



Child slavery in supply chains: Actors of the dirty scene



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Background: Child slavery in global supply chains is a complex problem because it involves various supply chain actors, including corporations, at different tiers, and external organisations and society. Many corporate sustainability on child labour, present a unilateral perspective which renders the development of child labour measures under the leadership of many companies tardy and inefficient.

Objectives: This study conducted a comprehensive investigation into child slavery in supply chains to identify the key actors that can combat child slavery in the supply chain.

Method: Thematic analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles, containing the keywords; child labour; supply chain, and child slavery; used interchangeably, based on three inclusion criteria; high frequency of relevant keywords; recent publication period; and high number of citations, was conducted.

Results: Four main actors and their influence on child slavery were identified namely i.). Corporations - through industrial characteristics, strategy, corporate social responsibility obligations, and internal stakeholders; ii.). Governments – through regulations, policies, and intentions to combat child slavery; iii.). Societies - through the establishment of social benchmarks and social accountability frameworks to address the social crisis; and iv.). External organisations - such as ILO, NGOs and trade unions as the dominant actors in combatting the child slavery phenomena in supply chains.

Conclusion: The findings provide a nascent conceptual model for empirical work and a foundation for descriptive and normative research on child slavery in supply chains.

Contribution: The study's contribution is the assessment of the child slavery phenomenon using a multi-stakeholder perspective to gain a better understanding of the dynamics associated with child slavery.

Keywords: child slavery; key actors; combatting child slavery; supply chains; social sustainability.

Introduction

Since the industrial revolution, slavery has gradually evolved into forms of forced labour, labour exploitation, and child labour. The use of children as a form of workforce hinders the lives and rights of millions of children and families. To be precise, child labour is a manifestation of the uncoordinated distribution of resources such as economy, politics, and education. Such a detrimental form of labour has a negative impact on economic and social development. Child slavery is part of modern slavery. According to the US Department of State, modern slavery refers to sex trafficking of individuals as well as forced labour, including bonded labour, domestic servitude, and forced child labour. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2017 global estimates of modern slavery showed that approximately 40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016, and of these, 24.9 million were individuals in forced labour, including 4.3 million children. Forced labour leads to illegal profit of \$150 billion in private enterprises alone, highlighting the dark side of the reality of today's supply chains (ILO 2017). It exists in many industries in developed or developing countries (Gold, Trautrim & Trodd 2015); some well-known cases include child labour in the West African cocoa industry (Reuters 2020a, 2020b) or children as young as 8 years old picking coffee beans in Guatemala for Starbucks (Guardian 2020). For decades, global supply chains with distant actors made it easy for western companies and consumers to ignore the conditions under which the products are produced in the supply chains.

Modern slavery in supply chain

Modern slavery is one of the challenges and risks facing the current supply chain industry. In 2005, the ILO launched the Global Coalition against Forced Labour. In the supply chain field, modern slavery is defined as 'exploiting people who are deprived of their personal freedom anywhere in the supply chain from raw material extraction to end-customer to provide services or produce' (Stevenson & Cole 2018). Forced labour encompasses slavery, debt bondage, and human trafficking (Lebaron 2020:41). However, supply chain management (SCM) definition of forced labour excludes human trafficking (Gold et al. 2015), and uses the terminology forced labour, modern slavery, child slavery, and child labour interchangeably. The research on modern slavery is underdeveloped (Crane 2013; Gold et al. 2015) and evidence suggests that progress in eliminating modern slavery is weak. International laws and covenants are frequently not enforced, while moral persuasion is often inadequate (Byerly 2012). 'The bitter reality of the 21st century is that human beings as slaves can be purchased at US\$100.00' (Christ, Rao & Burritt 2019). Thus, there have been calls for more independent SCM research on modern slavery (Gold et al. 2015; New 2015). Finding effective ways to address modern slavery is far from a simple undertaking and requires further investigation (Christ et al. 2019). All the endeavours by supply chains, such as the codes of conduct, Acts by governments, including the 2015 *UK Modern Slavery Act*, and social activities by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), seem to be incapable of fully combating the phenomena and lead to a more box-ticking approach rather than fully understanding and solving the problem (Benstead, Hendry & Stevenson 2018; Christ et al. 2019). Furthermore, excessive modern slavery is inevitably hidden and criminal in nature, and the monitoring mechanism requires considerable resources to extend to the entire supply chain industry, resulting in the risk of slavery emergence in various industries that cannot be gradually reduced (Stevenson & Cole 2018). Finally, the failure of business and management studies in investigating the dynamics of supply chain that give rise to modern slavery and the business actors and models through which it flourishes has been acknowledged by researchers (Caruana et al. 2020).

Child slavery in supply chain

As previously mentioned, the 2017 global estimates of modern slavery showed that 40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016, of which 24.9 million, including 4.3 million children, were individuals in forced labour (ILO 2017). The unit of analysis in this article is supply chain, we define child slavery in the supply chain using Gold et al.'s (2015) definition of modern slavery and the ILO's specific definition of child labour (2020) as:

... the exploitation of a child anywhere along the supply chain from raw material to the final customer for the purpose of service provision or production in a way that he/she is deprived from his/her childhood, potential, dignity and is harmful for his/her mental and physical development. (Gold et al.'s 2015:486)

There are research studies that identify the difference between 'child labour' and 'child work'. Some views believe that the child labour market is described as a dual nature, and some child work can promote the economy. The ILO is committed to combating the most hazardous forms of child labour crimes. It is impossible to eliminate the problem of child labour (Bhukuth 2005; Hussain-Khaliq 2004) as it is virtually the cheapest labour force in the labour market and the problem of child slaves is also one of the most difficult forms of slavery to discover and resolve (ed. Craig 2010; Gold et al. 2015). The agricultural sector accounts for the largest share of child labour, followed by services and manufacturing, as revealed in the ILO's 2017 report. A significant proportion of child labour in the global supply chain occurs at lower levels of activities, such as raw material extraction and agriculture. For example, most child slaves in the cotton industry suffer injuries caused by their forced labour and dangerous production environments. Moreover, in most countries, the legislative framework is not fully implemented and the definition of dangerous tasks to which the cotton industry is exposed is also ambiguous. This phenomenon not only occurs in agricultural industries, such as cotton, but also in other manufacturing industries. Child slavery prevalence is high in the textiles industry in particular in the country of origin of the material (ed. Craig 2010). Therefore, it is a complex and far-reaching human rights issue for any institution, enterprise, government, and individual.

Research problem statement

The rapid developments in global supply chains, exacerbate the challenges of monitoring and eliminating child labour (Van De Glind & Kooijmans 2008). Enterprises need to consider how to maintain the balance between the multi-party partnership and the interests of the business (Zutshi et al. 2009). Therefore, the solution to the child slave problem is interlinked. In effect, most solutions and schemes to child labour cases can conform to only a single aspect. Moreover, the complex composition and relationships of contemporary global supply chains also pose significant obstacles to addressing the problem of child labour. Consequently, corporates should encounter not only a unified internal loophole but also an understanding of the whole context of child slavery.

The problem addressed in this research is the lack of comprehensive investigation into child slavery in supply chains. Although there exists some limited research on the topic (Winstanley, Clark & Leeson 2002; Zutshi et al. 2009), a significant gap remains in understanding the key actors involved in child slavery within supply chains and the absence of a conceptual model to address this problem. This study intends to bridge the identified gap by conducting an initial exploration of the main actors who play a critical role in combating child slavery within supply chains through an in-depth literature review. The primary research question is focused on identifying the key actors involved in combatting child slavery in the supply chain. This research expands the

field of child slavery in SCM, an area that has not received adequate attention. It offers a comprehensive overview of the actors connected to child slavery and presents a conceptual model to effectively combat this issue within supply chains. By addressing these research objectives, the article aims to improve the understanding of the complexities related to child slavery and to provide valuable insights for targeted interventions.

The article is structured as follow: Section 2 provides an overview of the research method employed in this paper. Section 3 presents the results study. It also identifies and elaborates the four main actors and their roles in creating and combatting child slavery. In addition, Section 3 present the nascent conceptual model for empirical work and a foundation for descriptive and normative research on child slavery in supply chains. Section 4 concludes the article and presents practical and policy implications as well as areas for future research.

Research method

This research followed the thematic analysis approach of Hastig and Sodhi (2020) and Sodhi and Tang (2018). These existing studies have previously examined existing studies on child labour and supply chains using this approach and attribute its flexibility and accessibility as the main reasons for selecting this method. Thematic analysis enables the identification of key features of a large body of data and enables researcher to deduce rich descriptions of a large data set (Braun & Clarke 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis is increasingly becoming a qualitative research methodology in its own right (Sodhi & Tang 2018). Previous research findings suggest that literature on child labour in the supply chain was not well organised and integrated according to Sodhi and Tang's (2014) research stream maturity criteria. Sodhi et al. (2014) categorise the stages of a research stream's maturity as follows: (1) awareness, (2) framing, (3) modelling, and (4) validation. Thematic analysis, as employed in this research, can help to create awareness and framing child slavery in supply chains.

Because of these characteristics, the data collected in this study are more in line with the focus and description of the thematic analysis. The qualitative data can be systematically coded and analysed, and then linked to a wide range of theories or concepts (Braun & Clarke 2012). The thematic analysis was performed following the six steps outlined by Hastig and Sodhi (2020) as well as Sodhi and Tang (2018). The most important step in this research is to select 'data corpus' in step 1, which means being familiar with a representative sample of relevant literature and providing the basis for subsequent analysis. Step 2 is to systematically encode all the data and identify as many potential codes or semantic topics as possible when familiar with the data. Step 3 is to organise and integrate the initial data encoding to determine the entire data set. Different encodings are sorted to extract and form identified themes. Step 4 is to review and refine the two early steps to re-examine the coding level. At

the same time, it is necessary to determine whether the designed themes and coding are appropriate and coherent to gradually improve the entire map. In step 5, the themes and subthemes are named, and detailed analysis is performed to integrate the overall framework. A map is eventually proposed that could be applied to actors involved in combatting child labour in the supply chain. Step 6 is to produce the given steps into this research (Hastig & Sodhi 2020; Sodhi & Tang 2018).

The 'data corpus' of this research is an extensive sample of research literature on the factors affecting child labour in the supply chain. Consequently, we used search phrases for 'child labour; supply chain', 'child slavery; supply chain' interchangeably in Google Scholar Search (without quotation marks): there are no restrictions on searches. Articles are considered included in the sample in the order in which Google presents (i.e. the relevance ranking). In the initial period of filtration, the selection standard of including or deleting the article was based on the relevance of the abstract and/or full-text research topics (child labour and supply chain). In the retrieval stage, we found that in the literature with supply chain as the main research content, the references to child slavery are mainly included in the modern slavery cases with low frequency, so we excluded more than 10 repetitive and low correlation empirical articles. In further selection, we determined the comprehensive selection of literature by three factors: high frequency of relevant keywords, recent publication period, and more citations. Some of the literature was reserved in view of their uniqueness, including the contribution of theories in the field or the representativeness of cases (Behl & Dutta 2019). In the selection process, once we found that 10 consecutive articles had no relevant content, we stopped filtering the articles in rank order. Then, another similar phrase would be substituted before continuing the search. Eventually, 68 relevant articles were selected, 28 were conceptual articles and 42 were empirical articles. This kind of search has certain limitations, and it is impossible to determine whether all related articles are covered, or some similar resources are also excluded.

This approach has some limitations such as some relevant sources might be excluded from the search, resulting in some of the themes not being identified. Moreover, the selection of articles depends on Google Scholar's proprietary ranking, so there might be articles further down the list that we didn't include (Hastig & Sodhi 2020). Finally, at the time of this research (in 2020) articles on child labour was limited. Despite the limitations, these articles cover a wide range of industries and regions involved in child labour. We believe the themes and content contained have reached saturation, and there will be no further critical themes. Google Scholar's proprietary algorithm ranks each source based on the full text (Google Scholar 2020). Therefore, the literature with higher rankings are also followed and used in the selection (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Sources for thematic analysis, in order of appearance on Google Scholar.

S.no.	Author name	Journal name	Conceptual	Empirical
1	Zutshi, Creed and Sohal (2009)	European Business Review	√	-
2	Winstanley et al. (2002)	Business Ethics: A European Review	-	√
3	Fair Labour Association (2012)	Fair Labour Association	-	√
4	Kolk and Van Tulder (2004)	Journal of World Business	√	-
5	Manza (2014)	Boston College International and Comparative Law Review	-	√
6	Strand (2009)	Journal of Business Ethics	-	√
7	Faber, Krause and Sánchez De la Sierra (2017)	UC Berkeley: Center for Effective Global Action.	-	√
8	Kolk and Van Tulder (2002)	European Management Journal	-	√
9	Doorey (2011)	Journal of Business Ethics	-	√
10	Griek, Penikett and Hougee (2010)	Sustainalytics. Extrait de	-	√
11	Turker and Altuntas (2014)	European Management Journal	-	√
12	Kolk and Van Tulder (2002)	Journal of Business Ethics	-	√
13	Mamic (2005)	Journal of Business Ethics	-	√
14	Wolf (2014)	Journal of Business Ethics	√	-
15	Boje and Khan (2009)	Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship	-	√
16	Delaney et al. (2016)	Gender Equality and Responsible Business	-	√
17	Khan, Munir and Willmott (2007)	Organization Studies	√	√
18	Leonard and Berlan (2009)	International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy	-	√
19	Burra (2009)	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights	-	√
20	Grootaert and Kanbur (1995)	International Labour Review	√	-
21	Craig (2010)	Policy Press	√	-
22	Gold et al. (2015)	Supply Chain Management: An International Journal	√	-
23	Dessy and Pallage (2005)	The Economic Journal	√	-
24	Khanam (2005)	Asian Profile	-	√
25	Hussain-Khaliq (2004)	Journal of Corporate Citizenship	-	√
26	Afriyie, Saeed and Alhassan (2019)	Journal of Public Health	-	√
27	Chelliah (2017)	Human Resource Management International Digest	√	-
28	Anker (2000)	International Labour Review	√	-
29	Delistavrou, Krystallis and Tilikidou (2020)	International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management	-	√
30	Pedersen and Andersen (2006)	Journal of Public Affairs: An International Journal	√	-
31	LeBaron and Lister (2015)	Review of International Studies	√	-
32	Busse et al. (2017)	International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management	-	√
33	Hofmann, Schleper and Blome (2018)	Journal of Business Ethics	-	√
34	Van De Glind and Kooijmans (2008)	Children and Society	√	-
35	Thorlakson (2018)	Business Strategy and the Environment	-	√
36	Macdonald (2007)	Third World Quarterly	-	√
37	Hoang (2019)	Societies	-	√
38	Roy (2013)	South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases	-	√
39	Lindgreen et al. (2009)	Supply Chain Management: An International Journal	√	-
40	Masson et al. (2007)	The International Journal of Logistics Management	-	√
41	Senou et al. (2019)	IFAC-PapersOnLine	-	√
42	Perry and Towers (2013)	International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management	-	√
43	Smestad (2009)	Fashion Practice	√	-
44	De Lange (2007)	International Migration	-	√
45	Bhukuth (2005)	Journal of Asian and African Studies	-	√
46	Boersma (2017)	University of New South Wales Law Journal	√	-
47	Bøås and Hatløy (2008)	International Migration	-	√
48	Afrin (2014)	Development Country Studies	√	-
49	Welford and Frost (2006)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	-	√
50	Bhaskaran et al. (2010)	Indian Journal of Labour Economics	-	√
51	Park-Poaps and Rees (2010)	Journal of Business Ethics	-	√
52	Myrstad (1999)	Childhood	-	√
53	Deva (2014)	Journal of the Indian Law Institute	√	-
54	Barrientos and Smith (2007)	Third World Quarterly	√	-
55	Idris (2020)	Institute of Development Studies	-	√
56	Svensson (2009)	Supply Chain Management: An International Journal	√	√
57	Beske, Koplin and Seuring (2008)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	√	-
58	Nolan and Bott (2018)	Australian Journal of Human Rights	√	-
59	Ahmed and Nathan (2016)	Labour Conditions in Asian Value Chains	-	√

Table 1 continues on next page →

TABLE 1 (Continues...): Sources for thematic analysis, in order of appearance on Google Scholar.

S.no.	Author name	Journal name	Conceptual	Empirical
60	Sinha (2011)	Social Modernity	-	✓
61	Barrientos (2005)	Journal of International Development	✓	-
62	Phillips et al. (2014)	Third World Quarterly	-	✓
63	Kane (2009)	Global Social Policy	✓	-
64	Koseleci and Rosati (2009)	Understanding Children's Work Programme Working Paper	✓	-
65	De Neve (2008)	Research in Economic Anthropology	-	✓
66	Palley (2002)	Journal of Economic Issues	✓	-
67	Wood (2017)	European Business Review	✓	-
68	Flynn and Walker (2020)	European Business Review	✓	-

Using steps 2–5 of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), each article was coded, then the codes were sorted for potential subthemes and, finally, the subthemes were categorised into the four main themes of corporates, governments, societies, and external organisations, such as NGO and ILO, from our sample of the literature. This was performed manually with one of the researchers and then discussed between the research team, especially in stage 4 of revision. For example, 'Having a voluntary (or even mandatory) law is of no avail if it is not implemented and enforced by the decision makers' (Zutshi et al. 2009) was coded as 'Law' and later it was categorised under the subtheme of 'Governments' laws and policies' which finally goes under the main theme of 'Government'. All these themes are discussed in Section 3 with their subthemes obtained from thematic analysis of the literature.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Johannesburg College of Business and Economics Research Ethics Committee (No. 2023TSCM-0006).

Results: Actors affecting child slavery

The results bring evidence that the main four actors of corporations, government, society, and external organisations have the dominant effects on the child slavery phenomena within the supply chains. Corporations have an important role in creating and combatting child slavery through their industrial characteristics, strategy, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and through internal stakeholders. Government is the second actor that affects the phenomena through its regulations and policies, and its intention to combat child slavery. Society is the third actor that with its social accountability and social crisis affects child slavery, and finally external organisations such as ILO, NGOs and trade unions affect the phenomena while through collaboration they can hugely combat child slavery in the supply chains. The following sub-sections elaborate the role played by each of these actors in creating and combatting child slavery.

Corporates

The enterprises' decisions on all aspects of the supply chain will directly affect the probability of child labour. Responsible

enterprises are also faced with challenges of distinguishing suitable and sound anti-child labour mechanisms from child labour practices. Cross-regional enterprises and multinational enterprises have exposure to and higher numbers of child slavery incidences than regional enterprises. Therefore, in large enterprises, it has become increasingly common to include child slavery supervision as part of CSR (New 2015).

Industrial characteristics

Before formulating an enterprise strategy, it is necessary to consider characteristics of the industry and the environment in the aspect of labour employment. Industrial characteristics include the particularity of some raw materials and the origin of resources that may lead to the problem of child slavery. For example, in the cobalt mining industry of the Democratic Republic of Congo, most minerals come from underdeveloped areas, which are often characterised with unethical labour practices. Also, in the diamond industry in West Africa, the work in diamond mines is arduous and repetitive (Bøås & Hatløy 2008). Most of these regions are low-income areas and there is a serious lack of education for the local population, which accelerates the growth of child labour exploitation. In addition, children's physical advantages render them the preferred workforce in the mining industry as many mineral mining environments require a smaller body to access ore (Faber et al. 2017). Similarly, purchasing managers and contractors often fail to communicate directly with manufacturers in the field of low-cost, low-tech manual sewing or garment processing. Among them, the intermediary relationship is complex, especially when outsourcing to the family-based manufacturing sources, and it is impossible to distinguish between child labour or children in the family business, so such enterprises are difficult to effectively monitor. Consequently, many child labourers cannot be studied and traced in depth (Hussain-Khaliq 2004).

It is very difficult but necessary for companies in a non-capital-intensive industry to visit and investigate in depth in the early days as a strategy to identify and combat child slavery. For example, a critical investigation in Uzbekistan revealed that child labour is prevalent in various industries including salt lakes, pesticides and chemicals. Against this backdrop, a ban on Uzbekistan cotton imports was imposed and transparency was provided throughout the production process (Turker & Altuntas 2014). Also, in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, child labour accounts for 90% of the labour

force in cotton seed productivity. This is because hybrid seeds are produced by manual cross-pollination. The labour cost of hybrid seeds accounts for 50% of the total cost. Thus, to largely reduce costs, farmers would hire child labour who can work longer and are easier to control (Burra 2009). Therefore, on the one hand, a complete understanding of the characteristics of the industry and the environment of the enterprise's follow-up strategy has a guiding and prejudging role. On the other hand, the research of industry characteristics can also help local governments to increase the improvement of laws, implement purposeful and responsible sourcing policies, and strictly assess and regulate employment and resource issues in different fields.

Corporate social responsibility

In the global supply chain network, a responsible company needs not only to solve the problem of child labour but also to make efforts to avoid the problem of child labour in future. However, the proposal of CSR is a controversial issue and its definition and performance depend on the views of different stakeholders. At the same time, when enterprises implement CSR, they face a lack of resources and skills, demands by stakeholders, and obstacles in production technology (Welford & Frost 2006). Moreover, companies cannot promise to treat their economic interests and social responsibilities equally. Voluntary CSR initiatives have many limitations (Delaney et al. 2016). Corporate social responsibility encompasses a stronger social contract with greater expectations of society through the corporation as an institution with power and social influence (Bayerly 2012). Nevertheless, as CSR is not enforceable and sidelines the workers, rather than involving them. There is a need to move towards Worker-Driven Social Responsibility (WSR) from CSR (Lebaron 2020:171).

The reason business enterprises protect children's rights is because the impact of excessive exploitation on children is lasting and irreversible (Saputri 2018). To successfully solve and eliminate the problem of child labour, enterprises need to extend an enduring good reputation to society. When suppliers rely on future cooperation, reputation is a highly correlative guarantee (Pedersen & Andersen 2006). Disclosure of modern slavery could be a major reputational risk (Stevenson & Cole 2018), which would be even worse from disclosure of child slavery. 'Labour and human rights contraventions can materially impact upon companies' reputation, disrupt operations, divert management and board resources, and potentially lead to long-term running costly legal consequences' (ACSI 2020).

Therefore, CSR tends to focus on providing a healthy, sustainable, and regulated environment for child labour. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has issued the 'Children's Rights and Business Principle', which provides a comprehensive framework to help companies perform and understand the rights and welfare of children in business conduct. The framework highlights the need for companies to perform and respect children's rights and promise to support children's rights and promote efforts to eliminate

child labour in business activities and relationships. In addition to eliminating child labour exploitation, companies should ensure that children are protected and are safe in all business activities and facilities; companies should strengthen the efforts of communities and governments to protect children's rights, and redesign operating institutions to perform CSR obligations or create new businesses to help disadvantaged groups in society. The operation of CSR must also involve the process of inspection and auditing. In general, the auditing system of enterprises is mainly based on third-party audits, and enterprise evaluations are conducted through professional audits and inspection companies. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that the emergence of auditing becomes an additional expense for the enterprise. The low quality and high employment turnover of the audit market make audit quality unconvincing (Welford & Frost 2006). More seriously, in low-income countries, illegal practices, such as bribery and insider trading in audits, are constantly exposed. Certainly, strict auditing can be used as a symbolic power activity to legitimise and strengthen local problems in supply chain (LeBaron & Lister 2015). The effective existence of corporate internal audit and supervision systems have successfully averted risks, improved supply chain performance, and can gradually upgrade or improve clear standards for suppliers (Turker & Altuntas 2014).

Corporate strategy and management

Retailers in today's global supply chains rely heavily on intermediaries in low-cost countries but cannot understand the employment situation in the countries in which their products are manufactured. This will cause numerous child labour scandals (Masson et al. 2007). The complexity of the enterprise strategy development not only derives from the demands of the end customer but also includes the selection mode of upstream suppliers to avoid negligent management. Therefore, to solve the problem of child labour, the main purpose of corporate strategy and management is to find approaches to prevent child labour and institute efficient remedial measures.

A common approach among many firms is to establish a series of codes of conduct and ethics statements, including employee training, third-party commitments, supplier ratings and contract employment (Kolk & Van Tulder 2002). The adequacy of corporate codes of conduct has been questioned it is not clear if they fulfil social responsibilities but are rather believed to increase the risk of opportunism. Furthermore, because of different host country government regulations, strategies for dealing with child labour are inconsistent. Therefore, it will be difficult to fully measure the actual effects of multinational corporates on the issue of child labour. In addition, compared with NGOs, the standards of business association guidelines, drafted for child labour issues, are based primarily on profit. Therefore, the specific standard used as a reference for the formulation of a corporate strategy is essential. Also, the multiple standard references complicate the industry standards in the field and there is no single template (Kolk & Van Tulder

2002). Successful and efficient action guidelines in an enterprise are usually accompanied by the active commitment and permission of core stakeholders. The relationship among them is complex and tense (Mamic 2005). Furthermore, some companies formulate codes of conduct proposed mainly to provide a good social image and responsibility. Obviously, this starting point is biased (Pedersen & Andersen 2006). To deal with the problem of child labour, it is necessary to adopt a combination of passive and active measures at government and company policy levels. If managers fail to conduct and implement voluntary (or even mandatory) laws, they will not solve the problem.

At the same time, the corporate code of conduct should also include appropriate prevention and remediation, which is an integral part of corporate risk management and decision-making. Delaney et al. (2016) believe that a single corporate strategy and code in some developing countries (e.g. India, Pakistan) is insufficient to meet the conditions for elimination of child labour. Some companies have taken years to remedy child labour because it is difficult to reduce cooperation with suppliers within a short period. Child labour remedies are more difficult to implement than other types of slavery. The weak enforcement of existing laws and regulations, the concept of limited liability in company law, and the burden of proof on children create many obstacles to redress. Therefore, preventing child labour requires a complex solution.

Many multinational enterprises have pursued sustainable solutions to child slavery in recent years. The development of transparency and traceability will gradually compensate for the shortcomings of the ineffective or poor implementation of the enterprise and identify the error nodes in the employment of child labour. Furthermore, some companies can seek technology (such as blockchain applications) to help eliminate child labour and optimise supply chain networks in terms of traceability and transparency. The voluntary disclosure of Nike and Levi-Strauss suppliers for example, is actively monitoring misconduct and illegal behaviour in the supply chain (Doorey 2011). With effective IT systems and technology, these companies have demonstrated more efficient execution in the implementation of codes of conduct and strategies, and actively assisted companies in developing sustainable employment models.

Internal stakeholders

Internal stakeholders, such as long-term investors, shareholders, managers, and employees, put pressure on the company to contribute to sustainable development in addition to performance. It is one of the factors driving the development of CSR (Welford & Frost 2006). Supply chain managers will not only reduce the risk of reputation damage through the actions of stakeholders but also benefit from Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) (Wolf 2014). However, corporate self-discipline and CSR often unfairly favour corporate interests, and, therefore, may also bring symbolic, rather than substantive, results to stakeholders

(Boersma 2017). Consequently, on the issue of child labour, it is best for manufacturers to be ahead of this stakeholder group as this portion of the supply chain accounts for a significant portion of employment of child labour and can subsequently play a significant role combatting child labour. Furthermore, the role of government in developing the capacity of stakeholders and in encouraging the participation of a wider range of stakeholder groups are critical for the elimination of child labour (Winstanley et al. 2002).

Government

The ILO and UNICEF jointly stressed the need for government functions on the issue of child slavery. Government mismanagement and insufficient educational capacity are some of the reasons for the surge in child slavery (Fair Labour Association 2012). From the perspective of the government, the following sections present the sub-themes that affect child labour issues and discuss various themes or concepts.

Government laws and politics

In view of national slave governance, many countries around the world have promulgated laws and policies on child slaves. As a result of the impact of globalisation on the supply chain, both the source of resources and the consumer country need to gradually improve the legal system against child slavery. The Modern Slavery Act of 2015, issued by the United Kingdom, requires local companies to declare and ensure that no slavery or human trafficking exist in any supply chain steps (LeBaron & Rühmkorf 2017). California also enacted the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (Pickles & Zhu 2013) as early as 2011, requiring local companies to disclose information about their efforts to eliminate slavery and human trafficking throughout the supply chain. The Ivory Coast passed a comprehensive law pertaining to the local cocoa child slavery issue (Fair Labour Association 2012). The emergence of these laws will have a significant suppression effect on child slaves in the short term, but in the long term, its suppression and implementation effects are far from ideal. Most of the production activities in companies in the supply chain involves cross-regional or transnational supply and demand. Thus, the implementation of legislation in one country does not guarantee the elimination of child labour, nor is it necessarily the best way (Grootaert & Kanbur 1995). There must also be checks and balances to ensure applicability. For example, in the production network of embroidery and embellished clothing from North India, the monitoring of global buyers and their agents rarely involves evaluating production conditions inside the home at household level. With changes in child labour laws in India, the government carefully designed Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) based on the state approach to increase women's income and authority at work. The regulatory mechanism has changed from punitive actions to finding solutions combined with CCT and compulsory education, which may become an effective and rationale solution to end child labour in India (Bhaskaran et al. 2010). Many articles have proposed that, in addition to

the differences in government support complicating the prevention of child labour, the difficulty in implementing effective standards and regulations is also a major problem facing the government (LeBaron & Rühmkorf 2017). In West Africa, at least 300 000 children work as child labourers in the cocoa trade (McKinney, Hill & Hania 2015). The actions of local government are corrupt and backward, and these ponderous measures cannot effectively manage and intervene with supply chain enterprises, leading to more child slavery victims. This demonstrates that monitoring and auditing functions are essential to the internal and external concerns of government (Manza 2014). The government should force companies to conduct due diligence on contacts in the supply chain in the form of policies to scrutinise the balance of resources between corporate supervision and market understanding, while providing a fair and competitive market environment. The role of government must not only strive to improve its own implementation projects but also promote cooperation opportunities between NGOs and enterprises, with ability to pursue necessary measures to confront the problem of child labour.

Government intent

The global campaigns have highlighted the issue of child slavery, raising concern and vigilance among governments throughout the world. The attitudes and intentions of governments on the issue of child slavery vary from region to region. When establishing improved working conditions, elimination of child labour can be overlooked in some regions where the priority is to remain competitive in the global economy. For example, Indian trade unions often portray the anti-child labour movement as weakening the competitiveness of developing countries (Bhaskaran et al. 2010). In many developing countries, the national budget pays very little attention to education because of economic reasons. Some countries continue to impose restrictions on educational progress to delay elimination of the worst forms of child labour. Therefore, the government must demonstrate the political will to eradicate child labour and translate its commitment to eliminating child labour into concrete actions that serve as a springboard for their broader efforts.

Society

Child labour is not only a failure of corporate reputation but also a damage to social morality. No matter what form of child labour operates in the supply chain, it is inevitable to discuss and involve social human rights issues. The mutual influence of child labour and society is cyclical and vicious, so breaking the chain is also a goal for all parties to endeavour. These factors often cannot be solved by one party and the whole of society needs to be assembled and awakened to a responsible understanding of the problem of child labour. From a social perspective, this section designs sub-themes that affect child labour and discusses various sub-themes or concepts.

Compared with the intervention of enterprises and governments on child slaves, the impact of social norms on

child labour is easier to ignore. In the context of global supply chains, multinational suppliers and labour sources comprise most of a company's resource demands. Investigation into the social consciousness, cultural background and social benchmarks of the resource countries are the references for enterprises to select the source of supply (Leonard & Berlan 2009). In most areas where child labour occurs, a lack of education and poverty are the two most significant causes (Burra 2009). In Faber et al. (2017), a survey of 24% of child labour cases indicated that local social norms and practices believe that child labour and their income contribute positively to the family and the community. This is one reason rendering the cobalt supply chain of the Democratic Republic of Congo so rampant. Therefore, the societal norms as well as weak regulatory frameworks on ethical labour practices exacerbate the risk of enterprises exploiting labour in the local area. In addition to the countries of origin, consumer and market-oriented environments in consumer countries also need to be aware of the existence of child labour problems. In this regard, in some countries there is an obligation to work with government, business, and media advocacy to foster a dynamic awareness of the product source throughout society (Dessy & Pallage 2005). An example is Adidas. Solomon's contractor factory promoted the Children's Paid Education Program and successfully promoted the implementation of its social programmes and social activities (Park-Poaps & Rees 2010). These cases showed that society is a potential supervision mechanism for child labour in the supply chain through local benchmarking investigation. Good usage of public voice can bring positive benefit and welfare to children.

Social accountability

The problem of child labour cannot be solved solely through the standard of enterprises and rules by governments, but through the social responsibility that each of us has as consumers:

Regardless of the ultimate figure, the presence of any child engaged in labour is inherently concerning. It necessitates swift and, importantly, pragmatic reactions from all parties engaged in the supply chain management process including manufacturers, retailers, governments, and consumers, to mention just a few. (Zutshi et al. 2009)

We have already discussed the role of corporates and governments, but consumers and societies can also combat child slavery through different campaigns and boycotts (Delistavrou et al. 2020). Different sections of society can be involved in strategies that raise awareness towards child slavery and set time-bound targets to eliminate the problem (Van De Glind & Kooijmans 2008).

Social crisis

Social crisis events and phenomena also have far-reaching effects on child slavery to varying degrees. Social events, such as economic crises and health crises, generally have a negative impact on the overall labour market, including child

labour. In developing regions, such as Asia and Africa in particular, these shocks are fatal and take a long time to recover. Regarding economic crises, following the financial crisis in 2008, the positive trend of abolishing child slaves in several countries was reversed. Many families used child labour as a risk response mechanism to mitigate short-term economic shocks (Guarcello, Mealli & Rosati 2010). In addition, such social crises are often accompanied by the weakness and failure of safety nets. Establishing and launching a sound national safety net and expanding the scale of the safety net to flexibly prevent future shocks, regular monitoring of ongoing economic crises and prepared plans are also crucial (Kane 2009; Koseleci & Rosati 2009).

On the other hand, the global outbreak of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in 2019 has impacted global economic development. A further pandemic crisis would aggravate the damage of child labour throughout developing countries, including South Asia. In the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the impact of the outbreak exacerbated poverty and food crisis, and schools were closed. These factors leave children in a state of economic and social instability and stimulate child exploitation. Children have assumed new roles and responsibilities to supplement their household income, as shown in the NGO Report on Child Ebola Rehabilitation in local areas (Idris 2020). Thus, with the outbreak of COVID-19, economic weakening and chaos increased the vulnerability of the poor communities to forced slavery. At the same time, the crisis has provided manufacturers with an opportunity to use forced labour to expand their operations and save costs. Instability and depression in the manufacturing and fashion industries may also lead some businesses and institutions to loosen supplier employment rules. The crisis places children at risk not only in the working environment but also in conditions of health and hygiene. The spread and continuation of the crisis will, therefore, also have a continuing and potentially irrecoverable impact on child labour. The vulnerability of child slaves is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic change. When social crises arise, the importance of policies and preventive mechanisms is clear. Regular assessments of child slaves and a social planning framework for prevention are necessary. Furthermore, appropriate participation in international assistance and communication is a means of solution.

External organisations

In recent years, organising cooperation to combat child labour has become increasingly popular with enterprises and governments, such as Trade Union, Love146, and Action against Child Exploitation (ACE). Regardless of the international, national or industry level, proper organisation cooperation can accelerate and monitor the enterprise's response to child labour issues. Another advantage is that it can effect changes to local child labour issues and provide sustainable solutions and environments. Through the organisational perspective, this section creates sub-themes affecting child labour and proposes the sub-themes contained.

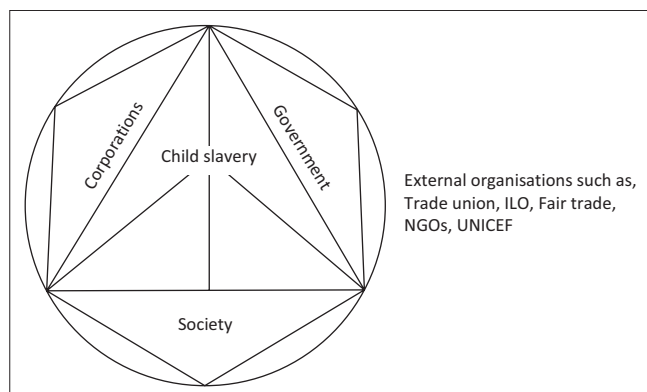
In addition to establishing a consolidated internal cooperative relationship between the enterprises and suppliers and manufacturers, external multiparty cooperation can also promote child labour issues. Generally, organisations and collaborations on child slavery issues in different industries expand social responsibility of the entire industry (Barrientos & Smith 2007). De Neve (2008) pointed out that the right of the organisation is not only a core labour right but also a key promoter and guarantor of related labour rights. Employees protect the interests of workers through general agreements or certifications in the industry through business associations or trade unions. Business associations or unions require both the formulation of industry standards or agreements and cooperation with NGOs or local researchers to investigate the employment environment of enterprises (Myrstad 1999). Although business associations or trade unions strive for benefits and improvements for child labour to a certain extent, they still put their interests in the dominant position. Workers, let alone children, have no substantive power and still lack the right to a voice and representation in the struggle for better and fairer employment (Khan et al. 2007). If there is no relative social supervision or corporate supervision, capabilities and mechanisms cannot accurately access their cooperation internal implementation capabilities. However, compared with business associations, most NGOs are not based on profit-making purposes. Therefore, the solution to the problem of child labour is more concrete and purer. Among them, Fair Trade activities are the most widely promoted. Fair Trade certification solves the poverty problem of creating conditions for child labour while also solving the complex supply chain problems of chocolate, coffee and other products. The multinational institutions of the fair trade system can also provide assistance, such as financial support and technical and administrative capacity, for production cooperatives. Enhanced organisational capabilities and greater use of external resources enable producer organisations to perform a series of collective governance functions that the national government has failed to perform effectively, solve the root cause of poverty caused by child labour, and combat middlemen who manipulate and distort market prices (Macdonald 2007). In addition, fair trade involves a continuous monitoring system. For sanctions that violate free trade standards, Fair Trade will deny illegal companies access to the fair-trade market and price premiums. Fair trade goods can always be traced back to the place of origin, and violations of labour laws can be identified and penalised (Manza 2014).

In recent years, many multinational enterprises have been cooperating with external organisations to motivate a child labour code of conduct for internal and external interactions, such as the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank. Many parties utilise international conventions to abolish all extreme forms of child labour, such as setting a minimum age standard, and defining acceptable and unacceptable forms of child labour. Corporate cross-regional initiatives and corporate codes of conduct would cooperate with the ILO and UNICEF to develop anti-child labour policies and practices that

correspond to their enterprise environment and characteristics. Many western multinational companies have cooperated with NGOs to build a complete sustaining responsibility in the supply chain. For example, Bayer's child labour policy adopted the ILO's core labour standards and the United Nations Global Compact principles to act against child labour in the Indian agricultural sector. This policy is based on reasonable economic principles, and sufficient commitments and consensus have been reached with stakeholders. The economic theory of labour standards provides an independent reason for labour standards, acknowledging that the root of the labour market and economic development is the problem of child labour (Palley 2002). At the same time, any form of platform or agreement cooperation can provide information and experience sharing. The effective implementation of SA 8000 certification can encourage different types of companies to implement CSR, promoting indirect coordination and information exchange (Lindgreen et al. 2009). However, the limitation of NGOs is that they cannot penetrate the supply chain of small and medium-sized enterprises. Some forms of child labour in family units and the informal sector cannot be identified by NGOs, and their activities are restricted by the voluntary codes of conduct of enterprises (Kolk & Van Tulder 2002). Therefore, the movement against child labour requires the participation of all parties. The cooperation of these organisations and assemblies can effectively spur or arouse the attention of enterprises and society to child labour.

Suggested model of actors affecting child slavery in supply chains with related themes and sub-themes

This study identified four themes affecting child slavery in the supply chain. In line with thematic analysis, the research discussed and reviewed the 10 sub-theme factors identified from existing literature. The integration and analysis of the literature can help to fully understand the causes of child labour and the actors of child labour and find solutions and concepts for enterprises in terms of management deficiencies. It is recognised that the complexity of the issue of child labour lies not only in the internal management of the enterprise but also in external incentives that need to be considered. From the overall frame model, as shown in Figure 1, the triangular



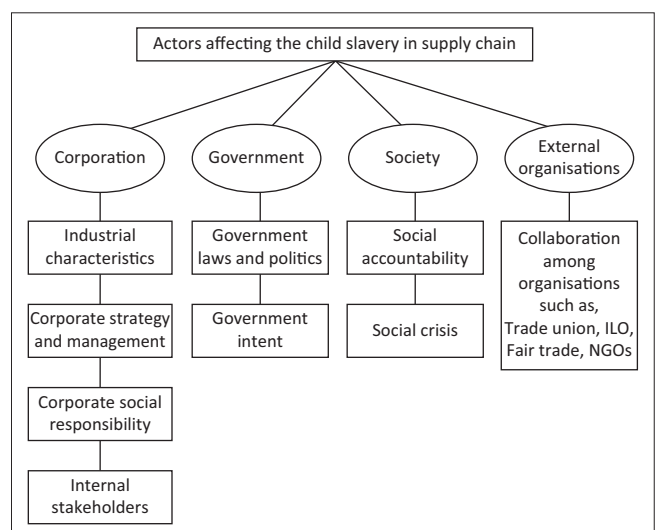
ILO, International Labour Organization; NGO, non-governmental organisation.

FIGURE 1: Model of actors affecting child slavery in the supply chain.

relationship exists between the corporations, government, and society in relation to the problem of child labour. Corporations seek existing projects operated by the public sector or NGOs. In addition, corporations work with government and civil society to address complex child labour issues. Although the leverage of corporate chain leaders in improving working conditions in their supply chain is important, the government should enforce due diligence standards and reporting requirements as prerequisites for the success of initiatives to control child labour (Nolan & Bott 2018). Enterprises and the government should not only have a compliance relationship; mutual supervision and restriction are also crucial.

Furthermore, this study elucidated the characteristics influencing the four actors' involvement in combatting child slavery as shown in Figure 2. Corporations are highly likely to be involved in the early stages of child labour incidence. The early stages of child labour are highly influenced by the corporate government and society. In the supply chain, organisations rarely have direct contact with and participation in the discovery of child labour. Organisational cooperation with the other three parties is used as a catalyst to stimulate and accelerate actions or remedial measures to deal with child labour (Zutshi et al. 2009). Through organisational cooperation corporations can provide resources for children's rehabilitation and feedback on the company's experience and challenges in addressing child slavery. In addition, effective organisational cooperation should closely coordinate efforts among the corporations, government, and society, of the country in which it operates. Divided negotiations are not conducive to consistent measures or actions in the supply chain; thereby, affecting efficiency. Therefore, the optimal state is that all parties can achieve the effectiveness of cooperation through high consensus and coordination mechanisms (Petrikova 2015).

Our findings suggest that existing studies have focused on the problem of child labour by enterprises, governments,



ILO, International Labour Organization; NGO, non-governmental organisation.

FIGURE 2: Child slavery in supply chain themes and sub-themes.

society, or organisations, or combines analysis of the relationship between the two dimensions, but there are no studies that integrate all three. This is the first study, to our knowledge, to present an integrated model on the actors of child slavery, to explain how they interact with each other and collaborate in combatting child slavery. Our findings support the view that combatting child slavery requires harmonisation of corporate strategies as well as the establishment of systematic preventive and remedial mechanisms.

Conclusion

The article investigates the actors of child slavery, that is, the actors that can either encourage or combat child slavery in supply chains by their actions. These actors include the corporations themselves, the governments, societies, and external organisations. The study provides a holistic model of actors involved in the child slavery phenomena in supply chains, highlighting that a collaborative effort is required, to combat child slavery, from diverse actors, namely corporations, government, society and external organisation. Eventually, successful organisational cooperation can promote overall governance capabilities, and strengthen the exchange of information so that the handling of child labour in trans-regional and transnational supply chains is done in a unified and certified approach. Based on this early-stage research, there are implications for researchers and managers.

Implication for future research

Themes and subthemes on the key actors provide concepts that can help with case study research, which can lead to more conceptual developments. Moreover, the themes and sub-themes developed through this research on the key actors who may encourage and/or combat child slavery, can provide a basis for further descriptive, instrumental, and normative research. One line of research could be to understand the tensions between different actors and the dynamics in their relations. Furthermore, future research could be focused on investigating how child slavery may differ between large supply chains and small and medium enterprises. The model presented in this article for the actors of child slavery in the supply chain and their related themes and subthemes is of too high level to show specific concepts and the relationships between them but can lead to an opportunity for further work to develop an ontology comprising a set of concepts and categories in a subject area or domain that reveals their properties and the relations between them. Early-stage research on how well different actors of enterprises, governments, societies, and external organisations are addressing child slavery will be beneficial in this regard. The findings of this research provide a new insight to address Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, decent work, and economic growth (Bag & Dhamija 2022). Therefore, we strongly recommend researchers put this forward and investigate how combatting child labour can

uplift efforts to achieve related SDGs. Finally, the article benefits from taking a stakeholder theoretical lens to identify different stakeholders that can combat child slavery. Previous research has applied humanitarian supply chains theories (Heaslip, Sharif & Althonayan 2012). However, we strongly suggest researchers to deep dive in the theory to identify and prioritise the stakeholders in child slavery combat in the supply chains to be able to design and develop new strategies needed (Hahn 2022).

Implication for practice

Many supply chains are facing social challenges related to child slavery, especially in times of crisis such as the post-COVID-19 economy. Combatting child slavery is far out of reach unless all actors collaborate nationally and internationally. Therefore, this article can help supply chain managers and decision makers in shaping these collaborations. Companies should not relax their attitudes towards child labour and need to be alert to the occurrence of opportunism. Companies need to have a deep understanding of local policies and the business environment. This requires the cooperation of the government, society, enterprises, and external organisations to combat child slavery in supply chains. As an example, NGOs can help to raise companies' goodwill costs through campaigns and consumer education, to reduce the use of child labour (Cho et al. 2019). However, how these mechanisms should work needs further investigation.

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Authors' contributions

M.L. conceptualised and contributed to the analysis, and write up of the manuscript. N.P. contributed to the writing up of the article.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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