

## **In Harm's Way: Children's Work in Risky Occupations in Brazil**

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### **Long abstract**

**Introduction.** Little is known about the connection between women's work and child labor, yet it exists. Our second study of this topic focuses on jobs that may be hazardous for children (e.g., domestic service, street peddling, tobacco cultivation) in Brazil. If children's work is closely tied to their mothers' employment in occupations that are particularly problematic for children, highly targeted policies may be needed to break this link perpetuating inequalities in economic status.

The motivation for this study derives from an interest in how children find themselves in various labor force jobs. What are the pathways to particular types of occupations, in particular industries? The "weak ties" social networks literature in the United States suggests that connections to acquaintances outside one's immediate family and social circle are especially beneficial for job-seekers (Granovetter 1973). We speculate that in less developed countries, where the tradition of children following same-sex adults into particular types of work has eroded less than in industrialized countries, "strong ties" – in particular, parental ties – to informal work networks may be particularly important in determining the jobs of children and youth. Since most labor force and household surveys contain information on parents and children (over age 10 in our case) but not on other networks, we do not attempt to compare the strengths of different types of connections to the labor market. Instead, we suggest a new direction for the child labor literature by examining mother-child associations.

Our interest here is not in the determinants of children's labor force participation in general. That literature has focused broadly on characteristics associated with children doing labor market work and, sometimes, household work. In contrast, we are interested in what kinds of market work children do, given that they are doing market work, and how they come to do this type of work. Thus, we take a more focused look at a piece of the overall child labor dynamic.

We do not assume that all labor force work is bad for children and youth. Instead, we focus on occupations and industries with known problematic aspects for young people. ILO Convention 182 defines the "worst forms" of child labor as including children under the age of 18 in (a) slavery, bondage, and other forms of forced or compulsory labor; (b) prostitution or the pornography industry; (c) illicit activities, such as the drug trade; and (d) "*work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to*

*harm the health, safety, or morals of children*” (emphasis added). Our concern is with the latter category of work. Further, we try to discern whether parents’ work – and in this paper, mothers’ work – might be the link between the child and the potentially problematic job.

The literature on child labor contains little about this possibility. In fact, very few papers consider children’s pathways to particular types of work. In some cases, of course, it is obvious. In the Carpet Belt of India, the work that is available is hand-knotting carpets. In the cocoa plantation regions of West Africa, jobs are to be found in the cocoa industry. In some rural areas, all jobs are agriculture-related. In many parts of the world, however, children can be found in multiple industries and occupations. This is true in much of the more populated regions of Brazil.

While we realize that many children, especially girls, are engaged in time-consuming and valuable household activities, we focus here on work that is defined as “labor force employment” under the United Nations’ System of National Accounts. Children may work for their own parents or other relatives and still be doing labor force work. They need not be paid to be doing labor force work; to a great extent, working children are reimbursed in kind, or their families expect future benefits from their children’s efforts. The word “work” will, in the rest of the paper, refer to labor force employment. We use the term “child” broadly, including persons under 18 years of age, as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Previous Findings.** In our previous analysis of relationships between children’s and mothers’ work in Brazil (DeGraff, Levison and Robison 2008; DeGraff and Levison 2008), we have found evidence of correlations between children’s and mothers’ labor force participation as well as in characteristics of their employment. For example, children in Brazil whose mothers are employed are more likely to be employed themselves. Moreover, children whose mothers work long hours are more likely to also work very long hours or work very few hours. Looking at employed mother/child pairs, children are also more likely to be employed in the same industry as their mothers. Their work is more likely to be located at home (or, conversely, far away from home) if their mothers’ work is so located. These and other findings from our previous research suggest an array of subtle connections between children’s and mothers’ work. In the proposed analysis, we plan to explore such relationships more fully for the case of children engaged in hazardous work.

**Data and Analysis.** Our background work for this study, which has been completed, is based on Brazil’s population census of 2000. We used the 6 percent sample available from the IPUMS-International project, with a sample of over 10 million persons (Minnesota Population Center). While the census does not have as many details about employment as we would like, it was very useful for identifying occupations and industries in which children were concentrated. Based on this information, and an understanding from the child labor literature about which types of jobs were likely to be hazardous in various ways for children, we identified jobs on which it would be especially useful to focus. These include domestic services, street workers, construction

workers, and farm workers engaged in tobacco, coffee, sugar cane, and possibly manioc production. All of them are identified as hazardous for children by Brazil's Ministry of Labor and Employment. We use these categories identified in the census to guide analysis using more detailed household level data.

The bulk of this paper will be based on analysis using Brazil's large household survey from the year following the population census. The data used for this analysis derive from Brazil's 2001 annual household survey, the *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios* (PNAD-2001), which included a supplement on child work. The supplement includes data that allow us to examine several dimensions of child work beyond labor force participation, and their potential relationships to mothers' work, such as hours of employment, employment status, location and industry of employment, and selected characteristics pertaining to the physical work environment. The PNAD-2001 is a nationally representative sample survey including 126,898 households and 378,837 individuals. Our analysis focuses on children ages 10 to 17 (inclusive) and their mothers, with the children defining the analysis sample. The total number of 10 to 17 year-olds in the full sample is 60,678.

For much of the analysis, we exclude individuals who are not the child of the family head, who are boarders or domestic workers (or their relatives) living in someone else's home, who are unrelated to the household head, or who do not have a mother or step-mother in the household. These exclusions are made because the data lack key information about the children's mothers, other family members and households. These sample exclusions reduce the analysis sample to 52,393 children. Within this group, we focus on children engaged in hazardous work as defined above, and make comparisons between this sub-sample and other 10-17 year-olds, both those in the labor force and those not. In addition, we will focus attention on the "excluded" children just mentioned. These categories of children are very often excluded from analysis because of data limitations, but they may well be at greater risk of ending up in occupations particularly harmful for children. To the extent allowed by the data, we will compare the employment characteristics of these children to those in the larger analysis sample.

This analysis is exploratory and, as such, our methods will be primarily descriptive. We seek to better understand how children engaged in hazardous work enter this particular type of work, what conditions do they face in such work and how these compare to the experience of other working children. For example, are these types of hazardous work more likely to preclude school attendance than other types of work?

**Policy Relevance.** This research topic opens the door to a large number of questions that have not yet been addressed, let alone answered, by the child labor literature. If children's work is closely tied to their mothers' employment in occupations that are particularly problematic for children, highly targeted policies may be needed to break this link perpetuating inequalities in economic status. Understanding some of the family connections underlying children's participation in hazardous work will prepare policy-makers to address how these types of children's jobs can either be made less hazardous, less accessible to children, or less likely to be chosen by families.

Another question this research highlights is whether children are better off if they are working for/with their own families. Our study can identify children whose work takes place in their homes, but we cannot address this important question. It is striking that the child labor literature is silent on whether children are better off if they are working for/with their own families. This has not been considered an empirical question, despite the fact that most working children are “employed” by their parents. Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) use a sample of 124 million 5-14 year olds from 36 countries in 2000 to estimate that 25 percent of 5-14 year olds do market work, and only about 8 percent of 5-14 year olds work for someone outside their family. Most children work on family farms or in family enterprises, and some of this work is likely to be hazardous. The analysis proposed here is intended to both make some headway in understanding dynamics surrounding children engaged in hazardous work, and also to encourage further research on these subtle yet very important details pertaining to child labor.

## References

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