

Child Labor and Human Trafficking: How Children in Burkina Faso and Ghana Lose Their Childhood

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Abstract

This article examines the impact and effects of human trafficking, child labor, and the various forms of mortality and immunization in the West African countries of Burkina Faso and Ghana. While human trafficking and inadequate labor laws encompasses all ages and genders, the primary focus of this article is to examine child trafficking and child labor and the degree to which people sold into slavery or forced labor are below eighteen years of age in these West African countries. Through the use of a literature review and the analysis of data provided by the World Bank and other scholarly sources, this article provides a comparison and an analysis on the effects of children “losing their childhood” in the two countries and the impacts of children born and raised in these West African nations. The concluding remarks of this article introduces and analyzes some solutions.

I. Introduction

Many people say that poverty is multidimensional. While multidimensional is technically defined as affecting many areas of life, I believe it has another, more important meaning. Poverty is non-discriminatory. It affects everyone and some more than others. Through the root causes of poverty like lack of access to clean drinking water, improper sanitation, malnutrition, inadequate vaccinations and immunizations, and a high rate of child mortality, children in the countries of Burkina Faso and Ghana are forced to fight for their lives before they even reach their fifth birthday. If they are lucky enough to reach that coveted birthday, they now must be faced with the burden of serving and providing for their family. Due to their young age they are often faced with two options, work or be sold. Education is not even a remote possibility for many of these children even though in the long run it will provide them with more opportunities and better chances to provide for their family. Instead these families of seven or more are forced to export their children in hopes of money to attempt to make ends meet and thus rob their children of becoming the future of our world through the one path that has a guaranteed success: education.

II. Brief Literature Review

For two relatively small countries, there is an extensive amount of research and information on the problems and troubles that Ghana and Burkina Faso deal with in respect to child trafficking, child labor, child immunization, and child mortality. As more and more people become involved in saving Africa, more attention is being brought to the inadequacy of the development of the future generation. The following publications explore the effects of children in society through the platforms of child trafficking, child labor, child immunization and child mortality in Burkina Faso and Ghana.

Conradi (2013) explores the connections between two of the worst forms of child labor, child trafficking and the induction of child soldiers. Many of the starting points for being taken as a child soldier and abducted into the sex trade of child trafficking are similar, Conradi explains. Throughout the article, Conradi examines how child trafficking and child soldiering are different but more importantly how they stem from the same lack of education and lack of investment into the lives of children at a young age. In many of these West African countries like Burkina Faso and Ghana, children are forced to take adult roles such as working in the mines and caring for younger siblings and thus abandoning school at young ages to better provide for their often-large family. As family's fall on harder times children are then sold in order to scrape more money or soldiers are recruited to get the children a better life.

Nancy Anash (2006) explores how often times children are segregated by gender in order to help make their families more money. While boys are recruited to become soldiers and help earn their families a better life, women are sold into sex rings. According to Anash, the younger the girls/women are, the more money they go for. Pimps have altered their recruiting habits and have targeted younger girls offering them a better life. One of the big questions that Anash answers is why boys are not sold into slavery like girls are. The answer provided is that because women are often regarded as second-class citizens, they are more often thought of as property than as human beings. A girl child is assessed at how much money she can earn a family rather than being respected in creating a family lineage like a boy child is.

Christelle Dumas (2007) examines how and why parents make their children work. In her first sentence Dumas makes an aggressive claim in that though many argue that child labor is caused by poverty, actually much of child labor takes place in rural areas and is more due to labor market imperfection rather than poverty. Countries like Burkina Faso often consider childhood leisure as a luxury good unlike Western nations who consider being a child a necessity. Dumas suggests that due to the high cost of education and the relatively low income of many families in developing nations, children are often forced to pick between providing for their families or gaining an education. Most choose their families over education, as they do not often equate education with money. Finally, Dumas also explores the idea of household labor and how that can be considered a form of childhood labor since children are forced to do dangerous tasks often required of an adult.

Blunch and Verner (2000) explore the link between poverty and child labor in Ghana. They acknowledge that though many consider the link between poverty and child labor to be a well-established fact, recently more and more researchers have determined that poverty is not a main cause of child labor. As opposed to Dumas (2007), Blunch and Verner state that child labor is not harmful and throughout her article she examines the determinants of harmful child labor and reinstates and approaches the connections between poverty and child labor from a positive

standpoint. Finally, Blunch and Verner acknowledge a gender gap in the statistics of child labor, in that girls are more likely to be solicited in harmful labor than boys are. They point out that this gender gap does not result from discrimination but rather the norms in society.

Becher et al. (2004) explore and attempt to quantify the risk factors and their effects of childhood morality in countries like Burkina Faso and other sub-Saharan African countries. The article states that most childhood deaths are preventable and that more than 15 percent of newborn children are not expected to reach beyond the age of five. They also present an analysis of mortality risk factors based on children over the course of seven years.

III. Empirical Background

Ghana and Burkina Faso are both Sub-Saharan African countries in West Africa. Ghana was formed from the merger of the British Colony of the Gold Coast and the Togoland trust territory in 1957. The country borders the Gulf of Guinea between Cote d'Ivoire (to the east) and Togo (to the west). With a land area of 238,535 square kilometer (92,099 square miles), it is a bit smaller than the state of Oregon. As detailed in Figure 1, Burkina Faso is located directly to the north of Ghana. With a land area of 274,200 square kilometer (105,869 square miles), Burkina Faso is a little bit larger than Ghana as well as the state of Oregon. Burkina Faso gained its independence from France in 1960. Ghana had a population of 25.4 million in 2012, while Burkina Faso had a population of 16.5 million in 2012 (World Bank, 2014).

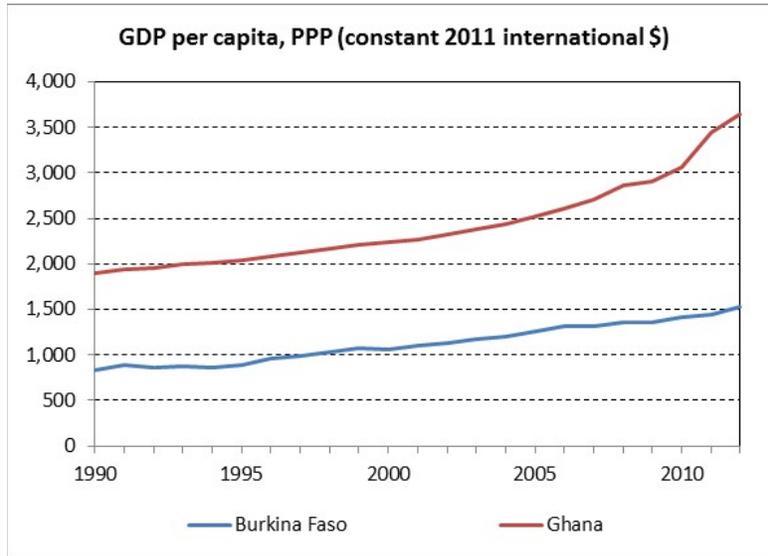
Figure 1: Location of Burkina Faso and Ghana in West Africa



Source: Google Maps (© by Google, all rights reserved).

Figure 2 illustrates how over the course of the last forty years, Ghana has substantially increased their GDP in current international dollars while Burkina Faso, though the average GDP has increased, it has not increased as substantially as Ghana has.

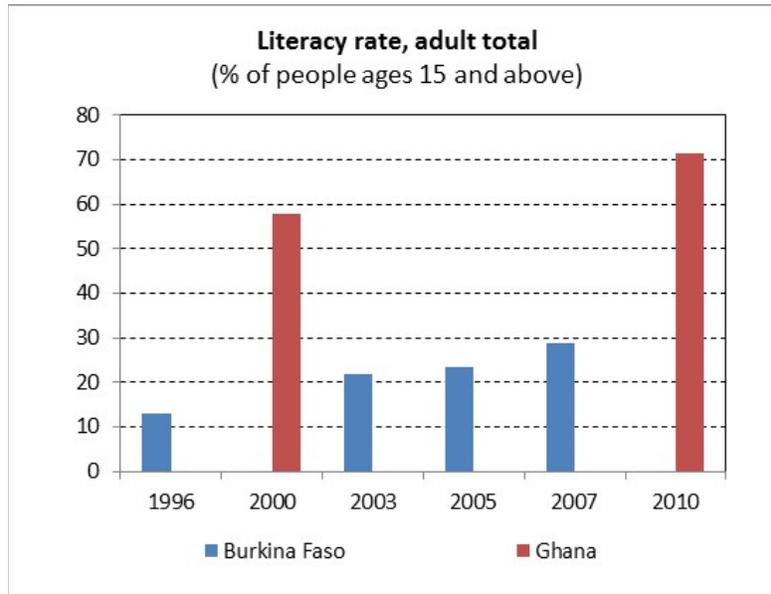
Figure 2: PPP adjusted GDP per capita in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1990-2012



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

Figure 3 provides a comparison of literacy rates in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Though there is not much data on these values it is clear that Ghana generally has more literate and educated people than Burkina Faso does. This could be due to the sizes of the country and their previous colonization.

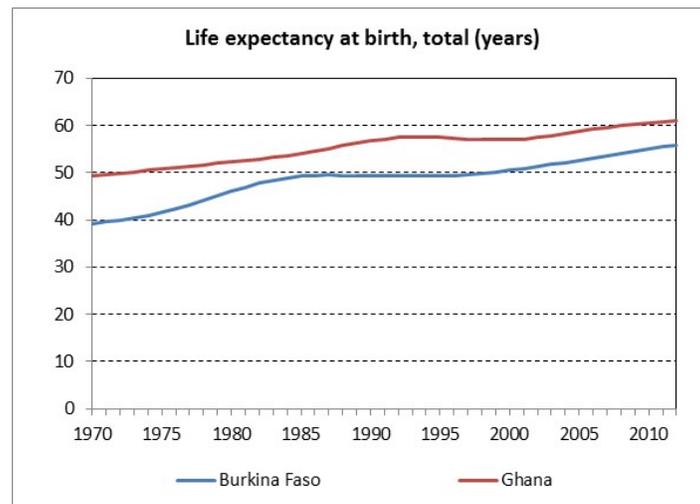
Figure 3: Adult Literacy Rates in Ghana and Burkina Faso, all available years



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

Figure 4 displays the average life expectancy at birth for Burkina Faso and Ghana. As displayed in the chart, Ghana has a slightly higher life expectancy than Burkina Faso, but both are relatively low with the average being around 55-60 years, much lower than those of the industrialized countries like the United States or the United Kingdom.

Figure 4: Life Expectancy in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1970-2012



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

IV. Discussion

IV.1. Infant Mortality and Immunization Rates

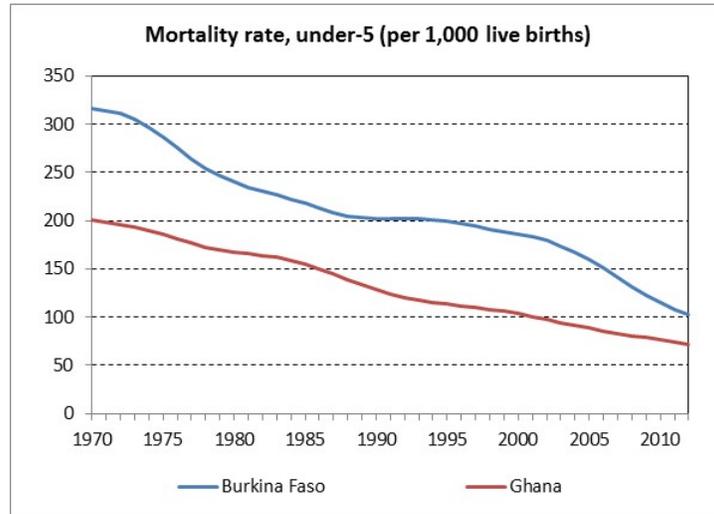
As the world population reaches close to over 7 billion people, countries, regardless of income level have begun to realize that children are our future. However problems such as infant mortality, immunization rates, lack of access to water and sanitation, and high malnutrition levels, prevent children from being able to embody and fulfill the goals that we have for them for the future.

Infant mortality, as defined by the Humanium website, is the annual number of children deaths divided by the total number of births in a given region. Child or infant mortality has six main causes, they include: pneumonia, diarrhea, premature birth, neonatal infection, malaria, and lack of oxygen at birth. Many factors additionally combine themselves and increase child mortality, specifically malnutrition which is responsible for 50 percent of child deaths worldwide. Ghana and Burkina Faso are not absent from these problems.¹

As shown in Figure 5, though both countries have decreased their under 5 child mortality rates over the last four decades, in 2012, there were still 102.4 children per 1,000 live births who died before their fifth birthday in Burkina Faso, and 72 children per 1,000 live births who died before their fifth birthday in Ghana. Similarly, Figure 6 displays the percentage of infant mortality per 1000 children in Burkina Faso and Ghana from 1970 to 2012. While these values have decreased over time, there are still between 50 and 70 infants dying per 1,000 live births.

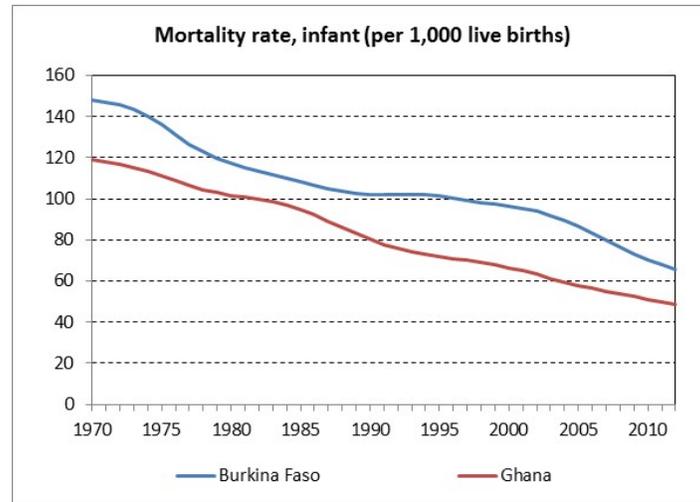
¹ Humanium (2011).

Figure 5: Under 5 Mortality Rate in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1970-2012



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

Figure 6: Infant Mortality Rate in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1970-2012



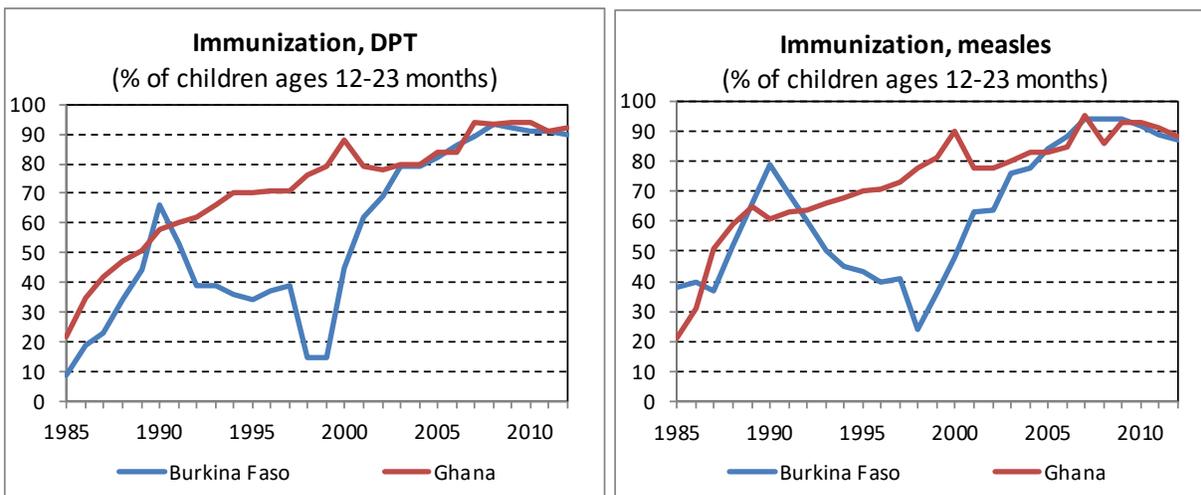
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

Many of these infants and children dying in Burkina Faso and Ghana are dying from diseases that are entirely preventable as there are immunizations and vaccines to help prevent them. However, due to the low immunization rates and the lack of knowledge and availability to these vaccines, children are going unvaccinated and are dying from preventable illnesses. While the children of Ghana and Burkina Faso are now being vaccinated from diseases like measles mumps, and rubella and DPT (diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), and tetanus), they are still extremely vulnerable to diseases like malaria (for which there are some preventable drugs) and Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and human papillomavirus (HPV), for which there exist preventable vaccines.² Furthermore,

² Blunch and Verner (2000).

children are not having the vaccines administered correctly and are still suffering from things like measles and mumps due to an inadequate amount of the vaccine and incorrect administration.³ As Figures 7 and 8 illustrate, immunization rates have risen over time, and more and more children are being vaccinated.

Figures 7 and 8: Immunization Rates for DPT and Measles, 1985-2012



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

While Ghana has many problems with child and infant mortality, it is one of the few countries in Africa that has successfully implemented a health insurance system. The National Health Insurance Scheme, which covers primary care services and basic drug costs, has lowered fees intentionally so that children and adults are able to get the needed medicine and services to combat diseases like malaria and cholera that are so prevalent in the West African countries.

While immunization rates and the problems associated with vaccines and diseases largely affect children and their ability to live past age 5, the water quality and the access to sanitation fuel the diseases and ultimately cause and allow for children to not be able to prosper in their perspective countries. Due to limited water in Ghana and Burkina Faso, children are forced to drink contaminated water and are thus infected with water borne illnesses like diarrhea or cholera.⁴ Additionally the few sources of water that are in these countries are often large distances from neighborhoods and communities and children are often tasked with walking large distances to retrieve this water and because of this are not able to go to school and get the education that they need in order to become the future of these two struggling nations.

Like in many non-industrialized countries, poverty in Ghana is more severe in rural areas. Though many suffer from the causes of poverty such as lack of access to clean water, sanitation, food, and vaccines, ultimately poverty begins with children. When residents were asked in 2008 to describe their living conditions, close to 70 percent of the population responded with saying their personal

³ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (undated).

⁴ Debrah (2013).

living conditions were poor or bad.⁵ Because poverty is endemic in Ghana, children are born into poverty and cannot get out of it. Because of this, children know nothing else than child labor or being sold to provide for their families. Ghana deals with many facets of poverty, from large family sizes to cultural barriers that prevent women from being considered a person.⁶

Burkina Faso is no different. Burkina Faso is among the poorest countries of the world.⁷ No single indicator can address all of the potential reasons for poverty in Burkina Faso, and the same could be said for Ghana. However, unlike in Ghana, in Burkina Faso, one of the main causes has more recently been related to climate related hazards. While Ghana struggles more with access to clean drinking water and lack of family planning resources, Burkina Faso's residents blame most of their problems on the environment and the impacts the environment has had on their agriculture-based society. Burkina Faso, like Ghana also struggles with the burden of having a large family and not having the family planning resources or knowledge to combat this situation. Like the children of Ghana, the children of Burkina Faso are born into poverty and they must survive and then begin to overcome the challenges that they have faced in order to embrace the future.⁸

IV.2. Age Six Means Work

Once children in Ghana and Burkina Faso have reached their sixth birthday, they face two choices in terms of making money: work or being sold. While to people living in industrialized countries, working seems like a much better alternative than being sold into a sex trade or a human trafficking ring, it can be just as dangerous for the child.

In Ghana, about one in every six children ages 4-17 is engaged in child labor, equating about 317,000 children working for economic gains. Child labor in Ghana is rarely the consequence of one single factor or event, but rather a consequence of chain events and a multitude of factors. Many children are forced to work due to the structure of the economy which is largely driven by family farming, cultural influences (which view child labor as a societal norm), a lack of return on education, and a low priority from the government to enforce anti-child labor laws.

Children in Ghana are engaged in the worst forms of child labor between various sectors and industries, such as cocoa farming and fishing industries. While there is a primary school completion rate of 98.5 percent, close to 43 percent of children ages 5 to 14 are actually working, at least part-time. Children in Ghana work in a variety of sectors. In the agricultural sector, they herd livestock, help catching fish, or clear land. Many work in services such as street begging, domestic service, and running errands. And unfortunately some children work sexually or in gold mines, which is both dangerous and unjust.⁹

Because of the relatively large family size, children are often seen as a commodity rather than an individual human being, and this is no different in Burkina Faso. Dumas (2007) examines why parents make their children work according to the poverty hypothesis of rural areas in Burkina Faso. The answer or relative answer that she concluded was that children are a commodity, an object to make a profit off. Child leisure is a luxury and the main purpose of having a child is first for the child to survive and second for the child to earn money for the family.

⁵ Debrah (2013)

⁶ Debrah (2013).

⁷ Hagberg (2008).

⁸ Government of Burkina Faso, Ministry of Economy and Finance (2000).

⁹ Johanesen (2015).

Furthermore, if the child is male it is even more important for that child to make a name for himself in the work force, as he will be carrying on the family lineage. Dumas (2007) also suggests that labor market imperfections are another main reason for using child labor. There are no set standards for the work force, and hence, children are thrown into the work force as an adult equivalent. Because they are seen as an adult equivalent in the work force, their education is falling to the wayside because their families need money to survive and there is no immediate reward for education, while there is one for a working child.

Children in Burkina Faso participate in two main types of labor in two distinct sectors: agriculture and mining. While 57.6 percent of the children complete primary school, close to 43 percent of children aged 5 to 14 are working in some sort of employment. In the agricultural sector, children are forced to herd animals, harvest mangos, plant weed and harvest crops, mostly cotton.¹⁰ Children are also working in the industrial sector, working in gold mines and granite quarries, which is work mainly meant for strong adults not growing children. Some boys that are placed in the care of teachers to be educated are forced to beg on the streets and give the money that they have earned to the teachers rather to their families. Because of the booming gold mines many children are leaving school to work in the gold mines in the hope of providing a better life for their family and for themselves.¹¹

One important source of labor in both Burkina Faso and Ghana, is becoming a child soldier. The term child soldier refers to any person under the age of 18, who has been recruited or used by an armed force in any capacity. While this is generally a broad definition, it encompasses many different forms of labor, including sexual, fighting, cooking, or spying activities. While child soldiering is exacerbated with the presence of conflict and times of boarder disputes, it can be found in many African countries without conflict. These conflicts increase the vulnerability of children to both abduction and recruitment under false pretenses. Many children agree to serve because they believe that by doing so they will help and bring honor to their family. In reality, they are on a death march.

IV.3. If You Can't Work, What Can You Do to Make Money?

Ghana's sex trade or the human trafficking rings are often perceived as being entirely composed of women, and this is for the most part true. While boys are either recruited to become child soldiers or taken to a factory or construction site to work at a young age, the only money that a girl or a woman can make for her family is by being sold for her body. Few girls enter the sex trade by choice, and instead are coerced and trafficked into the sex ring by men who capitalize on the need for money for the girls' families.¹² According to the United States Department of State (2002) Trafficking in Persons Report, at least 700,000, and possibly as many as four million, men, women and children worldwide were bought, sold, transported and held against their will in slave-like conditions.

While the exact number of Ghanaian women and children sold is not known, it is estimated to be in at least the hundreds of thousands if not millions.¹³ As Anash (2006) states, the main cause for the increase in supply of Ghanaian women into the sex trade and human trafficking rings is

¹⁰ United States Department of Labor (2013).

¹¹ United States Department of Labor (2013).

¹² Anash (2006).

¹³ Anash (2006).

influenced by poverty and the social, political, and cultural factors that are embedded in the customs and traditions of the country and the poverty that is embedded in the country currently. The cultural tradition of women being regarded as a commodity has prevented women from obtaining money and owning land and thus making it impossible to support a family. Because of this, they find their only source of income to be the sex trade.

Many question why boy children are not sold into the sex trade or trafficked as much as girl children are and this is due to cultural customs.¹⁴ In most Ghanaian societies, women are regarded as second class who exist to serve as profit families and essentially serve the family. Boy children are on the other hand respected because they are believed to be crucial to the existence of the family lineage and carry on the name of the family. Most of the children that are trafficked are trafficked to neighboring West African countries for labor purposes.

Like Burkina Faso, Ghana has an internal human trafficking problem and it has proven to be one of the country's biggest internal challenges. Many children are trafficked from their home villages to work in the fishing industry. They are often living in meager conditions and working long hours to help feed their families and provide what they believe to be a better life. They are often transported to places like Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, or Nigeria.¹⁵

Burkina Faso has one of the highest rates of human trafficking, and specifically child trafficking in the world. It is a country of origin, transit and destination for children and for women as well. Children are subjected to forced labor such as being farm hands, gold panners, washers and street vendors and beggars posing as religious individuals. Girls are often exploited in the sex trade, while boys are forced to do more labor intensive activities to make more money.¹⁶ Children are often transported to Cote d'Ivoire, Mali or Niger, but Burkina Faso is also a destination for children trafficked from Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Nigeria.

IV.4. Knowledge and Education: The Way to a Better Future

As Figure 9 shows, despite progress in both Burkina Faso and Ghana, there were still about 14 percent of primary school age children not enrolled in Ghana in 2013, and about 34 percent in Burkina Faso in 2012. The cultural norms place too much importance on large families and material wealth, while the education of these children is slipping through the cracks. Hence, children are not having the opportunity to get an education that would allow them to escape the poverty conditions that they were born into.

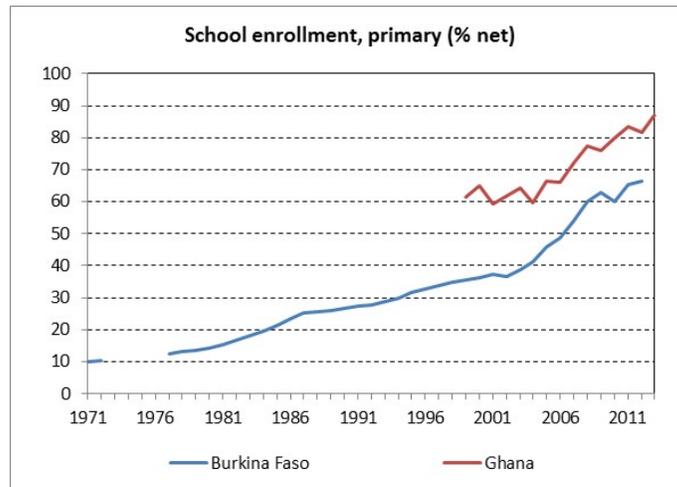
As Figure 10 shows, among those children that have completed primary school, only a fraction of them proceed onto secondary school where their education begins to become specialized. While Burkina Faso's percentage of children moving on to secondary school has barely reached over 50 percent, Ghana's progression rates are high, though they have started to decline in the last few years. As the demands of poverty are not being met, children and their families are sacrificing a secondary education for more money due to the children's participation in the work force or trafficking rings.

¹⁴ Anash (2006).

¹⁵ Johansen (2015).

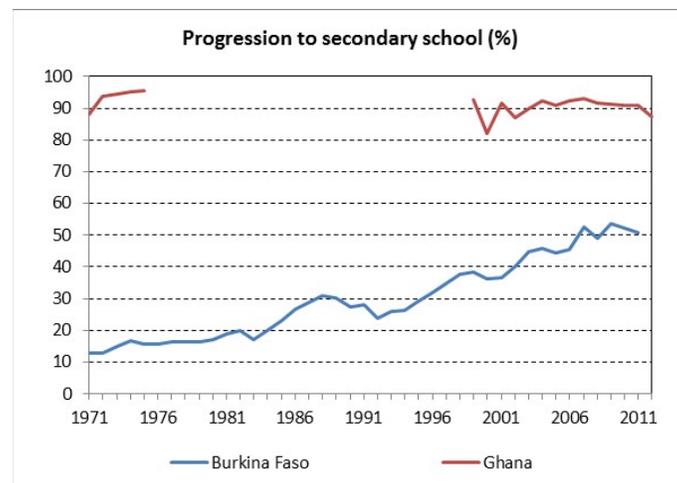
¹⁶ United States Department of Labor (2013).

Figure 9: Net Primary School Enrollment in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1971-2013



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

Figure 10: Progression to Secondary School in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1971-2012



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2014).

Though the percentage of completion of secondary and primary education is continuing to rise in Ghana, there are still many problems to overcome if we expect children to have a better future. Despite the fact that Ghana has a requirement for free education, families are often required to purchase books and school uniforms, and children without uniforms are often turned away from the school. Additionally access to education is often hindered by a shortage of classrooms and by schools with insufficient teachers and materials. Additionally, the government needs to put more of an emphasis on the importance of education, as education is the foundation for the success that we expect these children to have and maintain.

Unlike Ghana, the percentage of children moving on to secondary school and completing primary school is slightly over 50 percent, but it has not continued to grow over the past couple of years. Because of their lack of education infrastructure in Burkina Faso, this hinders children's ability to

have access to education, specifically in rural areas.¹⁷ Another major problem with the education system in Burkina Faso is that students are abused physically and sexually by teachers. They are thus discouraged from attending school as the education seems to have a negative outcome when they could be working or being sold and having an immediate positive outcome for the families.

V. Conclusion

This article has shown that children in Burkina Faso and Ghana have trouble surviving their fifth birthday due to the root causes of poverty, such as a lack of clean water, malnutrition, and missing immunizations. However, many of those that do survive face even more dire straits as they are forced into outrageous labor circumstances, and in some cases, sold into trafficking rings.

Unfortunately the sex trade and human trafficking in general is driven by demand. As long as there are people willing to pay money for sex rather than engage in an intimate act the market will continue to exist. Additionally, as long as there are people willing to pay families for their children, families will be willing to sell some of their children in order to make ends meet for their other children, which are most likely boys.

Ultimately, education is expensive. However, if children are able to overcome the odds of poverty and the high mortality rates and low life expectancy plaguing their countries, education is the ticket to the future. It allows for a path out of poverty and access to a future that these children need in order to become our future. In order to help these children succeed in embodying the goals that we have set for them, governments need to put a focus on eradicating poverty and promoting a need for education rather than a suggestion. Governments in Ghana and Burkina Faso need to make schools accessible and safe for children. They also need to make sure that parents send their children to school instead of sending them to work or selling them for sexual exploitation.

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