have been able to go beyond secondary education and complete tertiary education the graduation is important enough to celebrate. Graduation from university is a major event for Thais; anyone who has visited a Thai household that has a university graduate will be struck by the importance given to this occasion. Large photographs of the graduation ceremony are usually prominently displayed.

Adding to the importance of the graduation is the fact that the king of Thailand, or another member of the royal family, has often officiated at these ceremonies. For most of the graduates it will be the only chance to be seen with the king. In my two years as a teacher at Khon Kaen University from 1989 to 1991, and in 1996, the year when I was in Khon Kaen researching for this thesis, King Bhumibol Adulyadej attended the ceremonies.

### 4.3.4 Reaching adulthood by changing behaviour

Although most residents of the research sites expressed the importance of significant cultural events signalling the arrival of adulthood, a minority of residents regarded the person’s behaviour as more important. For these residents, adulthood occurred when the individual took on adult responsibilities. These findings were similar to those of Podhisita (1994:373), who found a divide between those who claimed that adulthood was gained after important social and cultural events, and others who felt age meant little unless accompanied by the ability to think and behave like an adult. Those holding this view often said childhood was a time of fun without concerns:

*Noi:* Children are those who have a great time, those who don’t have to think much (17-year-old seamstress Si Liam 7/10/96).

*Jim:* Children are children, they don’t have any thoughts, they just eat, sleep and play (30-year-old woman, Si Liam 3/10/96).
For the residents of the research sites changes in behaviour from not having ‘any thoughts’ to the acceptance of adult responsibilities consisted of stages. Many terms were used to indicate these stages: tarok (baby, when they are drinking the mother’s milk), luk on (baby, Isarn), dek lek (little child), dek noi (little child, Isarn), dek (child in general), dek chai (boy), dek sai (boy, Isarn), dek ying (girl), dek sao (girl, Isarn), bakham noi (boy with small scrotum, indicating a little boy, Isarn), i-nang noi or i-nang (little girl, Isarn), wai run (young person, close in meaning to teenager), nay (Mr, gained at age 15 when a boy receives his ID card), nang sao or just sao (Miss, gained at age 15 when a girl receives her ID card, this title changes to nang when a women marries), and phu yai (adult). There were large areas of overlap within these categories. There were no rules stating that at a certain age or after an event an individual had progressed from one group to another.

Nevertheless, those whom I interviewed would claim that there were distinct behaviour differences between these groups. Children who classified themselves as dek, often under 14, saw their lives as devoid of responsibilities. A 13-year-old boy, asked in what group (dek, wai run and phu yai) he wanted to be, said:

Yong: I want to be a dek as you don’t have to be responsible for anything (13-year-old boy Ban Nam Jai 17/11/96).

These young children saw those older than themselves as wai run. They were seen as having more liberties, as they could drink and smoke in public even if their parents were dissatisfied. Predominantly boys rather than girls were involved in this type of behaviour. Similarly, sexual experiences were a marker of manhood. Opportunities for boys in the research sites to visit prostitutes varied. Those living in Si Liam and Soi Shiwit Rantod had access to a wide range of sexual services, while boys in Ban Nam Suuy, the village furthest from Khon Kaen, had limited opportunities. Nevertheless, for some boys that I talked to, visiting prostitutes was an indicator that they were growing up. This seems to be the case for Thailand as a whole (Jackson I 997: 175).

Another change in behaviour occurs with the transition from school to the workforce. For the children of the study this was mostly happening when they were wai run. Entry into the labour force is an important transition rite, through which children and adolescents became social adults (Boyden 1994:13; Fyfe 1989:4). It is by gaining employment and an income that individuals gain adult status. Later chapters will show that the transition from education to full-time employment is being delayed.

Many adults that I interviewed were aware of the behavioural changes that occurred when children progressed from dek to wai run. Often they made negative comments about the changes, indicating that they themselves never acted in such ways when they were that age:

Bom: When we were kids there weren’t the places to visit. There were no restaurants. There were no pizza huts. Mostly we played at home and didn’t go anywhere. But these days kids have lots of places to go to. Sometimes I go out and I see teenagers
both boys and girls drinking and smoking. I don't like it (42-year-old woman, Si Liam 20/9/96).

Porn: Children of today are aggressive. I mean they don't want to believe what we say. Kids before would listen, these days kids will do bad things, they like to be aggressive, they like to destroy things. For example, destroy the environment, mucking up buildings with graffiti and paint, these are the bad things they do (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

Son: There is a big difference from the past. Children these days don't listen to adults. Before when an adult spoke we had to believe them and we were scared also (community male leader, Si Liam 7/10/96).

When the children became wai run many concerns developed. A primary school teacher, asked about the difference between wai run and dek, said:

Mon: There is a lot of difference with their minds and bodies. It depends on their minds and bodies, dek will play, the way dek do, they have no responsibilities. They have no pretensions. If they think they want to play they will. Wai run, however, start to tell lies and bullshit (Ban Nam Suiy 18/8/96).

A high school teacher described the struggle faced by many children and adults, probably as in most cultures, as children attempt to become adults. Asked what a wai run was, he stated:

Seree: It is the age of becoming an adult. They want to know and do just like adults. They are confident in themselves to such an extent that adults will be concerned about them. This means that adults and wai run can't get on with each other. The adults have passed this stage and will think that the wai run haven't grown up yet. The wai run will think they have grown up and there will be conflicts over the two different views (Si Liam 2/10/96).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the concept of childhood in both the West and Thailand is socially constructed and that it changes over time. The Thai demographic transition that started to reduce the proportion of children aged 14 and under in the early 1970s has brought a revolution to the lives of children in Thailand. Expectations about how Thai children should todian bunkhun, repay gratitude to their parents, has altered. No longer do children only help their parents with work around the house, or send remittances, but also they will study as a sign that they are good children. The changing lives of children have in turn helped change the demographic transition. With more children studying and for longer the cost of raising children has increased.

Accompanying the changes brought about by the demographic transition, definitions of childhood have been adjusting to new socioeconomic realities in Thailand. The Thai state influences children through Wan Dek Haeng Chat and the issuing of ID cards. Although the state has an impact on views about childhood, cultural values play a greater role. Traditional rites of passages were seen by a majority of residents of the research sites as indicators of adulthood. Nevertheless, these rites of passage have been transformed. Fewer men are being ordained as monks and growing
numbers of women are marrying later if at all. For some residents behaviour rather than age was important in indicating adulthood. Adults, however, regarded the changing behaviour as children approach adulthood as negative compared to their own pasts and a cause of great concern for them.

Although there has been a revolution in the lives of Thai children, the changes have not been universal for all groups of children. Following chapters will show that divides between children in Thai society, differences between boys and girls, between the rich and the poor, and differences between rural and urban children have resulted in different childhoods. Their childhoods have been defined by three central activities: time spent in non-paid work, both domestic and agriculture (Chapter 6); time in the paid workforce (Chapter 7); and time spent in school (Chapter 9). Chapter 5 shows that this concept is also socially constructed, like the term childhood, and that its meaning has been changing.
Chapter 5

What is ‘child labour’?

Child labour has come to be regarded as a ghastly by-product of the industrial revolution. The cruelty described in much of the historical literature has made the employment of children the industrial revolution’s most despised feature.

(Nardinelli 1990:2-3)

Depictions of working children during the Industrial Revolution have shaped our understanding of the term ‘child labour’. Exploited children working as chimney sweeps, down coal mines, and in factories, have created negative connotations in our minds: It was during the Industrial Revolution that the notion of ‘child labour’ as a social problem came into being. This was when a growing proportion of working children was no longer in the family-based production system. Children working for wages, particularly in the factory system, were seen as vulnerable and likely to be exploited by employers (Hasnat 1995:424; Mendelievich 1979:3). In Britain by the 1830s a view of ‘child labour’ had emerged as being immoral (Fyfe 1989:28).

The negative connotations of ‘child labour’ have continued to the present. Many people in Australia, when told of my research, reacted by saying ‘so sad’, ‘the poor kids’, ‘such a depressing topic’, and ‘good luck, I hope you will be able to help these children’. The assumptions behind these remarks were that ‘child labour’ was a major problem in Thailand, and that the type of ‘child labour’ that I would be investigating would be that of children working against their will in appalling conditions.

Yet, exactly what is ‘child labour’? As shown in the previous chapter the concept of a child has varied among societies and over time. Even if we take the International Labour Office (ILO) age limit of 15 (Thijs 1994:6) this still leads to confusion as to what labour we are referring to. Children’s work is not static; it has been constantly changing, reflecting new working practices within societies. Opinions about what is suitable work for children and what is not vary greatly. As a result, defining ‘child labour’ is bedevilled with ambiguities.

This chapter first explores the establishment of international conventions aimed at reducing or eliminating ‘child labour’. Second, the chapter discusses problems with defining ‘child labour’. Next, the chapter questions differences between child work and ‘child labour’; it shows how attitudes about what is suitable work for children have changed. It questions why many people do not regard children working on farms as problematic. After this, the chapter explores Thai views of ‘child labour’, by looking at
Thai and Isarn concepts of work. Next the chapter details the development of Thai ‘child labour’ legislation, before indicating views of ‘child labour’ held by government officials and respondents in the research sites.

5.1 ‘Child labour’ laws

Legislation determining what work children can and can not do have been crucial in defining ‘child labour’. This legislation has been developing over time, reflecting changing attitudes about what work is suitable for children. Almost all countries have introduced legislation prohibiting children below a certain age from working (Bequele & Boyden 1988b:160). The first international attempts to introduce ‘child labour’ legislation took place in 1890 after the German Emperor William II called for an international conference to tackle the problem of working children. Fifteen European countries met in Berlin and passed numerous resolutions to protect working children. The resolutions were non-binding but the proceedings proved to be a precursor for later efforts by the ILO (Weiner 1991:118).

The leading force in the international push for legislation preventing children from working in occupations considered inappropriate, as well as protecting working children, has been the ILO (Bequele 1995:2). In its foundation year, 1919, the ILO fixed the minimum age for admission of children to industrial employment at 14 years (Mendelievich 1979:13). Legislation aimed at combating ‘child labour’ was not fixed in that year, but has evolved as changing attitudes about ‘child labour’ have developed. International conventions on ‘child labour’ were progressively established in a growing number of sectors: maritime labour in 1920 and 1921, agriculture in 1921, non-industrial employment in 1932, underground work in 1937 and 1963, fishing in 1959, and in 1973 the Minimum Age Convention was passed (Derrien 1991:86).

The cornerstone of current international ‘child labour’ law has been the 1973 ILO’s Minimum Age Convention. This stipulates that the minimum age for admission to employment should be not less than the age of completion of compulsory education and not less than 15 years. The convention allows light work for children as young as 12 in developing countries if the work does not interfere with the children’s education (Bequele & Myers 1995:88; Derrien 1991:86; Thijs 1995:2-4).

In 1989 the legislative approach to ending ‘child labour’ received a major boost with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. By 1994 the convention had become the most ratified international convention in history. It states that governments shall take legislative steps to protect children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (Boyden & Myers 1995:1).

The legislative approach is likely to receive a further boost in 1999 as ILO members are drafting a convention to abolish extreme forms of labour for children aged
under 18. This new convention aims to gain global consensus by June 1999 to ‘ban slavery and bonded labour, sexual exploitation of children and their employment in “hazardous” industries such as construction, mining, quarrying and transport’ (Islam 1998:61).

5.2 Problems in defining ‘child labour’

The international efforts to restrict children from working have created definitions of ‘child labour’. As a result we all know what ‘child labour’ is. Or do we? We have heard of children working as bonded labour, in slave like conditions, and as child prostitutes. These are clearly bad forms of child exploitation, and I doubt that there is any real debate whether these cases are justifiable ‘child labour’. Yet, there are many other forms of children’s work that are not so easily classified as good or bad work.

It is surprising how many authors take it for granted that the definition of ‘child labour’ is known. They do not define what they actually mean by this term. When definitions are given they often inadequately detail the complexities of the phenomenon. For example, according to Fyfe (1989:4) ‘Child labour is work which impairs the health and development of children.’ This definition does not mention what ‘children’ means. Also, who decides that the work is unsuitable for children? Governments, parents, and children often have different views about what impairs their health and development. Further, even though some work may be detrimental to children, if they do not work it could even be worse for them. Without an income their lives could be even in a worse state than by doing the harmful work. Poverty has forced the children into the work and it may be only by working that the children have an opportunity to improve their welfare.

One ILO publication (Thijs 1994:6) stated that as far as the ILO is concerned ‘child labour’ occurs when ‘children under 15 [are] engaged in work or employment with the aim of earning a livelihood for themselves and their families’. This definition highlights a major concern in the ‘child labour’ literature. The definition implies that it is all right for children to work if they do not really need the money. If on the other hand, children are living in a state of poverty and need to work to earn a livelihood than this type of work should be stopped. Elsewhere the ILO has claimed that the problem is not ‘child labour’ but poverty:

Child labour can be considered as one of the phenomena caused by underdevelopment and poverty. In this sense child labour is not the problem—it is a symptom of the problem of poverty and inequality (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour 1994:14).

If poverty is the problem, then stopping children from working when they need money to support themselves and their families will only add to their economic difficulties.

A second ILO definition claims that
“Child labour” implies ... that young people are being exploited, or overworked, or deprived of their right to health or education—or just to childhood (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour 1994:2) (emphasis in original text).

This definition, however, does not define exploitation, overwork, children’s rights or even childhood. To find what these terms mean it is necessary to seek other sources. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) claimed that exploitative child work exists when children work when they are too young, work for too long hours, work for too little pay, work in hazardous conditions, work under slave-like arrangements, work under excessive physical, social, and psychological strains, when they have too many responsibilities, when the work does not facilitate the psychological and social development of the child, and when the work inhibits the child’s self-esteem (Black 1993:16; Fyfe 1989).

The ILO efforts to reduce and eliminate ‘child labour’ has resulted in the organisation attacking only certain types of children’s work:

ILO has tried to make a clear distinction between children working in socially and personally useful ways—working for pocket money, doing household chores, helping in the family business during the school holidays—and children whose working conditions should be regulated or eliminated. Working children at risk, according to ILO, are: children who are prematurely leading adult lives and working long hours for low wages under conditions which are damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development (Black 1993:16).

The ILO’s attempts to restrict children from certain activities while viewing children’s work in other areas as socially and personally useful have been attacked for their internal logic. White (1994:873) expressed these criticisms by pointing out that, according to the ILO, work was all right if it was unpaid, resulting from activities around the house or in a family business, or if the payment took the form of pocket money, implying that the children did not need to work. Yet, it was problematic for children to work doing the same work if they had to do so out of poverty. White (1995:17) claimed that the ILO

... regulations and interventions assume that working for one’s parents, at home, without pay, is more acceptable than working for others, outside the home, for money; also that work in small-scale enterprises like family businesses is less harmful than work in large-scale enterprises (like factories).

For many children, however, working in a factory or other large-scale enterprise comes high on the list of “preferred” kinds of work, while working at home occupies a very low place.

5.3 ‘Child labour’ and child work

It is not work itself that is the cause of concern but exploitation. In all developing countries children of all ages have always taken part in productive and economic activities central to the life of the family. It is only with the extensive penetration of the cash economy that child labour in the form of systematic exploitation of children by employers outside the child’s family became common.

(Macpherson 1987:199)
If all children work (Chapter 6) then surely only a proportion of these children can be part of the ‘child labour’ problem. We all know types of work that are beneficial to children, as part of their socialisation. We can all pinpoint certain forms of work that we find distressing when children are involved and that are clearly ‘child labour’. The ‘child labour’ literature classifies one as child work and the other as ‘child labour’. Yet where is the divide; at what point is one activity child work and the other ‘child labour’? More importantly, who is the moral judge who decides that one activity is good while the other should be eliminated?

The distinction between child work and ‘child labour’ is common. The ILO argues that while the latter is often highly exploitative, the former may not be harmful to children and may even be beneficial (Boyden 1990:196). Many authors make a basic distinction between the two (Fyfe 1989:3; Poudyal 1994:3). For example, George’s (1990) study on working children in India is based on the hypothesis that there is a distinction between the two.

The literature makes a distinction between child work and ‘child labour’ as work in itself is not damaging to children. On the contrary it can provide benefits to them as they learn new skills and responsibilities. Such work forms part of the socialisation process fundamental to the transmission of skills and knowledge between generations (Boyden 1990:206; Fyfe 1989:14; Fyfe 1993:7; White 1994:861). According to Zelizer (1985:220) psychologists have argued that economic dependency from not working can be a hazard to children. Evidence indicates that for boys aged 10 to 14 part-time paid work can help their feelings of competence and personality development. Children working in the study research sites often said that they found working a very positive experience. A 13-year-old boy who sometimes worked for his father after school and on some weekends as an ironsmith stated:

Yong: I feel good, I am proud (Ban Nam Jai 17/11/96),

after I asked him how he felt while working for his father.

5.3.1 What is suitable work for children?

Decisions about what is suitable work for children and what is classified as ‘child labour’ have changed over time. Zelizer (1985:79-98) detailed changing attitudes on this debate in the US from the middle of last century onwards. Family farm work was regarded as suitable while industrial work was condemned. In between certain occupations such as working as a Senate page, or as cash-girl or cash-boy in department stores were regarded as suitable. Children working on the streets were once positively regarded as these children were not employees but independent merchants. This changed with delivering papers singled out as good work for children, while other street occupations were declared as unfit for children. Another area of contention for reformers was child performers. It became legitimate for children to perform in churches, schools or other academic institutions, if it did not become wage labour. Many
forms of child work, however, were left untouched by legislation. Child minding, helping in small enterprises and shops, domestic service, street selling, and farming have been regarded as necessary for the livelihood of families and have remained unquestioned by many scholars (Nieuwenhuys 1994:10).

5.3.2 Working children on the farms

Family farm work has constantly been regarded as suitable work for children. To me, however, the blindness of the 'child labour' literature towards children working in agriculture is a major problem. There seems to be an assumption that farming is child work rather than 'child labour'. The majority of working children worldwide, however, are concentrated in the rural sector (Boyden & Holden 1991:118). In Thailand in 1996 over 65 per cent of children aged 13-14 in the workforce were working on the land (National Statistical Office 1987-1997). Yet little is said about these children.

These children have gained so little attention because they are working for their parents. Nardinelli (1990:151) suggested that 'child labour' legislation was rarely passed without the active support of adult male labour. The importance of children to the family labour system in agriculture partly explains why this type of work was not regulated in Britain or in other countries. 'Farm labor was almost blindly and romantically categorized as "good" work' (Zelizer 1985:77). The idealisation of farm work continued until the 1920s when investigations in the US uncovered hardships experienced by children in this industry. This discovery lead to a divide between children working in good farm work and exploitative farm labour. Commercialised agriculture became illegitimate for children while family farm work remained suitable (Zelizer 1985:77-79).

Children working as farmers have not been the focus of many 'child labour' researchers and campaigners. One of the workers at the 'child labour' NGO in Khon Kaen felt that children working on the farm were not a problem.

Simon: Working on the farm, is this child labour?

Chai: No, it isn't child labour as they are doing work to help their families. They are living with their families. Their hours of work are not fixed; for certain they are outdoors.

Simon: Lets suppose the kids are forced to do this work by their parents?

Chai: This isn't child labour because they can do it, but if things aren't harmonious this is a matter for the family (Khon Kaen 16/9/96).

The 'child labour' literature usually focuses on children in cities1. Fyfe (1989:6) claimed that priority should be on the urban sector and that the problem of working children in rural areas was secondary. One reason for the focus on children in cities is

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1 There are major exceptions to this such as the work by Nieuwenhuys (1994).
the perceived greater exploitation of these children (Boyden & Holden 1991:118). According to Mendelievich (1979:36) stated that:

There is no doubt but that it is urban areas that child workers are treated the worst, exploited the most and undergo the greatest privations, especially in manufacturing industry.

This statement is based on a common assumption that child work in rural areas is not a concern because it is within the family context. Labour within the family can, however, involve abuse and thus it cannot be assumed that the family is always supportive and protective of children (Boyden & Holden 1991:118; Fyfe 1989:71). Children themselves often make a deliberate choice to escape unpaid family work and enter the labour market. Despite parental opposition they decide to gain control of their own earnings rather than work long hours without remuneration under the control of their parents (Fyfe 1989:71-73; White 1995:17).

It has been argued that the move away from non-paying family work, such as farming, to paid employment decreased the exploitation of children. Nardinelli (1990:98) claimed that before the industrial revolution children had few alternatives to parental control. Industrialisation created new opportunities for children, as they were able to seek employment out of family control, enabling them to leave home if they desired.

It may be true that farm work is generally less exploitative than some other forms of work but this is not always so. It is an incredibly physically demanding occupation, especially when there is little mechanisation, and fraught with dangers, particularly with the use of chemicals. The children themselves and also the parents that I talked to did not want their children to participate in this occupation.

Simon: Do you want your children to work the rice fields?

Uut: No, I don't want them to grow rice, as it is difficult. You have to be in the sun and your face turns black. You are bent over all day and you end up as a hunchback. Your back hurts. It is very difficult. Growing rice you have to use your own labour not machines (40-year-old woman, Ban Nam Suay 30/8/96).

The children working as farmers are usually underpaid or not paid at all, and although many children will be combining farming with schooling, they do not have the same educational opportunities as other children. Often they live in areas with no schools or substandard ones. If there are educational facilities the children and their families may be too poor for them to study beyond primary education. Finally, it is often these children who, after migrating in order to gain better working conditions, grab the attention of people concerned with 'child labour' when they work in areas that are deemed to be exploitative. Surely, children working as farmers deserve greater attention.

5.4 Thai views of 'child labour'

There is no single Thai concept of raeng ngan dek, 'child labour' but a wide range of views. Opinions vary greatly reflecting a seniority system (Elson 1982:493), government
officials have one view, while many adults hold a separate view which often is different from that held by children. Children themselves, however, are not a homogeneous mass: children of different socioeconomic backgrounds, age, and sex holding at times separate views of the meaning of 'child labour’. These views are not static, but are changing, reflecting the new socioeconomic reality of the country.

5.5 Thai concepts of work

To understand how Thais and Isarn people define 'child labour' first an understanding of what they mean by 'work' is necessary. What work is and who does it are complex matters. Is work only what is done in the wage labour market or is it more than this? Jones (1981:223) argued that the term 'economically active'

... is a very western concept to separate economic from others activities, and even in the west the separation of a housewife’s work from that of a waitress in a restaurant is based as much on statistical convention as any immutable logic. Perhaps the best answer to our question in a peasant setting is that virtually every body is economically active.

5.5.1 Work is the things we do daily^2

The Thai word for work, ngan, has a broader meaning than the English word. Not only is it used to mean paid work, agricultural work, housework and school work as in English but it is also used for funerals, festivals, marriages, making merit and religious ceremonies. For many of the residents ngan was multi dimensional. A man listing the different types of work stated:

_Tui:_ There are many different types of work. First there is work around the house. Second there is the work concerned with Isarn traditions. Third there is marriage. Fourth there is the work when people die, the _ngan sop_ [cremation]. Fifth to give rice to the spirits, sixth _bunkhun_ [making merit], seventh _bun banfai_ [a festival where Isarn people send rockets into the sky calling for the rains], eighth _Kheewphansa_ [the beginning of Buddhist lent], ninth _Orkphansa_ [the end of Buddhist lent] and tenth _Katin_ [a day to make special offerings to all the monks in a temple usually in November] (42-year-old man, Ban Nam Suiy 15/8/96).

This man listed a series of important events when Thais and on occasions just Isarn people make merit. He did not include in his list a _ngan_ associated with earning money. For some individuals that I interviewed making merit was seen as the most important _ngan_, it ensured the continuation of traditions, beliefs and customs.

A second type of work not included in this man’s list was schooling. For many people that I interviewed this was seen as children’s most important type of work (Chapter 9). This was stated by an old woman who, asked if going to school was children’s work said:

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^2 Statement made by a 17-year-old girl, Si Liam 8/10/96.
Yes it is the work of children. ... It is important, as kids have to study. Their parents are delighted if they do. The parents have to let them study (old woman, Ban Nam Suiy 16/896).

5.5.2 Work is money

Ngan khu ngern, ngern khu ngan, banda suk

A second and narrower Thai definition of work, commonly heard in the research sites is that work is what you do for money. The above Thai saying, for many, defines work. It means ‘work is money, money is work, and this brings happiness’. Work is what you do to get money, and it is only by having money that you can have happiness. For those holding this view earning money was of utmost importance; they claimed it was more important than making merit as in order to do that they needed to have money. Many respondents repeated the proverb in part or in full. For example:

Pong: Work is money, money is work. For education if you have money you can enter a very good school. If you have good education you can do everything (57-year-old labour official, Si Liam 1/10/96).

A 17-year-old seamstress stated:

Noi: Work is the things that we have to do in order to get money (Si Liam 7/10/96).

Others interviewed, however, were unwilling to state which type of work was the most important, either what they did daily or what they did to earn a living:

Simon: For Isarn people there is the work of making merit and the work of, say, construction workers. Which type of work is more important?

Bong: Work for making merit is connected with tradition of various types. Within the year there may only be a few such events. If you add all the special days there would only be 15 days in a year. But construction work is daily work. It is work we do to survive. So they are important but for different reasons (NGO worker, Changwat Khon Kaen 9/11/96).

5.6 Isarn concepts of work

There are differences between the Thai concept of work as discussed above and the Isarn one. The Isarn word for ‘work’ has a narrower meaning than that of Thai and also that found in English. Comparisons of the words used between these two language groupings indicate the differences.

The Isarn equivalent of the Thai word tam meaning ‘to do’ is het and instead of the Thai word ngan for work, in Isarn it can be either wiak or ngan. Ngan has been adopted from Thai for certain types of work. When I interviewed Isarn people on the difference between the two words wiak and ngan, many said that they were the same and that they are interchangeable. Further questioning about when and why they would use one or the other resulted in the person realising that they were different.

Simon: What is het wiak?
Chai: It is work within the family at home, when working the fields. When we are talking about *het ngan* this is a new meaning, but *het wiak* it is a term that has been around for along time. *Het wiak* is work around the family and in agriculture. *Het ngan* is work where you are employed by another (NGO ‘child labour’ worker, Khon Kaen 16/9/96).

*Het wiak* is used for work in the fields, such as planting and harvesting rice, or for work around the house, looking after children, weaving and other traditional women’s tasks. It is used for forms of work that existed before the market economy penetrated Isarn. Today, some forms of *het wiak* can result in money, for example when the rice crop is sold. Nevertheless, these forms of work usually do not involve a wage.

*Het ngan*, on the other hand, is used to indicate paid employment. The residents of both villages, Ban Nam Jai and Ban Nam Suiy, who were in paid employment, such as construction workers in Bangkok or those working in fish-net factories in Khon Kaen were *het ngan*. *Het ngan* is the new form of work, the work that arrived with the changes brought by the market economy. Isarn communities have changed as households seek supplementary income, particularly wages (Havanon 1992:219). To gain consumer goods that increasingly became available the importance of money grew and with it the form of work that is now called *het ngan*.

This difference between *het ngan* and *het wiak* is important to grasp as it influences local concepts of ‘child labour’. I was often surprised, when asking village people either in Thai or in Isarn if they were working, to be told that they were not as they were *yuu ban suu suu* meaning in English staying at home doing nothing. My surprise was because I had seen them, and this included many children, working hard.

5.6.1 Work and *nati* (duty)

If the residents of the two villages were *yuu ban suu suu*, namely just staying at home doing nothing, how did they classify the work that I so often saw them doing? For many of the adults whom I interviewed the activities that I saw were not work but *nati*, namely duty. It was the duty of children to look after younger children, to fetch water, to wash clothes, to look after the buffaloes, to cook and so on.

An understanding of the difference between *nati* and work is important, as the adults of the research sites did not classify many activities that I thought were work as such. Seeing children involved in these activities I would have said at times that this was ‘child labour’, yet many adults did not agree. The use of language in distinguishing between different types of work reflects power relations between the generations. Adults’ (and usually men’s) work that was paid was important while children’s work was unimportant and was seen as only a duty. Some children whom I interviewed held different views from their parents’, as they did not see their work simply as their *nati* but as serious work, which they at times classified as ‘child labour’. *Nati* is work but for no money. Differences existed not only between generations over the question of *nati* but also between boys and girls (Chapter 6).
5.6.2 The changing Isarn concept of work and Wan Pra (Monks’ Day)

An understanding of the Isarn concept of work can be gained by studying the connection between Buddhism and work. Every seventh day is Wan Pra, a day when local people rest from their work. This concept, however, is being transformed as the market system gains greater dominance.

Wan Pra is a special day in the Buddhist calendar. Each morning monks will leave their temples to receive alms. Every seventh day, however, the monks stay in their temples and those who wish to make merit enter the temple to do so. Wan Pra coincides with the full moon and every other seventh day as it waxes and wanes.

Wan Pra is not only a day to enter the temple to make merit, it is also a day of rest. Traditionally, there was no concept of a weekend, but instead Wan Pra was the day Isam people did not work. This is illustrated by a conversation I had with Dok, a 30-year-old woman from Ban Nam Suvi (11/9/96):

Simon: On Wan Pra you are not meant to work, isn’t that so?

Dok: You aren’t allowed to do certain things. ... In this village you can’t kill any animals. On Wan Pra you aren’t allowed to kill animals. ... You can’t mill rice. ... It is a sin. We don’t even want to take the rice to the mill on Wan Pra. We don’t take the rice from the rice store to mill on Wan Pra.

Simon: In this village you can’t work but the children will go off to study.

Dok: Yes, they will.

Simon: If there are government workers in this village, would they work. Lets say there is a person working at the district office, would they work?

Dok: Yes, they will. ... Because government workers don’t stop, their work doesn’t stop.

With Wan Pra the difference between het wiak and het ngan is further illustrated. The kinds of work not performed on Wan Pra were the het wiak forms of work. Work on the farm and around the house were not performed, while work that earned a wage, het ngan was carried out. There was a divide in the importance of this day between those living in rural areas and in Khon Kaen, as many people I asked in the city could not tell me which day was Wan Pra.

Certain activities took place on Wan Pra. When I interviewed Dok, she and other women were sewing which was not considered to be work by the women. Also during Wan Pra other traditional women’s work, such as looking after children and cooking, still took place. This is not to say that men stopped while women continued working. Women, like men, stopped working the rice fields. Women also stopped rice milling, an activity predominantly carried out by them in the research sites. Men still carried out certain activities such as fishing.

The growing dominance of the market system is reducing the importance of Wan Pra. The importance of this day for children, in particular, has declined greatly. This is because children’s time is now controlled by the school calendar. They have to go to school from Monday to Friday and their days off are on the weekend and not Wan Pra.
For children in the paid workforce *Wan Pra* had also lost much of its meaning as they have to work as determined by their employers and not by the Buddhist calendar.

5.7 Thailand’s ‘child labour’ legislation

Legislation has been important in shaping the views of many Thais of what is ‘child labour’. Thailand, like other countries, has a well-defined legal code of what work children can and cannot do. At the time of my research children under 12 years of age were restricted from the workforce while those between 12 and 15 were limited to certain occupations. There were further restrictions, from a number of activities, for those under 18 (Banpasirichote & Pongsapich 1992:4-5; Bond 1982:4-5; Kanta 1986:390-2; Roongshshivin & Thanaphibul 1985:22-45; Roongshшивin & Thanaphibul 1986:376; Udomsakdi 1986:39-41; Women and Child Labour Division 1995:5). Despite having had this detailed anti-‘child labour’ code Thailand has not signed the 1973 ILO Minimum Age Convention which has been crucial in shaping international ‘child labour’ legislation (Fyfe 1993:55).

Thailand’s first Labour Act, which was promulgated in 1956, extended minimum standard protection to workers including children. This act responded to only one of the ILO conventions, prohibiting workers under 18 years from underground mining. The Act was short lived as it was repealed in 1958 (Banpasirichote 1995:18; Banpasirichote & Pongsapich 1992:61-62; Roongshшивin & Thanaphibul 1985:10). The next major event occurred in 1972 with the establishment of the Labour Protection Act, which was in force in 1996, when I was researching this topic (Banpasirichote 1995:18; Banpasirichote & Pongsapich 1992:62; Kanta 1986:390; TDSC Staff 1989:20; Udomsakdi 1986:39). Banpasirichote and Pongsapich (1992:62-63) described the 1972 legislation as a backward step compared to the 1956 Act. The Act resulted from a military coup in 1970 with the new government wanting to avoid the establishment of labour unions. The new regulations treated working children similarly to adults, omitting a maximum of six hours per day for children under 14. Further, measures in the 1956 Act protecting working children from dangerous work were more rigid.

Since I carried out my research there were moves in Thailand to alter the child labour legislation. The Department of Labour Protection and Welfare in March 1997 proposed to raise the minimum working age from 13 to 15 (Corben 1997:9). A year later, the Thai newspaper *Krungtepturakit* (1997) on its Internet site announced that new legislation raising the minimum age of work to 15 would take effect in August 1998.

This new legislation, now in effect, increased the age limit that children can be employed from 13 to 15. Children between 15 and 18 are allowed to work but the employer must inform labour officials within 15 days after the child starts working. Second, the employer must document changes in working conditions, and keep the record at the workplace, where it can be examined by labour officials at any time. Finally, the employer must inform labour officials of the termination of a child worker’s
employment within seven days after the child stops working. Children between these ages are prohibited from working overtime or on holidays. Also, there is a wide range of occupations that are forbidden to children (Orunakasikor et al. 1998:26-30; Thongpao 1998:1-3).

5.8 ‘Child labour’: a beating rod

One view of ‘child labour’ held by some Thai government officials and some individual Thais, is that ‘child labour’ is a tool that farang (Western person/s) can use to shame Thailand. Exaggerated reports of the situation in Thailand (Chapter I) create negative images of the country.

To do research in Thailand I had to gain permission from the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT). The granting of a student visa was not forthcoming as quickly as I had hoped; it took close to 10 months, and for a while I was concerned that I was not going to gain permission at all. Once the documentation was complete and I entered the country I had to present myself at the NRCT. There I was met by an official who told me that the NRCT took a long time deciding to give me a research visa as my topic was very sensitive. She stressed this over and over again. She was saying that I was not to give Thailand a bad name as a result of my research but to help to solve the problem. The encounter with the official was more of an interrogation, an interaction that I had never before experienced in Thailand. The sensitivity of the topic was drummed into me. Visiting the Department of Labour and Welfare the following day, which had to agree to my research before the NRCT could give me permission to enter the country, I was once again told that they took a long time to consider my research proposal. They also felt it was a very sensitive topic. At these two meeting I was told that I should not produce sensational allegations about ‘child labour’ that would damage Thailand’s image.

5.9 ‘Child labour’ and rong ngan narok (‘hell factories’)

The dominate view of ‘child labour’ in Thailand is of children working in rong ngan narok (literally this means ‘hell factory’; its English translation is ‘sweatshop’). On my arrival in Khon Kaen, many people indicated that this was the meaning of ‘child labour’. While discussing the reason why I was in Khon Kaen with strangers I was told many times that I should go down to Bangkok to investigate the topic. They were telling me that there I could find factories where children were being exploited, working in rong ngan narok. But in Khon Kaen, according to them there was no such problem.

On one occasion I was telling a policeman about my topic and he also told me that I should go to Bangkok. The conversation moved on to prostitution and in particular child prostitution. He assured me that at the hotels in Khon Kaen guests, if they so desired, could obtain a child prostitute supplied by the hotel management. Clearly the
problem of child prostitution and ‘child labour’ were for this police officer two separate issues.

The ironic aspect of these conversations was that they often took place in restaurants where young children were serving the customers. The work of these children was not regarded as ‘child labour’ as that was what occurred in rong ngan narok. For these people ‘child labour’ was a narrower concept than that defined by Thai legislation.

5.9.1 Thai textbooks and ‘child labour’

The dominate view of ‘child labour’ being children working in rong ngan narok is illustrated by Thai primary school readers. In the Mana and Mani textbooks certain types of work undertaken by children are encouraged as they are seen as being good for the child’s development. This is despite some of these forms of work being classified as unsuitable by both ILO and Thai ‘child labour’ legislation. The books, nevertheless, paint a very positive picture of children carrying out these activities.

A story based on Pet, a boy aged nine from a poor family, is of great interest as Pet is employed in a restaurant, contravening the legal code that restricts children under 12 from the workforce. Pet is portrayed as a good boy. Even though he is unable to go to school because of his family’s poverty, he is still studying as other children, after school, are coaching him. He is very diligent with his reading. Legally, Pet should be attending school, as compulsory education requires children to study until they are 12 or 13.

Pet was employed to work Monday, Wednesday and Friday from six to nine at night. The owner of the restaurant is not described in a negative way despite contravening the ‘child labour’ legislation. He is a friend of Pet’s uncle and is happy with Pet’s work and thus increases Pet’s wage and allows him to work more. Pet decides to work five days a week, from Monday to Friday, and to leave the weekend for his study.

One time Pet worked until 10 at night, as there were extra customers. Walking home alone, Pet spots two criminals committing a crime. He informs the police, who are able to arrive in time to save the day. Pet becomes a hero, has his picture taken in the paper and is rewarded by being given a grant for him and his younger siblings to study at school (Thai Department of Education 1992:56-57). For working hard and being a good child Pet was rewarded. There is no mention in the story that the work or the conditions were unsuitable for a child of Pet’s age.

A second story in the Mana and Mani series reinforces the view that ‘child labour’ is when children work in rong ngan narok, in sweatshops. This story centres on a mother, Nang Sroi, and her eldest son, who is nameless. Nang Sroi and her family are extremely poor; her husband died many years before, leaving her with five children to raise.
In this story a couple, who claim to be very rich, tell Nang Sroi that they wish to help poor people like herself. They constantly try to give her money, which she refuses. She, however, is finally convinced that they are good people and allows her eldest son to go with them to work in the city. Her son has just finished compulsory education and would be aged 12 or 13.

After a month the son runs back home, informing his mother that the couple had tricked her into selling him into a ‘hell factory’. Their role was to search for young workers who could be duped into working for the factory. The son, on his arrival at the factory discovers that it makes counterfeit money and refuses to work, but he is incarcerated and forced to do so. The story tells us that there is a guard ensuring that no one leaves the factory. Nang Sroi’s son and his fellow workers lack freedom, even though some of the workers are happy as they are getting a good wage. Nang Sroi’s son hates this work as he loves his country and knows that this factory is illegal. Counterfeiting money damages the nation.

One day the son escapes and informs the police. The children are freed and the police gain enough evidence to arrest the factory owner, a man they have known to be corrupt but have never had enough proof to convict.

Comparing this story with the story about Pet in the restaurant suggests that there are certain types of work that are regarded as suitable for children while others are not. Pet, despite being well below the legal age to work, is a hero. The restaurant owner is not portrayed as bad but someone who is allowing Pet to add to his family’s income. The second story, however, is written to warn children of the dangers of ‘child labour’. At the end of the story the children with their school teacher moralise about the problem Nang Sroi faced. They decide that they should not trust strangers who offer work places to children.

The two stories reinforce the common view in my study area that ‘child labour’ is work carried out by children in hell factories. Other work, even if it is illegal for children, is not considered a problem. This helps to explain why many people in Khon Kaen told me that I should go to Bangkok to carry out my research on ‘child labour’.

5.10 Views of ‘child labour’ by the residents of the research sites

The residents of the research sites held a wide range of opinions on the meaning of ‘child labour’. The people that I interviewed, however, believed there was a distinction between ‘child labour’ and child work. After being asked what ‘child labour’ is, a 17-year-old boy stated:

**Surin:** Child labour is ahm, to tell you the truth children should work to help their parents around the home, then there is the other sort it is the use of their labour in factories, where they do different things. Child labour and child work are not the same.

**Simon:** How are they different?
Surin: Children who are using their labour, I mean kids who might plant flowers this is children's work. Child labour is kids working in different types of factories. So the phrases child work and child labour are not the same (Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

Even though for the residents there was a dichotomy between 'child labour' and child work there were conflicting views about what work was suitable for children. Older members of the communities that I interviewed, whose own childhoods occurred before anti-'child labour' legislation existed in Thailand, often did not understand what the concern about children working was all about. These views are shown in the following two passages:

Be: Kids under 15 don't know how to be responsible for themselves. The Thai law doesn't let them work; they are not allowed to have a career, in a factory or in large industries. But they can work for their parents or in the countryside. The younger the kid is, the prouder the parents will be that their kids can work. That is how things are. I am proud that my grandchildren are clever and my children also. The kids work hard and learn things. But the law states that this is cruel for the kids. The law says if they are not grown up enough they shouldn't work, they shouldn't even work one day (72-year-old man, Ban Nam Jai 26/3/96).

An older woman held a similar view.

Simon: Mother, now the government is saying there is a problem with children working. Do you agree that this is a problem?

Han: I think it is good that they are working. When you have children you want them to be working, when they are ready. We don't force them, when they want to go they go. what they want to do they will do it (86-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 23/3/96).

Most adult residents in my study area, however, were concerned about children working in certain occupations. These people often defined 'child labour' as activities carried out by children (sometimes defined by the residents as under 12, for others those under 15 and others still under 18) for money. A narrow definition of 'child labour' by some residents was when children were working in sweatshops:

Simon: What is child labour?

Mon: It is the use of children's labour, those children who haven't reached maturity. They make the children work harder than the children can normally do, and the kids wouldn't be paid as much as adults.

Simon: What work would be child labour?

Mon: Going to Bangkok and working in a toffee factory, in a factory with bad conditions (female primary teacher, Ban Nam Suvi 18/8/96).

For these adults working on the family farm was not 'child labour':

Simon: Kids who finish school when they are 12, completing year 6, and don't study further. They will live in the village looking after the buffaloes, is this child labour?

Mon: No, I wouldn't say it is child labour. It's their own work. It's their duty, it is the responsibility of the family.

Simon: Adults say that they are working when they farm. For kids 12 who aren't studying but who are farming, what is this?
Mon: It is work of the home, it is their occupation, and it is what they do to survive.

Simon: But a child in Bangkok at a factory making toffee, this is an occupation.

Mon: It is an occupation. As farmers they don’t get paid, they do it for themselves, there is no employer but in Bangkok they get a wage for their efforts. Here we get benefits from our produce, our agriculture rewards us. We get paid through our vegetables (female primary teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 18/8/96).

This view that children working as farmers was not ‘child labour’ was common:

Tui: At 12 they finish school and they then will help their parents with work. This is not child labour because child labour has to be work in a factory. But this work looking after animals, this is helping their parents with work. Work around the village isn’t child labour (42-year-old man, Ban Nam Suiy 15/8/96).

Children’s work connected to money, het ngan, was seen as a problem. Children’s farm work, however, was not regarded by many adults as ‘child labour’ as this type of work was wiak, the Isan traditional form of work which children have always been doing. All the adults living in the villages and many of the adults in the city would have done this type of work when they themselves were children. As a result it was hard for them to see this type of work as being problematic for children.

The view that ‘child labour’ was when children were working for a wage and not on the family farm was not held by everyone. Some children who had to do this work held the completely opposite view. Asking a 14-year-old girl what ‘child labour’ is, lead to the following discussion:

Je: It is when adults take advantage of children. They make the kids work and pay them a little.

Simon: When working as farmers is this child labour?

Je: Yes it is (14-year-old girl, Ban Nam Suiy 15/8/96).

A young woman who because of her family’s poverty had to leave school at an early age and spent her time looking after the family buffaloes held a similar view.

Simon: Let’s suppose there is a kid 12 working in a factory, is this child labour?

Dok Mali: Yes.

Simon: Let’s suppose the kid is 12 is from this village and is not studying. The kid is looking after buffaloes. Is this child labour?

Dok Mali: Yes, it is.

Simon: How old were you when you were looking after the buffaloes?

Dok Mali: 12 to 13.

Simon: Was this child labour?

Dok Mali: Yes it was (18-year-old woman, Ban Nam Suiy 15/8/96).

These two conversations illustrate the different views that children can hold about the issue ‘child labour’ compared to adults. The two of them believed that working on the farm was hindering their development. There was no future working on the farm, they knew that they had to be in school if they were to have a future.
Not all children, however, held the view expressed by the above two interviewees. Other children removed from farming held the dominate view that ‘child labour’ was when children were forced to work against their will and often in rong ngan narok, in the hell factories. The following interview illustrates this view:

*Simon:* What is child labour?

*Wee:* It is when cruel people force children to work. It isn’t necessary. Child labour is forcing children, who are younger than the legal age to do so. If they are younger than the legal age than this is child labour. There would be a wage. Apart from that, the employer may torment and hit the kids (15-year-old boy, at the Khon Kaen University high school 6/1/96).

The negative connotations associated with the term ‘child labour’ meant that many children did not want to be seen as part of this phenomenon. Many working children I talked to did not see their own work as a problem. They would deny that their work was ‘child labour’ as they had volunteered to work themselves. For example a 17-year-old seamstress who worked six days a week in Bangkok at the age of 13 and had continued to do so, but in Khon Kaen, felt that her work was not ‘child labour’.

*Simon:* What is child labour?

*Noi:* Child labour is using the labour of children under 18.

*Simon:* Has your work been child labour?

*Noi:* No, it hasn’t. We contracted ourselves out for work, we weren’t exploited (Si Liam 7/10/96).

5.11 Conclusion

There is no one definition of ‘child labour’. Attitudes about ‘child labour’ have altered over time, reflecting changing values in societies. In Thailand what ‘child labour’ is has been influenced by cultural values about work and the legal code that restricts children from working in certain activities. Within this framework there are numerous views on what exactly is this phenomenon. Government officials concerned about protecting the image of the country have different views from others. Adults in turn have different views from children. Most adults made a distinction between child work and ‘child labour’, with farming being considered as suitable work for children. They held a common view that ‘child labour’ is work that children do in factories. Children, however, who have to work on their family farms, are aware of the hardships involved in this type of work and are willing to claim it is ‘child labour’.

... the assumptions underlying the notion of child labour are grossly inadequate to study the work performed by children in a rural setting, where children working in remunerated employment are rather the exception than the rule, and many children can combine school and work (Nieuwenhuys 1994:26).
Chapter 6

Which children are working?

Children have always worked and today where families need help, in developed and developing countries, children will and do continue to work. Work has always been part of a wider set of childhood activities which is the starting point for any classification and analysis of children’s economic role.

(Fyfe 1989:14)

The answer to the question, ‘which children are working?’, is different for each type of work. In Thailand there are many types of work: housework, work connected to religious events and to the cycle of life, school work, unpaid and paid work. This chapter answers the above question for each of these different types of work.

Throughout the chapter differences between boys and girls, among the different age groups, and the different locations are explored. Emphasis is given to paid work in that this type of work is the focus of many ‘child labour’ studies. As a result, a series of models is created to determine which children are in paid work.

6.1 Domestic work

To some extent children undertake cooking, cleaning, child care and other domestic activities. Although this type of work is part of the socialisation process and not usually regarded as ‘child labour’, for some children, particularly young girls, it is a full-time occupation that is underpaid or even unpaid. Rivera (1985:14) claimed that it is an irony that domestic work without pay does not generate the same outrage as children working for wages. She suggested that this reflected an attitude that exploitative relations do not exist within families.

Studies show that children’s involvement in domestic work can be substantial. A Tanzanian study claimed that children’s economic and domestic activities amounted to over three hours per child per day. This was over 46 per cent of the time adults spent on these tasks (Kamuzora 1984:114). Not only can children spend many hours on this type of work but they can provide financial benefits for the family as they can act as substitutes for adults, usually women, freeing mothers for paid employment (Ah-Eng 1982:567; Fyfe 1989:14; Jomo et al. 1992:150). According to Scott (1982:547), the substitution of children for adults in household work reduces children’s involvement in paid employment. They stay at home, carrying out housework and looking after younger siblings while the mother goes to work.
In this study of children in Changwat Khon Kaen I observed a few children who spent large amounts of time doing domestic work. At the extreme was one 13-year-old girl who was out of school, not in paid employment and whose parents worked full-time. She claimed that she did most of the family’s domestic work:

*Saeng*: When my parents go off to work I wash the clothes, I sweep the house, and wash the dishes.

*Simon*: Who does most of the housework, you or your mother?

*Saeng*: I do, my mother goes to sell things and I am staying at home. I want my mother to be happy. When my mother returns home from work I don’t want her to be tired. I wash the clothes. When my parents return home I give them water to drink so that my parents will say that I am a good person (Si Liam 1/10/96).

Apart from individual children like Saeng, there were two groups of children who tended to do more domestic work than other children. Adopted children were the first group. Some poor rural families allow their children to be adopted into richer families in the city. In exchange for free board and the opportunity to study, they are often expected to carry out domestic work. Observing families with such children, I was struck by the realisation that these children had to do more housework than other children. During two interviews parents did not even mention that such children were part of their household, even though they lived there. In a family noodle shop, it was the adopted child who carried out domestic duties and served the customers, while the other children in the household studied or played.

Domestic servants were the second group of children who did more household work. Some girls had been domestic servants, working for families in Khon Kaen and Bangkok. This work tended to be poorly paid and time consuming, with duties to be performed possibly at any time during the day and week. The ‘child labour’ literature claims female domestic workers are a high-risk group. Husin, a UNICEF officer in Bangladesh, was quoted as saying:

Child domestics live in isolation. Unlike other working children, they have little or no control over their lives since they have to adjust to a set of rules framed by their employers. They face the risk of physical and sexual abuse, and since they are isolated from their families they have no one to talk to about their problems (Black 1993:21).

However, none of the girls whom I interviewed indicated that they had any bad experiences. Those complaining about their work mentioned boredom being their biggest problem. On the other hand, these girls mentioned living in a middle-class family in the city and being able to go shopping with their employer as positive aspects of their employment.

For the majority of children the extent of housework was limited to assisting their parents. Children were expected to do this form of work as it was their *nati* (duty). This parental expectation, however, led to conflicts between generations. Children often staged protests at the suggestion that they should sweep the floor or do some other domestic chore. On occasions I heard children demanding why they had to do it. Their
eyes would roll at being told that they had to, and then they would drag their feet in an act of defiance. They wanted to be out with their friends or sitting in front of the television, or anywhere else as long as they did not have to do the work. There were many occasions, however, when children did what they were told with no fuss. Occasionally children did housework without being asked.

Over 90 per cent of children in this study claimed that they did domestic work. This large figure, however, tells us nothing about the extent of their involvement. As a researcher, looking at the lives of children and their work, I tried to be with them and to understand their perspectives of work as much as possible. Nevertheless, when it came to the question of housework, my adult eyes failed me. I was surprised by how little housework most children actually did. At the same time, I understood the sense of frustration from parents when trying to get their children to work around the house. Two fathers, whom I asked if children were doing their share of housework, told me:

*Pai:* No, because most kids are studying, they are reading books. During the night they watch TV. Their parents will buy food for dinner. They do nothing like what the kids had to do in the past (28-year-old man, Si Liam 4/10/96).

*Dara:* No, they don't help. Kids finish school for the day at three but don't get home until six in the evening. In between I don't know where they go (44-year-old man, Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

6.1.1 Boys, girls and housework

The literature on working children indicates major differences between boys and girls in terms of domestic work. Fyfe (1989:25) argued that these differences encourage a sexual dualism and help prepare the adult sexual division in which females are more intensively involved in domestic activities. He saw children's work as a mechanism by which these sex roles are learned and perpetuated. Nag and others (1977:125-130), in a comparison between Javanese and Nepalese villages, also found that girls did more work than boys in almost all age groups. The difference was mainly due to the girls' higher contribution to household maintenance, particularly in food preparation. This was also found by De Tray (1983:447), who showed that young Malaysian girls provided a greater transfer of wealth to parents during their early years at home than did boys. The study claimed that although boys and girls worked about the same labour-force hours, girls worked more non-market hours in the domestic sphere. In Thailand, the situation has been the same, as girls tend to work more in the household than do boys (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:7) as well as having been more likely to be in the labour force (this was the case until 1993) (National Statistical Office various years).

Thai societal conditioning of boys and girls has helped establish this sexual dualism. Piker (1975:100), on the basis of his work in rural central Thailand, argued that girls, and not boys, performed domestic work from an early age. Most girls around the age of five would start to carry out domestic chores and by the ages seven to 10 were so proficient that they were able to make a substantial contribution. This was based on the
belief that females have more capacity and propensity for responsibility. This view was held by many people in my own study, as the following discussions indicate:

Simon: The duties of girls and boys aren’t the same, are they? Do girls have more responsibilities?

Pong: Yes, because they are females, they have to help with housework, cooking, washing clothes. Their parents will tell them what to do and they will do it (57-year-old labour official, Si Liam 1/10/96).

Simon: How do the duties of boys and girls differ?

Jim: Girls have to help with housework, to cook. But boys, they will only help with a little amount.

Simon: Why?

Jim: Boys, they just want to play, but girls are much better at doing work. Girls have to do everything to help their mothers, to wash the clothes, mop the floors and to cook (30-year-old woman, Si Liam 3/10/96).

Young boys in Piker’s (1975:100) study, on the other hand, were able to do what they liked. There was an absence of responsibilities or parental expectations. Boys did not substantially assist in economic activities nor were they expected to assume domestic responsibilities of any magnitude. According to Muecke (1992:898):

Beliefs that boys are mischievous and men irresponsible, whereas girls are dutiful and women, loyal, run deep in Thai society. Such gender differences are assumed to be innate.

Many adults in my study articulated a belief that boys were hopeless, in terms of performing domestic work and taking responsibilities. Answering the question, ‘What do boys do?’, a woman said:

Puk: Each day they don’t do anything except playing takrao and football. They don’t help their parents. They are obstinate. They are only good for one thing and that is to do heavy work such as ploughing the fields, but they don’t do housework. The dishes they don’t do. When they come home from school their mothers will ask them to help. The mothers are tired and they need some help. But the boys will be angry. Girls will help wash the clothes, wash the floors and make things clean (old woman, Ban Nam Suify 30/8/96).

As soon as Thai children can read, this sexual dualism is reinforced. The second reading book for Year 1 students has strong stereotypes of what boys and girls should do in terms of work. The school teacher, asking if the students’ homes are clean, is answered by a girl who claims:

Yes, it is clean, I help my mother sweep and mop the house every day (Thai Department of Education 1977:81).

This image, that girls should do domestic work while boys should undertake more traditional male activities, is constantly reinforced throughout the series of textbooks. In the second reading book for Year 2 primary school children, for example, on returning from school the two main characters of the textbooks help their parents with housework. Mana helps his father in the garden, while Mani helps her mother sweep and mop the
house. She also helps with dinner and her mother lets her boil the drinking water (Thai Department of Education 1978:46).

Parental expectations about what should be done and by whom created conflicts between boys and girls. In the schools, where I volunteered to teach English, it was the girls who protested the loudest about their housework. Over 96 per cent of girls in the study claimed that they did housework. For boys the percentage was statistically significantly lower, but still high at over 90 per cent (Figure 6.1). Unfortunately I have no data measuring how long each child participated in this housework. Considering my observations I believe the difference between boys and girls would be greater than indicated by this figure.

![Figure 6.1 Proportion of children doing housework by sex*](image)

**Notes:**
- N=767.
- * Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.

Girls that I interviewed were well aware of the differences in the work expected of them compared to boys. For example, Aoi, a 15-year-old girl, showed her resentment of the situation:

*Simon:* Does your younger brother help with the housework?

*Aoi:* No, because he likes to play and housework is the duty of girls; it isn't the duty of boys.

*Simon:* Do you like this?

*Aoi:* No, I don't like this. Sometimes I feel angry that my younger brother doesn't have to do anything while I have to do it all the time.

*Simon:* Why do your parents think like this?

*Aoi:* It has been the duty of daughters to do this work from ancient times (Soi Shiwit Rantod 2/10/96).

Boys, although they often claimed that they did more work or more difficult work as it was often heavier, would admit that they tended to do less housework. Asking one boy about the differences between how boys and girls are raised, I was told:
Boys will play a lot, but girls are not naughty, they stay at home helping with family work, they cook (16-year-old boy, Ban Nam Sai 1/9/96).

6.1.2 Differences in housework by age

The extent of claimed involvement in domestic work among the three age groups, 8-12, 13-14 and 15-17 reveals major differences between boys and girls (Figure 6.2). Nearly all girls in all three age groups claimed that they were involved in domestic work resulting in no statistically significant difference among them. Girls learn from an early age that this type of work is their work, as defined by the sexual division of labour.

Figure 6.2 Proportion of boys* and girls doing housework by age

![Figure 6.2](image)

Notes: N=767.

* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.

This figure combines two calculations, boys doing housework by age and then girls.


There was, however, a statistically significant difference among the three age groups of boys. Among the two younger age groups most boys claimed that they were involved in domestic work. In the older age group, however, just over 80 per cent of boys claimed that they helped with domestic work. The lower involvement in this type of work by the older boys indicates a hierarchy in their various forms of work. This is indicated by the fact that over 90 per cent of boys aged 15-17 who were studying claimed that they carried out domestic work, yet only 70 per cent of boys not studying were doing so. Not studying affected girls in a similar way as there was a drop in their involvement in housework, but still 90 per cent of them worked around the house.

6.1.3 Differences in housework by location

There was also a statistically significant difference in the extent to which the children of the four research locations claimed they were doing housework (Figure 6.3). The area with the lowest proportion of children claiming they were doing this work was Si Liam. In terms of material possessions this site was clearly the richest of the four locations. Reflecting this wealth, children were less likely to be working around the house or in
paid employment but instead in their main occupation, education (section 6.3). After being asked what the duties of her daughters were, a woman told me:

*Bom:* Now they don’t really have any duties, because once they finish school for the day it is dark. Also sometimes they have to have special coaching lessons so when they return home they are tired and I don’t want them to do anything. They will play. They don’t have to boil the rice as we have a maid. Hardly ever will they have to do it (42-year-old woman, Si Liam 20/9/96).

This woman was so financially secure that her children did not have to work around the house. Their nati (duty) was not to do housework but to concentrate on their schooling:

*Bom:* They don’t have work but they have a duty. Their duty is to study (42-year-old woman, Si Liam 20/9/96).

![Figure 6.3 Proportion of children doing housework by location*](image)

Notes: N=767.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.

6.2 Religious and cycle-of-life work

The second ‘work’ this chapter analyses to determine ‘which children are working’ is that carried out for religious occasions and events marking the cycle of life. Children actively participate in these two types of work, yet differences exist in their involvement.

6.2.1 Religious work

Important throughout Thailand and Islam is Buddhism. The various wat (temples) played a significant role in the lives of the residents in my research sites. In turn, it was the residents who ensured that each wat functioned. They fed the monks and carried out the work for the ngan wat (temple work, that is temple festivals). The children played a role in this whole process.
6.2.1.1 Donating food and visiting the wat

Children donated food to monks. This is an important form of work as it enables the children to gain merit and it ensures that the wat functions. Monks are dependent on lay people providing food for them.

Although children participate in this religious work, their involvement seems to be declining. The first time I stayed in Ban Nam Jai I was the temple boy. I stayed with the monks in the village wat. One duty that I had was to walk with the monks each morning as they received alms from the villagers. While doing this I was able to count who was donating food. Overwhelmingly women, not men or children, gave food. On my first day at the temple 49 people donated food, of whom 40 were women while only two were children. Once the monks had completed their walk, people would then enter the wat to donate food for the monks. During my stay in the temple the numbers donating food varied, but each day there were only a few children. A woman told me, after I asked her if children were going to the temple these days:

Ploy: Kids tend not to go to the wat as they have to go to school. If they have a chore to do they may go. Sometimes we go, but it is mostly the old who go, and it is us women who go. Men they sometimes go (56-old-woman, Si Liam 1/10/96).

According to the children themselves, there were major differences between boys and girls, their age and where they lived in terms of who was making merit by donating food to the monks and who was visiting the temples. In the questionnaire the children were asked how often they did these two tasks each month. Although there was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in how often they visited the temple, there was a statistically significant difference in how often they made merit. Close to 40 per cent of boys reported that they never did, while the figure for girls was close to half this value. The girls’ greater participation in making merit reflects the division between men and women. Women unable to be ordained as monks need to be involved in other merit-making activities (Kirsch 1996:21).

There was also a statistically significant difference based on age and whether children undertook these two activities. The older the children the less likely they were to be involved in these two activities. Around 45 per cent of children aged 15-17 claimed that during the month they would not donate food to the monks or visit the temple. The figures for the younger groups were much lower with around 25 per cent of both the 8-12 and 13-14 age groups never making merit, and under 20 per cent of them never going to the temple. The older children’s lower participation rate in this work is partly based on the hierarchy of work. Their greater participation in paid work meant that they had less time for this type of work.

There was also a significant statistical difference between children based on where they lived. The children least likely to donate food or visit the temple were those living in the city site, Si Liam. There around 45 per cent of children claimed that they never did these two activities. Life in the city was far more secular than that in the villages. As
noted in Chapter 5, *Wan Pra* (monk’s day) a day of rest from work, was practiced in the villages but not in the city.

These figures are based on questions which asked the children to report how often they made merit and how often they went to the temple. I believe there would have been an element of misreporting with children overestimating how often they did these two tasks. This is because Thai children are taught that donating food to the monks and going to the *wat* are important acts. Around 5 per cent of children claimed that they did these two acts once every three days or more often: however, I did not see this occurring. Given that the children could have over-reported, it is interesting to note the large proportions who claimed that they never donated food to the monks or visited the temple.

One reason why large proportions of children were not donating food to the monks or going to the *wat* was their commitment to other forms of work. Asking one woman if children go to the temple, I was told:

Jim: No, they don’t, they don’t have the time (30-year-old woman, Si Liam 3/10/96).

The majority of children, except on the weekend, simply did not have time to be involved in work associated with the temple. While the monks were receiving alms, they were preparing to go to school. Children in paid employment also did not have time, as they would have been leaving for work. Schooling and paid employment were more important forms of work than religious work for the children.

6.2.1.2 *Ngan wat* (temple work)

During my first stay in Ban Nam Jai the villagers were preparing for an important *ngan wat*. The work started over two months before the day. Adults and particularly older residents carried out most of the work, but children were involved and became more so closer to the event. Old men spent each day in the temple grounds producing baskets, which were to be sold during the festival. At a later stage old women spent their days making special sweets which were to be sold. It was the old who were doing this work as they did not have to go to school, to paid employment or to the rice fields. Closer to the event, other adults who were not in paid employment but were working their rice fields became involved. They participated in a series of working parties in which the temple grounds were cleaned and beautified. With the ending of the school year children were able to participate to a much greater extent. Within the last fortnight before the festival there was a mass production of mobiles that were placed in the *wat*. Children and young teenagers spent hours doing this work. This work had an extra benefit for the young teenagers as both the boys and girls worked together. Answering, ‘who was doing what?’, a woman stated:

Mim: The old women are helping with many things. They make all the things necessary for the festival. You have seen them putting the mobiles in the temple, haven’t you?
The old women, the young girls and the men and women they are all helping with the work.

Simon: What are those under 18 doing?

Mim: They are making merit, they help make all the things for the festival, such as with the mobiles. Everyone does this work depending on how much faith they have. We all want to do this for the wat, we do this so the wat will be beautiful such as with the plastic flowers (31-year-old woman, Ban Nam Ji 23/3/96).

6.2.2 Cycle-of-life work

With the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, many Thais believe in a cycle of life. A person is born, matures, becomes an adult, marries, has children and then dies. After death comes rebirth and then the process continues (Na-Rangsi 1976:12). The markers celebrating this process, birth, marriage and death, involve considerable work in which children participate. The discussion below concentrates on the work children do for the last marker, death.

Children in Thailand, once they can make a useful contribution, todtan bunkhun (repay gratitude) to their parents. As shown in Chapter 4, this repayment can take different forms, such as studying or providing financial assistance. This process can span a whole lifetime as children are expected to pay respect to deceased parents (Knodel et al. 1987:145). Doing so is one of five duties that children have for their parents as taught by Thai Buddhism (Bayutto 1995:224; Chandruang 1969:142).

Showing respect to deceased parents is a major work, traditionally of great importance. While I collected quantitative data in Ban Nam Suui over the Songkran (Thai New Year) celebrations, some families held for their dead parents a ngan sop (work to make merit for the dead). Daughters and sons of the dead parents, whether they were still children or not, spent great effort in ensuring the success of these events. People returned to the village for the first time in years to participate. They had been earning enough money to afford the occasion. One 16-year-old girl, whose father had died a number of years earlier, was in paid employment to earn sufficient money to hold such an event. She said:

Jiab: I want to earn money to give to my mother, as I want to make bun [make merit] for my father April next year.

Simon: How will you make bun?

Jiab: We will make bun by providing food for the monks and we will provide entertainment. There will be molam\(^1\) (Ban Nam Suui 22/8/96).

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\(^1\) Molam is a traditional form of Isarn music. Providing such entertainment could be expensive. According to an organiser of a molam troupe that I interviewed the top of the range, including dancers, could cost up to 50,000 baht (Aus $2,000) for one night. This girl and her mother were not in a position to afford such an expense and were more likely to afford two singers, musicians and maybe a small number of dancers.
A ngan sop requires financial resources and large amounts of physical work. Children of the families organising these events participated in this work. Days before the occasion, children along with parents ensured that everything was organised. The area under the house or the garden, where people would sit, was cleaned. Mats, tables and chairs had to be arranged. A loud speaker system would be set up. Days beforehand, food of various sorts and, in particular, sweets were prepared. The previous day or on the morning of the celebration, often a buffalo or some other animal was slaughtered. This would lead to a working party by all the family members, ensuring the meat dishes were made. During the ngan sop children took an active role in serving the monks and ensuring that their needs were met. Once the monks had left, the children continued with their work, welcoming guests and providing them with food and drink for the rest of their stay. Ngan sop is work of great importance, in which children are actively involved.

All of the children from the families involved in the ngan sop that I attended, were working. Yet divisions existed in their work, as there were gender-specific tasks. This is portrayed in the second reading book for Year 2 primary school children:

Mana helps his uncle arrange the table with the Buddha figure and gets ready the bottles, glasses, the spittoons, and the tea for the offerings for the monks.

Mani helps her older female relative with the blooming flowers and the vase for the incense sticks which will be placed on top of the table with the Buddha figure.

The father and the other male relatives prepare for the religious rituals. Some are getting ready to give food to the monks. Others are preparing for where the monks will sit.

The mother and the other female relatives are helping each other in the kitchen. They are getting ready the food for the monks and the others who will come for the ritual.

The mother gets Mani to help wash the vegetables. She chops the onions and garlic, and helps to take the food to the adults who are making the offerings (Thai Department of Education 1978:87-88).

6.3 Children’s main work: education

Children’s main form of work in the research sites was study. Only one other form of work, namely housework, had a greater proportion of children involved in it. However, in terms of hours spent at school and the importance that both children and their parents gave to it, education was clearly children’s main work. Figure 6.4 illustrates to which the children of the research sites were studying, combining study with paid work, in paid work, and yuu ban suu suu (staying at home with no paid work). Children’s main work was study with over 80 per cent of them, including both boys and girls, in school.

The extent that boys and girls combined studying with other activities varied, as there was a statistically significant difference between them in their current activity.

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2 The importance of education as children’s main form of work and its relationship to ‘child labour’ is explored in detail in Chapter 9.
There were more girls in school who were not in paid employment, while more boys were combining the two activities. Further, there were more boys in paid employment than girls, leaving slightly more girls than boys not in school and not in paid employment. The higher proportion of girls doing nothing could be accounted for by their greater involvement in housework. Despite these differences between boys and girls there was no statistically significant difference between them in the likelihood that they were studying. Thus, combining those studying while earning money and those just studying eliminated the statistical difference shown in Figure 6.4.

As expected, the age group with the highest proportion studying was those below the compulsory education age limit. Close to 100 per cent of children aged 8-12 were in school (Figure 6.4). In Ban Nam Jai there was one 11-year-old boy who was not studying, as he had cancer and was seeking treatment. In Soi Shiwit Rantod there were three children aged 8-12 not studying. This included a 9-year-old girl who was physically unable of studying, a 10-year-old girl who claimed her parents refused her permission to study and a 12-year-old boy who told me he had a criminal record and was banned from school. Of those aged 13-14 close to 90 per cent were studying. Yet, among those aged 15-17 over 50 per cent were not studying. Thus, there was a major divide between children younger than 15 and those older. The younger children’s work was studying, while half of the older children had other forms of work.

There was a statistically significant difference among the different research sites in the extent of children’s involvement in the different types of activities (Figure 6.4). The one location that was markedly different was Soi Shiwit Rantod, the slum, which had just under 70 per cent of the children studying, well below the other sites.

Around 7 per cent of children were combining schooling with paid work. This was more common for boys, with close to 10 per cent of them doing so. Only 4 per cent of girls combined the two activities. The location furthest away from the city, Ban Nam Suiy, had the highest proportion of children combining the two activities, with close to 13 per cent of children combining the two. In the second village, around 6 per cent of children were doing so. The children from these two villages in paid employment while studying were overwhelmingly working in farming (Chapter 7). In the city, however, with no farming work, only around 2 per cent of children combined the two tasks in Si Liam, while not one child was doing so in the slum.
Figure 6.4 Current primary activity by sex*, age*, and location*

Notes: N=767.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
This figure excludes all unpaid work, except schooling.
6.4 Working in the labour force

The last form of children’s work to be analysed in this chapter is that which occurs in the labour force. This is the focus of most ‘child labour’ studies as it is the type of work people are concerned with when arguing that children should not work. This section of the chapter will answer the question: ‘Which children were doing this type of work?’.

6.4.1 What is meant by working in the labour force?

Attempting to measure the extent that children work within the labour force is fraught with difficulties. Are they part of the workforce if they work only one hour a week or is that too short a time? If so, how many hours do they have to work before they can be considered part of the labour force? Do they have to be paid? If so, what of all the unpaid work that children do, such as farming? The National Statistical Office (NSO) (various years) defines children as part of the Thai workforce if they were not in the education system and during the survey week they

- worked for at least one hour for wages, profits, dividends or any other kind of payment, in cash or in kind, or
- worked for at least one hour without pay in business enterprises or on farms owned or operated by household heads or members.

Taking this definition, both paid and unpaid workers are part of the labour force.

6.4.2 Unpaid labour-force work

In Thailand the most common form of labour-force work for children was unpaid work, and particularly so in rural areas. Children worked on farms and in shops run by family members. The extent of this work varied from full-time to a minor activity after school. Some children who had only completed six years of education were working on the family farm as a full-time job. They were likely to do this until they gained paid employment. At the other extreme, some children’s involvement in unpaid work consisted of serving customers in the family shop when an adult member of the family was occupied. This type of work occurred out of school hours and would only occur if the child happened to be there.

NSO (National Statistical Office 1987-1997) figures (Figure 6.5) indicate that there has been a dramatic decline in this type of work. From 1988 to 1996 the decline was fivefold. The figures also indicate that usually more boys than girls have done this type of work. Most of this work was in farming.
6.4.3 Paid work and problems in defining it

This study has focused mainly on paid work, because paid work was the focus of the questionnaire and many of my interviews, and children themselves defined their participation in the workforce in terms of paid employment. The reasons why the children defined those activities for which they received money as work are many. In part, it was due to my own preconceived ideas of work. Because of my Western perceptions, I did not include questions in the questionnaire about work connected to religious events or the cycle of life. To gain information about children’s involvement in these types of work I was dependent on observations and in-depth interviews. A second reason for the children’s definition of work being based on money was that the questionnaire was written in Thai and not in the local Isam dialect, which has no script. Thus the focus of the questionnaire was on the Thai word for ‘work’ ngan, which for many Isam speakers meant paid work (Chapter 5). A consequence was that children did not mention their involvement in unpaid work such as on the family’s farm. A further reason why children volunteered their paid employment as work was that for many children this was their most ‘important’ work. As noted in Chapter 4 paid work can be an important transition rite, in which children become to be seen as adults.

Although the children gave details of their paid work, not all forms of such work were mentioned. For example, the children of Soi Shiwit Rantod did not report, in the questionnaire, their involvement in going through piles of garbage to collect used paper to sell at a recycling centre. On my visits to Soi Shiwit Rantod I would see children going to collect paper: when I interviewed these children and asking specifically about
this work, they did tell me about it. However, it is unclear why the children did not mention this work in the questionnaire. It could have been because they did it rarely, or they themselves did not regard the activity as work, or they felt that the interviewers were not interested in such activities. Or, and more likely still, it was a form of work that was socially and personally embarrassing.

One other work that some children may have been doing, and which no one mentioned while answering the questionnaire, was selling their bodies. I was told by residents and non-residents of Soi Shiwit Rantod that some boys and girls from the slum were prostitutes. Asking a girl from Soi Shiwit Rantod, asked if there were children who were prostitutes said:

*Ai*: Yes, most of them would do it at the pubs and bars but no one is doing it here in the Soi.

*Simon*: Do you know those selling their bodies?

*Ai*: I know their names. I know their faces because we use to be friends when we were small kids (15-year-old girl, Soi Shiwit Rantod 2/10/96).

Discussing whether there were prostitutes in Khon Kaen, a girl from Si Liam claimed:

*Jit*: Yes, they are around the Khon Kaen spirit house, next to Hi-tech [a popular discotheque]. There would be many kids selling their bodies. They would be aged around 12 to 14. They don’t let kids under 18 enter Hi-tech but those aged 13 to 14 will wait outside. They sometimes will go off to sleep with those who want to have sex. They will be from Soi Shiwit Rantod (12-year-old girl, Si Liam 1/10/96).

Children, in the other research sites, could also have been involved in this industry. It is understandable that no child mentioned this as those who were prostitutes were unlikely to volunteer such information.

**6.4.4 Which children were working for money?**

According to the information that the children provided, one in five of them was working for money. Unlike other forms of children’s work, that was necessary for their communities’ survival, paid work was a more discrete activity. Far fewer children were involved in it than other forms of work. Although there were fewer children doing this type of work, there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls, among different age groups, and among children living in the different locations (Figure 6.6).
Figure 6.6 In paid work or not, by sex*, age*, and location*

Notes: N=767.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
6.4.4.1 Sex differences in working for money

In Thailand sex differences among children in the labour force have existed in the past. Archavanitkul and Havanon (1990:16) using labour force data showed that previously more girls than boys were working in the Thai labour force. They stated that, in 1983, among children aged 12-14 in municipal areas, the percentage of girls in the labour force was 10 per cent, double that of boys. In non-municipal areas the number of children in the labour force was greater with 31 per cent of girls and 27 per cent of boys involved. This trend was confirmed by the 1993 NSO Labor Force Survey (National Statistical Office various years) which, although based on a slightly different age group of 13-14, indicated that in municipal areas 13 per cent of girls and 8.8 per cent of boys were working.

Not only were there more girls than boys in the Thai workforce but they seemed to be in greater demand. Archavanitkul and Havanon (1990:22) indicated that the demand employers placed at employment agencies was higher for girls than for boys. Possibly because girls were perceived to be more obedient less likely to escape and, therefore, would work longer. Government raids rescuing illegal child workers between 1978 and 1982 discovered 585 girls and only 55 boys (Thanapoboon, 1987 quoted in Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:22). This distribution could have reflected the fact that girl workers were located in factories while boys were more likely to be distributed throughout the workforce.

There can, however, be little doubt that there were more girls than boys in the labour force. Archavanitkul and Havanon (1990:16) argued that since fewer girls than boys continued their education to a higher level, they were more likely to enter the labour market before boys of the same age. Richter and Ard-am (1989:28), in their study of working children in a Thai fishing community, found that some girls were taking jobs so that a sibling could stay in school, and that this child was likely to be a younger brother.

Despite past differences between the number of boy and girl workers, recent data (Figure 6.6 from my study, and Figure 6.7 for Thailand as a whole) indicate that the trend has been reversed. By 1994 there were more boys than girls in the labour force and this continued up to 1996, the year of my study.

Disaggregating the data into those who were in paid and unpaid employment indicates that more girls than boys tended to be in the paid workforce. Figure 6.8 indicates that, for all years except for 1988 and 1995, girls outnumbered boys. The figures for 1988 are curious as they indicate a marked increase of boys in paid employment and a marked decline for girls. The next year, however, showed a reverse of this trend.
Figure 6.7 Proportion of boys and girls aged 13-14 within the Thai labour force; 1984-96

Note: Data for 1984-85 have been adjusted to account for the fact that for those years data were collected for children aged 11-14 as a whole. The adjustment was calculated from the 1986 figures. In this year data were collected for those aged 11-12 and those aged 13-14. For the younger group, boys represented 6 per cent and girls represented 9 per cent, of those in the workforce for the combined 11-14 age group. Thus the figures for the 1984-85 period have been adjusted assuming that those aged 13-14 represented 94 per cent for boys and 91 per cent for girls of the 11-14 group in the workforce.

Source: National Statistical Office (various years).

Figure 6.8 Numbers of children aged 13-14 in paid employment within the Thai labour force

In my own study boys were more likely to be working for money than girls with nearly a quarter of them doing so compared to 16 per cent of girls. This sex difference is interesting, as it contradicts the above-mentioned studies on working children in Thailand. This difference is explained, in part, by 3 factors. First, in contrast to some studies my data include children working in agriculture, in which more boys work than girls (Chapter 7). Second, the data include children in paid employment while studying, which is not the case for the NSO labour force data. Finally, the data was collected in 1996 after a dramatic period of rapid economic change in Thai society in which the lives of boys and girls were transformed (Chapter 8). By this year girls outnumbered boys in the Thai and Changwat Khon Kaen education systems (Chapter 9). These changes could account for why more boys than girls were in paid employment.

6.4.4.2 Working for money and differences by age

The age at which children first start paid work is of great interest. This study interviewed children aged 8-17 (Chapter 2), so the youngest possible child in paid employment was aged eight. One boy and one girl of this age working for money. In the interview children were also asked at what age they started paid work. Three children claimed that they did so when they were 4 years old, 12 children claimed they had worked when they were 5 years old, seven children claimed they had when they were 6 years old and 36 children claimed they were in paid employment when they were 7 years old. These ages are very low, but are not unusual in studies on working children (Chapter 2).

Rural children started paid employment earlier than children in the urban areas. On average, children in the two villages, Ban Nam Jai and Ban Nam Suiy, started paid work when they were only 9.7 years old. The majority of this work would have been part-time work as the children were combining this work with schooling (Chapter 7). In the urban areas, Khon Kaen and Bangkok, the average starting age was 13. In the study there were 28 children who started their first paid employment in Bangkok. These children had the highest age of starting their first employment, 14.1 years. Age 13 was the limit of compulsory education, allowing a number of these children working in urban areas to be working full-time. There were also 37 children who started their first employment not in the two villages or in an urban area. The majority of these children was working in neighbouring communities of the two villages and had a higher age of starting work, compared to other village children. Their average age of starting paid employment was 12.

Girls, on average, started paid work before boys: at 10.8 years of age compared to 10.9 years of age for the boys. This difference, however, was only slight and was not statistically significant. However, for children who started paid work within urban areas, namely Khon Kaen and Bangkok, there was a significant difference, with girls on average starting their first paid employment one whole year earlier than boys. Their average age of starting paid employment was 12.5, while for boys it was 13.5. On the
other hand, in the two villages, Ban Nam Jai and Ban Nam Suiv, boys at 9.6 years of age started their first job slightly earlier than girls, at 9.7 years, but the difference was not significant. A possible explanation for these differences were the greater involvement of boys in non-paid positions, namely farming, and the greater involvement of girls in paid employment within the Thai labour force (Figures 6.5 and 6.8).

Probability of working also differed among children based on age. Of children aged 8-12 less than 7 per cent were in paid employment. The proportion for children 13-14 was close to 12 per cent, but for children 15-17 it was around 44 per cent. In this study there was a progression: older children were more likely to be working for money. Further differences, based on children's age and their type of paid work, their hours, and their wages are discussed in Chapter 7.

6.4.4.3 Working for money and differences by location

Children in Ban Nam Suiv were the most likely to be working for money, with over a quarter doing so. This was followed by the other village, Ban Nam Jai, where 21 per cent of children were in paid employment. The involvement in agricultural work, particularly among the younger children, accounts for a good proportion of this work (Chapter 7). Children in the city were least likely to be working for money: 87 per cent of children in Si Liam and 90 per cent in the slum, Soi Shiwit Rantod, were not working. The low proportion of children working in the slum is surprising, as they were one group who needed extra money. This can, in part, be explained by their involvement in paid work unmentioned in the questionnaire, such as recycling paper or as prostitutes.

6.4.5 Children's work history

Although only 20 per cent of children were working for money at the time of the interview, over 66 per cent of children were working or had done so. There was a statistically significant difference by sex, age, and location for those who were working, had worked and had never worked (Figure 6.9). This division into present and past work will be called the work history of the children. This work history reveals changing working practices in the research sites, which mirrored changes that occurred in Thailand as a whole.

The major difference between boys and girls, in their work history, was that a higher proportion of boys was in paid employment. As noted above there was a statistically significantly difference between the two sexes in this activity. There was, however, a greater proportion of girls who had worked, 48 per cent compared to 44 per cent of boys. Combining those who were working and those who had worked, there was still a greater proportion of boys currently or ever involved in paid work. As a result there was a greater proportion of girls who claimed that they had never worked for money.
These results confirm the findings of the national surveys. Previously more girls than boys in Thailand were in the labour force but by the time I collected data for this thesis boys outnumbered girls (Figure 6.7). Dramatic changes in Thai society had led to more girls than boys studying in Thailand and Changwat Khon Kaen (Chapter 9). Girls’ past paid work was being replaced by the unpaid work, study, both in the country as a whole and in the research sites.

There were major differences among the three age groups in their work history (Figure 6.9). Close to half of all children aged 8-12 had never worked. The proportion of children aged 13-14 who had never worked was close to one-third and for children aged 15-17 only 17 per cent had never worked for money. It is interesting to note that the proportion of children who had worked for money was greater for both the 8-12 and 13-14 age groups than those aged 15-17. A large proportion, over 45 per cent, of children aged 8-12 claimed that they had worked for money; over three-quarters of these children were working or had worked in farming. For children aged 13-14 close to 60 per cent claimed that they had worked for money. Over 70 per cent of these children were working or had also worked in farming. The high proportion of younger children who had worked is accounted for by part-time work, often in school holidays and usually in farming. Once school started they left their work for the classrooms.

Children in Si Liam were far more likely to have never worked for money than any other group of children (Figure 6.9). Close to two-thirds of children in Si Liam had never worked, while in the three other locations only about 20 per cent of children had never worked. Except for children who had migrated from the countryside the city children had no opportunity to work in farming, the main source of work for younger children (Chapter 7).

Even though Soi Shiwit Rantod had the lowest proportion of children of any location who were in paid employment, it had the highest proportion of children who had worked for money in the past. This would indicate that these children were keen to earn money but had worked in occupations that were short-lived, or their employers may have been regarded them as unreliable workers. Residents surrounding the slum had strong negative feelings towards children from Soi Shiwit Rantod.
Figure 6.9 Work history, by sex*, age*, and location*

Notes:  N=767.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
6.4.6 Differences between this study and national figures

Given that I have used the children’s own definition of work, it is important to note the disparity between this study and the data collected by the NSO. Although this study indicates that 12 per cent of children aged 13-14 were working, and that this was 1 per cent below the figure for Isarn children, according to the NSO (various years), there were major differences in the two findings. In reality the extent of children working in this study was far greater than that measured by the NSO. This is because the above-mentioned children were in paid work, while the NSO figures include unpaid work. In 1996 only 15 per cent of working children aged 13-14 in Isarn were paid workers (National Statistical Office 1987-1997).

There are reasons for this large disparity between the two studies. It has been shown elsewhere that official figures on working children tend to be quite low and do not indicate the true extent of children in the labour force (Bessell 1995:3). According to Boyden (1991:26), official surveys and censuses often do not record children’s work if they are studying. In this study data were collected on the paid employment of students. Also, according to Boyden the illegality of children’s work makes people reluctant to reveal its existence, thus reducing the recorded number of working children. Official surveys tend to be targeted at adults who often deny or ignore the extent that children work. This is because they do not perceive it as work, are hesitant to admit it due to legal restrictions, or are conscious that they would prefer their children not to be working and therefore underplay their involvement to outsiders. Boyden claimed, however, that in surveys that ask children and not adults, as in my own study, the reported incidence of children’s work is consistently higher. She felt this could be either because children tend to be less aware of the legal restrictions, or, more likely, because they were proud of their economic role and want it to be recognised.

6.5 Models to determine who were in paid work

To determine why certain children were working for money while others were not, six models were created. These were: a ‘parent model’, a ‘child model’, an ‘economic model’, a ‘family model’, an ‘education model’, and a ‘grand model’. The most important variables from the first five models were entered into the ‘grand model’ to determine which factors were most important in determining which children were in paid work.

6.5.1 Tree regression analysis

The technique used for these models is called ‘tree regression analysis’. It uses the computer package ‘Splus’ to search for the most important variable dividing the children in the sample into those who were working for money and those who were not. The technique then builds on the first divide by successively splitting the data set into
increasingly homogeneous subsets of those children in paid employment and those not. This process continues until no further divide can be made or the N value becomes too small (Statistical Sciences 1991:0-34).

At each divide in Figures 6.10 to 6.15 the name of the variable, the number of children at that divide, and the proportion of these children in paid work are given. At each division the children less likely to be working are presented on the left-hand side of the divide and those more likely to be working on the right-hand side. Each figure is a simplified version of the output, as it only shows the first three levels of the analysis. Depending on the level of complexity desired and the number of variables entered into the analysis, a multi-level output can be achieved.

6.5.2 ‘Parent model’

The ‘parent model’ is the first model presented as parental characteristics are the first factors that are likely to influence the likelihood that children were working for money. The following variables were used: father’s age, where the father was born, father’s education, father’s occupation, where the father spent most of last year, where the father had lived most of his life, mother’s age, where the mother was born, mother’s education, mother’s occupation, where the mother spent most of last year, where the mother had lived most of her life, and the language that the parents spoke (Thai or Isarn).

The most important variable was where the father had lived the most (Figure 6.10). Although 20 per cent of children were working for money, only 5 per cent of children were working if their fathers had lived most of their lives in Khon Kaen, elsewhere in Isarn, except for in the two villages Ban Nam Jai, and Ban Nam Suji and the surrounding areas around Ban Nam Suji. However, children whose fathers had lived most of their lives in the two villages and surroundings, in Bangkok or the rest of Thailand were far more likely to work. Over a quarter of such children were in paid employment.

As indicated by this model the group most likely to be working were those children who were a subset of the second set of fathers. This subset had as a group: no mothers, or mothers aged 35-54 or over 60. This group was further divided into those mothers who only completed Year 2-3 or Year 8, or who did not detail their educational background. Of these children over two-thirds were working for money.

De Tray (1983:445) argued that parental desire for monetary transfers from their children is likely to be higher for young parents, to be low when parents are in their peak earning ages and to increase as parent productivity falls in old age. Looking at the mothers and the proportion of children working in this study, no such relation existed. Younger mothers were less likely to have children working for money. The main reason for this is that younger mothers were more likely to have younger children, who were less likely than older children to be in paid work. Even though young parents may have
greater parental desires for monetary transfers than older parents their children being younger are more likely to be studying and not be in a position to earn money.

6.5.3 ‘Child model’

In the ‘child model’ seven variables were used: age of the child in years, sex of the child, where they were born, where they had lived the most, where they had lived the most the year before the interview took place, and where the children were living at the time of the interview.

The most important variable in the ‘child model’ was the age of the child. Figure 6.11 shows that, although 20 per cent of children were working for money, only 9 per cent of children aged 8-14 were doing so. On the other hand, over 43 per cent of children aged 15-17 were working. The majority of children were starting paid work not when they were 12 but at 15. This is an important finding, as the ‘child labour’ literature pinpoints age 12 as significant for when children make the decision to continue with their education or to enter the workforce: ‘... in most countries and occupations the greatest work transition for children takes place at about 12 years of age, when work intensity increases significantly’ (Boyden 1994:23).

The next most important variable, after age, was where the children had lived the most. Children aged 8-14 who had lived most of their lives in Ban Nam Suiy, in other parts of Changwat Khon Kaen (that is, not in Amphoe Muang Khon Kaen and Amphoe Yai), and other parts of Thailand (excluding Bangkok) were more likely to be working than children of the same age who had lived elsewhere. In the first group 15 per cent of children were working compared to 5 per cent of the other children.

Although 43 per cent of children aged 15-17 were working, only 22 per cent of children of this age who had lived most of their lives in Khon Kaen, other Amphoe Yai, and other parts of Thailand were doing so. This level was half the proportion of children who were working in the same age group and who had lived most of their lives in Ban Nam Jai, Ban Nam Suiy, other areas of Changwat Khon Kaen, and other parts of Isarn.

6.5.4 ‘Economic model’

Poverty is seen by many writers as the overriding reason why children enter the labour force. This is the case in Thai ‘child labour’ studies, which pinpoint poverty as the major reason why children work (Banpasirichote 1995:5; Bond 1982:2; Chavalitnitikul 1988:54; Petchprasert 1985:4; Richter & Ard-am 1989:32; TDSC Staff 1989:21; Wun’Gaeo 1985:3). It is seen as the factor that forces children into the workforce as they and their families need money.

3 Amphoe Yai is a pseudonym given to protect the identity of the research site.
Measuring the economic well-being of children and their families, however, is fraught with difficulties. Is it based on income, and if so which member of the household or members’ income should be measured? Although certain members may be earning more than others, they may be contributing less to household expenses, instead spending their money on alcohol, as an example. How can you measure income in a rural setting where many families are dependent on the sale of a crop? Instead of income, this study uses a series of variables that are taken as a proxy for wealth. The variables used in the study were: amount of land the family owned, the number of rooms in the house, who owned the residence, economic position of the family (a self-reporting five-point scale from ‘barely able to survive’ to ‘well to do’), whether the family in the past year were not able to buy the daily necessities, whether household members missed a meal due to a lack of money, whether the household had a television, a video, a refrigerator, a radio, a bicycle, a motorcycle, a car, what type of stove was used for cooking, whether the household subscribed to a newspaper, the type of water system used, and whether the family had difficulties buying school supplies, books or school uniforms.

Caution is needed in reading the results of the ‘economic model’. The results of the first subset, ‘the number of rooms’, is in fact a divide between children living with an adult and those not living with an adult (Figure 6.12).

As noted in Chapter 2, 35 children were living without an adult or were living with an employer. The adult questionnaire was not used in these cases and thus there are some missing data connected to these children. If the variable ‘number of rooms’ is removed, the model created is very similar, except that the variable ‘whether they own their house’ appears. This variable is similar to that of ‘number of rooms’ in that it was not asked to the children questionnaire. This indicates that these 35 children had distinct socioeconomic characteristics. They tended to be concentrated in the city in Si Liam or in the village Ban Nam Suiy and most of them were working. This shows that without adult economic support children in this study were working.

6.5.5 ‘Family model’

The need for children to work for money is likely to be influenced by familial power structures. To test this, 12 variables were used to create the ‘family model’. These were: whom the child was living with, number of adults (those 18 years and over) in the household, relation of child to head of household, whether the child had migrated, birth order of the child, number of older children, older boys and older girls (under 18) in the household, number of younger children, younger boys and younger girls in the household, and the number of children in the household.

The most important variable, in the ‘family model’, was whom the child was living with (Figure 6.13). Only 16 per cent of children living with both parents, with just the father or just the mother, with grandparents, other relatives, with siblings (three cases) or at the temple (one case), were working for money. This compared to over 80
per cent of children living alone, with friends, with their partner (one case), employer or with other members of the village (one case). In this model the group of children least likely to work were those in households with two or fewer adults and who were living with both parents or with either their father or mother. Of these children just over 10 per cent were working for money.

These findings indicate that the role of adults in ensuring the financial security of children is important. Most likely to be working were those children not living with a related adult. Caution must be exercised, however, as the older the child the more likely they were to be working and also the more likely that they would not be living with a related adult. Overall, there were seven children living alone, five of whom were in the 15-17 age group. Also, 29 of the 30 children living with friends and two out of the three children living with an employer were in this age group.

Creating a ‘family model’ separately for all three age groups confirmed the importance of whom the child was living with in determining if they were in paid work. Of children aged 8-12 only 7 per cent were in paid work, yet this declined to 5 per cent for those who with living with their parents, other relative or their siblings. For these children, however, who were living with their grandparents the proportion working increased to 17 per cent. Of children aged 13-14 only 12 per cent of were in paid work, yet for those living by themselves, with friends, grandparents or with an employer the proportion was 43 per cent. For children 15-17, 43 per cent were working, yet if they were living by themselves, with friends, an employer or other people in the village 81 per cent of them were in paid employment.

A second important finding from this ‘family model’ is that children from households without the father present were not in the high working group. The ‘child labour’ literature claims that children in female-headed households tend to be worse off than those children with two parents, as they are likely to be participate more often in domestic or income-producing work (Goddard & White 1982:471). De Tray (1983:447) in his study in Malaysia found that children of single mothers participated in labour market activities much more frequently than children of currently married mothers. He believed that this was evidence for parents perceiving children to be an insurance policy. Mothers who, for whatever reason, had lost their husbands turned to their children for help. Asra (1994:65) in his Indonesian investigation had similar results. He found that marital status of the household head was related to the likelihood of whether children were working: a higher percentage of working children was found in female-headed households.

Despite the findings of other studies, children from female-headed households in this study were not a high-risk group for being in paid employment. There were 39 children from the 767 who were living with their mother but not with their father. This could have been because of the death of the father, divorce or separation, or because the father was working elsewhere at the time of the survey. Of these children only four, or 10 per cent, were working for money. This was below half the level of children working for money in the study. From this study, however, it is not possible to tell whether these
mothers were temporary or permanently separate from their husbands. Their men could have been elsewhere earning money at the time of the survey. Despite that, the low proportion of children from single mothers is impressive and deserves future detailed study.

6.5.6 'Education model'

Education is seen as a solution to 'child labour' (Chapter 9). While studying, children can work for money only before and after school or at weekends. To see what impact education was having on whether the children of the research sites were working for money, an 'education model' was created. There was only one variable that was entered into this model: whether the child was studying or not. Of those children studying fewer than 10 per cent were working for money, while two-thirds of the children not studying were doing so (Figure 6.14).

6.5.7 'Grand model'

The 'grand model' uses the variables that had the most impact in each of the previous models; 17 variables were entered into this model. From the 'parent model', they were: where the father had lived the most, mother’s age, level of mother’s education, and father’s age. From the 'child model' the variables were: age of the child, sex of the child, where the child had lived the most, where the child was born, and where the child spent most of the previous year. The economic variables used were: number of rooms, type of stove used for cooking, amount of land owned, and the water system the household was using. From the 'family model', the variables used were: whom the child was living with, number of adults in the household, and relation of the child to the head of the household. Finally, the one variable from the 'education model' 'whether the child was studying' was entered.

The 'grand model' indicates that two simple questions can determine which children of the research sites were in paid employment: first, whether the children were studying, and second, whom were they living with. Despite this study’s attempt to take into consideration as many variables as possible the above two questions were the most important. Of all the variables entered into the model these two variables had the most influence on the likelihood that children were working.

The most important variable, from the questionnaire, determining whether the child was working for money or not, was whether the child was ‘studying’ (Figure 6.15). As noted in the section on the ‘education model’, 9 per cent of children studying were in paid employment, while 66 per cent of those not studying were working for money. The economic boom conditions that continued up to 1996 in Thailand (Chapter 8) have allowed more children to continue with their study (Chapter 9). The norm for the children of the research sites by 1996 was to study until they were 15 years old. This finding suggests that to reduce the number children in the labour force, policy makers should increase the ability of families to send their children to school.
The variable ‘studying’, is not simply an educational variable. To some extent it also indicates the age of the children and their socioeconomic background. As noted earlier in the chapter, there is a strong relationship between age and whether the children were studying. In Changwat Khon Kaen the majority of children were studying until they were 15. In the ‘grand model’ if the variable ‘studying’ is removed the most important variable becomes ‘age’ while little else changes.

The group least likely to be working for money, as illustrated by the ‘grand model’, were those children who had lived most of their lives outside of Ban Nam Suiy or other parts of Thailand and who were studying. Only 5 per cent of them were working for money. The group of children, however, most likely to be working for money were those living alone, with friends, with other relatives (that is, not with their parents, grandparents or other siblings) or with an employer and who were not studying. From this group a massive 98 per cent were in paid employment.

It is important to note that the sex of the children did not play a role in the ‘grand’ or the ‘child model’. Although there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls, with boys more likely to be in paid employment, once other variables were considered, through the creation of the ‘grand model’, this difference was not important. Further, creating separate models for both boys and girls indicated that the models were similar with the variable ‘studying’ being the most important.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the answer to the question, ‘Which children are working?’ differs depending on the type of work and the characteristics of the children. The extent of children’s involvement in domestic, religious, cycle-of-life, schooling, unpaid, and paid work differed by the sex, age, and location of the child.

Although the extent of involvement in the various types of work varied by sex, age, and location other variables were more important in determining whether children were in paid employment. The two most important variables were whether the children were studying, and with whom were they living. If children were not studying they were far more likely to be working for money. The probability that children were studying was influenced by their age. The older the child the less likely that they were in school. Thus age did have an indirect impact on whether children were involved in this work. Those children who were not studying and not living with a related adult were far more likely to be working than other children.

The chapter also indicates that, although there are many types of children’s work, there is a hierarchy with schooling and paid work being the most important. These two acts took precedence over other types of work. Children in school were less likely to participate in domestic work or work related to religious concerns. According to Knodel and others (1987:118): ‘...children are generally seen to be less helpful in doing household chores and in contributing to the family’s economic activities, in large part as a result of increased school attendance’.
Those children in paid employment were also less likely to be involved in these other types of work. Of these two types of work there was a clear divide, with those studying tending not to be in paid employment. With increased levels of education attainment and a decreasing involvement in paid employment, education is becoming Thai children’s main work.
Figure 6.10 'Parent model': Proportion working

All children
N=767
20% of N were working

Father lived most (1)
N=216
5% of N were working

Father lived most (2)
N=551
26% of N were working

Mother's age (3)
N=126
10% of N were working

Mother's age (4)
N=425
31% of N were working

Mother's education (5)
N=407
29% of N were working

Mother's education (6)
N=18
67% of N were working
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables used in 'parent model'</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Father's age</td>
<td>(1) Khon Kaen, Other Amphoe Khon Kaen, Other Changwat Khon Kaen, and Other Isarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Father has lived where most of his life</td>
<td>(2) No father, Ban Nam Jai, Ban Nam Suiy, Other Amphoe Yai, Bangkok, and other Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Father's education</td>
<td>(3) 20-34, and 55-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Father's occupation</td>
<td>(4) No mother, 35-54 and 60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Father lived where most in the past year</td>
<td>(5) Finished years 4-7, 9-10, and University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mother's age</td>
<td>(6) No mother, finished years 2-3, Year 8 and Missing data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mother has lived where most of her life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Mother's education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mother's occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Mother lived where most in the past year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Language spoken at home, Thai or Isarn (Laotian)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6.11 ‘Child model’: Proportion working

All children
N=767
20% of N were working

Aged 8-14
N=515
9% of N were working

Lived most (1)
N=322
5% of N were working

Born where (5)
N=178
12% of N were working

Aged 15-17
N=252
43% of N were working

Lived most (2)
N=193
15% of N were working

Born where (6)
N=15
47% of N were working

Lived most (3)
N=69
22% of N were working

Was where most last year (7)
N=62
37% of N were working

Lived most (4)
N=183
51% of N were working

Was where most last year (8)
N=121
59% of N were working
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables used in the ‘child model’</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age of child</td>
<td>(1) Khon Kaen, Ban Nam Jai, Other Amphoe Khon Kaen, Other Amphoe Yai, Other Isarn, and Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sex of child</td>
<td>(2) Ban Nam Suiy, Other Changwat Khon Kaen, and Other Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Child lived where most</td>
<td>(3) Khon Kaen, Other Amphoe Yai, and Other Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Born where</td>
<td>(4) Ban Nam Jai, Ban Nam Suiy, Other Changwat Khon Kaen, and Other Isarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Living where at time of survey</td>
<td>(5) Khon Kaen, Ban Nam Jai, Ban Nam Suiy, Other Amphoe Yai, and Other Changwat Khon Kaen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lived where the most the previous year</td>
<td>(6) Other Isarn, Bangkok, and Other Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7) Ban Nam Suiy, and Other Isarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8) Khon Kaen, Ban Nam Jai, Other Changwat Khon Kaen, and Other Thailand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6.12 ‘Economic model’: Proportion working

All children
N=767
20% of N were working

Number of rooms (1)
N=732
18% of N were working

Have gas cooker
N=214
8% of N were working

Other cookers (3)
N=518
22% of N were working

Number of rooms (6)
N=260
17% of N were working

Number of rooms (7)
N=258
27% of N were working

Number of rooms (2)
N=35
60% of N were working

Water system (4)
N=18
28% of N were working

Water system (5)
N=17
94% of N were working
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables used in the 'economic model'</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Amount of land in <em>rai</em> (unit of area equal to 1,600</td>
<td>(1) 1-6 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square metres)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Number of rooms</td>
<td>(2) Children who had no parent living with them were not asked this question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Who owns the home</td>
<td>(3) No stove, Charcoal, and Electric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Economic position of the family</td>
<td>(4) Well water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Able to afford the daily necessities</td>
<td>(5) Rain water, and Piped water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Missed a meal due to lack of money</td>
<td>(6) 2-5 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Have a TV</td>
<td>(7) 1 room and 3 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Have a video</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Have a refrigerator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Have a radio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have a bicycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Have a motorcycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Have a car</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Type of stove used for cooking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Whether household subscribes to a newspaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Water system used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Difficulty of buying school supplies or books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Difficulty of buying school uniforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6.13 'Family model': Proportion working

All children
N=767
20% of N were working

Live with (1)
N=724
16% of N were working

Live with (2)
N=43
81% of N were working

Live with (3)
N=632
14% of N were working

Live with (4)
N=92
30% of N were working

2 or less adults in household
N=366
11% of N were working

3 or more adults in household
N=266
20% of N were working
### Variables used in the 'family model' | Notes
---|---
1. Child living with whom | (1) Both parents, Father, Mother, Grandparents, Other relatives, Siblings, and At the temple
2. Number of adults (those over 18) in household | (2) Alone, Friends, Partner, Employer, and Other villagers
3. Relation of child to head of household | (3) Both parents, Father, Mother, Siblings, and At the temple
4. Has the child migrated | (4) Grandparents, and Partner
5. Birth order of the child | |
6. Number of older children (under 18) in the household | |
7. Number of older boys (under 18) in household | |
8. Number of older girls (under 18) in household | |
9. Number of younger children in the household | |
10. Number of younger boys in the household | |
11. Number of younger girls in the household | |
12. Number of children (under 18) in the household | |
Figure 6.14 'Education model': Proportion working

All children
N=767
20% of N were working

Studying
N=617
9% of N were working

Not studying
N=150
66% of N were working
Figure 6.15 ‘Grand model’: Proportion working

All children
N=767
20% of N were working

Studying now
N=617
9% of N were working

Lived most (1)
N=386
5% of N were working

Mother’s education (5)
N=197
13% of N were working

No mother or mother has no education
N=23
43% of N were working

Live with (3)
N=109
54% of N were working

Land (6)
N=49
35% of N were working

Live with (4)
N=41
98% of N were working

Not studying now
N=150
66% of N were working

Lived most (2)
N=220
16% of N were working

Land (7)
N=60
70% of N were working
Variables used in the 'grand model' | Notes
---|---
1. Where father has lived the most | (1) Khon Kaen, Ban Nam Jai, Other Amphoe Khon Kaen, Other Amphoe Yai, Other Changwat Khon Kaen, Other Isarn, and Bangkok
2. Mother’s age | (2) Ban Nam Suiy, and Other Thailand
3. Level of mother’s education | (3) Both parents, Father, Mother, Grandparents, and Partner
4. Father’s age | (4) Alone, Friends, Other relatives, and Employer
5. Age of child | (5) 2-6 years, 9-10 years, and Missing
6. Where the child has lived the most | (6) 0-2 rai, and 7 rai
7. Where the child was born | (7) 3-6 rai
8. Sex of child | |
9. Where the child spent most of the previous year | |
10. Number of rooms | |
11. Type of stove | |
12. Amount of land in rai | |
13. Water system | |
14. Who the child is living with | |
15. Number of adults (those 18 and older) in the household | |
16. Relation of child to head of household | |
17. Studying now | |
Chapter 7

The dynamic nature of children's paid work

Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and for the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.

(Prout & James 1990:8-9)

Too often 'child labour' studies portray children as passive victims forced to work in 'slave-like' conditions. This view has existed since the 1830s when 'working children were seen as "slaves" who needed rescuing' (Fyfe 1989:33). Such a view has been constantly reinforced by 'frequent references to child labour as a form of slavery' (White 1994:852). Within the popular press and academic work terms such as 'enslaved' (Bangkok Post 1996c:34), children 'being driven out to work' (Bangkok Post 1996f:8), 'victims' (Black 1995:59), 'treated like slaves' (Chao Sod 1996:16), and 'child slave labour conditions in factories' (Cook 1995:22), constantly appear. Further reinforcing this impression are titles such as Child Slaves (Lee-Wright 1990), The Abuse of Child Labour in Thailand (Bond 1982), and Child Labour: The Modern Thai Slavery (TDSC Staff 1989).

References connecting 'child labour' with slavery hinder us from seeing working children as actively constructing their own lives. This chapter attempts to readdress this by showing the dynamic nature of children's paid work. The word 'dynamic' is used as both the children and the market constantly adjusts to changes. Children work in a wide range of occupations, they can change their employment and often do so, and they can be highly mobile, travelling large distances to gain higher wages. There are many different markets for working children. For the children of this study there was no one type of paid work but a series of different types of work; paid work was different for boys and girls, among different ages, and among children in the various locations. There was a progression in the type of work carried out by children; the older the child the better-paid the job.

At the same time employers were willing to employ children even though it might have been only for a short term because of the nature of the work or because of the changing circumstances of the children; also they were willing to employ children even if it was illegal to do so. This is not to say that the market for working children is perfect; past reports have indicated children working against their will in appalling
conditions, particularly in prostitution (Bangkok Post 1995:6 Holt & Khaikaew 1995:17). Also in this study on children in Changwat Khon Kaen there were cases of children being exploited by their employers, yet usually these children were in a position to leave and seek new forms of employment.

To illustrate the dynamic nature of children’s paid work this chapter analyses the working patterns of the children in the study who were previously, or currently, in paid employment\(^1\). These two units of analysis are two distinct groups. To analyse the work history of children, the unit of analysis is the number of jobs that the children had previously worked in and does not include children working at the time of the survey. For this analysis there were 768 cases, one case more than the total number of children in the study. This is possible as although some children had never worked in paid employment other children had worked in a number of positions and these children were counted more than one time. The unit of analysis, however, for current work was the 153 children who were in paid employment at the time of the survey.

The chapter starts by reviewing the work history of the children and details the differences between boys and girls, among the different age groups, and the children of the different locations. Second, the chapter illustrates the mobility of the children in this study as they have changed their working positions. Next, the chapter details how the children entered their current work positions. This shows that the children of the study were active in choosing their work, contrasting with the images of children being forced to work. Following this the chapter explores the children’s current work. The working conditions of the children are explored, including a case study of the experiences of one girl. I have selected this case study as it highlights problems that some children faced, but also the dangers of assuming only certain types of children’s work are ‘child labour’ (Chapter 5), and finally the ability of children to remove themselves from difficult situations. The chapter then details the time the children spent working per day and per week, and the children’s earnings. Finally, the chapter explores differences between children who were combining employment with study and those who were only in paid employment.

### 7.1 Children’s work history

The children of the research sites had a wealth of working experience. The type of employment that these children were entering and leaving differed between boys and girls, among the different ages, and among the children of the different research sites.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the past occupations of all 767 children in the study, by sex, age, and location. As noted above, with some children working in more than one position and others not working at all there were 768 cases. Their main form of paid work was farming, which accounted for over 60 per cent of positions. The next most

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\(^1\) In this chapter, unless stated otherwise, all references to child work refer to paid work.
common occupation was craft and production accounting for less than 20 per cent of all positions. It is interesting to note that for Thailand as a whole farming has also been children’s main occupation in the labour force (Chapter 8).

There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in terms of their occupations at \( P<0.05 \). A greater proportion of boys than girls had worked in farming, and in craft and production. Of these two occupations the difference was greater between the two sexes in farming, accounting for close to 65 per cent of boys’ positions, and over 55 per cent of girls’ positions.

Although there was only a small difference between boys and girls in craft and production, there was great diversity between the two sexes within this category. Boys had been employed in a far greater range of activities. There were 32 different types of work classified as craft and production that these children had been employed in, 19 of which had only boys and seven which had only girls. The girls’ past employment was concentrated in factories, accounting for over 55 per cent of their positions, and in particular in fish-net factories, accounting for 40 per cent of all female positions in this occupation. Discussions with managers of factories confirmed a preference for females for this type of work. Asking why the factory mainly employed females, I was told:

*Duan:* Females stay, we feel that they will be more patient than males. Men, they don’t really like work that makes them sit because when you are working here you have to pack the products. The men, if they sit doing this they get bored, men like to walk, they will want to get out of the factory. We use them to send the finished product out of the factory. They like doing that.

*Simon:* So females are better?

*Duan:* Yes they are better, they are more patient (30-year-old manageress of a soap factory, Si Liam 12/10/96).

Also, in the small-scale factories there was a preference for girls over boys:

*Rong:* I will accept girls because I have had boys working for me and their work wasn’t as good as that of the girls. Further, we want ones that are single so that they stay here so that they are working from early in the morning (bakery owner, Si Liam 24/11/96).

The most common activity for boys in craft and production was as construction labourers. This accounted for close to 20 per cent of all their positions. Boys’ positions related to the building trade were widespread and apart from construction included blacksmith, welder, welder and cutter, electrician, carpenter, painter, wallpaperer, window maker, and bricklayer.

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2 This chapter, when using Chi-square, always uses \( P<0.05 \) as the level of significance.
Figure 7.1 Past paid employment by sex*, age*, and location**

Notes:  
N=768.  
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.  
** Indicates too few cases to determine a statistically significant difference.  
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.  
Although girls had been less involved in farming and craft and production, they had a greater participation in sales and services. Girls' participation in sales was double that of boys. Once again, there was a strong preference for girls over boys:

*Tuk:* Girls are more meticulous than boys and when they serve you they smile. They are able to sell the fruit and they can also do the work around the shop. If they were boys they would be able to help with work around the shop only. They wouldn't be able to sell (owner of a fruit shop, Khon Kaen University 9/10/96).

Figure 7.1 also indicates that there is a strong relationship between age and children's employment. There is a progression: as children age they leave farming and enter craft and production work and to a lesser extent sales and services. Reaching age 15, children branch out into a wider range of occupations.

Although there were too few cases to determine the existence of a statistically difference between location and occupation the data suggest that children's work is influenced by where they live. In the two villages the majority of children's positions have been in farming, while in Khon Kaen and the slum Soi Shiwit Rantod the majority of children's positions have been in services, craft and production, and in sales.

### 7.1.1 Time children worked in past employment

Time children spent in any of their positions differed by age, occupation, and place of work, but not by sex. In the questionnaire children were asked at what age they had started and ended their various paid jobs. Based on these two questions, a history of their working experiences was created. For the purpose of the analysis the time spent in a job was divided into three time periods: less than one year, one to two years, and two and more years. The reason for these categories was that the questionnaire asked the year that children started and stopped working and thus details are limited to years, rather than months or days. Thus, children starting and stopping their position in the same year were classified as working less than one year. Further, the calculation is based not on the children's ages at the time of the survey but at the time they ended their paid employment. Thus, children aged 13-14 were able to work in one position for more than two years if they started work when they were 12 or younger.

There was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in the time they had spent in their past paid jobs (Figure 7.2). Around 45 per cent of boys and 40 per cent of girls had worked for less than one year in their position. Close to 30 per cent of them had worked for one to two years and under 25 per cent of boys and over 25 per cent of girls had been in their position for more than two years.
Figure 7.2 Time worked by sex, age*, occupation*, and location*

Notes: N=768.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, Isarn excludes the research sites, Bangkok is Bangkok and other non-Isarn areas of the country.
The oldest children were likely to have worked for the shortest period of time (Figure 7.2). This finding is statistically significant, and could be seen as surprising given that the older children had longer to find a long-term position. The data, however, indicate that there was a major divide between children aged under 15 and those older. Younger working children tended to have worked in farming and did so part-time. The major difference between children aged 8-12 and those 13-14 was that over 40 per cent of children of the younger age group who had worked had been in their position between one and two years, with nearly a quarter of them having been in their position over two years; for the 13-14 year olds the pattern was reversed with under 30 per cent of them having worked in a position between one and two years with and 30 per cent having worked in their position for over two years. This difference is mainly because the 13-14 group was older and had longer to be in their position.

Children aged 15-17, however, had a totally different working pattern from the two younger age groups; this indicates that a major shift in the employment of children takes place at age fifteen. All these children had identification (ID) cards and had completed compulsory education and as a result tended to work in a greater range of activities and locations. As shown in Chapter 8, although children without ID cards participate in paid work they are channelled into certain occupations. Children attending school, which was the case for the majority of children under 15 (Chapter 6), were limited to jobs physically close to their schools. Such restrictions did not apply for most children aged 15-17. Children from the research sites had worked in 84 jobs (a number of children had worked in more than one position) in Bangkok. Children in the oldest age group accounted for over 95 per cent of these positions.

Children working in sales, craft and production, and service had been likely to be working for a shorter time than those working as farmers (Figure 7.2). This difference was statistically significant. The difference is explained by the working patterns of the three age groups. Most children who had worked in the three above-mentioned occupations were aged 15-17. In sales, 65 per cent of the children had been in the oldest group, in craft and production over 70 per cent had been in this age group and for services over 60 per cent had been aged 15-17. In farming, however, over 70 per cent of the children had been aged under 15, and in transport over 60 per cent of the children had been aged 8-12. A change in the working patterns of children occurs at age 15. At this age children tend to move out of farming and into occupations, such as craft and production, which they occupy for short periods.

The large proportion of children who had worked for less than one year in sales, craft and production, and services occurred with children moving away from farming and into other occupations. At age 15, children from the two villages branched out into occupations offering better wages. These types of work, however, tended to be much shorter in duration than farming, because, they took place away from home. The locations that had the highest proportion of children working less than one year had been in Khon Kaen, other parts of Isarn, Bangkok, and the rest of Thailand (Figure 7.2).
The exception was Ban Nam Suiy, where over 40 per cent of children’s positions were less than one year. This is explained by the high proportion of children from this village who had worked in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand. They accounted for over 70 and 80 per cent of all positions worked in these two areas.

The progression of children from a limited number to a greater range of occupations as they age has been noted in the literature on working children. Hobbs and others (1992:100), studying working children within a Western setting, suggested that younger children are likely to be performing specifically children’s jobs but as they get closer to 16, the spread of employment available widens.

7.2 The mobility of working children

The mobility of child workers in this study undermines the image of children forced to work against their will. The children were not tied to one position. Instead they were active in deciding where and for how long they would work.

The following story of Jiab, a 16-year-old girl from Ban Nam Suiy, illustrates the dynamic nature of the labour market for children. When she finished Year 6, at the age of 13, she worked as a domestic worker for a family in Khon Kaen. The family had relatives in the village and came in person to seek a young girl who would look after their children. She stayed in this position for six months before returning to her village around Orkphansa (ending of Buddhist lent, a religious holiday) for about two months to harvest the family’s rice. With the completion of the harvest she returned to Khon Kaen to work as a sales assistant in a gold shop, where she worked for seven months. She returned to her village again for about two months to work around the farm. After her short stay in the village she went to Bangkok to become a construction worker. Asked about this work, she said:

*Jiab:* I felt that construction work was better than working at the gold shop. I was doing work that wasn’t that difficult even if I was hauling metal or stones to combine with the cement. What I did [in construction] depended on what I was ordered to do.

Jiab stayed in her construction job around three months before returning again to her village to harvest the rice. As soon as the rice harvest had been completed she started to cut sugar cane in her local amphoe (district). She stayed in this position for a total of five months. Jiab claimed that this was her most physically demanding job:

*Jiab:* It was very tiring because if we worked hard we got paid a lot, we didn’t have time to rest. ... [We started] From 6 in the morning, and sometimes we would return at 5 and other times it was 7 at night.

After five months’ cutting sugar cane she returned to her village to spend three months working on the family farm; then she returned to Bangkok to work again as a construction worker. She and friends from the village worked on a seven-storey town house. They worked for only 15 days gaining 1,300 baht. Her wage was lower than before as there was no overtime, unlike her previous time in Bangkok. She and her
friends returned to the village for *Kheewphansa* (beginning of Buddhist lent). It was at this stage that I interviewed her. She was planning to stay in the village for about three months working on the family farm, before returning to Bangkok to seek new employment. This time, however, she was thinking of working in a factory:

*Jiab*: If there is factory work I will go and work in one. I will wait for my friend to come back from a factory and I will then go with her. It is better than staying here in the village doing nothing.

Once again she was only thinking of working for about three months before possibly returning to her village (This story is based on an interview with a 16-year-old girl from Ban Nam Suiy 22/8/96).

As illustrated by Jiab’s story, many children were regularly entering and leaving paid employment. Some children were highly mobile, travelling from one end of the country to another for a job and then spending a limited time before moving on to another position or back home. This is illustrated in the following interview with a 15-year-old boy from Ban Nam Suiy:

*Simon*: How old were you when you went to work in Khon Kaen?

*Pan*: Fifteen. I worked for 13 days and then returned.

*Simon*: Have you worked in Bangkok?

*Pan*: Yes, I went to sell sweets. I stayed for 17 days. My uncle rang saying he wanted me.

*Simon*: How long did you work in Songkhla [a city in the south of Thailand]?

*Pan*: Twenty five days (10/4/96).

This mobility, as described by Jiab and others, reflects the dynamic nature of the market for working children. Children unrestricted by schooling and having an ID card were willing to travel to gain higher wages. Asking a school teacher where the children from Ban Nam Suiy would go to work, I was told:

*Rot*: Most of them would work in Bangkok. If they are cutting sugar cane they will go to Kanchanaburi3 (9/11/96).

These two sites were known as places where children could gain relative high wages. Within their own village earnings were limited as most work was limited to farming. Further, very few children from Ban Nam Suiy were willing to travel the 80 kilometres to Khon Kaen to seek employment. Just 5 per cent of currently working children from Ban Nani Suiy were in Khon Kaen. If the children were going to leave the village, they were more willing to travel further afield to where wages were higher. Over a quarter of the currently working children from Ban Nam Suiy were in Bangkok and a further 15 per cent were working out of Isarn in other parts of the country. Most of these children would have been working in the high paying sugar fields around Kanchanaburi.

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3 Kanchanaburi is a province in central Thailand and is a centre of the Thai sugar industry.
The mobility of children is further illustrated by children from neighbouring countries entering Thailand seeking employment, attracted by the higher wages obtainable in Thailand. Numerous reports have appeared claiming that large numbers of workers, both children and adults, have crossed into Thailand (Banpasirichote 1995:2; Phongpaichit & Baker 1996:104; The Nation 1996a:A3; Zaw 1996:A11). In a report on foreign children entering Thailand, Im-em (1998:17) concluded that, although it was impossible to give an exact figure, there was an increasing number of children from Laos and Cambodia entering Thailand to work.

It should be noted that foreign children have been brought into Thailand against their will. Reports suggest that children from neighbouring countries have been smuggled into the country to be 'sex-slaves' (Bangkok Post 1996g: perspective 3; Bangkok Post 1998b; Holt & Khaikaew 1995:17; Paul 1995:11; U.S. Department of Labor 1995:136; Uniyal 1993:25).

The 'child labour' literature provides evidence that the mobility of working children into and within Thailand is not unique. According to Nardinelli (1990:85-86) children in England, during the Industrial Revolution, were also mobile when seeking work. Child participation was greater in the counties that had high adult wages. Thus, he claimed that there was no tendency for working children to drive adult wages down. The determinant of both adult wages and the employment of children was the demand for labour. Children were mobile, as they migrated to where the highest wages were being offered.

7.3 Children’s entry into the labour force

How did the children gain their employment? Did they themselves make the decision to work or did their parents or other adults decide that they should? Was there a role for job or employment agencies\(^4\) or did employers themselves go searching for young workers? The analysis, based on the 153 children who were currently working at the time of the questionnaire\(^5\), shows that each of these different possibilities occurred.

The two most common ways that currently working children gained their employment were through a relative or through their own efforts. Relatives helped 38 per cent (54 children) of the working children to gain their employment, the majority of whom (44 children) were helped by a relative who was not the child’s parent. Around 30 per cent (45 children) gained their employment as a result of their own efforts. They knew the employer or they made the effort to apply for the position, thus they did not gain their employment through a broker or an employment agency. Friends of the

\(^4\) Job and employment agencies range from government services, which children cannot use, to illegal operations, which would be willing to find positions for children.

\(^5\) The analysis in the remainder of the chapter is based on these 153 children.
children were also important in assisting them in gaining their current positions, as 18 per cent (28 children) claimed this was the way they found their jobs.

One further substantial way children entered the paid workforce was by an employer directly contacting them; over 10 per cent (17 children) of children gained their employment through this means. Ten of these children were working in Khon Kaen and five of the others were in, or near, the two villages. One child, working in Bangkok, and another in other parts of the country\(^6\), gained their employment through this means. For example, within the male sex industry there was evidence of employers directly recruiting workers. The recruitment was from Khon Kaen’s informal male prostitution market to the gay clubs in Pattaya. It was not clear, however, whether those being recruited were children or adults. A number of young male prostitutes aged 15 to 18 in one of Khon Kaen’s main parks told me, that the night before, staff from a Pattaya gay club had persuaded fellow workers to go with them. The young men I was interviewing claimed that the staff had a truck and were travelling through Isarn looking for new workers.

My findings on how children entered the labour force differ from previous Thai ‘child labour’ studies that suggest the most common way children enter the workforce is through a broker. Most investigations on working children in Bangkok claimed that job agencies acted as brokers or agents finding children for employers and positions of employment for children. These agencies either directly went to the villagers seeking children or found them at the main Bangkok bus and train stations (Banerjee 1980:18; Bond 1982:3; Fyfe 1989:119; Kanta 1986:396; Lee-Wright 1990:143; TDSC Staff 1989:19-20; Wun’Gaeo 1985:3).

According to allegations published by the International Labour Office (ILO) (1993:18) the recruitment of children is systematic throughout Thailand:

> In the rural areas child catchers and recruiters travel around taking children from poor families. And in the towns and cities certain shops have specialized in the selling of children and teenagers. These children are being bought and sold for work in private houses, restaurants, factories and brothels.

The above reference to ‘selling’ of children and teenagers seems to me an exaggeration. In all the towns and cities that I have visited in Thailand I have never seen a shop that specialises in the selling of children. Further, when I asked, no one working in the field of ‘child labour’ in Thailand was able to show me the existence of such a place.

In my study, only two of the 153 children currently working used an employment agency to gain their position. These two children, however, were both 17 when they gained their employment. This was hardly evidence for the systematic recruitment of children into the workforce by employment agencies.

\(^6\) Not in Isarn or in Bangkok.
The difference in my study, with the lack of children using employment agencies compared to previous Thai studies, could be due to a number of reasons. First, my study includes all paid working children and not just those children working in industries associated with ‘child labour’. It is unlikely that any employment agency would bother to find children part-time work farming, yet this type of work was common among the working children in my study. A second possible difference between my study and others is that it was not based in Bangkok and that the labour market for children could be inherently different in Changwat Khon Kaen. Ayuwat and Srisontisuk (1993:13-14) in their study on working children in Khon Kaen, however, found that children did use middlemen and job agencies, but they did not detail the number of children doing this. They noted that the most common method of gaining employment was by children going with relatives or friends to the place of employment. Tongyu (1996:35) in her study on working children in Khon Kaen also found that it was mainly relatives and friends that found working children their positions, and not employment agencies. When I was researching this topic there were private employment agencies in Khon Kaen but these were sending workers to other Asian countries. There were strict government regulations about their operations and there was never any suggestion from Non-Government Organisation (NGO) officials working on ‘child labour’ in Khon Kaen that these agencies were sending children overseas. A further possible reason why children in my study were not using employment agencies, was that Thai society had changed. It is possible that the decline in the supply and demand of working children since 1988 was so great (Chapter 8) that children and employers no longer needed employment agencies. This is a possibility as in my study there were 19 children working in Bangkok, yet not one of them used an employment agency to find their positions.

7.4 Children’s current employment

Analysing the working patterns of the 153 children who were currently working reveals a different picture from those who had worked in the past. Children were mostly employed in craft and production (Figure 7.3) with nearly half of all current working children in this occupation. The next most common occupation was farming, with over a quarter of working children. After these two occupations came sales, with under 15 per cent, services, with 10 per cent, and transport with under 5 per cent of current working children.
Figure 7.3 Current paid employment by sex*, age**, and location**

Notes:  
N=153.  
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05. This could be tested once six children working in transport were removed.  
** Indicates that there were too few cases to statistically test the relationship between these variables.  
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.  
The fact that craft and production, and not farming, was the dominate occupation, demonstrates the progression in children’s working patterns. Over 60 per cent of children who had worked had their first job in farming. Once these children finished school they tended to enter other occupations. Over 65 per cent of children aged 8-12 and half of those aged 13-14 currently working were in farming. Yet for those aged 15-17 only slightly over 10 per cent were in this occupation (Figure 7.3).

There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls and the occupations they were undertaking. This result was achieved by removing the six cases of children working in transport. Unlike those children who had previously worked, there was a higher proportion of girls (50 per cent) than boys (45 per cent) currently in craft and production (Figure 7.3). Another difference with craft and production was that these children were employed in only 15 categories compared to the 32 categories in the children’s work history. This could be because there were only 153 current jobs compared to the 768 past working positions. A second possible reason for the fewer current positions was a decline in the number of working children. Chapter 8 details a dramatic decline in the number of children in the Thai workforce between 1988 and 1996, the time of my survey.

A similarity between those who had worked and those currently working was that the boys and girls were segregated into different types of craft and production work. In seven of the 15 different types of jobs there were only boys and in six only girls. Close to 45 per cent of all girls within craft and production were working in factories.

A striking feature of children’s current working patterns was that the majority of children in Ban Nam Jai were in craft and production (Figure 7.3). Over 55 per cent of working children from the village were employed in Khon Kaen, 18 kilometres away; all of these children were in the age group 15-17. Children aged 8-14, however, if they were working, were doing so in the village and they were combining this with study. All but one of the children aged 8-12 and one in the 13-14 age group were working in farming. Because Ban Nam Jai was only a short distance from Khon Kaen, there were many employment opportunities for the children of this village.

Working children from Ban Nam Suiy were geographically more dispersed in their work places then any other group; children from this village were travelling long distances to gain employment. Close to half of the working children from this village were working out of the village or its surrounding areas. Despite that, all working children aged 8-12 and three-quarters of the age group 13-14 were working in the village. The large proportion of children from Ban Nam Suiy working out of the village was accounted for by those aged 15-17. From this group 70 per cent of those working were in employment out of the local region. Among the 19 children working in Bangkok, all of whom came from Ban Nam Suiy, 17 were aged 15-17. Further, all 11 children working in other parts of the country (outside of Isarn and Bangkok) were from Ban Nam Suiy and aged 15-17.
7.5 Children's working conditions

The working children differed greatly in attitudes towards their work. The majority were happy with their working conditions but a few were clearly distressed by various aspects of their employment. In the questionnaire current working children were asked how happy they were with their wage, their employer, their promotion prospects, and the distance they had to travel to reach their employment.

Using a three-point scale: happy, indifferent, and unhappy, it is clear that the majority of working children claimed that they were happy with their work (Table 7.1). 85 per cent of children were happy, while 15 per cent were unhappy with the wages that they received. This level of happiness was the highest for any of these questions. In the other questions there was a high proportion of children who were indifferent. Overall, however, over two-thirds of the children indicated that they were happy with each of these facets of their employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wage</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Although the majority of working children indicated that they were happy, there was a number of alarming cases. During my stay in Thailand I saw and interviewed children who had experienced or were experiencing exploitation. Three cases stand out. The first case was a boy who, when asked how much he received in one of his jobs, claimed:

Iat: I worked for only four days [at age 14]. If I had worked for a year I could have got 10,000 baht, but for four days I got nothing. This is because I ran away as the owner of the shop would hit me. The owner was a woman. I couldn't get on with her. Another worker tried to escape but couldn't and then was bashed up. No one went to the police. No one could escape as they were in debt to her for accommodation (17-year-old boy, Ban Nam Suay 10/4/96).

The second case occurred in an interview with two waitresses who were working in a restaurant at Khon Kaen University. They were aged 12 and 13 and were working in part to ensure that younger siblings could study. They worked seven days a week and claimed that they had received only three days off work in the past year. While talking about their working conditions and their employer they started to cry. They were greatly frustrated with their situation:

Rat: Sometimes he [the owner] complains. We get angry so we quarrel. I get worried, I don't know how to describe my feelings. I am worried, I would like to quit, but I am poor so I have to put up with my work, for my family (13-year-old waitress, Khon Kaen University 11/8/96).
Their tears shocked me because I had never realised how bad their working conditions were, and because when I ate at the restaurant they seemed so happy. I thus asked them if they cried at work:

*Rat:* Sometimes I cry. ... I feel sorry for myself. ... I ask myself why was I born like this. ... I just smile, but my mind is thinking about other things (13-year-old waitress, Khon Kaen University 11/8/96).

The third example, which I detail as a case study, took place when Jiab was 14 years old and worked in a gold shop in Khon Kaen:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simon: How was the gold shop?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jiab: It was very cruel. For example, sometimes when we sold the gold he would forget to weigh the gold, and as a result some of the gold would go missing. And of course he would blame us. We had to do all the housework also. We would get up at 6 in the morning, we would have to hurry to send his kids to school. We would then buy food, cook, wash the bathroom, we had to do everything. He was strange. When he lost some gold he made us responsible. If he didn’t find the gold he would take it out of our wages.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simon: Would he swear at you often?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jiab: Yes, very often. His voice was very loud, but it was his wife who liked to criticise us. She would say we were country idiots and she couldn’t understand why they wanted us. She would tell us that we should go and stay with the thugs at the market, as we were country idiots who couldn’t do the work well. She wanted us to go and stay with the thugs.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simon: Anything else?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jiab: For Songkland we were going to return to our village but he wouldn’t open the shop for us to leave [she and her fellow workers were living in the shop]. The three of us were stuck, the other three [living in a second gold shop] were able to return home. We couldn’t leave as he had shut us in. He wouldn’t open up the shop as he didn’t have enough workers. At first he told us to stay there until the 12th and he would come and take us home. But come the 13th in the morning he didn’t open the shop again, he was still telling us he would send us home first thing. He then returned and told us he was going to open the shop to sell. On the 14th he was going to send us home, but he didn’t let us out until lunch time. We were screaming for help but no one came to help. All three of us screamed for help. Some people came to the shop to buy gold and we told them, through the locked door, to go to the second shop and ring the bell to tell him to come and open up but he never did.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Simon: How much were you paid?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jiab: In the beginning 1,000 baht. As soon as I returned from the village it was increased to 1,500 baht. But he would find something wrong with me. If a customer came to buy something but wasn’t happy and walked out he would tell me that I wasn’t working properly and he would take money out of my wages. I was left with only 1,300 baht, I didn’t want this and I told him I would return home if he gave me only 1,300 baht. At the same time the other two workers were going to leave. All three of us left. He also wasn’t pleased, I was never able to work him out. He expected us to be able to sell everything all the time to any customer who entered the shop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Simon: Were you hit? |
Jiab: Yes, this happened sometimes. Once my friend was serving a customer who came to see a gold ring and he stole it. The owner checked how much the ring was worth and then picked up a large book and threw it at her head. She started to cry. After that she left for her village. The owner went and apologised asking her to work again. He was a womaniser also. I was told that whoever works at his shop would have to sleep with him. He is Chinese.

Simon: What else do you want to say about this shop?

Jiab: There was this big problem. There was a girl. You see there were two gold shops. The other shop was owned by the sister of my boss. This girl went to work at his sister’s shop. The sister, her name is Mia. The boss liked to criticise his sister Mia a lot. He went to his sister’s shop every day. The boss slept with this girl and she became pregnant. He gave her 500 baht. This girl then tried to commit suicide by taking pills. The sister rang our shop to tell our boss to come quickly and pick up the slut and to throw her away anywhere. Our boss’s wife answered the phone and went to see the girl. She hadn’t died. She was 17 or 18. She took the girl back to the girl’s home. This was happening often, but I didn’t know who they were. He was crazy. When he sold gold he didn’t check the gold properly. He would then go and punish his employers. He was very terrible.

Simon: You worked there for seven months. How did you feel when you left?

Jiab: Then there was a scene, there was a new girl, very innocent. The boss told me to hit her. He liked his employers fighting each other. So I returned home and I felt very good once I returned home (16-year-old girl, Ban Nam Suiy 22/8/96).

Jiab’s story illustrates the need to listen to children’s experiences. Many residents of the research sites believed that ‘child labour’ only occurred in rong ngan narok (hell factories) (Chapter 5). They would not have classified Jiab’s work as ‘child labour’ even though her work, because of her employer, was clearly unsuitable. As distressing as Jiab’s story is, she applied to do this work and in the end was able to leave.

7.6 Time spent at work

Close to one-fifth of current working children were employed three or less hours per working day (Figure 7.4). Although there was no statistically significant difference between boys or girls. there were such differences among the different age groups and various locations. Over 60 per cent of working children in the age group 8-12 were working only two or fewer hours per working day. Children within the two older age groups were working longer hours, with around 90 per cent of those in the 15-17 age group working over two hours per working day. The children of Ban Nam Suiy were the most likely to be working less than three hours per day. This is because this was where most children were involved in farming.
Notes: N=153.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy.
Soi Shiwit Rantod was removed from the analysis as there were only four children working. For 'location' there were only 149 cases.
Figure 7.5 Days worked per week, by sex, age*, and location**

Notes:  
* Indicates a significant level of difference at $P<0.05$.  
** Indicates that there were too few cases to determine a significant level of difference.  
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.  
Figure 7.5, illustrating the days worked per week, shows that over 10 per cent of currently working children were working one or two days a week, with the rest working three or more days a week. Again, there was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls but there was among the various age groups, while there were too few cases to determine if there was a statistically significant difference by the different locations. Close to half of the 8-12 age group were working only one or two days a week. The proportion for children aged 13-14 was close to 15 per cent, yet for children aged 15-17 it was only around 3 per cent. In the city there were no children working only one or two days per week, while over 20 per cent of working children in Ban Nam Jai were doing this part-time work.

Figures 7.4 and 7.5 indicate that if boys and girls were working they were likely to be working the same amount of time. The difference was between the different age groups with younger children more likely to be working fewer hours. This further illustrates the change that occurs in children’s working patterns as they age. Both hours worked per working day and the number of days worked per week increased with age.

7.7 Earnings

Analysis of the earning patterns of the currently working children indicates that again there was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in the amount they were earning but there was among the different age groups and the different locations.

For this analysis the earnings of the children were divided by those who were earning less than 10 baht per hour and those who were earning more. Although over two-thirds of boys were earning more than 10 baht per hour and just over 50 per cent of girls were doing so, this was not significantly different at P<0.05 level. Using a Chi-square test, the Pearson level of significance was P<0.058, just above the significant level.

There was a clear, statistically significant difference among the age groups and the amount that they were earning. Three-quarters of children in the age group 8-12 were working for less than 10 baht per hour. As with the time spent working there was a clear progression, with the older children working for more money than the younger children. Close to three-quarters of the working children aged 15-17 were working for 10 or more baht per hour.
Figure 7.6 Earnings per hour, by sex, age*, and location*

Notes: N=153.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy.
Soi Shiwit Raintod was removed from the analysis as there were only four children working. For ‘location’ there were only 149 cases.
In 1996 20 baht was equivalent to (A) $1.
There was also a statistically significant difference between the amount of money children were earning from the different research sites. A greater proportion of children in the city was working for less than 10 baht per hour than in the two villages. Close to two-thirds of working children in Si Liam were working for less than 10 baht per hour, while all four working children in Soi Shiwit Rantod were doing so. The site from which the largest proportion of children was earning 10 or more baht was Ban Nam Jai. There, over three-quarters of working children were earning this amount. In this village there was a divide between those working in the village and those working elsewhere. All children working in the village were earning less than 10 baht while all those working out of the village were earning more than this. There was also a major difference in those children from Ban Nam Suiv who had travelled to Bangkok or to other areas outside of Isan to work. Of this group over 80 per cent were earning 10 or more baht.

7.8 Combining work and school compared with just working

A major difference among those children working was between those combining work with school and those who were just working. Not only was education the most important factor determining whether children were in paid employment (Chapter 9), but it was also crucial in affecting the type of work carried out by children who were combining employment with schooling. The type of work done by children who were in school was markedly different from that done by other children. Those in school were working part-time while those no longer in school had the opportunity to work full-time.

A little over one-third of working children were combining paid employment with schooling (Figure 7.7). There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls, among the different age groups and the various locations. Boys were far more likely to be combining school with work. Over 40 per cent of the working boys were both studying and in paid employment. Of girls, however, only a quarter was combining the two activities. The difference was due to the greater involvement of boys in farming, as close to 85 per cent of children combining study with work in farming were boys.

Over 95 per cent of children aged 8-12 who were working were doing so while still in school. Among working children aged 13-14, 65 per cent were also in school. Of those aged 15-17 over 80 per cent of those currently working were not in school. This division between those 15-17 and younger is the major cause of the differences between the age groups that have been discussed in this chapter. It accounts for the type of work carried out by the children, the place of work, the hours worked and the earnings from the work.
Figure 7.7 Comparison between those studying and working with those who are working, by sex*, age*, and location*.

Notes: N=153.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy.
Soi Shiwit Rantod was removed from the analysis as there were only four children working. For 'location' there were only 149 cases.
Figure 7.8 Comparison of those studying and working with those working, by occupation*, hours worked per day*, days worked per week*, and average earnings per hour*

Notes: N=153.
* Indicates a significant level of difference at P<0.05.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suay, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
The category 'transport' was removed as there were only six cases and thus distorting the results. For 'occupation' there were only 147 cases.
The location with the highest proportion of working children combining work with school was Ban Nam Suay, where just under half of the working children were doing so. Among the children of the village, however, there was a division. Nearly all children working in the village were also studying, while nearly all children who spent most of their year outside of the village were just working. In Ban Nam Jai 30 per cent of working children were combining the two, while in Si Liam, just over 15 per cent of working children were combining school with paid employment. In Soi Shiwit Rantod, the slum, all four working children were not studying.

By attending school, students worked on average fewer hours and fewer days compared to other working children. Figure 7.8 shows that over 40 per cent of children in school and in paid employment worked three or fewer hours per working day. Among working non-students, however, close to 90 per cent were working more than three hours per working day. A similar division occurs with the number of days they were working. Over 30 per cent of the working students were working one or two days a week, while 99 per cent of the non-students were working three or more days a week.

Reflecting the different working patterns of these two groups of children, their earnings differed. Over half of the working students were earning less than 10 baht per hour, while over two-thirds of the working non-students was earning 10 or more baht an hour.

7.9 Conclusion

Much current advocacy undertaken by NGO activists focuses on exposure of gross abuses of human and child rights, and is often anecdotal and centred on the stories of specific victims. The availability of more reliable, carefully researched information would make possible more effective advocacy...

This chapter has illustrated the dynamic nature of children’s paid work by detailing the working patterns of the children in the research sites. Of the three key variables examined in this chapter – sex, age and location – sex was the least important in influencing the working patterns of the children. Although statistically significant differences existed between boys and girls in the type of work that they had and were performing, there were no statistically significant differences between them in the period of time they had worked, the hours and days working or their earnings.

While sex was the least important of the three key variables, age was the most important. There was a major difference between the children in the 15-17 age group and those younger. The majority of working children in the two age groups, 8-12 and 13-14, were working in farming, and tended to work fewer hours per day and fewer days per week, and earned less than the older children. The older children, however, were employed in a greater range of occupations and in a greater range of jobs within these occupations. A major reason for this was that the children aged 15-17 had an ID card...
and most of them had completed their education, allowing them to seek employment in a greater range of work types and locations. As a result there was a progression in the type of work done by children. They moved from part-time work, predominantly in farming, into a greater range of positions that were better-paying, full-time, and in a greater range of localities.

This progression of children’s work partly explains why farming accounted for over 60 per cent of past work yet only a quarter of current work. A further possible explanation for this large decline in the number of children in farming is that changes to Thai society have reduced not only the number of working children but in particular the number of children in agriculture. The following two chapters detail the changes that were taking place in Thailand and in the research sites up to 1996, and explore the implications for farming and other working children.
Chapter 8

From paddy fields to ‘hell factories’¹ and into the schools

The best bet is to allow economic development to proceed, indeed to do everything to facilitate it. For if anything is the antidote to child labour it is the modernisation process. European experience aside, this seems to be born out by what is currently happening in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, themselves former havens of child labour. Despite their governments doing considerably less than India’s in tackling child labour, they have made more progress. The paradox can be explained only by their greater rate of development.

(Brasted & Wright 1996:58)

Children’s work in Thailand has been transformed. Socioeconomic changes have shifted children’s working activities away from the paddy fields, first to paid employment, and now into the schools. Previously, the work of most children in Thailand was overwhelmingly rural. They received limited schooling and participated in agricultural production from an early age. A second phase² resulted in increased numbers of children working in non-agricultural activities. As seen in Chapter 5, for many people agricultural work is not ‘child labour’ and at times not even work but the duty of children. For these people ‘child labour’ exists when children are working in the ‘hell factories’ and other locations associated with the exploitation of children. In this second phase, even though children have started to work in non-agricultural activities, the large majority of children in the workforce were still in agriculture. Recently, a new phase has been under way in Thailand with more children undertaking their new form of ‘work’: schooling (Chapter 9).

The recent shift in the activities of Thai children, which mirrors previous changes that took place in developed nations, offers answers to the questions how reductions in child employment were made in those nations and how other countries can tackle this issue. There is debate, however, within the ‘child labour’ literature on the causes of these transformations. Bequele and Myers (1995:33-37) listed five ways of reducing the employment of children. This chapter takes three of these proposed means, the ‘law and enforcement’, the ‘technological development’, and the ‘economic development’

¹ This term was discussed in Chapter 5.
² These phases discussed in this chapter are not distinct periods, but broad trends. In the first phase children from rich families studied and like the small proportion of children in urban areas did not work as farmers. Today there are still children who are receiving only a limited education and spending their youth working in paddy fields or ‘hell factories’.
approaches to determine which one has been the most effective in reducing the number of working children in Thailand. The fourth way of reducing the number of working children, the ‘education’ approach, is discussed in the following chapter. The fifth strategy, ‘targeted incomes’, is seen by Bequele and Myers as a method by which developed nations with social security systems can reduce the need for children to work. As Thailand has only a limited social security system this approach is not discussed.

8.1 The ‘law and enforcement’ approach

The importance of legislation to reduce the employment of children is debated. For some writers it is an important tool in the fight against ‘child labour’ while for others it is counter-productive, only making work carried out by children illegal and thus more difficult to regulate.

8.1.1 The benefits of ‘child labour’ laws

Bequele and Boyden (1988a:9) claimed that ‘Historically, the single most important and common approach to the problem of child labour has been the adoption of legislation’. According to Thijs (1996:5) legislation that raises the minimum age of employment and improves working conditions, combined with factory inspections and the introduction of compulsory education, appears to have eliminated children from the organised workplace.

Most writers who support ‘child labour’ legislation, however, stress that legislation in itself is not sufficient to solve the problem. Such measures should not supplant long-term structural reforms and anti-poverty policies. Instead, legislation should reinforce and complement them to deal with the worst forms of ‘child labour’ and to provide minimum levels of protection for children when they must work (Blanchard 1985:19).

Another claimed benefit of ‘child labour’ legislation is that it helps to create new attitudes of respect for the needs and rights of children. Discussion of ‘child labour’ concerns raises standards of behaviour by both firms and workers towards children (Bequele & Myers 1995:81). This is one of the most important aspects of ‘child labour’ legislation. As legislation changes, raising the age that children can enter the workforce, societal values are changed. Institutions, families and children make greater efforts to ensure that the nation’s youth do not work in the labour force.

8.1.2 Problems with legislation

Working children and young people occupy a relatively weak and easily exploitable position in work relations and in the labour market. They share this problem with various other structurally disadvantaged groups in society (for example, women, ethnic minorities or migrants, the disabled). However, they are the only one among such groups whose exploitation is generally addressed by attempts to remove them completely from the labour market, rather than by
supporting their efforts to improve the terms and conditions under which they work.

(White 1994:849)

The ‘law and enforcement’ approach to eliminating ‘child labour’ has not been successful. Legislation has not substantially stopped children from working throughout much of the world (George 1990:11). Brasted and Wright (1996:57) condemned the attempts to ban ‘child labour’ in India where ‘child labour’ has been illegal since 1919 yet it has increased rather than declined. They argued that the lip service paid to UN conventions merely puts a veneer of respectability on the intentions of government and industry without doing anything significant to alleviate the problem. This is similar in Thailand where the number of children in the workforce increased for years despite legislation restricting children from working.

8.1.2.1 ‘Child labour’ laws are unenforceable

A major problem with ‘child labour’ legislation is that it is unenforceable (Goddard & White 1982:471). Mhatre (1995:53) claimed that in South Asia there is no lack of ‘child labour’ laws, the problem being their enforcement. Grootaert and Kanbur (1995a:36), however, believed that weak enforcement does not provide an argument for not passing legislation. They felt that apart from its symbolic value, legislation is the only way to effectively address cases of children working as prostitutes and child soldiers.

In Thailand ‘child labour’ laws have been contravened with impunity (Fyfe 1989:121); and despite anti-child prostitution laws, the youth sex market seems to be thriving. Udomsakdi (1986:45) asserted that the problem is that there are too few inspectors and that their efforts are restricted by laws permitting the officers to operate only during working hours of 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Further, any inspection must be preceded by a warning and once there are irregularities, the inspectors must seek the cooperation of the police. In 1992, 4,306 factories were inspected, a small fraction of all factories in the country. Of these, 2,775 factories were infringing some safety regulation, but only five prosecutions were made (Phongpaichit & Baker 1996:213). The Thai Foundation for the Development of Children argued that weak law enforcement had led to children as young as nine working in dangerous and unhygienic environments (Corben 1997:9). Bond (1982:6) claimed that the reason why the laws were not enforced was the indifference and corruption of the police department.

Table 8.1 illustrates the limited action of government officials concerned with ‘child labour’. In 1996 at the time of data collection for this thesis Thai children below the age of 15 could work in certain occupations if they gained permission. According to the Department of Labour and Social Welfare Office in Khon Kaen, a total of 29 children of this age gained permission to work in 1993 and 42 in 1994. In 1995 the Office collected no data at all. By the beginning of 1996, 10 children had gained permission to work throughout the province. It was possible, however, to see far more
children working than that indicated by these records. Only around 10 children under 15 should have been working in 1996 as many of the children who had gained permission to work in 1993 and 1994 would have been older than 15 by 1996. For example, only one boy had gained permission to work in the restaurant industry and that was in 1993. Yet in 1996 it was common to be served by children while eating at restaurants (Chapter 7).

Clearly the records kept by the Department of Labour and Social Welfare Office in Khon Kaen did not reflect the number of children working. What is not clear is why the records were so poor. It could have been because employers saw no need to inform the office; or there were too few inspectors; or because of corruption; or it could have been simply due to inefficiency in book keeping.

### Table 8.1 Number of children under 15 years of age who gained permission to work by industry in Changwat Khan Kaen; 1993-96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Petrol stations</th>
<th>Textiles factories</th>
<th>Fish-net factories</th>
<th>Restaurants</th>
<th>Plastics factories</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In 1995 no data were collected. Data for 1996 included only the month of January.
Source: Department of Labour and Social Welfare Khon Kaen 1996.

8.1.2.2 The removal of working children from the formal sector

Another consequence of "child labour" laws is the removal of children from the formal sector into the unregulated sectors of the economy where virtually none of the legal provisions relating to the protection of children is enforced (Boyden & Holden 1991:127; Mendelievich 1979:18).

In many countries children are not found in the formal sector but are active in the informal sector. According to Goonesekere (1993:V) in Sri Lanka the effective enforcement of legislation virtually eliminated child employment in the formal sector.
She asserted, however, that child employment was not eliminated but simply moved from the formal to the non-formal sector.

In Thailand children have been restricted from the formal sector. This is not to say that no children work in this sector, but their numbers are limited. The main reason for this is that these areas are accessible to inspections. In Ban Nam Jai, for example, when I carried out my research very few girls aged under 15 worked in the fish-net factories. Many females aged around 16 and older, however, had entered the factories once they finished compulsory education at 12 years of age. Asking a young villager if there had been any inspectors at the fish-net factory where she was working, and her age when this took place, I was told:

Saeng: We were 15, 14, there were some who were 13 to 14 and others were 18. Arjan, we were all different ages. We all cried because the inspection meant we would have to stop working. When the officers first came to the factory to check, it was just like what she told you. The employer hid us in the bathroom. But after the inspection they were afraid that the officers would know about us so they told us that we would have to stop working. After being told this at a meeting with the employer, we cried, all of us cried because we were so sad.

Simon: Why were you sad?

Saeng: Because we had to stop working, the children who were too young were not allowed to work any more. We were sad because we were not allowed to work. Before, we were earning a wage. What could we do if we didn’t work? But before we were getting 700 baht a fortnight and we were happy, arjan (17-year-old girl, Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

8.1.2.3 No protection

By forcing children into the informal sector, ‘child labour’ legislation paradoxically makes it harder to protect working children. If it is illegal, little can be done to improve it. Children are denied workers’ rights. They have no protection against abuse and no redress in cases of dismissal or accidents at work. By ‘child labour’ being made illegal the defencelessness of child workers is increased. They are excluded from trade unions, unable to demand contracts, minimum wages, security or safer working conditions (Boyden & Holden 1991:127; Fyfe 1989:128; Goddard & White 1982:471; Mendelievich 1979:7; Rodgers & Standing 1981:39). In short, legislation aimed at removing children from the workforce increases their powerless and the extent that they can be exploited. Children earn less and can be made to work longer hours than adults (Hewitt 1992:50).

‘Child labour’ legislation reduces the protection of working children, while benefiting those most exploiting these children. Standing (1982:616-7) contended that as ‘child labour’ legislation is more easily applied to the relatively high-wage formal sector, small-scale enterprises that pay low wages are given a competitive edge. As noted above, enterprises in the formal sector are subject to inspections and are more visible to public scrutiny. Small-scale enterprises, on the other hand, are less likely to be
inspected, yet at the same time they are more likely to be exploiting their child workers. Being able to pay less to their child workers would allow them to employ more and not fewer children.

In Thailand 'child labour' legislation has reduced the protection of working children while benefiting small enterprises. Thai children are restricted from the formal sector by the use of ID cards, as noted in Chapter 4, children under the age of 15 are not entitled to a card; without one, children are legally restricted from working in certain occupations. Employers are supposed to check their future employees’ ID cards to determine their age before employing them. This is a means by which the government attempts to control 'child labour'.

The lack of an ID card, however, does not stop children from working, it simply limits the areas in which they can do so. When I asked a 17-year-old boy whether having an ID card restricted children from working in the industries that he had worked in, he said:

*Surin:* No. It depends on the work place as to whether they will accept them or not. Some places have a labour shortage and they will accept anyone of any age. If they can work they will be accepted. In some other places, however, they will not accept those under the age limit. In some places they will accept the young kids to sell things but the factories don’t want them (17-year-old boy, Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

Not having an ID card does not stop children from working, but channels them into jobs that are less controlled by the government. These activities will be less well paid:

*Simon:* When you go for construction work do you have to have an ID card?

*Tat:* Yes. If you don’t have one you get paid poorly (16-year-old boy, Ban Nam Suix 1/9/96).

Further, the children are restricted from the companies most concerned about the legal restrictions of employing under-age children. Children are not allowed to work for employers that are likely to provide the best working conditions, including the best salaries. The managers of large companies in Khon Kaen, who were interviewed, stressed that they could not employ children under the age of 15. The following comments show this:

*Juk:* We have to consider the name of the company and this limits whom we accept. If the kid is younger than the minimum age we will not consider the kid (a manager of fish-net factory A, Khon Kaen 21/11/96).

*Ling:* They [children younger than 15] can’t work as this is against the law. If they don’t have an ID card, we can’t accept them. This is because if the Ministry of Labour inspects our factory we will be in trouble. Sometimes we will accept those who are older, some positions are for those who are 30 years or older, but before we didn’t accept people like this, now it is harder to find labour. We are screening on age and accepting those who are older (a manager of fish-net factory B, Khon Kaen 10/10/96).

*Lit:* The youngest is 18 years old. We do not hire staff who are younger than this as we are afraid that we will break the law. We try to do everything to ensure that we don’t
break the law. We try to ensure there are no problems, there could be problems like accidents. The oldest one at the Khon Kaen branch is 39 years old (manager of a large department store, Khon Kaen 13/11/96).

The managers that were interviewed were running both large Thai and international companies that were offering some of the better working conditions in the province. Despite the assertions of the managers, I knew children below the minimum age who were working in their enterprises. However, there were only a very small number who had managed to enter the workforce by lying about their age.

Children realise the importance of the ID card and how it influences their working conditions. They have been able to subvert the system by falsifying ID cards. When I asked a 16-year-old girl, who had worked from an early age, whether her fellow workers aged 12 to 13 would have ID cards, she said:

_Jiab_: They would have borrowed an ID card from a friend or would have a receipt for one and then they would be accepted.

_Simon_: Would many kids from Isan do this?

_Jiab_: Yes, lots of us do this in Bangkok. Yes, we do this often. All of those aged between 12 and 14 would do this (16-year-old girl, Ban Nam Suay 22/8/96).

Banpasirichote and Pongsapich (1992:25) in their study _Child Workers in Hazardous Work in Thailand_ also noted cases of children under 15 using ID cards of relatives or friends.

### 8.1.3 The timing of ‘child labour’ legislation

The timing of ‘child labour’ legislation indicates how important it may have been in reducing the numbers of children in the workforce. A powerful argument for ‘child labour’ legislation would be if the number of working children declined after the introduction of such legislation. The reverse is also true: if increases in working children occurred after the introduction of such laws, doubts would be raised as to their effectiveness. In Thailand the anti-‘child labour’ legislation that was in force in 1996, when I collected data for this thesis, had been introduced in 1972 (Chapter 5). Yet it was not until 1989 that numbers of children in the workforce started to decline.

In Britain during the Industrial Revolution the Factory Acts have been seen as crucial in combating ‘child labour’. According to Nardinelli (1990:104-9) those who supported such legislation believed that the problem of child exploitation changed dramatically once the acts had been passed. The laws, in combination of factory inspectors and social reformers, meant British children were saved from the worst abuses of industrialisation. Nardinelli, himself, however, strongly argued that it was not legislation that reduced ‘child labour’ in Britain but economic and technological change. He showed in his study that these two factors had reduced the demand for ‘child labour’ before the Factory Acts had been introduced.
Often legislation is introduced after the number of child workers starts to decline. Brown and others (1992:755-6) noted that regulations aimed at reducing the use of child workers in the fruit and vegetable canning industries in California were introduced in 1913; yet, by that stage the city canneries had already removed most of their child workers. He further argued that corporate leaders helped formulate, monitor and enforce the regulations. It was in the interest of the large companies to introduce an across-the-board ban on child workers that would exact a relatively high cost on the small-scale, technologically backward, and rural segments of the industry. Thus in California 'child labour' legislation was introduced after the use of children started to decline, and also it was used by large companies to ensure that small enterprises did not have the advantage of using cheap labour.

Nardinelli (1990:124), comparing 'child labour' legislation in Britain, the United States, France, Germany and Japan, claimed that the legislation came after industrial growth had taken place. The laws were never enacted during the formative stages of industrial growth. The reason why 'child labour' legislation is introduced after the number of child workers starts to decline is because it will only become effective when children become marginal in the production process. Then it will mainly be a case of speeding up or completing changes already set in motion (Goddard & White 1982:471; Standing 1982:618).

In August 1998 new 'child labour' legislation came into affect in Thailand (Chapter 5). This new legislation has a chance of being effective, as children have increasingly become marginal in the production process. It was introduced after a dramatic reduction in child working numbers had occurred. There was little chance that this legislation would have been effective in 1988 when 40 per cent of Thai children aged 13-14 were in the labour force. In Britain it was the long-term decline of 'child labour' that contributed to the enactment of 'child labour' laws rather than the other way round (Nardinelli 1990:149); the same is the case in Thailand.

A major problem, however, for the new legislation is that even though it was proposed before the economic crisis hit Thailand, it was introduced during a period of economic pain. The number of children in the workforce increased after the crisis occurred (8.3.5) and this raises doubt that the legislation will be effective, in the short term anyway.

**8.1.4 Boycotts**

A recent form of enforcement of 'child labour' legislation has been the threat of boycotts of products made by children. This form of enforcement has originated in developed nations that are able, through trade policies, to influence labour policies in the developing nations.

The use of boycotts as a means of combating 'child labour' has been criticised. White (1995:18) claimed that
The target of such campaigns is not the bonded labour of children, or other forms of near-slavery; it is not to reduce children’s working hours; to ensure that they are not engaged in dangerous work; or to provide them with better pay, with access to education, with the rights to associate and organise (if these were the targets, it might make good sense to support such campaigns). The target of these campaigns is the complete removal of children from the labour market, generally up to the age of 15 years.

The logic of the boycott movement is that children are being forced to work and once ‘liberated’ they will be free to go to school. This is clearly not the case. Although there are cases of children who are working against their will, the great majority of children are working because they themselves or their families need money. They are working because of their poverty. If they are removed from their workplace because of a boycott, they will be forced to seek further employment elsewhere. This new employment may be far worse than the original workplace. Children unable to sell their labour, have only their bodies to sell (Allsebrook & Swift 1989:138).

Detailed studies are showing the detrimental effect boycotts are having on working children, the group that the supporters of boycotts want to assist. Boyden and Myers (1995:37-38) cited a case in Bangladesh where as a result of a boycott approximately 100 child garment workers signed a petition pleading not to be dismissed. They feared that they would have to follow other young workers who, after being dismissed from the industry, ended up as child prostitutes, brick breakers and garbage collectors. Bissell (1997:12) using a rapid assessment study confirmed reports that in Bangladesh children ‘released from work were finding more hazardous and exploitative jobs to do.’ In 1996 the President of the US Council for International Business warned against the use of boycotts. He noted that companies that were under threat from consumer boycotts sacked their child workers. These children, he claimed, were forced into prostitution, begging or into work which had far less favourable conditions than the original work (United States Council for International Business 1996:1). Within Thailand there is also evidence that boycotts have had a negative impact on child workers. Runcharoen (1995:5) asserted that trade sanctions imposed by the British government in the 1980s on Thailand’s garment industry resulted in the displaced girls entering prostitution.

Typically, the boycott movement is aimed at products made for the export market. Vulliamy (1997:13) claimed the bill the US Senate passed in 1997 aimed at banning imports made by forced child labour was designed to stop the following: carpets, rugs, footballs, clothing, sports shoes, toys and trinkets. According to Hasnat (1995:423), however, there is no evidence that children who work in the export sector are worse off than children working elsewhere. Further, Bequele (1995:9) argued that as poverty is the primary cause of ‘child labour’, imposition of trade restrictions would only deny developing nations effective ways to promote growth and improve living standards.

It is desirable for children to attend school rather than being part of the workforce. Yet this cannot be achieved through boycotts that result in the abrupt dismissal of children. As long as children and their families cannot afford schooling and need
money, they will work. In any economy, characterised by poverty and inequality, prohibition of children from working would only create greater poverty and suffering (Tjandraningsih 1993:230). For the majority of working children the priority should not be to remove them from the workforce but to improve their working conditions (White 1995:19).

8.2 The ‘technological development’ approach

Technological change has helped shift children’s working activities away from both the paddy fields and the ‘hell factories’ to the schools. Many activities in which Thai children were involved have been either reduced or eliminated as a result of new technology.

8.2.1 Technology and the paddy fields

Technological change has reduced the demand for children to work on farms. Levy (1985:777) in his study of working children in Egypt claimed that tractors and irrigation pumps had removed the need for children on many farms. Within my research sites new technologies had also reshaped the lives of rural children. Many tasks that once consumed hours of children’s time have been reduced or even eliminated. I illustrate this by discussing the changing means of storing and obtaining water, the introduction of electricity and the replacement of buffaloes with tractors.

8.2.1.1 Water

Obtaining sufficient drinking water for humans and livestock is a major problem in the dry season. Many villages have either a natural or a constructed pond, but these often dry up during the long dry season. Villagers are then found to obtain water from wells, often located many kilometres away from their homes. One of the most common sights in the Northeast is long lines of women and children pushing two wheeled carts loaded with water cans, which they have filled at the communal tank, or wells to their homes.

(Rambo 1991:20)

By 1996, the scene depicted by Rambo was less often seen. The extent that girls and women collect water has been reduced. New technology, namely containers and piped water, has transformed this form of children’s work dramatically.

New means of storing water have altered the lives of children. Before the introduction of the above mentioned innovations, usually women and often girls spent many hours fetching water. This type of work is often not considered to be ‘child labour’ but it is extremely time consuming and is often very physically demanding. During my stay in Ban Nam Jai I watched many girls fetching water from a village well. They were skilled in throwing a bucket into the well and pulling it up by a rope. I tried my hand at this activity but I was never able to obtain the water as quickly as the girls. In the past this work by children was crucial for the family’s survival, and often young
girls were unable to attend school as they had to carry out their ‘duties’, which included fetching water. Asking a woman whether life was better in the present or 20 years beforehand, I was told:

Puk: These days life is better as we don’t have to do anything any more. We don’t mill the rice by ourselves, which is better than in the past. We don’t have to fetch water and there is electricity so we don’t have to collect kindling. We don’t have to carry the water. Before, our shoulders were damaged as we carried too much water (old woman, Ban Nam Suiy 30/8/96).

Over time in the four research sites there have been changes in the water storage systems. According to a number of older residents, before, there were no means to store water. They had to obtain it daily from a well or even buy it as was the case in parts of the city. In the late 1970s, however, large water jar containers were introduced to the area. These jars, which are used to collect rain water from roofs, played a major role in providing safe drinking water and also helped reduce the need for girls to fetch water, particularly in the wet season.

The introduction of piped water has further helped to reduce the need to fetch water. Piped water existed in all four research sites by the time I left Thailand at the end of 1996. The supply of this piped water was not as efficient in each site but it did exist. At the time I was collecting quantitative data in Ban Nam Jai, a large public water system was created. Earth-moving machines brought into the village by the local authorities created a large water storage area for the whole village. This system was large enough to provide an all-year-round water supply for the village. It also increased the efficiency of the village piped water system and further reduced the need for young girls to fetch water from the local well.

8.2.1.2 Electricity

The number of households and villages with electricity in Thailand increased dramatically from the 1960s. In a sample in the study by Knodel and others (1987:42) only 6 per cent of villages had electricity in 1965 but this increased to 36 per cent in 1980 and to 70 per cent in 1984. In Phongphit and Hewison’s (1990: 110) study of rural Isam very few villages did not have electricity. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) (1994b:91), by 1994 over 92 per cent of families and 99 per cent of villages in Changwat Khon Kaen had electricity.

The arrival of electricity not only heralded television, radio, refrigerators and other electrical appliances, but it brought major changes to the lives of children. Electricity altered many facets of living, as shown in the discussion I had with a villager:

Simon: Before, when there was no electricity, how was life?

Ek: We would sleep early in the evening because we didn’t have television to watch. When farming we would have to sleep in our fields because they were too far from our houses. Now we have vehicles, which have made moving around convenient.

Simon: No electricity, no television, what did the kids do?
Ek: The kids would see movies shown by the mobile cinemas in the fields. The kids would play but not after dark. Once it got dark they would return home.

Simon: I talked to a teacher who said that, before, the kids would play a lot but now they just watch television.

Ek: Before we Laotians\(^3\), Thai Isarn, from adults to children would play ‘the tiger eats the cow’ on Songkran day. But these days things have changed. Now there are motorbikes. Whoever has money will buy one. Once they have one they will drive around. Now they are not interested in playing any more. Instead, they are interested in watching TV (30-year-old man, Ban Nam Suiy 16/8/96).

Electricity not only brought changes to the lives of children but also to their work. First, it allowed the spread of rice mills. Many adults that I interviewed talked about their involvement as children in milling their family’s rice. By all accounts this was hard physical work but it had been eliminated in my research sites. Both villages in my study had a number of small-scale electric-powered rice mills. This was adults’ work as I never saw a child working in these mills. The introduction of electricity also reduced the need for children to collect kindling. Cutting and collection of fire wood were mainly children’s and women’s work (Elson 1997:179). This activity was still carried out, although on a limited scale, by a number of children while I lived in Ban Nam Jai and Ban Nam Suiy. They entered wooded areas around their villages and collected bits of woods to start fires for cooking. Electricity, however, had reduced the extent that this was necessary.

8.2.1.3 Buffaloes and tractors

The introduction of new farming technology throughout Thailand has not been even. The farmers of the central region of Thailand, for example, adopted new methods before Isarn farmers. Turton (1989b:57) noted the marked contrast between these two regions of Thailand. He claimed that there was a rapid increase in the use of mechanisation and tractors around Bangkok while in Isarn farmers still widely used draft animals. Duncan (1996:10), however, seven years later noted that tractors had largely replaced buffaloes in Isarn for draft purposes. He also noted that Isarn farmers had altered their techniques in a response to labour shortages. They were increasingly no longer laboriously transplanting their seedlings and they were using more machinery to increase their productivity.

The replacement of buffaloes by tractors has come close to eliminating another form of child work. In all four research sites there was a dramatic reduction in the number of buffaloes. In Si Liam and Soi Shiwit Rantod there were no buffaloes left at all, even though previously there had been many. In the two villages, however, there were still buffaloes, but their numbers had declined dramatically. Not one of my chief informants had any buffaloes. During my stay in Ban Nam Jai I stayed in the temple

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\(^3\) Here the respondent was calling himself Lao-\(\)t\(\)ian before calling himself a Thai or an Isarn person. This was not unusual.
ground, and with two families. Both families had sold their buffaloes just before I arrived in the village. The story was the same for the family I lived with in Ban Nam Suiy. One person I talked to told me that they should build a buffalo museum as they were becoming part of the past and that children did not know what they were for. Although this was a tongue-in-cheek comment, there had been a reduction in the buffalo numbers. On asking a school teacher if there were many buffaloes I was told:

Mon: Now there aren’t that many left. The villagers use tractors. Before, you couldn’t walk without landing in the buffalo shit. Because the villagers in the morning would take the buffaloes out to graze and then bring them back in the evening (primary school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 18/8/96).

The reduction in buffalo numbers has had major consequences for children. Buffaloes are highly labour-intensive as they must be minded during the day when they graze. Purcal (1971:23) estimated that a group of households in West Malaysia used their buffaloes for farming for 274 hours per animal per year, yet they spent on average 502 hours per year looking after them. Historically, it was children, and in particular boys, who were responsible for looking after the buffaloes. It was an activity that did not require a lot of skill but was time consuming. In a study in Bangladesh it was estimated that boys aged 10-14 typically spent two to three hours per day caring for the families’ animals (Mannan 1990:26).

During my stay in both of the villages a small number of children still spent time minding buffaloes. For children to do this they must not be in school as it was impossible to combine the two activities. On weekends some school children would take charge of the buffaloes.

For many farmers the introduction of tractors has replaced the buffaloes in the farming process. What is not clear, however, is why this took place. Was the change due to increasing school enrolments that led to a lack of buffalo minders, forcing parents to introduce tractors? Or did the reduction of buffaloes, resulting from the introduction of tractors, allow increasing numbers of children to attend school? What is clear, however, is that one form of work that Isam children have extensively undertaken is being reduced.

8.2.2 Technology and the ‘hell factories’

In the non-agricultural sector new technologies have reduced the need for employing children. Technology is seen as a powerful cause of the decline in the numbers of working children (Brown et al. 1992:731-752; Grootaert & Kanbur 1995b:196; Levy 1985:777 and 788; Nardinelli 1990:111). Bequele and Myers (1995:37) argued that technology reduces the number of children working in two ways. First, it replaces children who were doing routine, repetitive tasks and, second, it increases the demand for skilled labourers, who are almost always adults and not children.
Nardinelli (1990:111) detailed the impact technology had on the British textile factories during the Industrial Revolution. He showed how the shift from water to steam power helped to reduce the demand for children. The desire for child workers was further reduced with the adoption of self-acting spinning mules. Brown and others’ (1992:734) study of working children in the US canning factories showed that the use of new technologies turned child workers into liabilities rather than assets.

Similar to changes that took place in the Industrial Revolution technological change is reducing the demand for working children in Thailand. Large employers in Khon Kaen were using new techniques that required a more skilled workforce. For them the new technologies and work practices were increasing the importance of education:

*Ling*: Now the kids are clever with education they are studying more. Now we have computers, which we are using a lot. Just like at the major department stores, our workers have to use bar codes in the production-process and in accounting. By this we check how much we have produced. The workers have to learn how to use them if they have had no experience. Those who finish Years 9 or 12 are quicker than those who only complete Year 6. Now we are using more technology (a manager of fish-net factory B, Khon Kaen 20/10/96).

Although the manager of this fish-net factory claimed they were using more technology, their lack of sophisticated technology had created one of the most important forms of work outside agriculture for the women of Ban Nam Jai. Not only were many women from the village employed in the various fish-net factories around Khon Kaen, but many others worked in the village repairing nets that had not been made properly in the factories. Many girls outside school hours spent their time mending nets. The work in the village was totally dependent on the inadequacies of the factories’ machinery. According to a manager of one of the factories, of 100 nets produced at the factory between 10 and 20 nets had to be sent to the villagers to be mended (a manager of fish-net factory B, Khon Kaen 10/10/96). If and when this machinery is replaced by better technology that does not tear so many nets in the production process, this whole form of work will disappear.

Nardinelli (1990:112) stressed in his work that new technology does not always reduce the need for working children. He suggested that some technological innovations can increase the demand for children in the short run. Further, if children’s labour is cheap enough, enterprises will use child workers rather than introduce new technology. Thus, for Nardinelli it was the rise in real incomes that reduced ‘child labour’. When the cost of employing children became too expensive, technological alternatives to child employment were used. This suggests that, although technology can reduce ‘child labour’, new technologies will only be introduced if the economic conditions are favourable.
8.3 The ‘economic development’ approach

In Thailand economic forces have been crucial in shaping what children do. Economic development has had a major impact on moving children from the paddy fields to the hell factories and into the schools. The economic decline in Thailand since 1997 is providing further evidence of the importance of the ‘economic development’ approach, as a proportion of children dropout of schools for the workforce.

Rodgers and Standing (1981:23) argued that child employment not only reflects a society’s economic processes but also shapes the normative attitudes towards children. Historically, Thailand’s economy was based on rice production, and as a result the majority of working children in Thailand were involved in this activity. However, with the development of an industrial base a proportion of children started to become involved in non-agricultural work. In the decade from 1985 to 1996 when Thailand experienced economic boom conditions (Warr 1996:1) a further change to children’s ‘work’ took place: the number of children in the workforce declined while the number in schools increased. However, with the onset of the economic crisis in 1997 there was a rise in the number of children in the labour force.

8.3.1 ‘Paddy field’ phase

In phase one, which for Thailand can be called the ‘paddy field’ phase, children worked alongside their parents, assisting them with the rice crop. The production of rice has dominated Thai society. From the signing of the Bowring treaty with Britain in 1855, which increased Thailand’s contact with the world’s trading system, this crop has dominated the country’s economy (Falkus 1991:54; Kemp 1991:318). As late as 1960 the traditional ‘five R’s’, rice, rivers, rain, religion, and the royal family dominated Thai society (Falkus 1991:56).

So dominant has farming been that in 1956 close to 88 per cent of the working population was employed as ‘farmers, fishermen, hunters, loggers, and related workers’, and only 2.1 per cent in manufacturing (Falkus 1991:56). In the 1960s, not only was Thailand an overwhelmingly agricultural country, but its output was based on one crop. The country’s farmers produced rice on over 80 per cent of the cultivated land (Falkus 1995:15).

The lives of the majority of Thai children, like those of their parents, were centred on farming. Apart from a limited amount of schooling they would have assisted their parents from an early age. In interviews in my study sites older people constantly talked about their involvement in this activity:

*Ann:* I ploughed, planted and harvested rice, fetched water, chopped wood, I did everything from when I was a kid (old woman, Ban Nam Suiy 30/8/96).

For some there was school as well as work on the farm:
Dara: When I was a kid my life was spent in the fields. In the morning I would mill the rice because before we didn’t have rice mills ... When I was seven I can remember once I had milled the rice I would get the water to water the plants, I would collect 12 lots of water on my back for my grandmother. I would have to walk 700 metres each time and every day I did this. I would also take the buffaloes and tie them up in the fields. Then I would go to school. As soon as school finished for the day I would again help my parents with work (44-year-old man, Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

8.3.2 From the paddy fields to the ‘hell factories’

As the Thai economy has shifted toward an industrial basis opportunities for children to work in manufacturing, commercial, and wage agricultural labor, often outside the formal sector, have been increasing. These trends have been accelerated by growing rural poverty and urban/rural economic disparity, prompting many children to enter the work force in order to support their families or themselves.

(Brown & Sittitrai 1995:142-3)

From the 1960s onwards, the importance of farming started to decline. In 1960, agriculture accounted for close to 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Production (GDP). This share fell to 27 per cent in 1970, 21 per cent in 1980, 12 per cent in 1990 and to less than 10 per cent in 1996 (Chandavithum 1995:1; Duncan 1996:3; Sussangkarn 1995:237). By 1990, agriculture had been reduced to a minor role in the Thai economy. Industry was growing at 15 per cent a year while agriculture was stagnating. Industry by 1990 contributed twice as much to GDP as did agriculture. The countryside had changed from being important to peripheral (Phongpaichit & Baker 1996:141 and 146).

Many farming children and their parents no longer saw themselves as having a future in agriculture. Poor conditions led many families to look beyond farming in their efforts to increase their incomes. Among the young there was a widespread perception that agriculture was not sufficient to meet their needs and they increasingly turned to income-generating activities (Rigg 1988:342). Raising aspirations meant that villagers no longer wished to maintain traditional lifestyles. Every parent that I interviewed told me that they did not want their children to be farmers. The following reply from a farming woman to the question ‘Do you want your children to be farmers?’, was typical of many responses:

Mim: No, I don’t want them to be farmers. I and my husband have struggled. Yes, they have farmed in the past but they had to. They can’t just become rice farmers as the cost of living is so high. Farming is not enough. You have to also earn money in other ways. We have had to struggle to ensure that our kids received good things. We have had to work very hard (31-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 23/3/96).

The share of employment in agriculture has declined, although not to the same extent as the decline in the importance of agricultural to the nation’s GNP (Sussangkarn 1993:358; Sussangkarn 1995:242). Even though agriculture has become less important, in 1997 more than half of the country’s labour force was still employed in agriculture (National Statistical Office various years).
The major workforce activity for Thai children has always been and still continues to be farming. Even with the increased involvement of children in non-agricultural activities they continue to be overwhelmingly concentrated in agriculture. Figure 8.1 shows that in 1987 over 90 per cent of boys and 80 per cent of girls aged 13-14 in the workforce were farming. This high rate has declined with the decreasing importance of agriculture but in 1997 over 67 per cent of working children were still engaged in this activity (National Statistical Office various years).

Figure 8.1 Proportion of boys and girls aged 13-14 in the labour force working in farming 1987-97


Over time, nevertheless, children and adults around the country, including those from Isarn, have become less involved in agriculture. The rate at which Isarn people were drawn into these activities, however, was slower than for the rest of the country. As the main crop of the region, sticky rice, was not exported, Isarn was only gradually drawn into the exchange economy (Falkus 1991:70; Kemp 1991:318). Three distinct factors, the building of the railway and road system, the kan pattana (development) program, and the degradation of natural resources, all enhanced this process.

8.3.2.1 The development of the railway and roads

The development of the railway and road system was one of the main catalysts in bringing both Bangkok and the market system into reach for the average Isarn person. Before the building of the railway and road system a trip to the capital could take weeks or even months depending on the starting point of the journey (Phongphit & Hewison 1990:88). The construction of the railway line to Khon Kaen in 1933 (Nicrowattanayingyong 1991:176) and the opening of the Friendship Highway in 1958
(Caldwell 1973:200; Keyes 1967:56; Rogers 1989:32), however, reduced this to a day trip. According to a resident in Ban Nam Suicy:

**Ann:** Before we had heard of Bangkok but we never went there. We didn't even really know Khon Kaen as to get there we had to walk ... These days you can go to Bangkok or Khon Kaen whenever you want (old woman, Ban Nam Suicy 30/8/96).

The railway and roads transformed Khon Kaen, and Isarn as a whole. On visiting Khon Kaen, Prince Damrong, the Minister of Interior at the beginning of the century wrote that:

[I] asked villagers about their livelihood and found it to be very amazing. ... People in this area live self-sufficiently; and there is virtually no need for using money ... Each household lives independently from the others. There are no masters and no servants. Household members are simply looked after by their household's leaders, village headmen, and commune leaders, in that order. But there is no single rich man who has up to 200 baht. Neither is there a single person who is as poor as turning himself into a servant (bao). They may have lived like this for hundreds of years ... Because money is not important, nobody accumulates it ... (Nicrowattanayingyong 1991:139).

The infrastructure introduced into Isarn, in particular the railway, transformed the local economy from that described by Prince Damrong into one dominated by Bangkok. Trade became possible as goods, which before had been too expensive or perishable, were easily transported between Isarn and the capital (Keyes 1967:18). The introduction of trade was one factor in spreading the need for wage labour, including the labour of children.

8.3.2.2 Kan pattana (development) program

With the first National Economic Development Plan in 1961 the government introduced the *kan pattana* development program. Phongphit and Hewison (1990:105) argued that this was the factor that brought a large number of Isarn villagers into the market-oriented mode of production. The program introduced cash crops to the region. The first new crop promoted was kenaf, followed by new varieties of rice and cassava. As farmers had to buy the fertilisers and pesticides needed for the success of these cash crops a number of them became trapped in a cycle of debt.

At the same time these villagers often had less time for those activities that had helped to maintain their previous self-sufficiency. No longer did they invest the same time in growing vegetables, fishing, weaving, or making handicrafts (Phongphit & Hewison 1990:107). This forced them to buy most of what they needed for daily life, including some basic foodstuffs such as rice.

The need for money among Isarn people grew. Turton (1989a:78) claimed that villagers' inability to repay debts, often at high interest rates, appeared to be the major factor in the dispossession of their land. Caldwell (1973:162) claimed that in 1953, 16 per cent of the farmers were in debt. By the mid-1980s, however, 70 per cent of farmers
owed money with the average amount being 10,000 to 50,000 bhat4 (TDSC Staff 1989:21).

The debt influenced both urbanisation and ‘child labour’. A common method of paying off debt was to migrate either to Bangkok or to some nearby urban centre to seek employment. This process, in part, contributed to ‘child labour’ in Khon Kaen. Families either sent children to work in the city or they moved en masse. The Thai government urbanised Khon Kaen as a symbol of the kan pattana program (Nicrowattanayingyong 1991:195). It is unlikely, however, that the introduction of cash crops was part of that program even though it contributed to the process.

8.3.2.3 Environmental degradation and the push of children into the workforce

The state of the Thai environment has had major consequences for the lives of Thai children. The deteriorating environment in Thailand removed many traditional forms of child work and replaced them with activities that are considered as ‘child labour’. The ‘child labour’ literature gives little importance to environmental degradation in forcing children into the workforce, because concern about ‘child labour’ focuses on children in manufacturing, commercial and service activities and not on children who spend their time farming.

In 1939 most of Isam was covered by forests but by the early 1990s only 15 per cent of the surface was classified as such (Rambo 1991:21). This reduction, according to Rambo (1991:32), changed the relationship between Isam farmers and natural resources. Deforestation, soil erosion, loss of wild species, and overgrazing of remaining wild areas were a consequence of the incorporation of Isam farmers into the larger social and economic system.

With the reduction of forested areas more Isam families were unable to survive without greater participation in the market. Less firewood was gathered, fewer fish were caught and more meat had to be bought. For all necessities cash was increasingly required (Scott 1976:64).

Previously, survival was dependent not only on the rice crop but also on the ability to add to that staple by hunting and gathering. This was graphically depicted in the book Luk Isan, called in English, A child of the Northeast (Boontawee 1988). This book is set in the 1930s and is centred on the life of a small boy called Koon. Through Koon we see the desperation faced by his family in their efforts to gain sufficient food. There are numerous adventures when Koon and his family hunt, fish and gather food. Older residents in my study led lives like Koon. Not only did they farm from an early age but they also foraged the forests to supplement their family food supplies:

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4 This was equivalent to about Aus $500 to $2,500 in 1996.
Hoi: Yes, we collected mushrooms and frogs, there were lots of them... There were lots of trees, lots of fields. We would collect things and cook them. The forests were large, here and everywhere (old man, Ban Nam Jai 23/3/96).

In the two villages where I carried out my research both boys and girls were still involved in gathering food. This form of work had not been eliminated, just reduced. One favourite activity was to hunt for a particular lizard. They spent great physical efforts capturing the lizards. Armed with sling shots these children were usually able to return with a supply sufficient for a meal\(^5\). The children not only hunted lizards but also birds and fish and gathered fruit, mushrooms, red ant eggs, vegetables, and kindling.

Although the children spent time foraging for food their success at doing so was limited by the natural environment around them. The extensive forest mentioned above had been logged. Compared to the time of their parents and grandparents there were no longer the natural resources that could be hunted or gathered:

Somjet: The amount of nature has been reduced. The village forest before had many trees. That was the case 50 to 60 years ago. When I came to live here there were tigers, wild pigs, large snakes around our village. The wild pigs would come to our village. There were barking deer. These animals use to come to our village. There were lots of trees (45-year-old man, Ban Nam Suay 31/8/96).

Ying: Presently, it is very hard to find any animals, almost none are left (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

With the reduction in resources that once supplemented families' food supply, the need to work for money increased. Families, and that often included children, were forced into the labour force. Money has become crucial in the lives of the residents of my research sites:

Ann: Before, there was enough to eat, but now there is nothing to do. Now when you finish school you have to go to Bangkok to work... But before to eat you didn't have to buy things. These days if you don't have money you can't eat. You have to work for everything. Now you have to buy everything (old woman, Ban Nam Suay 30/8/96).

Simon: So do you have enough money?

Puk: I have enough to buy things to eat, if you don't have money you can't buy anything. The economy today is based on buying. Come the end of the month there is the bank, the life insurance, the electricity, and the water to be paid off. Each month it is no small amount (old woman, Ban Nam Suay 30/8/96).

In the city, when I collected my data, children were removed from the natural environment and were unable to collect food. Some of them, however, were still collecting things. A group of children, particularly from the slum Soi Shiwit Rantod, were supplementing their family incomes (or their own in some cases) by collecting paper, which they sold at a recycling centre. On numerous occasions I saw children

\(^5\) The children often prepared these lizards themselves, but I must say this was not my favourite dish within the Thai cuisine.
going through garbage searching for paper. This work had monetary value unlike the collection of food carried out in the villages.

8.3.3 The ‘hell factories’ phase

It was not until the spread of commerce, and later the rise of industry, that questions were raised on the economic roles of children and their roles as family members. (Hull 1981:47)

For Thailand the second phase, the ‘hell factories’ phase, occurred with the introduction of the market economy which transformed the lives of many children. This is the phase with which most of the ‘child labour’ literature is concerned.

From the 1960s onwards with the onset of industrialisation in Thailand (Falkus 1995:15) there were substantial changes to the economy. There was a steady shift away from agriculture towards industrial and export production (Podhisita & Pattaravanich 1995:1). Around 1986 industry exceeded agriculture in its contribution to GDP. The economy’s engine was no longer agriculture but industrial exports, construction, banking, transport and other services (Falkus 1995:13).

According to Chandra vi th um (1995:7), the rapid industrialisation with an emphasis on export-oriented production created the need for a large workforce with few skills. As a result children who had before the 1960s worked on farms were recruited to work in the non-agricultural sector. Children from this time on were employed in food-processing facilities, textile plants, pastry and confectionery factories, cosmetics factories, rubber and plastic plants, and metal works. Chandra vi th um also stated that girls were employed in restaurants, beauty parlours, movie houses, clubs, bowling alleys and massage parlours.

8.3.3.1 Poverty and the ‘hell factories’

The main reason why Thai children worked in the non-agricultural sectors, as well as on farms, was that they were too poor to afford schooling. Poverty is seen as the overriding cause of ‘child labour’ (Bequele 1995:15; Bequele & Myers 1995:33; Bond 1982:2; Brasted & Wright 1996:56; Hasnat 1995:419). Mendelievich (1979:4) claimed that ‘child labour persists in inverse relation to the degree of economic advancement of a society.’ Children are forced into work as they cannot afford to go to school and they and their families need the money that they earn.

For the villagers I interviewed, it was commonsense for a child to work for money if the family was facing economic hardship. A woman, asked what a child aged 12-13 would do if the family was very poor, said:

Fa: The kid would go and work at the fish-net factory, this is what your normal person does. The rich people and the government they don’t really take care for us, Simon. The government and the rich don’t really look at the conditions of the poor. We lack
things. For example with rice, some people don't have any rice fields and they don't have any work. The government doesn't help us with these problems, so we have to use the labour of our children and grandchildren, isn't that so? Let's suppose the government helps poor people not to use child labour then they would have to give us money to help with everything. I don't say it has to be rice that they would give us every month. If it was like this there probably would be no child labour, wouldn't that be the case? (31-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 23/3/96)

Figure 8.2 Proportion of children aged 13-14 in the workforce in Thailand and Isarn; 1984-97

Note: Data for 1984-85 have been adjusted to account for the fact that for those years data were collected for children aged 11-14 as a whole. The adjustment was calculated from the 1986 figures. In this year data were collected for those aged 11-12 and those aged 13-14. The younger Thai group represented 8 per cent of those in the workforce for the combined 11-14 age group. Thus the 1984-85 period has been adjusted assuming that those Thai children aged 13-14 represented 92 per cent of the 11-14 group in the workforce. The younger Isarn group represented 5 per cent of those in the workforce for the combined 11-14 age group. Thus the 1984-85 period has been adjusted assuming that those Isarn aged 13-14 represented 95 per cent of the 11-14 group in the workforce.

Source: National Statistical Office (various years).

The greater poverty in Isarn has led to more children working in this region than in other parts of the nation. Figure 8.2 shows that in 1988 when the proportion of Thai working children aged 13-14, which includes those from Isarn, peaked at 40 per cent, in Isarn it was 60 per cent. In reality the proportion of Isarn children would have been even greater than the Figure indicates as many Isarn children migrate to employment centres outside the region and thus are included in the national and not in the Isarn statistics.
8.3.3.2 Not just poverty

Although poverty is the overriding reason why children work, it is not the only cause. Child work is rooted in traditions, attitudes, and customs (Hasnat 1995:419). New attitudes about how children should live and the belongings and opportunities that they should have are creating a greater dependency on money and thus work.

White (1994:868-69) suggested that in Indonesia ‘child labour’ can be understood, in part, by a growing materialistic culture, created partly by the media, in which young people desire certain kinds of clothing, eat certain kinds of food, engage in certain activities and own certain possessions so as to be a ‘proper’ person. White believed that this was an important reason for why children decided to enter the labour market.

Thai children, like their Indonesian counterparts, are affected by a growing materialistic culture. The desire to be ‘proper’ has meant that they need to be seen at the right place. During my stay in Khon Kaen a number of Doughnut shops opened. In the first few months of their operation there were crowds of teenagers buying this type of food. Asking why, I was told:

_Poi_: Because it is fashionable. It is smart, it is a hit. ... Yes, it is from overseas, this is the reason. It belongs to the West. In the past we didn’t have anything like this. ... It is the environment. They follow their friends, fashion and social values. Maybe they are afraid to be out-of-date (15-year-old boy, demonstration school 6 6/1/96).

Images, created in part by the media, were important for the children of the research sites:

_Seree_: Yes, they see the commercials and they want to copy the fashion of other kids (high school teacher at Si Liam school 2/10/96).

Attempting to keep up with fellow children was expensive, as they constantly needed new and bigger possessions to stay ‘cool’. Asking a group of girls if boys had to have motorcycles, I was told:

_Saeng_: Yes, for them to be cool they have to have motorbikes. If they don’t have motorbikes they are not cool and us girls will not like them. ... The motorbike must be a popular brand and it must be big (17-year-old girl, Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

The materialistic culture had created a greater desire for money. Whether it was to buy a couple of _baht_ worth of sweets in the villagers or pizza in the city, children needed money. The children’s desire for money was a constant conflict between them and their parents. According to one mother:

_Ying_: Kids these days as soon as they wake up are asking for money (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

In Thailand many university campuses have a demonstration school. These are high schools connected to education faculty. They are highly regarded and children from around Isan had migrated to Khon Kaen to gain entry to this school.
For some children the only way to gain enough money to be a ‘proper’ person was to work. No longer was it only absolute poverty causing children to work but a desire to spend.

8.3.4 From ‘hell factories’ to the schools

The shift from the ‘hell factories’ to the ‘schooling’ phase took place as a result of a dramatic growth in the Thai economy. From 1988 to 1996 the number of children working in Thailand declined dramatically (National Statistical Office various years). After recovering from a recession in 1985 the economy started to grow at double-digit rates (Krongkaew 1995:63; United Nations Industrial Development Organization 1992:1). From 1986 to 1995 the Thai economy was the fastest growing economy in the world. In terms of economic growth Thailand was a superstar (Warr 1996:1; 1997:1).

The rapid economic growth, however, was accompanied by increasing regional inequalities (Kinvig 1989:8). The Bangkok Metropolitan Region in 1995 contained just over 17 per cent of the country’s population but accounted for over 53 per cent of the total GDP (Sussangkarn 1995:244). From 1975-76 to 1992 the proportion of total income received by the poorest 20 per cent of the population declined from 6.1 to 3.9 per cent. By the early 1990s Thailand’s richest quintile received 55 per cent of the country’s total income, resulting in great social and income inequalities (Komin 1995:253).

This inequality was not just among adults but also among children. There was a growing gulf between different groups of children. There were major differences between children in the city. Some children, while talking to me, would say ‘us poor children’ while others were able to flaunt their wealth:

*Dang*: They have pagers, mobile telephones, wear sun glasses and drive Citroens, Mercedes Benz or BMWs.

*Simon*: How old are they?

*Dang*: About 16 to 17.

*Simon*: And they have a Mercedes Benz!

*Dang*: Yes. One boy in our class has. His parents gave it to him. His parents are the owner of Villa, they also own a Sony shop and a bus company. These are owned by them. There are a lot of young women who admire those who drive the Citroens and Mercedes. They want to sit in their cars (16-year-old girl, demonstration school 28/12/95).

The economic expansion has been criticised not only for increasing inequality but for not benefiting most Thais. Chandravithum (1995:9) said that the majority of Thai people did not benefit from the economic boom; instead, rural people, slum dwellers, workers, the self-employed, wage earners, small traders, and lower-level public servants were disadvantaged during the boom as their share of national income declined.
Despite the increasing inequality there was a dramatic decline in the number of working children in Thailand. The boom increased inequality but also decreased poverty. This provides an important lesson to ‘child labour’ researchers who believe that inequality is a major hindrance in reducing the number of working children. Bequele and Myers (1995:33-34) stressed that increasing per capita GDP does not automatically reduce ‘child labour’. They felt that much depended on the distribution of income as it was only when the poor increase their prosperity that the number of children working decreased. The Thai experience is showing that Bequele and Myers were only partly right. Income distribution is not important as long as poverty is reduced.

The decline in the number of working children in Thailand during a period of increasing inequality, however, was not unique. Scott (1982:547) showed that in Peru the proportion of children aged 6-14 in employment fell dramatically, although inequality had increased. The decline took place after a 30-year period of industrial and urban growth.

Children as a group were among the winners from the economic boom years in Thailand. Their numbers in the workforce declined dramatically and there was a corresponding increase in their numbers in schools (Chapter 9). The rapidly growing economy led to a decline in levels of absolute poverty and an improvement in the general situation of children and their families (Ageros 1996:1). Since 1962-63, when the first set of data on household income and expenditure was available, the proportion of people considered to be poor has steadily decreased (Krongkaew 1993:405). The boom dramatically reduced absolute poverty, which fell from 22 per cent in 1988 to 10 per cent in 1994, using the most common definitions of poverty (Warr 1997:2). The largest absolute decline in poverty occurred in Isarn, the poorest region of the country, where the level of poverty fell from 45 to 22 per cent of the population (Warr 1996:2).

According to Warr (1996:3-4), the data from Thailand have indicated that the faster the economy grew the greater the reduction in poverty. He found no evidence that rapid economic growth was bad for the poor in absolute terms. Instead, he suggested that the rate of aggregate growth may be the single most important determinant in the decline of poverty. The data also indicate that the rate of aggregate growth may be the most single important determinant of declines in the number of working children.

Without increasing overall affluence ‘child labour’ will persist. It is when families become richer that children leave the workforce. The supply of working children declines, as schooling becomes an affordable alternative. Nardinelli (1990:8) illustrated that it was rising incomes that were chiefly responsible for the long-term reduction of ‘child labour’ in Britain. He claimed:

The growing real income of nineteenth-century Britain was the most important force removing children from textile factories after 1835. Children worked in factories because their families were poor; as family income increased, child labour decreased. Indeed, as a given family’s income increased younger children began work at a later age than their older brothers and sisters (Nardinelli 1990:112).
‘Child labour’ in Thailand declined between 1988 and 1996 before rising with the beginning of the economic crisis in 1997 (Figure 8.3). Although it is still a problem, the number of children in the workforce has decreased dramatically. One of the great gains of the Thai economic boom from the mid-1980s until 1996, was to transform the nature and extent of children’s work.

![Figure 8.3 Proportion of children aged 13-14 in the workforce in Thailand, 1984-97](image)

**Note:** Data for 1984-85 have been adjusted to account for the fact that for those years data were collected for children aged 11-14 as a whole. The adjustment was calculated from the 1986 figures. In this year data were collected for those aged 11-12 and those aged 13-14. The younger group represented 8 per cent of those in the workforce for the combined 11-14 age group. Thus the 1984-85 period has been adjusted assuming that those aged 13-14 represented 92 per cent of the 11-14 group in the workforce.

**Source:** National Statistical Office (various years).

The number of children surveyed working in the labour force of Thailand declined more than fourfold between 1988 and 1996 (National Statistical Office various years). In 1988 there were over 988,000 children in the workforce aged between 13 and 14, and over 189,000 children aged 11 to 12 were working. By 1996 the numbers of children aged 13 to 14 had declined to over 199,500. Unfortunately, there are no data on children aged 11 to 12 in 1996. Considering school enrolment numbers, however, a major reduction in their numbers is assumed.

This dramatic change in the number of children working was felt in the research sites. Far fewer children were working or seeking employment. An owner of a small bakery, when asked about the difference between the number of children applying for work in 1996 and five years earlier, said:

*Rong:* I would say five years ago there were more kids who were applying. It was easier to find workers then (bakery owner, Si Liam 24/11/96).
A second employer, asked the same question, stated:

*Duan:* Before, there were more than now. Presently, there aren’t that many. ... Now they are helping kids who have only a little amount of education to study. Families are allowing their children to study. Kids of this age should be studying rather than working (30-year-old manageress of a soap factory, Si Liam 12/10/96).

In 1996 it was no longer the norm for children under 15 to be in the workforce. Instead, their lives and their ‘work’ centred on schools. Asking a villager if children were now working, I was told:

*Ann:* No, they don’t work except for going to school and reading their books (old woman, Ban Nam Suiy 30/8/96).

The decline of children in the Thai workforce, although it occurred throughout the nation, was predominantly in the non-municipal areas. Figure 8.4 illustrates that the majority of working children in Thailand have been and continue to be located in rural areas.

Figure 8.4 Proportion of children aged 13-14 in the workforce in municipal and non-municipal areas in Thailand, 1984-97

![Graph showing the proportion of children aged 13-14 in the workforce in municipal and non-municipal areas in Thailand, 1984-97.](image)

Note: Data for 1984-85 have been adjusted to account for the fact that for those years data were collected for children aged 11-14 as a whole. The adjustment was calculated from the 1986 figures. In this year data was collected for those aged 11-12 and those aged 13-14. The younger group, represented 12 per cent in the municipal areas and 8 per cent in non-municipal areas, of those in the paid workforce for the combined 11-14 age group. Thus the 1984-85 period has been adjusted assuming those aged 13-14, represented 88 per cent in municipal areas and 92 per cent in non-municipal areas, of the 11-14 group in the paid workforce.

Source: National Statistical Office (various years).
Figure 8.5 provides further evidence that for Thailand the majority of working children is not only in rural areas but are in farming. Although the ‘child labour’ literature is concerned with children in non-agricultural activities, the majority of working children in Thailand are elsewhere. The figure also indicates that the decline in the importance of agriculture has been matched by a decline in the proportion of children working in this area. Nearly all the decline in the proportion of working children since 1988 was a result of children leaving the farms. In Thailand, although the country has reached the ‘schooling’ phase, the majority of children who are working are still in agriculture. As noted in Chapter 5, there is a major lacuna in the ‘child labour’ literature on these working children.

Figure 8.5 Number of working children 13-14 in Thailand by occupation 1987-97


8.3.4.1 Decline in demand for child workers

The economic boom not only reduced the supply of working children but it also decreased the demand for their services. Structural change during the boom shifted the demand for employment away from labour-intensive industries towards higher skilled employment.

The demand for children in labour-intensive industries declined. Sussangkarn’s (1995:239-241; 1998:2) analysis of the Thai economy during these years showed that there was a shift away from labour-intensive industries to medium-high technology enterprises. In the second half of the 1980s the bulk of Thailand’s manufacturing exports consisted of labour-intensive products. They grew at 30 to 40 per cent per annum during the early stage of the boom. Many of these industries had shifted from more industrialised Asian economies to take advantage of cheap Thai labour and this at
times included children. However, lower-cost countries such as China, Indonesia and Vietnam have quickly eroded Thailand’s advantage as a base for labour-intensive manufactured products. By 1993 medium-high technology manufactured exports had passed labour-intensive industries in importance to the Thai economy. The loss of competitiveness was apparent by 1996, when total exports declined by 0.2%, compared to increases of over 20 per cent per annum in the previous years. Exports of some products, such as medium to low quality garments and shoes, declined by about 30 to 40 per cent in 1996 (Sussangkarn 1998:2). There was a transition away from labour-intensive industries to industries that required a more skilled workforce and less likely to employ children. According to Sussangkarn (1995:244), these industries and department stores, good hotels and the financial sector were not accepting applicants with only primary education. Large employers in Khon Kaen were reluctant to employ children because of their perceived immaturity:

Ling: For children aged 16 we have to think whether to accept them. They would be in the production section. When we employ kids to work here, we have to talk to them so that they can understand. We must know that they are 16 and that they will have to do work that those aged 20 are doing. They have to be responsible. They can’t be expected to be treated like children, they have to adjust a lot. There is a big problem, they think the factory is like a school. They go running around as if they were playing (a manager of fish-net factory B 20/10/96).

The erosion of labour-intensive industries, and thus a decline in the employment of children in these areas, was due to a rise in wages. From 1982 to 1994 real wages increased by 70 per cent, with most of the increase occurring after 1990. From that year to 1994 real wages increased by 10 per cent per year. No longer was there a pool of cheap rural labour, and labour shortages started to exist (Warr 1997:15).

8.3.5 Working children in the economic crisis

Millions of Asian children already have dropped out of school this year; millions more are on the verge of leaving the classroom for the workplace in the coming months. Asia had greatly reduced child labor in the past decade, but that progress is unravelling as young children are now working long, hot, dangerous hours in glass factories, garment sweat shops and cement plants. Others are turning to street begging and prostitution. Families are marrying off their daughters at increasingly young ages so they have fewer mouths to feed. And some families who believe they can no longer afford to raise their children are leaving them at orphanages. (Sullivan 1998)

Thailand in 1996 seemed to be a model of development success (Warr 1998:2) but by 1997 the country’s economic miracle had come to a sudden end. The economic conditions that existed while I was researching this thesis have been reversed. By the middle of 1998

Domestically, the economy was in disarray. The exchange rate had collapsed, following the decision to float the currency in July 1997, a humiliating IMF bailout package had been agreed to, and confidence in the country’s economic institutions was shattered,
especially that of the Bank of Thailand. Both rich and poor Thais were experiencing genuine economic hardship (Warr 1998:2).

The consequences of the economic crisis for children are potentially devastating. Nevertheless, caution must be taken in accepting the media reports and the claims that are being made. Reports of millions of Asian children dropping out of school, daughters being married off at increasingly young ages and children being left at orphanages need to be confirmed. A detailed study is needed to determine the effects of the economic crisis on children.

8.3.5.1 Leaving school for the workplace

The revelation coincided with a report on the number of school dropouts which has climbed past the 200,000 mark since the economic crisis struck. (Bunnag & Santimetaneedol 1998)

The economic crisis has taken its toll on the country’s human resource development and over 250,000 students nationwide are reported to have dropped out of schools mid-year or failed to further their studies this year. (Santimatanedol 1998)

The slump has forced as many as 300,000 pupils to drop out before completing Mathayom Suksa 3 [Year 9] compulsory education, according to a member of the Foundation for Children’s Development. (Bangkok Post 1998a)

The first report appeared in September, the second in July, and the final report in August of 1998. A difference in these reports of 100,000 children illustrates the variation in estimations of the suffering caused by the economic crisis. Such a large variation signals a need for caution in concluding the exact outcomes for children of the economic crisis. Further, the actual figure of children leaving the education system could be lower than that indicated by the above claims. The report indicating a dropout level of 200,000 children claimed that this figure is likely to be inflated as school administrators try to obtain funding from the central government (Bunnag & Santimetaneedol 1998).

Despite data inaccuracies in media reports a major reversal seems to have occurred in Thailand with growing numbers of children leaving the schooling system and entering the labour force. Children are likely to have left school throughout the country including Changwat Khon Kaen. An UNICEF official told me (pers. comm.) that on a visit to a school in Changwat Khon Kaen she discovered that the government had cut the budget for the school lunch program which had provided free lunches to poor students. Without such assistance poor families are likely to find it harder to send their children to school.

Although this is conjecture it is possible that girls from poor families will be removed from the education system before boys. Podhisita and Umaporn (1995:35) claimed that in the past boys were far more likely to cite personal problems for leaving
the education system while girls cite family problems. In other words daughters are more likely to be affected by family circumstances. Once families face financial difficulties girls’ education may suffer.

According to the NSO the increased school dropout rate was matched by an increased participation rate in the labour force by children aged 13-14. The trend of declining numbers of children in the workforce stopped with the onset of the economic crisis. For the first year since 1988 the number and proportion of children aged 13-14 in the workforce increased (Figures 8.2-8.5). In 1997 the number of working children in the 13-14 age group rose to 219,400, an increase of 19,900 children over the previous year.

The increase in the number of child workers illustrates the importance of the ‘economic development’ approach in reducing the number of children in the workforce. During the economic boom the number of children in the labour force declined. With a reverse in the economy, however, there was an immediate reaction with more children forced back into the workforce. However, it must be stressed that although there was an increase in the proportion of children aged 13-14 in the labour force the figure was the second lowest level ever recorded.

It may seem surprising to some that when an economy is contracting and unemployment is increasing the number of children in the workforce would increase. Yet this has happened in Thailand:

This situation gives rise to the seeming paradox that where underemployment is greatest, child labour is also liable to be most prevalent (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions 1987:4).

Rodgers and Standing (1981:36) argued that high unemployment among working class families discourages school attendance. This is because children’s labour is needed to supplement family income and because of the perception that the years their children will be able to study will be insufficient to secure reasonable paid jobs. In short:

Child labour is rooted in poverty. Unemployment and underemployment, precarious incomes, low living standards, and insufficient opportunities for education and training are its underlying causes. Children work because they must—for their own survival and that of their families (Blanchard 1985:V).

8.3.5.2 Boys and girls in the economic bust

The 1997 economic crisis possibly reveals a sex difference in the nature of children’s work in Thailand. During the economic boom the number of both boys and girls working declined. The rate of decline for girls was quicker than that for boys and by 1994 boys outnumbered girls in the workforce (Chapter 6). This was a reverse of what had existed before the economic boom. With the onset of the economic crisis in 1997 the increase in the number of working children was greater for girls. However, it must be stressed that in 1997 there were still more boys than girls in the workforce, but the gap had been reduced.
The increase in the number of children in the workforce did not occur in all occupations (Figure 8.6) but occurred in farming and sales. In craft and production and in services the number of working children actually decreased. The children entering the workforce were centred on only certain types of work. The structural shift in the Thai economy during the economic boom, which reduced the demand for children within the industrial sector was still occurring. It seems children joining the labour force were not working in *rong ngan narok* (hell factories) but in farming and sales work considered by many not as 'child labour' but as the children's duty (Chapter 5).

Figure 8.6 Change in number of child workers in Thailand aged 13-14 by occupation, 1996-97

![Chart showing change in number of child workers by occupation](image)


Figure 8.6 also reveals differences between boys and girls. In 1997 over three times more girls than boys started working in 'farming'. More girls than boys also became 'sales' workers. This information combined with Figure 8.7 suggests that large numbers of girls either left schooling or lost paid employment to start unpaid work, usually on the family farm. Many of the sales workers would have also been working as unpaid family members. The increase in unpaid family workers was dominated by girls. Their increase was eight times greater than that for boys. Although unpaid family work, particularly on farms, may not be regarded as 'child labour' it is a grave concern that young children have been forced back into the labour force.
It seems that during times of economic growth in Thailand, which allows increasing numbers of children to study, more girls than boys take this opportunity. In times of economic hardship, however, girls are more likely than boys to be forced back into the workforce.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the relative importance of legislation, technology and economic development in transforming children’s work in Thailand. Although there are authors who regard legislation as important in combating ‘child labour’, many people concerned about working children have been critical of this approach. They believe that if ‘child labour’ is made illegal, protecting working children and improving their working conditions becomes more difficult. The benefits of ‘child labour legislation must not lie in restricting children from working or employers form accepting children in their workforce, but in changing societal attitudes about children. Changing legislation raising the legal age of entry to the workforce, as has recently occurred in Thailand, helps to alter expectations about children’s work. For most of the residents of the research sites by 1996 the expectation was that this work was schooling.

Technical advances can reduce and at times eliminate forms of children’s work. This had occurred in the study areas; the need for children to collect water and kindling had been reduced; they no longer needed to mill rice; and fewer children were looking after buffaloes. New technologies were changing the demand for children in factories, as employers needed more educated workers. This in turn was encouraging children to spend more time in their main form of ‘work’: studying.
The factor that brought the most dramatic changes into the working habits of children in Thailand was economic development. The evidence from Thailand since 1988 strongly supports the argument that the best way to reduce the number of working children is to encourage economic growth. The economic boom that Thailand experienced from the mid-1980s to 1996 has shown that the 'economic development' approach has been the most effective in Thailand in ensuring that children do not enter the labour force. The economic crisis, forcing children back into the workforce, further illustrates the importance of economic growth in both making and encouraging the new 'work' of children: school.
Chapter 9

‘Education is children’s main occupation’

If the success of revolutions is measured entirely by their completeness, certainly the social revolution which has transformed the role of young people in society during the last century has been among the most successful. The elements of the revolution have been manifold, affecting family relations, educational opportunities, job opportunities, and peer relations. Just as no single cause explains the change, no single factor characterizes it, but some broad trends might be noted. First, young people now spend far more time in formal educational institutions than ever before: as a corollary, they spend less time in employment. Such jobs as they do hold, moreover, tend to be short-term, sought out for immediate spending money rather than as life’s work. Whether the school prepares the young for careers or not, the social expectation increasingly has been that it should and will. Hence the length of formal education has been stretched out from the early through the middle teens to the late teens and early twenties.

(Coleman et al. 1974:9)

The revolution described by Coleman and others occurred in USA, yet they could have as easily been describing the changes in Thailand. Lives of Thai children dramatically changed during the twentieth century. As a result of fertility declines, improvements in health and gains in education, Thai children are now fewer (as a proportion of the total population), healthier and better educated than at any other time. Like the youth in developed nations Thai children are spending less time in employment and a greater proportion of their lives in educational institutions. Education in Thailand has become children’s main occupation.

Education is the opposite side of the ‘child labour’ coin: while studying, children are not in the workforce. Although this statement is a simplification, since children combine labour-force activities with school, extending the period of education means a reduction in the time children spend in the labour force. Thus education ‘is a surrogate measure for child labor’ (Weiner 1991:156); so it is important to examine the changes in the Thai education system and the implications for children.

The 1990s have seen a revolution in child activities in Thailand; children are leaving the workforce for the classroom. Figure 9.1 shows this relationship between education and children in the labour force. There has been a dramatic increase in the

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1 Statement made by a 13-year-old waitress working at Khon Kaen University, who wished to be studying, 11/8/96.
progression rate for children in Changwat Khon Kaen which mirrors a dramatic decline in the number of Isarn children aged 13 to 14 in the paid workforce. As a greater proportion of children has progressed to the first year of high school, typically around age 13, there has been a similar proportion of children in the same age group leaving the workforce. The trend in Changwat Khon Kaen, up to 1996 when I was researching this topic, was towards universal schooling for 13 to 15-year-olds. This is important because ‘In country after country the establishment of universal schooling up to the age of fourteen has signalled the virtual end of child labour’ (Weiner 1991:156).

Figure 9.1 Comparison of progression rates from primary school to Year 7, Changwat Khon Kaen, and proportion of Isarn children aged 13-14 in the workforce, 1985-96

Notes: Data for 1985 have been adjusted. For this year data were collected for children aged 11-14 as a whole. The adjustment was calculated from the 1986 figures when data were collected separately for those aged 11-12 and those aged 13-14. The younger group represented 5 per cent of those in the paid workforce for the combined 11-14 age group. Thus 1985 data have been adjusted assuming those aged 13-14 represented 95 per cent of the 11-14 group in the paid workforce.

The progression rate is calculated by comparing the number of students in Year 6 with the number of students in Year 7 the following year.

Sources: Khon Kaen Provincial Hall (various years) National Statistical Office (various years).

This chapter shows there has been a long-term trend for Thai children to spend more time in their main form of work, studying, and less time in the labour force. Yet

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2 It is not possible to show the numbers of children aged 13-14 in Changwat Khon Kaen’s labour force as published data from the NSO Labour Force Surveys are broken down no further than by regions.
this change has not been uniform, differences exist for boys and girls and for those living in urban and rural areas. First, this chapter explores the relationship between education and children in the labour force by reviewing the ‘child labour’ literature on education and its effect on children. Next, the chapter details changes to the Thai education system that have occurred this century. It then focuses on the changing enrolment patterns of the residents in the research sites. Finally, the chapter investigates the changing attitudes to education, by juxtaposing the views of children, their parents and grandparents, and those of teachers and employers.

9.1 Education: a weapon against ‘child labour’

Education is considered by many to be the single most important weapon governments can wield against child labour. (Boyden & Myers 1995:8).

Many ‘child labour’ scholars see education as a means of reducing the number of child workers. First, the level of parents’ education seems to influence the probability of children being in the labour force. Second, education can increase children’s awareness of their rights and thus help to reduce exploitation. Finally and most importantly, physically placing children in classrooms reduces their opportunities to work.

A number of ‘child labour’ studies have noted the impact parents’ education has on the probability that their children will be in the workforce. Asra (1994:69), in an Indonesian study, argued that children were more likely to work if their parents had limited education. In a second Indonesian study Irwanto and others (1995:69, 73-75) found the same relationship. They suggested that more educated parents had higher aspirations for children than less educated ones. They found, however, that mothers’ education played a greater role than fathers’ education in determining whether children studied. Children of less educated mothers were less likely to be studying. A Malaysian study by De Tray (1983:447) indicated that there was a different effect of fathers’ and mothers’ education on whether their children were in the labour force. Fathers’ schooling had no effect on young children’s participation rates, although older children of better educated fathers participated less in all forms of productive activities than other older children. For mothers, however, increased levels of education reduced all children’s participation rates. Knodel and others (1990:39), reviewing the determinants of children’s education in Thailand, added another important factor apart from parents’ education, namely the socioeconomic status of the parents. Poorer parents were less likely to have children studying. In Thailand low education has led to poor incomes transmitting inequality across generations (Khoman 1993:330). This has led to poor children not in school, but in the labour market from an early age like their parents before them.

The Irwanto and others (1995:66) study also found a relationship between single mothers and their children’s education. Children from female-headed families were
more likely to drop out of school than children from two-parent households or single-male-headed families.

Goddard and White (1982:472) hoped that education promotes children's awareness of their working rights. This assumes that children are manipulated when because of their youth they are oblivious of their legal entitlements. Writers on Thai 'child labour' hold this view. For example, Bond (1982:3) claimed that poor village children from Isarn became child workers because of their ignorance.

The main hope of education in reducing the number of children in the labour force, however, is that it removes them from the labour market. While physically located in school they are unable to work. School attendance limits the hours of work and defines the character and the conditions of employment that children can undertake. The relationship between education and 'child labour', however, is not straightforward. Before and after school, children are able to work.

The logic of schooling as a weapon against 'child labour' is that school children will not be participating in the labour market. Case studies, however, do not always indicate this to be the case. Myers (1989:331) claimed that in Peru children's paid work may have actually contributed to retaining them in schools rather than keeping them out. Only by gaining an income was it possible to cover the cost of school attendance. Children who were employed had higher levels of education than children who were not. Boyden (1990:206; 1994:26) stated that one of the ironies of increased school attendance is it can increase the number of children in paid employment, as children have to cover expenses such as uniforms and books. She felt that this was one explanation for the large percentage of children in many countries who combine school with work. Black (1993:20) supported this view by stating that on Smokey Mountain, in Manila, most children were earning money to pay for their school uniforms and books.

Evidence of the combination of schooling and paid work was found in my study. For example, 54 children, 7 per cent of all children, were combining the two activities (Chapter 6). Of these children, however, only one claimed that paid work had a negative effect on her education as she felt she was unable to keep up with her studies. Also a group of school girls in Years 8 and 9, just before their summer holiday, said that they planned to work in a fish-net factory for their break. They spontaneously stated that working in the factory was good as it gave them a chance to earn money so they could buy their school books and uniforms. They stressed school uniforms were the more important (based on diary 6/3/96).

9.2 Compulsory education

If education is the solution to 'child labour' then compulsory education would seem an effective tool in reducing the extent of children in the labour force. This, however, is highly debated in the 'child labour' literature. One group of writers believes that the elimination of 'child labour' can take place by forcing children to attend school. A
second group, however, believe that it is only when children and their families can afford education that they will go to school.

Fyfe (1989:31-33 and 141), reviewing the historical changes that took place in British ‘child labour’, believed that it was compulsory educational legislation that was the turning point in the campaign against ‘child labour’, it was school-based and not industrial or agricultural legislation that effectively ended ‘child labour’. He stated in a later work that ‘Education laws are the best laws against child labour and they are often much easier to enforce’ (Fyfe 1993:11).

A number of ‘child labour’ writers share Fyfe’s view that compulsory education is crucial in removing children from the workforce. Thijs (1994:21) stated that compulsory education was the policy instrument of many states to effectively remove children from the workforce. Hasnat (1995:424-5), looking at historical trends for the United States and Europe, asserted that compulsory education removed children from the labour force. This is despite saying, in the same paragraph, that it was a combination of economic, technological, social, and legal factors that eliminated ‘child labour’.

Not all ‘child labour’ scholars, however, think that compulsory education is the panacea for ‘child labour’. Brasted and Wright (1996:58) argue that children will attend school only if parents are convinced that schooling will benefit their children. Simply trying to enforce education will not work as

... compulsory education will not in itself create circumstances in which parents can afford to lose their children’s economic contribution in favour of sending them to school. Where adult wages are low, where social security systems are not in place, and where a preteen or teenaged child can adequately perform agricultural, trading or manufacturing tasks, it is difficult to picture an early end to damaging forms of child work (Black 1993:13).

Many children who are not at school and are in paid work are working because they and or their families need money. In rural Thailand many children have only limited education because of the low perceived returns of schooling (Khoman 1993:330). They are forced into the labour market, as they have no chance of pursuing an education (Petchprasert 1985:4). A villager articulated the necessity of children in poor families to work:

*Somjet:* The kids who aren’t going to school, firstly their parents are poor, they don’t have money to send their kids to school. If the child gets employed the parents will get money to help the family. ... If you are going to school you are not earning any money. What they could be earning is gone. For example if I go to work with my wife we can get only so much, but if we go with our children, we can get more. We can get more money to support the family which will enable us to have better conditions (45-year-old man, Ban Nam Suuy 31/8/96).

For other children money is not crucial in deciding to leave school. Instead they are alienated by the education system and see no reason to study. For these children grade repetition and low attendance are serious problems. Such concerns undermine
their confidence and lead to dropping out. When school is boring, work becomes more attractive (Boyden 1994:27). Surin, a 17-year-old boy, reflects this:

Surin: I think working is more enjoyable than studying. Because when you go to work you meet new things. You don’t have to do the old boring things. If you study there is nothing new each day, it is always the same. All you do is to write in books, it is all boring stuff. Working is fun; work is something different. It isn’t boring. I decided by myself to leave school, as I wanted to have new experiences. I didn’t want to study; I wanted to experience strange and new things. If I studied I would have been very bored (Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

Instead of compulsory education as the way to reduce the number of children in the labour force, other writers stress the importance of economic factors. One of the most important authors arguing this line is Nardinelli (1990:112) who stressed that children worked because their families were poor. For him the decline in British ‘child labour’ was not due to the introduction of compulsory education, as suggested by Fyfe, but rather the growing real income of British families. As families became wealthier their children could leave the workforce and attend school.

Himes and others (1994:10) supported Nardinelli’s view in their study on working children and education. They suggested that most educational experts believe the growth of educational systems comes when children and their parents see the relevance of education to their lives rather than when education becomes compulsory.

Increasing the wealth of the community puts families in a position to send their children to school and not to work. Fyfe (1989:33), although stressing the importance of compulsory education in ending ‘child labour’ in Britain (as noted above), partly undermined his thesis by referring to the importance of economic developments. He noted that with the introduction of compulsory education there were changes in the economy reducing the demand for child workers. Such economic progress enabled families to afford education.

The evidence from this study of Changwat Khon Kaen children indicates that over time there has been a mismatch in the years children actually study and the years required by legislation. In Thailand from 1921 to 1996 there were four distinct periods in the years of compulsory education3. During the first period, from 1921 to 1937, children were required to attend three years of school (Falkus 1997:173). Second, from 1937 to 1962 the government required children to spend four years studying. Compulsory education then increased to seven years in 1962 before being reduced to six years in 1978 (Falkus 1997:173; Knodel et al. 1987:39; Mason & Campbell 1993:33; Praditwong 1990:72-73).

Figure 9.2 indicates that even though there has been compulsory education there have been long periods of time when most students studied fewer years than legally

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3 Most authors mention only three periods, claiming that compulsory education from 1921 to 1962 was for four years.
required. The data for this figure are based on the educational levels achieved by those older than 13 in the household survey that I carried out. Children younger than 13 were not included in this analysis as they had not completed compulsory education. I completed my data collection in the middle of 1996, dividing those aged 13 between those who had completed year 6 and those who had not. Each dot in the figure indicates the number of years greater or less than compulsory education that residents gained. The straight horizontal line that intersects '0' at the y axis represents the stipulated number of years of study as required by compulsory education. It takes into account the four different compulsory education systems since 1921. If individuals studied the compulsory years of education they were represented on the horizontal line by a dot. If they studied fewer years they were below the line, while those studying more years than required by compulsory education appear above the line. The second line is a lowess line of best fit indicating the average number of years studied by individuals born in any particular year.

Figure 9.2 Years of education over time in relation to compulsory education

Note: Total number of cases equals 1613.
Source: Khon Kaen household survey 1996.

From 1903, when the oldest person in the survey was born, up to 1996 there were shifts in the average years of education. Before the 1930s the average was below the norm. For approximately the following 20 years residents, on average, studied for the compulsory number of years, which at that time was four. After that there was a dip, indicating the inability of most families to send their children for the full seven years of compulsory education. For those born in 1982, however, the average was close to three years above compulsory length of education, namely nine years. For residents the community norm was nine years of education. In reality the norm was higher than this as
the majority of the children were still studying when I collected the data, and thus by the
time they completed their studies the average would be higher.

Figure indicates that the government and the community have been out of step in
the number of years expected and the actual years spent at school. In earlier periods
families were unable to afford to send their children to school for the necessary number
of years. In the later period there has been another imbalance but with children studying
longer than required. More families sent their children to school for longer because of
the economic growth from the late 1980s to 1996 (Chapter 8). With greater prosperity
children, on average, were studying more than required by compulsory education.
Economic change and not compulsory education have increased the number of years of
education of Thai children.

These education data suggest that the best way to tackle ‘child labour’ is through
economic development. ‘Child labour’ scholars who see poverty to be the key cause of
the phenomenon hold this view. To reduce the supply of ‘child labour’ it is necessary to
increase family income and that of the community in general (Brasted & Wright

In recent years the Thai government has indicated its desire to extend compulsory
education from six to nine years. The Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai, in October 1992,
announced to parliament that his government would increase compulsory education to
nine years. A reason given for this decision was to ensure children would enter the
labour market when they were 15 (Women and Child Labour Division 1995:2). Since
that date there have been a number of announcements proclaiming the forthcoming
expansion of compulsory education (Bangkok Post 1996b:3; Bangkok Post 1996d:3;
Falkus 1997: 159), but as yet it has not occurred. When the government does introduce
nine years of compulsory education it will catch up with the new community practice.

9.3 Changes in the Thai education system

The Thai education system has developed from catering only to the urban elite, normally
boys, to a universal system, in which both boys and girls and those in rural areas
participate. Up to the early nineteenth century formal education was exclusively for men
(Paranakian 1984:252). Even by World War II the system benefited only a small
proportion of Thais. A tiny upper class received a Western-style education while the rest
of the population was uneducated or attended a few years of primary education or
received instruction in a Buddhist temple (Anderson 1977:16).

An historical date of importance for the Thai education system was the
introduction of compulsory education in 1921 (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:8;
Falkus 1997:173; Knodel et al. 1987). Legally, from this time on, Thai children were
supposedly attending school. Despite the passing of this legislation, in rural Isarn most
villages did not have a school until after World War II, even then the schools were often
in temples. It was only in the 1960s that government schools started to make an impression (Phongphit & Hewison 1990:102).

The immediate post-war period there was an upgrading of the Thai education system (Guest & Charmratrithirong 1992:79). This expansion has continued, and from the 1970s onwards there has been a rapid expansion. A commitment by the government to increase the schools available and the growth in the number of school-aged children drove the expansion (Mason & Campbell 1993:33). By the 1990s there was a primary school close to almost all Isan villages (Missingham 1994:47).

9.3.1 Changing school enrolments

The revolution in education, as described by Coleman and others at the beginning of the chapter, has also occurred in Changwat Khon Kaen and in the research sites. The majority of children now spend longer in education and thus fewer years in the workforce. This change, however, has occurred at various times for different groups. The probability of the residents of the research sites studying and not being in the workforce has varied depending on where they lived\(^4\) (location), their age, and their sex.

To determine the degrees of importance of location, age, and sex in influencing educational attainment, I have used ‘tree regression analysis’ as in Chapter 6. In figures 9.3 to 9.8 the name of the variable, the number of individuals at that divide, and the years that the group had studied above or below the norm is given at each divide. At each divide the group studying the least is given on the left-hand side of the divide. The norm is the number of years that each individual had to study as specified by compulsory education. With compulsory education in Thailand increasing from three to six years it is obvious that the younger residents on average were more likely to have studied longer. However, by creating a norm, the years required by compulsory education, comparisons can be made between individuals over time. To do this I selected the four age groups; 14 to 24, 25 to 39, 40 to 64 and those 65 and older, that reflected the different compulsory education systems. A fifth group comprising those aged 14-19 have also been used to illustrate recent education patterns. Once again all children 13 and under have been removed from this analysis as they had not completed compulsory education.

\(^4\) The residents could be divided into groups based on where they were born, where they had lived most of their lives, or where they were living at the time of the survey. Of these three the final possibility was the most significant.
Figure 9.3 Education model for residents aged above 13 in the research sites

All residents aged above 13
N=1613
Years studied above norm = 0.3

Living in BNJ, BNS, and SSR
N=1235
Years studied below norm = 0.3

Living in SL
N=378
Years studied above norm = 2.1

26 years and older
N=798
Years studied below norm = 1.1

14-25 years old
N=437
Years studied above norm = 1.2

Females
N=181
Years studied above norm = 1.3

Males
N=197
Years studied above norm = 2.8

Females
N=225
Years studied below norm = 2.5

Males
N=186
Years studied below norm = 1.6

29 years and older
N=112
Years studied above norm = 0.4

14-28 years old
N=69
Years studied above norm = 2.9

Notes: The norm is the compulsory number of years of education for which the residents had to study.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
Figure 9.4 Education model for those aged 65 years and older

Those aged 65 and older
N=81
Years studied above norm = 0

78 and older
N=16
Years studied below norm = 2.2

Females
N=7
Years studied below norm = 3

Males
N=9
Years studied below norm = 1.6

65-77 years old
N=65
Years studied above norm = 0.6

Females
N=36
Years studied above norm = 0.2

Males
N=29
Years studied above norm = 1

65-72 years old
N=22
Years studied above norm = 0.8

73-77 years old
N=7
Years studied above norm = 1.8

Note: The norm is the compulsory number of years of education for which the residents had to study.
Figure 9.5 Education model for those aged 40 to 64

Notes: The norm is the compulsory number of years of education for which the residents had to study. SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
Figure 9.6 Education model for those aged 25 to 39

Those aged 25 to 39
N=508
Years studied below norm = 1.2

Living in BNJ, BNS, and SSR
N=393
Years studied below norm = 1.9

Living in SI
N=115
Years studied above norm = 1

25-38 years old
N=361
Years studied below norm = 2.1

39 years old
N=32
Years studied above norm = 0.7

25-36 years old
N=76
Years studied above norm = 0.5

37-39 years old
N=39
Years studied above norm = 1.9

31-38 years old
N=236
Years below norm = 2.7

25-30 years old
N=125
Years below norm = 1

Females
N=17
Years below norm = 3

Males
N=15
Years above norm = 4.9

39 years old
N=18
Years above norm = 0.5

37-38 years old
N=21
Years above norm = 3.1

Notes: The norm is the compulsory number of years of education for which the residents had to study.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suay, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
Figure 9.7 Education model for those aged 14 to 24

Notes: The norm is the compulsory number of years of education for which the residents had to study. SL is Si Lian, BNJ is Ban Nam Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
Figure 9.8 Education model for those aged 14 to 19

Notes: The norm is the compulsory number of years of education for which the residents had to study.
SL is Si Liam, BNJ is Ban Naan Jai, BNS is Ban Nam Suiy, SSR is Soi Shiwit Rantod.
I use data collected from the Khon Kaen household survey that I carried out in conjunction with the Khon Kaen child survey. In the household survey, the number of years of completed education was collected for each member living in the household at the time of the survey. A household survey was only carried out where there was a child aged between eight and 17. No data were collected for households with no children of this age. Although I did not collect data from all households, I did from the majority and thus out of convenience I call those in the data set the residents of the research sites.

9.3.2 Differences by location

Inequalities in educational achievements based on location in Thailand have been evident to many scholars. London (1980:80) argued that a 'spatial elitism' exists because the Bangkok education system has been given priority over schools in provincial towns and villages.

This 'spatial elitism' also has had a strong affect in Changwat Khon Kaen. Children in Khon Kaen have had and are having the best opportunities to study and as a result they are less likely than rural children to be in the workforce. Where the residents of the research sites lived was the factor that most strongly influenced their educational achievements (Figure 9.3). All of the residents over 13 years old had studied on average 0.3 years above the time required by compulsory education. Nevertheless, those who were living at Si Liam at the time of the survey on average had studied over two years above what was required. In the three other sites, however, on average they had studied 0.3 years less than was required. Disaggregating the data by age cohort reveals that location has been the most important factor for all groups except for the oldest age group (Figures 9.4 to 9.8). For those aged 65 and older location was not important, no matter where people lived they on average received the same amount of education. In all other age groups those living in Si Liam studied longer on average than the residents of the other locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of education</th>
<th>Si Liam</th>
<th>Ban Nam Jai</th>
<th>Ban Nam Suai</th>
<th>Ban Nam Siui</th>
<th>Ban Nam Rantod</th>
<th>Soi Shiwit Rantod</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Khon Kaen household survey 1996.
Table 9.1 details the number of years individuals studied in the four research sites. This shows the respondents in Si Liam were clearly the best educated. Over 28 per cent of them had 10 or more years of education, while the other sites had no more than 6 per cent achieving this level. Si Liam also had the lowest proportion of residents achieving only one to four years of study. Over 27 per cent of Si Liam respondents gained only this level, while in the two villages, Ban Nam Jai and Ban Nam Suiy, and in the slum, Soi Shiwit Rantod, over half of all residents only achieved this level.

Although there was debate among those I interviewed about where life was best for children, either in the city or the countryside, everyone agreed that the city provided the best educational opportunities. Asked about the opportunities for villagers to study, a young girl said

Jit: No, they can’t really study. The kids in the city can study more, they have more knowledge. The kids in the countryside don’t study as sometimes their parents are poor and they don’t send their kids to school. But I came to the city [at the age of nine] and could study. Here things are far more modern, there is a lot of technology (12-year-old girl, Si Liam 1/10/96).

For a woman living in Ban Nam Jai the children in the cities had a clear advantage over those in the countryside because of their education opportunities:

Ying: I think the kids in the city have a better life as they don’t have to take responsibilities for work. From Monday to Friday they study. On the weekends they have coaching lessons, they just have to study (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

This difference in educational opportunities between the locations has always existed. The average years of education in each of the four communities had increased over time, but at each stage residents in the city have had more education. By 1996 the average years studied in Si Liam was nine, a whole year of education longer than in the other sites. It is important, however, to note that this gap has declined in recent years. The nine-year average in Si Liam was achieved by those born in the mid-1970s and has stayed constant ever since. In the other locations, however, for those born in the 1970s the average has been constantly rising from six towards nine years.

Past differences between the city and countryside reflect the greater resources that have existed in Khon Kaen. In the past the two villages only had primary schools providing four years of education. To gain further education children had to be sent out of the village. If the family did not have relatives living near a high school in some other community, it was next to impossible for them to educate their children. Children in Ban Nam Suiy had to travel to a small town but for many this was impossible. Tui explained why he stopped his education in Year 4:

Tui: Before, there wasn’t a favourable attitude about studying. The school was far away, it was at the amphoe about 20 kilometres away and the road was no good, it was only a track for carts.

Simon: When you finished did you think you wanted to study further?
Tui: I wanted to study but there was no opportunity to do so, as I had to work to help my parents. There were only a few who didn’t work to help their parents. There was no money to pay the fees; our economic situation wasn’t good (42-year-old man, Ban Nam Suay 15/8/96).

A second man tells the same story:

Somjet: The school, we didn’t have an opportunity to study, as it was at the amphoe. As soon as we finished year 4 that was it (45-year-old man, Ban Nam Suay 31/8/96).

Economic inequalities, as well as ‘spatial elitism’ explains the differences in educational achievements among the four research sites. This is particularly the case with differences between Si Liam and the slum Soi Shiwit Rantod. The slum was physically located within Si Liam and thus residents living in these two locations had the same spatial access to educational facilities. Poverty had reduced the opportunities of residents of the slum to study.

9.3.3 Differences by age

Age was the second most important factor in influencing educational achievements among the residents of the research sites, while taking into account compulsory education. Age as a factor was constantly more important than sex for the various age cohorts (Figures 9.4 to 9.8). In the four research sites there has been a steady increase in the number of years that children, on average, spent in school; this has resulted in an increase in the age children enter the workforce. The oldest residents received no education while the youngest, those aged 14, were receiving on average close to nine years of education.

Table 9.2 Number of years of education gained by age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of education</th>
<th>Aged 14-24</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Aged 25-39</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Aged 40-64</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Aged 65+</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Khon Kaen household survey 1996.

Table 9.2 shows that the oldest group, those aged 65 or older, had the fewest years of education. Over 22 per cent had received no education, while over 98 per cent had received four or fewer years of education. Only one person in this age group had nine years of education. The older residents as a group had little or no education. Their youth
was spent working around the house or on the family farm looking after the animals. Nim, now a 65-year-old woman, typifies this:

_Nim:_ No, I wasn’t able to go to school.

_Simon:_ Why not?

_Nim:_ Before there was no one to do work around the house, to look after the cattle and the buffaloes (Ban Nam Jai 11/9/96).

The second oldest group, those aged 40 to 64, was substantially better educated than the oldest group. Only 3 per cent had received no education. For a long time compulsory education in Thailand was set at four years. It is this age group that passed through the education system with this required level. Thus it has the highest proportion that completed four years of education, with over 76 per cent of them doing so. The great majority of these children started to work as soon as they finished school:

_Ploy:_ I left school and worked as a farmer. That was the way in the villages in those days (56-year-old woman, Si Liam 1/10/96).

The age group 25 to 39 completed their study when there were seven years of compulsory education. Despite that, just over one per cent of them completed the required years of education. Instead close to 60 per cent of them completed only four years of education, three years below the number required by compulsory education legislation. This illustrates that for the residents the norm for this age group continued to be four years of education, despite the government’s increased required level. Within this group, however, over 22 per cent managed to complete five or six years of education. This represented a large increase in years at school compared to the two older age groups.

Over 44 per cent of the youngest group, 14 to 24, completed six years of education. This was twice the level for the next best group. More importantly, nearly half of the group had eight or more years of education. Members of this age group, however, are divided into two. The first part of the group consists of older members who completed their studies before the dramatic shift in education took place. The younger members of the group, however, completed their studies or were doing so after the change started. Below, I detail the increases in educational achievement for the younger members of the 14 to 24 age group.

9.3.3.1 Changes in school enrolments in the 1990s

Changes in enrolment rates in Changwat Khon Kaen during the 1990s can be best described as a revolution. The change has seen a shift from the majority of children only finishing primary school to most students finishing junior high school.

Figure 9.9 shows this dramatic shift in education enrolments. As late as 1988 only slightly more than 30 per cent of students completed primary school and continued on to the first year of high school. By 1996 this had been totally transformed with over 95 per cent of students completing primary school and progressing to the next year.
Figure 9.9 Progression rates from primary school to Year 7, Changwat Khon Kaen 1985-96

Notes: The progression rate is calculated by comparing the number of students in Year 6 with the number of students in Year 7 the following year.

Source: Khon Kaen Provincial Hall (various years).

The figures are slightly distorted for two reasons. First, from the data it is not possible to tell if there are students repeating Year 7 and thus distorting the proportion progressing to Year 7. Secondly and more importantly, Khon Kaen is an education centre for Isarn and thus there will be students who enter the province from neighbouring regions in Year 7, inflating the figures.

Figure 9.10 illustrates the changes that have taken place in Changwat Khon Kaen in a 12-year period. In 1984 Year 6 was the standard for the majority of children. This was the most important transition point in the education system (Knodel & Havanon 1992:2). When children finished this level they dropped out of school and started their full-time employment lives. By 1996 the standard, however, had shifted to Year 9. It was at the age of 15 that children in Changwat Khon Kaen were making the decision to continue with their studies or enter the workforce.

Even though the change from 1984 to 1996 represents a big increase in the number of years of education children were receiving, it is a shift of only three years. For Thailand to be competitive in the global market it needs an educated workforce that can work in more skilled economic activities (Warr 1993:77). Nine years of education as a standard for Changwat Khon Kaen students is an improvement from past years but it is far from sufficient. Guest and Panpung’s (1997:51) study shows that, even with marked increases in years of education compared to previous years, by the year 2010 nearly two thirds of the workforce will still only have only a primary level of education.
Figure 9.10 also reflects the fertility decline that took place throughout Thailand over the 12-year period. By 1996 there were fewer children going through the education system. Mason and Campbell (1993:33) estimated that from 1995 the Thai primary and secondary school-age population will decline by as much as 100,000 per year. One possible consequence will be more resources per student, hopefully providing a better education for them. Knodel and Wongsith (1991:191) argued that family size has a negative effect on the probability that children will study. With fertility decline the proportion of children from small families increases, improving their chance to study and delaying their entry into the workforce.

The dramatic shifts in progression rates in Changwat Khon Kaen started in 1990 and 1991. Similar dramatic shifts occurred in the research sites. If it is assumed that those aged 14 had completed Year 6 in 1995 and those aged 15 had done so in 1994, and continuing up to those aged 19, who would have completed Year 6 in 1990, the recent increase in years of schooling is visible. This analysis includes ages up to 19, as 1990 is the first year of the dramatic increase in enrolment rates as shown in Figure 9.9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of education</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 or less</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 plus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The age group with the highest proportion to complete six or fewer years of education was those aged 19 (Table 9.3). Over three-quarters of them only managed to complete this number of years. The pattern for the children in the research sites in 1990 was that once finishing year 6 they would enter the labour force. The change in education attitudes started to take effect in the following two years, 1991 and 1992. Of those aged 18 and 17, the proportion who only completed Year 6 or less was reduced to 55 and 50 per cent. By this stage a growing number of children were not stopping at six years of education but continuing with their studies. By 1993 six years of schooling was clearly not regarded as sufficient, as the proportion of children aged 16 who completed this number had been reduced to one-third. The next year, 1994, the proportion only completing Year 6 or less was reduced further with only 27 per cent of children doing so. Of the group aged 15 at the time of the data collection, over 47 per cent had completed nine years of education; this was the greatest proportion to do so of any age group. Of the 14-year-olds only 11 per cent had only six years of education with the majority continuing with their studies. Considering that over 70 per cent of these children were studying in Year 7 or 8, they were likely to be the largest group to complete Year 9.

The change in enrolment rates had been so rapid that by 1996 there were divisions between those who were in their late teens and those younger. In Si Liam those 17 to 19 had on average more education than those aged 14 to 16, because the younger group were still studying. In the three other sites, however, older children were more likely than younger children to have left school at the end of primary school. Those who were aged 14-16 had studied 0.7 years longer than those aged 17-19. This difference was growing as many of the younger children were still studying (Figure 9.8). A 17-year-old girl and her friends, asked why they had left school when they were 12, said

_Saeng:_ Because at that time we didn’t like to study. Most of us liked to work because we could earn money to give to our parents. To study would have added to our parents’ burden; in the past our economic situation wasn’t good. We thought it was better to work. We could earn money (Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

Younger children, however, knew a change had taken place and that studying was their occupation. A 13-year-old boy, asked if life had changed in his village, stated:

_Yong:_ It’s changed. Before, children didn’t study up to Year 9 but now there are many kids doing so.

The same boy, asked how he felt when seeing children not studying, replied:

_Yong:_ I feel they have no future (Ban Nam Jai 17/11/96).

The increase in years of education for children in Changwat Khon Kaen is not unique for Thailand. Many writers have described the dramatic changes that have been taking place throughout the nation in the 1990s. Sussangkarn (1995:244) saw a dramatic increase in the number of children progressing from primary to high school. There was a
jump between 1990 and 1995 from 50 to 85 per cent of children making the transition. He felt that it was possible for Thailand to reach 100 per cent by 1996. Jones (1996:3) stated that for Thailand ‘the growth of the secondary educated population is proving to be one of the major trends of the 1990s’. Banpasirichote (1995:8) saw the trend leading to fewer children being in the workforce.

9.3.4 Differences by sex

A concern in the ‘child labour’ literature is the disparity between males and females in their educational attainment and thus the timing of their entry into the workforce. Historically, girls in Thailand had fewer opportunities within the education system. The consequence was that girls were forced into the labour market earlier than boys (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:16). Changes in the 1990s enrolment patterns, however, show that the sex gap has closed.

The 1921 Primary Education Act, which introduced compulsory education, was also important in that it made school attendance mandatory for girls as well as boys (Knodel 1992:96). Before this time for most Thai children studying took place in Buddhist temples. Because of strict rules that prevented Buddhist monks from interacting with girls, this education was limited to boys. The introduction of government schools allowed girls to participate in the education system, enabling them to catch up with boys. Thus over time the difference in the rates of literacy between men and women has diminished (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:12-13).

A gap, however, has existed in the number of years of schooling boys and girls receive (Knodel 1997:61; Knodel et al. 1990:39), partly because rural families with limited resources have sent their sons to secondary school rather than their daughters (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990:15). Richter and Ard-am’s (1989:3) study indicated that girls were taking jobs in the Thai fishing industry often to ensure that a younger brother could study. Yet it is not simply economic factors that have created this gap. Attitudes within the community have favoured boys over girls. In the past there was a belief that school was not appropriate for girls:

Simon: You finished Year 4. Why didn’t you study further?

Ying: Yes I finished Year 4. My grandmother, she was old fashioned. She told me that girls didn’t have to study, because I would get pregnant and the father of the child wouldn’t want the baby. She thought I would be lost to vice. She didn’t let me study. My uncle was willing to pay for my studies but she wouldn’t let me go. She didn’t want me far away from her (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

A further likely reason for a disparity between the sexes in their educational opportunities is the different attitudes of parents towards what housework they expect their daughters and sons to do. Girls around the world, even when at school, tend to be given tasks that are more tedious and arduous than those boys receive, thus harming their education (Bequele & Boyden 1988b:157). This attitude existed in the research site as demonstrated in Chapter 6.
By 1996, in Changwat Khon Kaen there was no real difference between the sexes in school enrolments. Figure 9.11 shows more boys in the younger age groups; this was to be expected because there were more boys than girls in these age groups. By senior high school, Years 10 to 12, girls outnumbered boys, though only slightly. There is a sex difference of note and that is occurring in Years 7 to 9. This could be accounted for by more boys than girls migrating to Khon Kaen to take up the perceived better education facilities in the province.

Although the sex gap has all but closed, this has not always been the case. Further, the sex differences that have existed have varied by location. Figures 9.4 to 9.8 illustrate the changing importance of sex as a factor influencing residents' educational attainment. For the oldest cohort sex was the second most important factor after age. Males in this age group received on average more years of schooling than females. For the age cohort 40 to 64 sex retained its status only in Si Liam as the second most important factor. There, males studied close to three years longer than females. By the age group 25 to 39 sex had decreased in importance as a factor and in those aged 14 to 24 and those 14 to 19 sex did not even appear on the Figure. If Figure 9.8 was replaced by a more complex model sex would have appeared, but at two further levels below what is presently shown. Further, the sex difference would have shown girls aged 16 studying on average 1.7 years longer than boys.

During the time period covered by these data the location which had the largest sex gap was Si Liam, the city site. Figure 9.5 indicates that for those aged 40 to 64 sex was the second most important factor in Si Liam in influencing educational attainment of those living there. With a greater range of education facilities in the city it was the
boys who were able to take advantage of these services. Girls who were born in the 1960s (Figure 9.6), however, started to close the gap and the girls who were born in the 1980s had overtaken, if ever so slightly, their male counterparts.

In Ban Nam Jai, the village 18 kilometres from the city, the sex gap has passed through four phases. Originally, there was a large gap with girls more likely than boys to receive no education. For those born in the 1940s and 1950s there was no gap, as both boys and girls studied for four years. The years of study for both boys and girls increased in the 1960s and 1970s. During this time girls on average were receiving slightly more years of education. In the final phase, for those born in the 1980s, the sex gap had closed. Being so close to the city, children in recent years have been able to attend educational facilities, such as technical schools and even the university, while still living in the village. It seems that on average both boys and girls are using these services to the same extent.

In Ban Nam Suiy, unlike the other three locations, in 1996 there was still a sex difference, with boys on average receiving more education than girls. There was a short period when there was no sex difference, when both boys and girls received four years of education. Before and after that period boys have received more education. As this village is 80 kilometres from the city, children have had to live away from their village to gain more than normal high school education. The data suggest that families were more willing for their sons than their daughters to do this.

Previously boys studied longer than girls in Soi Shiwit Rantod, the slum, but this has been reversed. Of those born before the late 1970s, boys usually received more education than girls; since then girls have gained more education. In this site there are only 54 cases thus producing the fluctuations that exist for the women.

The removal of the sex gap in Changwat Khon Kaen and in the research sites supports the argument of Knodel (1997:65-68) and Knodel and Jones (1996a:2, 1996b:684) that poverty is a more important barrier to education than sex. Knodel (1997:68) pointed out that in Thailand in 1990 54 per cent of students in the post-secondary sector were women.

This included 54% of the general university students, 69% of the teaching college students and 83% of the graduate nursing students. In vocational schools men predominated but even here 46% of the students were women.

With girls now staying on at school longer than boys, the possibility that they will on average enter the workforce earlier has been eliminated. As shown in Chapter 6 boys have outnumber girls in the labour force since 1994.

9.4 Education and changing attitudes

Expansion of education results in changing attitudes about children and also the importance of the education system. This has been the case internationally as well as in
Thailand. Once mass education takes place, attitudes about children change. According to Fyfe (1989:141) the passing of the British Education Act of 1870 expressed a changing view of childhood. It heralded the belief that children studying and not in the labour force was the best for the nation's future. Increasing compulsory education means childhood itself is extended (Cunningham 1995:7). According to Vlassoff (1991:110) parents value their children's education more and thus children are required to work less, both in household chores and in the paid workforce, enabling them to focus on their education. As a result their economic benefit to their parents begins to decline. For Hasnat (1995:424-5) education is seen as the key, changing beliefs about children:

The spread of literacy and schooling helped change traditions and attitudes about children from economically useful family members to economically burdensome but emotionally priceless objects. When that happened, society started to remove children from the labor force and place them in school.

Evidence of changing attitudes towards children in Thailand resulting from education is provided by Knodel and others (1987:118). They argued that as a result of increased school attendance children were seen to be less helpful in performing household chores and in contributing to the family income. In my own study new attitudes towards children because of education were evident:

Ang: These days kids don't know how to help their parents. Now they don't help at all. They are unable to help their parents because of education. Now as soon as they, the kids, want to go out to visit they go. It isn't the same as before.

Simon: Why isn't it like it was before?

Ang: Because the kids are getting a lot of education and things are modern. They only study and they don't help their parents with work, these days. Children these days are like that, they don't help their parents, they just think of themselves (60-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 11/9/96).

Although the views of this woman were negative her statements indicate the changing work patterns of children. No longer did children have time to work for their parents as they were concentrating on their main form of 'work': schooling.

The change in attitudes about children has been matched by new attitudes about education. The importance of education was growing and this was tied to economic factors:

Fa: If you don't have good qualifications, you can't work. If you do work you only get paid a small amount. Now they accept Year 9 qualifications and above. Whoever has high qualifications gets the high paying jobs (31-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 23/3/96).

In interview after interview the importance of education was stressed. Many respondents, questioned about the importance of education, claim that it is samkhan mak ti sut, 'the most important thing'. This claim was made by parents, their children, teachers and by many employers.
9.4.1 Children's attitudes to education

Children in Changwat Khon Kaen knew of the importance of education and were aware of the transformation taking place in enrolment rates. They saw education as being important for their futures. Child after child emphasised that without a high level of education they would be unable to gain a good job. This was true both for children who had left the education system and for those who were still studying. Children also understood that a greater proportion of them were in school than children had been in the past.

Children often saw that education would enable them to gain knowledge which in turn would lead to a good future. This usually meant having a profession, so they would not have to work in the rice fields or as labourers. Asking about the importance of education, I was told:

Gob: It ensures that we aren't naive. We have greater knowledge. It allows us to progress and to have a life of quality (16-year-old girl from a neighbouring province at a coaching school, Si Liam 24/11/96).

Children in the research sites understood that in the past, six years of education was all that members of their communities gained, but in their circumstances this was not sufficient. Children often mentioned how economic change had enabled them to continue with their studies, as in the following interview:

Simon: How old were the kids who went to Bangkok to work?
Tat: As soon as they finished Year 6 they would go.
Simon: Presently are there lots of people leaving for Bangkok to work?
Tat: No, not many because most kids are studying until Year 9.
Simon: Why aren't the kids leaving so as to work in Bangkok?
Tat: Because everyone has to study and the economic situation in our village has improved (16-year-old boy, Ban Nam Suiy 1/9/96).

The attitudes of children and also of their parents towards education are summarised by the 17-year-old boy who earlier in the chapter said that he left school because he was bored. However, he believed that children should study more:

Surin: I think everyone should study more. If the government introduced the law for compulsory education until Year 9 this would be good. This is because in the workplace today, there are some places which accept those who have finished Year 6, but the kids work harder than those who finished with more education. Some of them will not last because they will have to work hard. Now those who have finished Year 6 in Changwat Khon Kaen, nearly all of them can't find work. Parents realise this is a problem and they are sending their kids to study further (17-year-old boy, Ban Nam Jai 18/2/96).

9.4.2 Parents' attitudes to education

Educating their children was of great importance to parents. Many parents I interviewed and observed during my fieldwork were making great efforts to enable their children to
gain as much education as possible. They were proud when their children were progressing through the education system. They did not want their children to leave school early and enter the workforce. This is illustrated in the following passage:

Somjet: My daughter, I will let her study as much as she wants. Whatever she says she wants to study, I will support her. I would like it to be as much as possible. I will try to send my youngest daughter to have as much education as she is capable of. If I don’t have the money I will borrow the money so that she can study. I like education a lot. Look at me, at my age I am studying in the external education system (45-year-old man, Ban Nam Suiy 31/8/96).

Parents who had limited education were trying to ensure that their children gained a proper education. For these people education was seen as opening new opportunities in the rapidly changing Thai society. But, more importantly, it was a matter of security to ensure that their children did not face the hardships that they themselves had faced:

Tuk: I wanted to study a lot but there was no one who would pay for me. There was no money. I wanted to study but no one would pay. As soon as I had my child I have tried to ensure that she would study. I want her to be better off than me; I don’t want her to face difficulties like us. I have tried to let her study as much as possible (owner of a fruit shop, Khon Kaen University 9/10/96).

In the villages all parents that I interviewed stressed that they did not want their children to end up being farmers. They felt it was a hard and unrewarding occupation. They believed that through education their children had a hope of escaping the life that they had lived. The sentiments in the passage below typify the attitudes of many village parents:

Ying: If my children don’t study they will end up as labourers. During the rice season I want my kids to work the rice fields. I want them to know how difficult farming is. This will give my kids a greater desire to study. I want them to know what hardship is. I want them to be determined to study, and thus they will be able to get good work. I don’t want them to be farmers (36-year-old woman, Ban Nam Jai 18/9/96).

I was seen by many of the residents in my research sites as proof of the benefits that education can bring. Doing a PhD and the possibility of gaining the title Doctor gave me much more prestige in Thailand than it does in Australia. They often told me that I should enter politics, as they saw me as someone who could go to high places. In Thai politics a doctorate increases a candidate’s chances of becoming a Member of Parliament.

The more education the children of the research sites received, the greater opportunities they were believed to have. Many parents claimed that it was up to their children to determine how much education they obtained, but they wanted them to gain as much education as possible. Asked what they meant by this they often said they wanted them as well educated as I had been.

The value of education was seen across all generations. Grandparents also believed that education was important to the children of the day. Some of them went as
far as saying that it was unfortunate that they themselves did not have the opportunity to study like the children of the present:

*Be:* These days there are no kids who finish Year 4. ... They would finish Years 6, 9, or 12, or they would finish a degree or a master’s course. It is a great pity.

*Simon:* What is a pity?

*Be:* It is a pity that I am old. I would have liked to study so as I could have known more.

(72-year-old man, Ban Nam Jai 26/3/96).

### 9.4.3 Teachers’ attitudes to education

The teachers that I interviewed were aware of the dramatic changes to the lives of children. They were seeing the increasing numbers of students each year entering their schools. Further, they were observing the shifts in attitudes concerning education from parents and even from employers. The following discussions typify many of the teacher comments about the changes to education:

*Simon:* In the five years that you have been here have you seen a changing attitude of the villagers concerning the importance of education?

*Rot:* Yes, previously the kids would only finish Year 6 and they would go and work; this was difficult work and they were being exploited. Now they think that if they study further they will not be exploited. I feel villagers’ views on education are better as they are sending their children to study more and more. They are saying when you finish Year 9 your wage is lower than those who finish Year 12. They are thus sending their kids to study until Year 12. No matter which family, if they have money, they will send their children to school.

*Simon:* Five years ago was there a thought that Year 6 was enough?

*Rot:* Yes, it was, but today you have to study until Year 12. Further, the villagers want to have all these material goods. These things have entered the family, such as TVs, fridges and motorbikes. The villagers today, they believe that these things are necessary for their lives. If they have an opportunity to send their children to study Year 9 or Year 12 they will send them to school. They believe that their kids, once they finish, they will be able to get more money and thus will be able to help their families in the future. From agriculture these days there are no real benefits so it is better to send their kids to work elsewhere so that they can send money back. This is a reason why the villagers want their children to study more. To summarise it is the truth; the way the villagers perceive education has improved. They understand that if their kids study as much as possible they will not be exploited and they will understand social change much better (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

A second teacher from the local Ban Nam Suiy high school was also aware of the change in attitudes concerning education and stressed the growing importance that parents and children placed on education:

*Simon:* You have lived here seven years now, haven’t you? Have you seen anything that has changed in the lives of the children here?

*Porn:* Well these days people give greater importance to education. Children themselves give more importance to education. Before, only a few people would study. We teachers would have to go to their homes and plead with their parents to let them study; we would have to tell them the importance of education so as to get their
children to come to school. We would say, 'if you study you will get a career'. Yes, we had to go and tell the parents the importance of education before their kids would come. Now as soon as we open the school for the new year all the kids will come to apply to study.

Simon: Why have the attitudes changed? Why do the children now believe that education is more important for them?

Porn: Now there exists a lot of competition for the kids who finish school and seek employment. If they go to work in a factory and have only finished Year 6 the factory will say they are too young. The factories will not accept them also because of the issue of child labour, as they are still too young. Factories will not accept them. Factories now will advertise for people who have finished Year 9 or Year 12 so children will have to come back to study. If children leave they have to come back to study (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

A third teacher also believed that the changes taking place in the education system were due to economic factors. No longer was it possible not to study; he felt that children had to study even if they wanted to be labourers:

Mu: These days you have to have more qualifications to get employed. Today even labourers have to have knowledge if they are going to work. Unlike in the past, you didn’t need to know anything and you would survive. Presently, if you don’t study you can’t survive (high school teacher, Ban Nam Jai 15/11/96).

9.4.4 Employers' attitudes to education

Employers' attitudes towards education varied according to the type of skill they required. All the interviewed employers were aware of a change to the level of education attainment being achieved within the community. The following statement was typical of this awareness:

Tong: Now nearly 100 per cent of our workers have finished Year 9. Before, our workers had a mixture of education backgrounds, with about 10 to 15 per cent of them having this level (a manager of a department store chain in Khon Kaen that has one store in Si Liam 20/11/96).

The employers were pleased with the changing schooling practices, but there were differences in the perceived importance to them of this change. The managers of the large and medium employment centres from which I gathered data all expressed their delight at the change in educational levels achieved by their workforce. They felt that it would increase their production output. However, some employers with small scale operations could not see the benefits that increased education would have for their workers.

For the larger employers the introduction of new technologies and work practices was increasing the importance of education. After being asked if workers today are working better than in the past a manager of fish-net factory B stated:

Ling: Now the kids are clever with education they are studying more. Now we have computers, which we are using a lot, just like at the major department stores, our workers are like those at the department stores. They have to use bar codes in the production process and in accounting. By this we check how much we have produced.
The workers have to learn how to use them if they have had no experience. Those who finish Years 9 or 12 are quicker than those who only complete Year 6. Now we are using more technology (20/10/96).

An owner of a small bakery in Si Lian, dependent on unskilled labour articulated the unimportance of education to small-scale employers. The extent of education was of no importance to him. It did not matter what education his workers had, as he could train them quickly and there was nothing within the work that required an education:

*Rong:* For this work what you have to know you learn here at the shop. That is all you have to know. If they finish Year 6 or whatever, as long as they can count to 100 it is enough.

*Simon:* Most of them will have finished Year 6 or more than that?

*Rong:* There are some who have finished Year 9. I am not interested in what they have finished. All I want is that they can work. The people around here are not rich. It is enough for their children to finish primary school and for them to then to earn money. That is what it is like here (bakery owner, Si Liam 24/11/96).

### 9.4.5 Returning to school

The large numbers of people returning to school indicated the growing importance of education. The story of Dok Mali highlights the changes in attitudes about education in Isarn and Thailand as a whole. At one stage she had to give up her education as her family was too poor. She was the youngest child of four, and it was her education that the family sacrificed as the family supported an older brother through high school and then on to a teachers’ college. It was a rational decision to support the older brother, as he had passed through more years of the education system. The further he went, the greater the rewards for the family. By the time I left Thailand, he had only a year to go before he started being a teacher and gaining a regular salary and other benefits that Thai public servants receive. The benefit for Dok Mali’s family once her brother started working as a teacher would be huge.

Leaving school, Dok Mali spent her time looking after a nephew and the family buffaloes. She spent two years doing this and seemed to have no future outside of farming. It is noteworthy that she had never been more than a small distance from her own village. She had not even travelled the 80-kilometre distance to Khon Kaen.

Dok Mali’s future, however, improved dramatically when her mother was able to make a profit from her agriculture work. With the money Dok Mali returned to school and, despite being older than her fellow students, was successfully completing her high school education.

Dok Mali’s story is typical of many young individuals throughout Isarn who had left school early. I was constantly coming across people who for one reason or another was returning to school. Dok Mali lived in Ban Nam Suiy, but there were cases of young people from Ban Nam Jai and Si Liam doing the same. Typically, they were not
returning to a high school but were attending classes through the Changwat Khon Kaen external education system (Figure 9.12).

Returning to school was not limited to the youth of the region. In Ban Nam Suî there were many adults gaining an education. They proudly announced what level of schooling they were up to. The clear majority had only three or four years of primary schooling but now, through an external form of education, they were adding to this base. Teachers from the Changwat Khon Kaen external education system were offering classes up to the end of junior high school in the village.

Somjet: I am now studying.
Simon: You are presently studying? But you are old!
Somjet: I am studying because the government has given the people the opportunity to study, I will finish Year 9 next term, in one month’s time.
Simon: Why did you decide to go back and study?
Somjet: Because I wanted to know more things. Studying has a positive benefit for yourself. I want to study and get knowledge. You can get a career depending on what you study. If you study a lot you can develop yourself and the nation as a whole. They are the benefits of studying. Those who are interested have to study. These days those who are interested in getting on in life will have to study the most, but here they don’t have the opportunity to do so. Thus they have to study in the external education system. There is a policy to allow those who didn’t complete their studies to do so up to Year 9 at least. This will be the limit of compulsory education (45-year-old man, 31/8/96 Ban Nam Suî).

Figure 9.12 Growth of the Changwat Khon Kaen external education system

Source: Khon Kaen External Education System (various years).
9.5 Coaching schools a new form of ‘child labour’?

Education, in my view, should be the main occupation of children, yet at the same time, caution must be taken to ensure that this form of child work does not become a new form of ‘child labour’. Excessive pressures placed on children by parents, teachers and society as a whole can remove children’s childhoods as much as other forms of children’s work, such as in factories.

Reflecting the growing importance of education in Changwat Khon Kaen, there was a growth of coaching schools. Children were not only studying during school hours but also in the evenings and at weekends. In Si Liam a number of coaching schools were catering for students struggling in their courses or students seeking to enter one of the top universities in Thailand.

I came across a number of children who were attending coaching schools. This was a recent development and had occurred with the shift in Changwat Khon Kaen enrolment rates. Even in Ban Nam Suiy, the village furthest from Khon Kaen, there were children at weekends going to the nearest town to attend computer classes. A local high school teacher, asked whether some children from the village were attending coaching schools, said:

Rot: Five years ago there were 10 kids doing this, but now the numbers are increasing (high school teacher, Ban Nam Suiy 9/11/96).

For a group of students, mainly middle class and living in the city, studying had become their full-time occupation. When I asked a group of girls why they were studying at a coaching school in Si Liam both on Saturday and Sunday, I was told by one:

Gob: Because it was recommended to us that it would be better than studying by ourselves. We think we have to try to study as much as possible.

Simon: What lessons are you taking?

Gob: Maths, chemistry and physics. We finish at two in the afternoon.

Simon: Do you also study English?

Gob: Yes, we study on Mondays and Tuesdays. Then also on Sundays, starting at two in the afternoon.

Simon: Why don’t you study, say music?

Gob: I would like to study music, but now we are preparing for the entrance exam so we are only studying those courses that we are tested on (16-year-old girl from a neighbouring province at a coaching school, Si Liam 24/11/96).

These girls were charming and highly articulate. They all expressed desires to succeed academically as they wanted to study medicine, law or engineering at the leading Thai universities. They seemed to have good prospects of achieving their goals, but they were pitiable because they had no time in their lives except for study.
The pressure placed on students to study was sadly demonstrated when a 17-year-old boy jumped to his death. It was reported that the Year 10 boy took his life ‘after facing tremendous pressure from his parents and teachers who were not satisfied with his academic performance’. The report also claimed that ‘Many of our youngsters today are having a life of misery under the rigid educational system and high competition among top schools which strive for academic excellence’ (Bangkok Post, 1996e:22).

9.6 Conclusion

To summarize society has passed through two phases in its treatment of youth. In the first, which may be characterized as the work phase, young persons were brought as quickly as physical maturity would allow into economic productivity, to aid the economy of the family. In the phase, which may be described as the schooling phase, young persons are being kept as long as possible in the school and out of the labor force, to increase their potential for productivity.

(Coleman et al. 1974:2-3)

Thailand, like Western countries before it, has seen a revolution in the way children spend their time. Recently, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of Thai children in the labour force. This change coincides with an increasing number of children continuing with their education.

The data from this study suggest that there has been a constant increase in the number of years studied, and an increase in the age at which children enter the labour force. Older residents had only a few years of education or none while many children by 1996 were studying nine or more years. This change, however, has not been uniform. Children in Si Liam continue to get a better education than those in the two villages or the slum. This has meant that children from Si Liam have been able to spend more time in their main ‘work’, schooling, than other children. In the 1990s this gap, however, has been declining with a massive increase in school enrolments in the other research sites and Changwar Khon Kaen as a whole. With this increase number of children studying, a past sex gap with males on average studying longer than females has disappeared. By 1996 girls were slightly outnumbering boys in the school system.

Thailand, in its treatment of its youth, has reached the schooling phase. Although there are still children in the workforce, and some in appalling conditions, the norm for children’s work is study. Clearly, in Thailand education has become children’s main occupation. Care however, must be taken to ensure that schooling remains children’s main work and does not become a new form of ‘child labour’.
... one has to admit that there is a gap in the social science research about youth in Thailand. Not much effort has been made to collect and analyze data pertaining to their life courses, and certainly not much analysis has been made on such subjects as youth’s values and attitudes in various social issues, gender construction, family relations, social networking, self image and self esteem, mental well-being, and so forth. Even fewer [sic] effort has been made to measure the extent to which changes taking place in the macro-processes affect various aspects of the youth’s life. In short, we lack the kind of research which can contribute to a holistic understanding of youth in the present day.

(Podhisita & Pattaravanich 1995:5)

This thesis has attempted to contribute to our understanding of children in Thailand by exploring the working lives of children in four communities in Changwat Khon Kaen, Thailand. Doing so it has provided a greater understanding of what it means to be a child in these communities and the Thai society as a whole.

The thesis has shown that the situation of children in Thailand, compared to that of their parents and grandparents, has improved dramatically. As a group Thai children today are healthier and better educated than at any other time. Socioeconomic change combined with new cultural values and the Thai demographic revolution has resulted in children in Thailand increasingly leaving the workforce and continuing with their studies. From 1988 to 1996 there was a fourfold reduction in the surveyed number of children aged 13-14 in the workforce (National Statistical Office various years) and there was a similar dramatic increase in the number of children in school (Chapter 9).

This final chapter is divided into two parts. First, it reviews the main findings of the chapters and secondly it places these findings into context by predicting the future of ‘child labour’ in Thailand.

10.1 The study’s findings

The primary objective of this thesis was to examine the lives of Thai children by studying the nature of ‘child labour’ in the country. The thesis had two secondary objectives: first to show that ‘child labour’ has been constantly changing and second to show than images of exploited children have distorted our understanding of the phenomenon of ‘child labour’. The thesis attempted to answer the following five questions:
1. What is a ‘child’?

2. What is ‘child labour’?

3. Which children are working?

4. What differences exist among working children?

5. What developments in the Thai society have reduced the number of Thai children in the workforce?

‘What is a “child”?’ was explored in Chapter 4, which shows that there is no simple answer to this question. Although a ‘child’ can be understood biologically, implying differences by age and sex, social and cultural influences create numerous ‘childhoods’. As well as age and sex, ‘childhoods’ are shaped by the children’s socioeconomic background. Factors such as their family backgrounds, how much education they and their parents have, their parents’ marital status, the economic well-being of the children and their families, where they live, and their working experiences have all influenced the lives of children. Further, comparing the lives of grandparents, parents and their children, the chapter shows that these Thai ‘childhoods’ have been changing as demographic and economic developments have altered ideas about how children should live.

In the research site there was no one marker, dividing children from adults. Traditional indicators of when an individual becomes an adult have been less clear-cut. Previously, the majority of men would be ordained as monks at the age of 21. This made them suk (‘ripe’), allowing them to marry and giving them adult status. The practice of being ordained into the monkhood, although still common, is no longer universal. For women, a common rite of passage into adulthood was through marriage. The average age of marriage, however, for both men and women, has been increasing and a growing number of people were not marrying at all. For many women now, marriage is no longer an important indicator of adulthood.

The second question, ‘What is “child labour”?’, was answered in Chapter 5. As with understanding a ‘child’, we can only understand ‘child labour’ in its social, cultural and historic setting. The Isan concept of ‘work’ has changed over time. Even though there were different types of work, such as work in the house and in the fields, work by men and women, and work by children and adults, the introduction of a market economy has led to the use of two separate words to describe two different types of work. The residents of the research sites, while speaking Laotian, had combined the Laotian word het ‘do’ and the Thai word ngan for ‘work’, when talking about paid work. On the other hand, when the residents were talking about unpaid work, namely farming and housework, they used the Laotian term for ‘do work’, het wiak. This distinction between paid and unpaid work influenced many residents understanding of ‘child labour’. For them ‘child labour’ consisted of activities carried out by children for money. They did
not regard children planting and harvesting rice or looking after farm animals as 'child labour' but as the children's 'duty'. Such 'work' was not a matter of concern for them.

But other residents, and children in particular, did not accept the difference between paid and non-paid work in defining 'child labour'. A number of children believed it was 'child labour' when they farmed for no money. They were able to compare their lives with those of other children and were able to see that they were at a disadvantage. Instead of spending their time caring for buffaloes or working the rice fields they would have preferred to be elsewhere, particularly in school.

The lives of children working as farmers has not interested 'child labour' campaigners and researchers to the same extent as working children in urban areas. There seems to be a perception, not just by adults in the research sites who believe that 'child labour' occurs when children work for money, that this form of work is not a concern. Yet, as Chapter 5 illustrated, there are major reasons why these working children should be targeted. They tend to be some of the poorest children in Thailand. They are underpaid or not paid at all for physically demanding and at times dangerous work. They live in areas with the poorest education facilities. Finally, they often end up being the children in the urban 'hell factories' that concern most 'child labour' campaigners and researchers, as they and their families migrate to the cities to seek better opportunities. These children working in rural areas deserve greater attention than they have been receiving so far from 'child labour' researchers and campaigners.

The third question of the thesis, and the title of Chapter 6 was 'Which children are working?'. This chapter illustrated the problems in measuring the extent of children's involvement in work. As noted in Chapter 5, there are many different types of work. Both children and adults saw some of these forms of 'work' as more important than other forms. They were self-selective in the types of 'work' that they mentioned they were involved in. Some forms of work, such as prostitution and recycling garbage, are personally and socially embarrassing and those involved, not surprisingly, were not forthcoming in claiming that these were their 'work'.

Despite these uncertainties, this chapter has analysed who is working for money and who is not. There are differences based on the age, location, and sex of the children. This chapter showed that two simple questions could be asked to determine whether children were involved in the paid workforce. If they were studying and living with their parents they were least likely to be in paid employment. The chapter also found that for the children of the research sites the age that children entered the paid workforce was 15. This is an important finding as the 'child labour' literature suggests that 12 is the critical age at which children leave school and start work (Boyden 1994:23).

The fourth central question of the thesis, 'What differences exist among working children?', is reviewed in Chapter 7. This chapter, based only on those children who indicated that they were working for money, illustrates that children are active in the construction of their own social lives and that the market for working children is
dynamic. The Thai labour force is affected by seasonal fluctuations and this affects the working patterns of children. Most working children in this study were not tied to one job but were highly mobile between different forms of employment. The extent of this mobility varied between children, based on their age, location and sex. Children aged 15 and older and thus with an ID card had far greater mobility than younger children.

There were also major differences between the working children based on the types of work they were doing and also the conditions of that work. The younger the children the more likely their work was in agriculture. Also, these children were likely to be working shorter hours, fewer days and for lower wages than other children were. The older the children the more likely they were to be working in non-agricultural areas. Boys, however, were more likely to be working as farmers than girls, while there was a greater proportion of girls in ‘sales’, ‘craft and production’ and ‘services’.

This chapter showed that the conditions of work varied greatly. Some children were delighted with their work while others wanted to leave, either to take up another job or to return to school. Within the study sites, the children working under the most difficult conditions were not in the ‘hell factories’, but instead in occupations such as waitressing and working in a gold shop, which were not even regarded as ‘child labour’ by some people.

The fifth central question of the thesis, ‘What developments in the Thai society have reduced the number of Thai children in the workforce?’, was addressed in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9. Chapter 8 indicated that of legislation, technological change and economic progress it has been economic factors that have had the most influence in reducing the number of children in the workforce. The economic boom in Thailand, from the mid-1980s until 1996, lead to a lower child participation rate in the workforce. Over this period, families, on average, became richer and were able to send their children to school rather than to the workforce. At the same time, the restructuring of the Thai economy, away from labour-intensive industries towards more technology-based ones, reduced the demand for unskilled labour, including children’s labour. The economic crisis that hit Thailand in 1997, which led to an increase in the number of children in the labour force, provides further evidence of the importance of economic development in reducing the number of children in the workforce.

Chapter 9 showed that there has been a major transformation in the attitudes of the residents towards education. Schooling was seen as samkan mak ti sut, ‘the most important thing’, by many residents. Children saw the importance of education for their lives. They knew that if they did not receive a good education they were destined to have a shiwit lambaak, namely a ‘difficult life’. With only limited education they were likely to be labourers or farmers, neither of which they desired. Parents were making great efforts to ensure that their children had as much schooling as possible. They saw the value of education and believed that their children would have better lives than themselves, if they got a good education. No parents who were farmers wanted their
children to enter this occupation. Farming was seen as a career that was both difficult and without a future.

The teachers and employers, interviewed for the study, recognised this change in attitudes towards education. All the teachers indicated that a major transformation in their local communities had taken place. No longer did they have to plead with parents to send their children to high school. Instead, a larger proportion of children each year was enrolling to undertake high school education. Employers were also aware of the increased amount of education children were receiving. The majority of these employers were delighted at this development as they considered a better-educated workforce important for their industries. The one exception to this was an employer who was using unskilled labour. He felt, as long as his workers could count to 100, this was all they needed.

As a result of changing attitudes towards education, there was a dramatic increase in school enrolments. In 1988, in Changwat Khon Kaen, only around 34 per cent of children who had completed primary school the year before entered high school. By 1996, however, this figure had reached 98 per cent. The majority of children were continuing their education until they had completed Year 9, at around 15 years of age. This was becoming the new universal education in Changwat Khon Kaen. This fact is important as it confirms the findings of Chapter 6 that age 15 was the time that the majority of children were making the decision to enter the workforce or to continue with their studies. It is also important, as in country after country ‘child labour’ has been virtually eliminated once universal schooling up to the age of 15 is achieved (Weiner 1991:156).

10.2 Speculations: the future of ‘child labour’ in Thailand

This final section of the thesis places the study’s main findings into context by suggesting possible future scenarios of ‘child labour’ in Thailand. Although it is impossible to know what will happen, predicting the extent of ‘child labour’ in Thailand is possible by reviewing the impact of past fertility declines, combined with the predicted future lower fertility levels and the impact of either economic growth or decline. The section first outlines the factors that may increase the number of children working in Thailand; then, it details the more likely long-term scenario of a decreasing number of children in the workforce.

10.2.1 Increasing ‘child labour’

The 1997 increase in the number of children in the Thai labour force possibly will continue and a new trend of increasing numbers of children entering the workforce will take place. Briefly, three factors raised in the ‘child labour’ literature, AIDS, foreign children entering Thailand to work, and the economy, are discussed here.
AIDS could influence the future nature of ‘child labour’ in Thailand. Parents suffering from the disease, and without a social security system to protect them, will become increasingly dependent on their children (Bonnet 1993:384). An NGO in Bangkok, the Duang Prateep Foundation, has seen a growing number of children affected directly and indirectly by the disease. They claimed that these children are increasingly taking on the burden of caring for seriously ill or dying parents. They will have to sacrifice their schooling for the need to work (Plank City News Duang Prateep Foundation Newsletter, undated:5).

The majority of children orphaned by AIDS in Thailand, it has been predicted, will be aged between five and 12. In 1990, the number of living children aged under 12 whose mothers had died of the disease was 239 but this could increase to over 85,000 by 2000 (Boonchalaksi & Guest 1993:12-14). Many of these children will be looked after by grandparents or other relatives (Sakboon 1996:2), but it is likely that these children will come under greater pressure than other children to work:

In the absence of action, the HIV/AIDS epidemic will almost certainly expand the demand for child labor, increase the exploitation of children in child labor markets, and worsen their working conditions. This is, unfortunately, the nature of HIV; it feeds synergistically off many of the weaknesses in the societal fabric and in turn amplifies them (Brown & Sittitrai 1995:145).

A second candidate for increasing the number of children in the Thai workforce is children from neighbouring countries. The potential for the increased entry of foreigners, both children and adults, into the Thai labour force is great. Mynammar and Bangladesh, which have not completed their fertility transition, and Laos and Cambodia which have barely started their transition, all have economies far less developed than Thailand’s (Guest & Panpung 1997:16-17). The ‘new face’ (Banpasirichote 1995:17) of Thai ‘child labour’, namely foreign children, could continue to expand. The proportion of foreign children working in Thailand, as a total of all working children, could grow. This is because as Thai families become wealthier they will be able to afford their children’s education, ensuring that more Thai children do not enter the labour force. Children from neighbouring countries, however, would be attracted to work in Thailand, by the higher wages that they would receive.

However, although in the long run the number of foreign children working in Thailand could increase, they are unlikely to increase the total number of children in the workforce. First, with the downturn in the Thai economy the number of children from neighbouring countries entering the country is likely to be reduced. Thailand’s economy, despite the downturn, would still be more dynamic than the above-mentioned economies, but there would be far fewer opportunities for children to gain employment. Even though there was an increased number of children involved in the workforce in 1997 after the economic crisis occurred, the increase was basically accounted for by children working as unpaid family members on the farm. This is unlikely to be an attraction to foreign children. Further, with the economic crisis facing Thailand there
will be growing pressure to deport foreign workers, including children, from the
country.

When the Thai economy does start to grow, foreign children are still not likely to
increase the total number of children in the workforce, because of two factors. First, the
restructuring of the Thai economy away from labour-intensive industries towards more
technologically advanced industries is likely to reduce the demand for children. Second,
with an improving economy a greater number of Thai children are likely to be leaving
the workforce than could be replaced by illegal foreign workers.

The factor that is most likely to increase the number of children in the workforce
is a protracted economic downturn. If the economic crisis that hit Thailand in 1997
continues, an increased number of working children is likely. Problems in the economy
will lead to increased levels of poverty. This in turn will lead to growing numbers of
families unable to afford their children’s schooling, forcing increasing numbers of
children back into the workforce.

In August 1998 the Thai economy was predicted to contract by 7 per cent an
increase from a June projection of 4 to 5.5 per cent (Bardacke 1998; Yuthamanop &
Sirithaveeporn 1998). With this contraction in the economy large numbers of people
will be forced into poverty. According to Warr (1998:17) over 7 million people could
have moved from above the poverty line to under it. This would mean an increase in the
proportion of the population in poverty from 8 per cent in 1996 to around 20 per cent in
1998. This he claims would almost eliminate all the dramatic reductions of poverty
achieved since 1981.

At the same time the number of working children affects the economy. The Thai
economy is influenced by its human capital. The large numbers of children previously
not in school but in unskilled occupations has created a largely unskilled workforce. If
large numbers of children are forced out of the education system this could have a long-
term detrimental effect on the Thai economy.

10.2.2 Decreasing ‘child labour’

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the number of children in the Thai
workforce in the long run is likely to decrease. The long trend of increasing years of
education and the subsequent decreasing involvement in the workforce will probably
continue. Two factors, decreasing numbers of children because of past fertility declines
and possible further reductions plus a recovery in the economy, are both likely to result
in fewer children in the workforce.

As noted in Chapter 4, the proportion of the population aged 14 or under has
declined from over 46 per cent of the population in 1970 to under 28 per cent by 1995
(Human Resources Planning Division National Economic and Social Developme
Board 1995). Reductions in fertility experienced by Thailand are predicted to continue.
Using medium forecasts the proportion of children aged 14 or under is predicted to decline to just under 20 per cent by 2020.

With predicted fertility levels below replacement levels the number of children within the age group likely to enter the labour force will decline. With families, on average, having fewer children, they should be able more easily to afford their child's or children's education, reducing the probability that they will enter the workforce. More children studying longer will increase the wealth flow from parents to children, which in turn will increase the probability of lower fertility levels. With declining child numbers, and maintaining other factors constant, reducing 'child labour' should be easier. This will have a major benefit to Thai society as a whole. Fewer Thai children will enter the workforce enabling them to study longer. In the long run this will provide a better-educated workforce and a more prosperous society, which will provide even greater educational opportunities for future generations of Thai children.

The main factor, however, in reducing the number of children working in the labour force is likely to be the economy. In the past, economic growth was the major cause for the reduction in the number of children in the workforce. Thai families, on average, have steadily become richer and have increasingly been able to afford to send their children to school for longer periods. This trend is likely to be repeated once the economy starts to recover. Although the Thai economy is not likely to grow at the dramatic rates that it achieved from 1986 to 1996, a growing economy will result in more children delaying their entry into the workforce.

To conclude, although it is impossible to predict with any certainty exactly what will happen, the nature and extent of 'child labour' is likely to constantly change. As demographic, social, cultural, and economic forces shape the Thai society, Thai perceptions of what a 'child' is and what 'work' they should do will alter. It will be these forces, along with the perceptions of what children should and should not do, that will shape the nature and extent of 'child labour' in Thailand.
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The Australian National University

I would like to ask you permission to administer a questionnaire, to all those here, who are aged between 7 and 18. This questionnaire is concerned with child and youth activities in Khon Kaen. There will be a series of questions concerning migration, family structure, socio-economic background, education, working history, work and aspirations of the children and youth found in this area. The reason that I wish to carry out these questions is that I am assisting a researcher from the Australian National University, in Australia, who is presently carrying out PhD fieldwork.
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|     |               | Other people answering questions | [ ] | 2  
|     |               | Other, please state | [ ]  |
| 009 | Second visit | Refused to answer questions | [ ] | 1  
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|     |               | Other, please state | [ ]  |
| 010 | Third visit | Refused to answer questions | [ ] | 1  
|     |               | Other people answering questions | [ ] | 2  
|     |               | Other, please state | [ ]  |
| 011 | Was anyone else present? | Yes | [ ] | 1  
|     |               | No | [ ] | 2  
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|     |               | Don't know | [ ] | 8 |
| 013 | Was father present? | Yes | [ ] | 1  
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|     |               | Don't know | [ ] | 8 |
| 014 | Were there other relatives present? | Yes | [ ] | 1  
|     |               | No | [ ] | 2  
|     |               | Don't know | [ ] | 8 |
| 015 | Was employer present? | Yes | [ ] | 1  
|     |               | No | [ ] | 2  
|     |               | Don't know | [ ] | 8 |
| 016 | Were there other children present? | Yes | [ ] | 1  
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**Migration questions**

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For those not living where they were born

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<td>No [ ] 2</td>
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<td>208 Did you migrate in order to study?</td>
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<td>209 Did you migrate in order to seek employment for yourself?</td>
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<tr>
<td>210 Did you migrate because of problems with your parents?</td>
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<td>211 Did you migrate because of other reasons?</td>
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<td>For those not born in Khon Kaen</td>
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<td>212 Have you lived in Khon Kaen?</td>
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<td>213 In the future do you think you will live in Khon Kaen?</td>
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<td>214 How old do you think you will be where you live in Khon Kaen?</td>
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<td>215 What will you do in Khon Kaen?</td>
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<td>216 How long do you think you will stay in Khon Kaen?</td>
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<tr>
<td>221 How long do you think you will stay in Bangkok?</td>
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<tr>
<td>222 Presently do you have a sibling under 18 living elsewhere?</td>
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<td>223 Where?</td>
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<td>224 What is s/he doing there?</td>
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<td>225 Before did you have a sibling under 18 living elsewhere?</td>
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<td>Individual questions</td>
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<td>303 In a month how many times would you make merit?</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304 In a month how many times would you go to the temple?</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How the child todian bunkhun</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 306 Are you giving money to your parents? | Yes [ ] 1  
No [ ] 2  
Don’t know [ ] 8 →310 |
| 307 How often do you give money to your parents? | Weekly [ ] 1  
Monthly [ ] 2  
On special holidays [ ] 3  
Once a year [ ] 4  
Other, please state [ ]  |
| 309 If you didn’t send money home would your family face difficulties? | Yes [ ] 1  
No [ ] 2  
Don’t know [ ] 8 |
| 310 Do you help your parents with housework? | Yes [ ] 1  
No [ ] 2  
Don’t know [ ] 8 |
| 311 Do you look after younger siblings while your parents are working? | Yes [ ] 1  
No [ ] 2  
Don’t know [ ] 8 |
| 312 Have you been a novice or monk? | Yes [ ] 1  
No [ ] 2  
Don’t know [ ] 8 |
| 313 | Are you todtan bunkhun in any other way? | Yes, please state | [ ] |
| 314 | Do you think it is all right for a person of your age to work part-time? |  | |
| 315 | Do you think it is all right for a person of your age to work full-time? |  | |
| 316 | Do you know if there is a law about the age at which a young person is permitted to work? |  | |
| 317 | At what age is a person allowed to start work? |  | |
| 318 | Do you have money to spend (money that you have earned yourself or that others have given to you) |  | |

**How much the child spends on average per month on**

| 319 | Food |  |  |  |  |
| 320 | Rent |  |  |  |  |
| 321 | Transport |  |  |  |  |
| 322 | Disco |  |  |  |  |
| 323 | Karaoke |  |  |  |  |
| 324 | Snooker |  |  |  |  |
| 325 | Film |  |  |  |  |
| 326 | Expenses with partner |  |  |  |  |
| 327 | Other entertainment expenses |  |  |  |  |
| 328 | Clothes |  |  |  |  |
| 329 | Mx: |  |  |  |  |
| 330 | Cosmetics |  |  |  |  |
| 331 | Alcohol       |            |            |            |            |
| 332 | Cigarettes   |            |            |            |            |
| 333 | Remittances  |            |            |            |            |
| 334 | Gifts for parents |            |            |            |            |
| 335 | Other expenses |            |            |            |            |
| 336 | Total        |            |            |            |            |

Where does most of this money come from?

| Parents           | [ ] 1 |
| Siblings          | [ ] 2 |
| Other relatives   | [ ] 3 |
| Fan (partner)     | [ ] 4 |
| Own earnings      | [ ] 5 |
| Other, please state |    |
| Don't know        | [ ] 98 |

What do you like to read?

[ ]
401  What in your family makes you 
happy

402  What in your family makes you 
sad

403  What are the causes of these 
conflicts?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presently who are living with?</td>
<td>By yourself [ ] 1&lt;br&gt;Friends [ ] 2&lt;br&gt;Parents [ ] 3&lt;br&gt;Father [ ] 4&lt;br&gt;Mother [ ] 5&lt;br&gt;Grandparents [ ] 6&lt;br&gt;Other relatives [ ] 7&lt;br&gt;Partner [ ] 9&lt;br&gt;Others, please state [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of accommodation do you have?</td>
<td>No accommodation [ ] 1&lt;br&gt;Dormitory [ ] 2&lt;br&gt;Parents' home [ ] 3&lt;br&gt;Employer's housing [ ] 4&lt;br&gt;Renting [ ] 5&lt;br&gt;Others, please state [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who pays for your accommodation?</td>
<td>Stay for free [ ] 1&lt;br&gt;Pay your self [ ] 2&lt;br&gt;parents [ ] 3&lt;br&gt;Other relatives [ ] 4&lt;br&gt;Partner [ ] 5&lt;br&gt;Others, please state [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe your family's economic situation?</td>
<td>Barely able to survive [ ] 1&lt;br&gt;Have the basic necessities [ ] 2&lt;br&gt;Comfortable [ ] 3&lt;br&gt;More than adequate [ ] 4&lt;br&gt;Well to do [ ] 5&lt;br&gt;Don't know [ ] 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past year have there been times in which you have not been able to buy the daily necessities?</td>
<td>Almost always [ ] 1&lt;br&gt;Many times [ ] 2&lt;br&gt;Sometimes [ ] 3&lt;br&gt;Very few times [ ] 4&lt;br&gt;Never [ ] 5&lt;br&gt;Don't know [ ] 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the last month have you gone without a meal because you didn't have enough money?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you gone without a meal in the last month?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have electricity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a TV?</td>
<td>Black and white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a video?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a refrigerator?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a radio?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a bicycle?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a motor bike?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence have a car?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

507 How often have you gone without a meal in the last month?

508 Does your residence have electricity?

509 Does your residence have a TV?

510 Does your residence have a video?

511 Does your residence have a refrigerator?

512 Does your residence have a radio?

513 Does your residence have a bicycle?

514 Does your residence have a motor bike?

515 Does your residence have a car?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What type of stove does your residence have?</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Electric</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other, please state</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your residence subscribe or buy newspapers or magazines??</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of water system does your residence have?</td>
<td>Rain water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pipe water</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reservoir, pond, dam</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>River</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other, please state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Options</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presently are you studying?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No [ ] 2→612</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What level are you studying?</td>
<td>See code book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do the majority of your education expenses come from?</td>
<td>From yourself [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grandparents [ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relatives [ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fan (partner) [ ] 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other, please state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last week how many times you didn't go to school?</td>
<td>0 [ ] 0→606</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3 [ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 [ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>5 [ ] 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last term who often did you attend school?</td>
<td>Always [ ] 0→608</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not often [ ] 3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Never [ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>When you were not at school what were you doing?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In the last term who often did you attend school?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What level of education do you think will complete?</td>
<td>See code book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you worked or are presently working for money?</td>
<td>Yes, presently working [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not now but before yes [ ] 2→611</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Never [ ] 3→901</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>610</strong></td>
<td>How does your work affect your study?</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>→700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>611</strong></td>
<td>Why did you stop working?</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>→700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**For those not studying**

| **612** | Why are you not studying? | Never studied [ ] 1 →617 |
| Financial problems [ ] 2 |
| Looking after younger siblings [ ] 3 |
| Lack of interest [ ] 4 |
| Could not cope [ ] 5 |
| Completed education [ ] 6 |
| Other, please state [ ] |

Don’t know [ ] 98

| **613** | What was your highest level of education achieved? | See code book |

| **614** | How old were you when you completed your education? | |

| **615** | Who decided that you would leave school? | Your self [ ] 1 |
| Both parents [ ] 2 |
| Your father [ ] 3 |
| Your mother [ ] 4 |
| Other relatives [ ] 5 |
| Others, please state [ ] 6 |

Don’t know [ ] 98

| **616** | How important was your education for finding a job? | [ ] | →700 |

<p>| <strong>617</strong> | Why have you never studied? | [ ] |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was the job</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Age started</th>
<th>Age finished</th>
<th>Reason for leaving</th>
</tr>
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<td>701.1</td>
<td>702.1</td>
<td>703.1</td>
<td>704.1</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>801 Can you please tell me the reason why you are presently working?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>804 Are you presently working?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>805 How long did you take to find your position?</td>
<td>[ ] Straight away [ ] Within a week [ ] Within a month [ ] Within 6 months [ ] Within a year [ ] Over a year [ ] Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>806 How did you find this position?</td>
<td>[ ] By yourself [ ] Through both parents [ ] Through father [ ] Through mother [ ] Through other relatives [ ] Through friends [ ] Through job agency [ ] Through employer [ ] Through advertisement [ ] Other, please state [ ] Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>807 Did you know anyone at your work before gaining this position?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>808 Who did you know?</td>
<td>[ ] Friends [ ] Relatives [ ] Friends and relatives [ ] Others from your village [ ] Others, please state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did your parents know anyone at your work before you gained this position?</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2 → 811</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who did they know?</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends of your parents</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td>[ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friends and relatives</td>
<td>[ ] 4</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others from your village</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others, please state</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average how many days do you work per week?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average how many hours do you work per week?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While working do you get breaks</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While waiting for customers</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td>[ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 minutes per day</td>
<td>[ ] 4</td>
<td>[ ] 5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-60 minutes per day</td>
<td>[ ] 5</td>
<td>[ ] 8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour plus per day</td>
<td>[ ] 8</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How many co-workers are under 18?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many co-workers are 18 or older?</td>
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<tr>
<td>On average how much do you get paid per week?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who receives the pay?</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your self</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your parents</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>[ ] 3</td>
<td>[ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fan (partner)</td>
<td>[ ] 4</td>
<td>[ ] 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your employer keeps your wage</td>
<td>[ ] 5</td>
<td>[ ] 98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others, please state</td>
<td>[ ] 98</td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

274
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is the wage paid?</td>
<td>Per day [ ] 1, Per week [ ] 2, Per month [ ] 3, Per year [ ] 4, Per piece [ ] 5, Per customer [ ] 6, Other, please state [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were your parents given a payment when you started work?</td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 98, Yes [ ] 1, No [ ] 2, Don't know [ ] 8 →821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much did they receive?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How much in tips do you receive on average per month?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you receive bonus?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1, No [ ] 2, Don't know [ ] 8 →826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you receive a year?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is food provided by your employer?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1, No [ ] 2 →826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many meals a day are you given?</td>
<td>1 [ ] 1, 2 [ ] 2, 3 or more [ ] 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is accommodation provided by your employer?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1, No [ ] 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does your employer do if you come late?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does your employer do if you make mistakes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you saving money?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1, No [ ] 2 →831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average how much are you saving per month?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever had any sickness which you think may have been due to your work?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1, No [ ] 2, Don't know [ ] 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you received any injuries while you were working?</td>
<td>Never [ ] 1, A few times [ ] 2, Sometimes [ ] 3, Often [ ] 4, Always [ ] 5, Don't know [ ] 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your pay?</td>
<td>Very Satisfied [ ] 1, Satisfied [ ] 2, So so [ ] 3, Dissatisfied [ ] 4, Very Dissatisfied [ ] 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your employer?</td>
<td>Very Satisfied [ ] 1, Satisfied [ ] 2, So so [ ] 3, Dissatisfied [ ] 4, Very Dissatisfied [ ] 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your fellow workers?</td>
<td>Very Satisfied [ ] 1, Satisfied [ ] 2, So so [ ] 3, Dissatisfied [ ] 4, Very Dissatisfied [ ] 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your customers?</td>
<td>Very Satisfied [ ] 1, Satisfied [ ] 2, So so [ ] 3, Dissatisfied [ ] 4, Very Dissatisfied [ ] 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your promotion opportunities?</td>
<td>Very Satisfied [ ] 1, Satisfied [ ] 2, So so [ ] 3, Dissatisfied [ ] 4, Very Dissatisfied [ ] 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| How satisfied are you with the distance of your work from home?         | Very Satisfied: 1  
Satisfied: 2  
So so: 3  
Dissatisfied: 4  
Very Dissatisfied: 5 |      |
| Are you satisfied with your work for any other reasons?                 | Yes, please state: [ ]           |      |
| Are you dissatisfied with your work for any other reasons?              | Yes, please state: [ ]           |      |
| Last year did you help growing rice?                                   | Yes: 1  
No: 2            | 844  |
| Why did you help growing rice?                                          |                                  |      |
| To help in the rice production did you have to resign from your position? | Yes: 1  
No: 2            | 843  |
| If you had an opportunity what would you do?                            | Stay in this position: 1  
Change jobs: 2  
Study full time: 3  
Don't know: 8 | 844  |
| Why are you not working now?                                            |                                  |      |

Worked in the past but not now
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>901</th>
<th>What do you want to be doing in 1 years time?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>902</td>
<td>What do you want to be doing in 5 years time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>903</td>
<td>Where do you want to live in 5 years time?</td>
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</tbody>
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* I have not included the code book because of considerations of space.
I would like to ask you permission to administer two questionnaires. One to an adult in the household, and a second one to children aged between 8 and 17. This questionnaire is concerned with child and youth activities in Khon Kaen. The household questionnaire will consist of general background questions about those living in this household. The second questionnaire will consist of a series of questions concerning migration, family structure, socio-economic background, education, working history, work and aspirations of the children and youth found in this area. The reason that I wish to carry out these questions is that I am assisting a researcher, Mr Simon Baker, from the Australian National University, in Australia, who is presently carrying out PhD fieldwork.
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<td>001</td>
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<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Respondent’s name</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
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<td>004</td>
<td>Date of interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Interviewer’s ID</td>
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<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Data entry ID</td>
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<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Was the interview successful?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1  → 200  No [ ] 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Visit 1</td>
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<td>009</td>
<td>Visit 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>Visit 3</td>
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280
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Relation to head of household</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Main activity</th>
<th>Last year where did you live the most</th>
<th>Where have you lived the most</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>102.1</td>
<td>103</td>
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<td>108.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 Where did you live most in the past year?</td>
<td>See code book</td>
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<tr>
<td>201 Where have you spent most of your life?</td>
<td>See code book</td>
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<tr>
<td>202 Where were you born?</td>
<td>See code book</td>
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<tr>
<td>For those not located in their place of birth</td>
<td>If still in place of birth go to 212</td>
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<td>204 Your main activity before migration?</td>
<td>Employed [ ] 1                    Unemployed [ ] 2</td>
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<td>Other, please state</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don’t know [ ] 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>205 Did you come here because of debt or financial difficulties of your family?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1                         No [ ] 2</td>
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<td>Don’t know [ ] 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>207 Did you come here because of lack of work for you or your partner at the place of origin?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1                         No [ ] 2</td>
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<td>Don’t know [ ] 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>208 Did you come here in order for your children to study?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1                         No [ ] 2</td>
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<td>Don’t know [ ] 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>209 Did you come here in order to seek employment for yourself, your partner or other family members?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1                         No [ ] 2</td>
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<td>Don’t know [ ] 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>211 Did you come here because of other reasons?</td>
<td>Yes, please state</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have any children under 18 years old living in Khon Kaen?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2→216</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are they doing there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you have any children under 18 years old living in Khon Kaen in the past?</td>
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<td>What were they doing there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have any children under 18 years old living in Bangkok?</td>
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<td>2→220</td>
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<td>What are they doing there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you have any children under 18 years old living in Bangkok in the past?</td>
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<td>What were they doing there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have any children under 18 years old living anywhere else?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2→301</td>
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<td>Where?</td>
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<td>What are they doing there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you have any children under 18 years old living in there in the past?</td>
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<td>What were they doing there?</td>
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</table>

See code book
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language spoken at home?</th>
<th>Lao/Isan</th>
<th>Thai</th>
<th>Other, please state</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>301</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ ] 1</td>
<td>[ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>302</td>
<td>Does your family subscribe or buy newspapers or magazines?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1</td>
<td>No [ ] 2</td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>303</td>
<td>Do you know if there is a law about the age at which a young person is permitted to work?</td>
<td>Yes [ ] 1</td>
<td>No [ ] 2</td>
<td>Don't know [ ] 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304</td>
<td>At what age is a child allowed to start work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>305</td>
<td>At what age should a child start work part time?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>306</td>
<td>At what age should a child start work full time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much land does your family have for fruit and veg (suan and rail)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much land does your family have for rice?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many rooms in your house?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you own your house?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td></td>
<td>1→506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who owns the house?</td>
<td>Your grandparents' house</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rented</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government house</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other, please state</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe your family's economic situation?</td>
<td>Barely able to survive</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have the basic necessities</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than adequate</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well to do</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past year have there been times in which your family has not been able to buy the daily necessities?</td>
<td>Almost always</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many times</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very few times</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response Options</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the last month have you or children gone without a meal because you didn’t have enough money?</td>
<td>Yes [1] No [2] Don't know [8]</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>→510</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your home have electricity?</td>
<td>Yes: [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know: [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of stove</td>
<td>None: [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charcoal: [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gas: [ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electric: [ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other, please state: [ ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know: [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your family subscribe or buy newspapers or magazines?</td>
<td>Yes: [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know: [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of water system does your house have?</td>
<td>Rain water: [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pipe water: [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well: [ ] 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reservoir, pond, dam: [ ] 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>River: [ ] 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other, please state: [ ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know: [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have difficulties in buying school supplies or books?</td>
<td>Yes: [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know: [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have difficulties in buying the uniforms?</td>
<td>Yes: [ ] 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: [ ] 2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know: [ ] 8</td>
<td></td>
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* I have not included the code book because of considerations of space.