

Neiuwenhuys, Olga (1994) *Children's Lifeworlds: Gender, Welfare, and Labour in the Developing World*. London: Routledge.

This book offers a look at the unique lives that children are living in Kerala, a state in the southern Indian coastal villages where both boys and girls are part of the workforce in this developing society. In this poor rural setting children are expected to take part in work duties at a young age. Neiuwenhuys shows us the positive and negative aspects of this and why something that amounts to exploitation in our society is the norm in another.

In the rural areas of Kerala, the people have resorted to fishing and handicraft making as their main sources of income. In particular is the craft of coir making, in which coconut husks are beaten into fibers, separated, spun into yarn and woven into useful products like mattresses, floor mats, ropes and fishing nets. This home-made industry is a valuable contribution to the income of these people. Since the craft it is done in the home, children become involved at a young age.

Children may enter the workforce around the age of 7 for girls and 3 for boys, helping to spin the wheel to make rope or beat the husks into fibers. As soon as a child is old enough to be useful, they are incorporated into the workforce. They are put to work cleaning, fetching water, gathering firewood, and doing other menial tasks.

One interesting aspect of the society is that gender and age have a particular importance when allotting tasks. Women are particularly singled out in what tasks they are asked to perform. They perform the most basic tasks, such as washing laundry and cooking. They would certainly not be expected to perform more important tasks. Age and gender are very important in the society to determine the work that is to be done. The higher up one is the more important the task required. If an adult male has a son, the son will be assigned more menial tasks like fishing and collecting food for animals. Meanwhile, the adult will look for wage work outside of the village and receive guests and visitors. The social hierarchy is definitely present in this society.

The idea that children can be asked and even expected to work, with little or no compensation, is viewed as exploitation in our society, where children are protected and nurtured until adulthood. However, Neiuwenhuys argues that it is a necessary and essential part of the economy of these people saying, "The age and gender division of labor of the domestic group provides coir-making and artisanal fisheries with a pool of lowly-remunerated labor, and this has sustained their resilience in the face of technical modernization." She

finds it an essential part of the economy, bettering the culture as a whole and allowing them to continue their way of life.

This book shows that children are not viewed the same in every society. Some of our cultural expectations, of what children's lives should be, are different in other parts of the world. It offers a unique perspective on what children's lives may be like in other "developing" parts of the world.