



ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE INFANT-JUVENILE LABOR OF SCHOOLCHILDREN

ATIVIDADES RELACIONADAS AO TRABALHO INFANTO-JUVENIL DE ESCOLARES

ACTIVIDADES RELACIONADAS AL TRABAJO INFANTO-JUVENIL DE ESCOLARES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to investigate the occurrence of activities related to the child labor among children and teenagers who attend schools. **Method:** it is a descriptive and exploratory study, with quantitative approach, performed with 177 children and teenagers, aged from 8 to 14 years, attending the 4th and 5th grades of the Brazilian elementary school system (known as *Ensino Fundamental I*), in the municipality of João Pessoa/PB/Brazilian Northeastern. The data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed by means of the quantitative method with simple statistics. This study had its research project approved by the Research Ethics Board, through the CAAE (Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Consideration) nº 0112.0.086.000-09. **Results:** most respondents reported helping parents at home or at their work. As to those who reported working in other activities, they have a working day that hinders the development of everyday school activities. **Conclusion:** in schools, there are children and teenagers who experience the child labor. Therefore, the child labor is still a problem that needs to be resolved among the families. **Descriptors:** Child Labor; Child Health; Childish Development.

RESUMO

Objetivo: investigar a ocorrência de atividades relacionadas ao trabalho infantil em crianças e adolescentes que frequentam escolas. **Método:** estudo descritivo e exploratório, de abordagem quantitativa, realizado com 177 crianças e adolescentes, na faixa etária dos 8 aos 14 anos, que cursavam os 4º e 5º anos do Ensino Fundamental I, no município de João Pessoa/PB/Nordeste do Brasil. Os dados foram coletados por meio de questionário e analisados pelo método quantitativo com estatística simples. Este estudo teve o seu projeto de pesquisa aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética, mediante CAAE (Certificado de Apresentação para Apreciação Ética) nº 0112.0.086.000-09. **Resultados:** a maioria dos entrevistados referiu ajudar os pais em casa ou no trabalho. Já os que afirmaram trabalhar em outras atividades, têm uma jornada que dificulta o desenvolvimento das atividades escolares cotidianas. **Conclusão:** nas escolas, existem crianças e adolescentes que vivenciam o trabalho infantil. Destarte, a mão de obra infantil ainda é um problema que precisa ser resolvido entre as famílias. **Descritores:** Trabalho de Menores; Saúde da Criança; Desenvolvimento Infantil.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: investigar la realización de actividades relacionadas al trabajo infantil en niños y adolescentes que frecuentan escuelas. **Método:** estudio descriptivo y exploratorio, de abordaje cuantitativo, realizado con 177 niños y adolescentes, en el grupo etario de los 8 a los 14 años, que cursaban los 4º e 5º años de la Enseñanza Primaria en el municipio de João Pessoa/PB/Nordeste del Brasil. Los datos fueron recogidos por medio de cuestionario y analizados por el método cuantitativo con estadística simple. Este estudio tuvo su proyecto de investigación aprobado por el Comité de Ética, mediante CAAE nº 0112.0.086.000-09. **Resultados:** la mayoría de los entrevistados dijo ayudar a los padres en casa o en el trabajo, y los que afirmaron trabajar en otras actividades, tienen una jornada que dificulta el desarrollo de las actividades escolares cotidianas. **Conclusión:** en las escuelas, existen niños y adolescentes en trabajo infantil. La mano de obra infantil todavía es un problema que precisa ser resuelto entre las familias. **Descriptores:** Trabajo de Menores; Salud del Niño; Desarrollo Infantil.

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INTRODUCTION

The exploitation of the child labor is an ancient event, but, the first reports of work in childhood emerged with the Industrial Revolution, a time when entire families were exploited, children were forced to exhaustively work and without any security. This contributed to their low level of schooling, as well as to the high prevalence of occupational diseases, work accidents and death.¹⁻²

Brazil is internationally known for presenting high rates of child exploitation in terms of labor force. This is an old phenomenon, which was usual at the beginning of colonization, when black and indigenous children were introduced in the domestic work or in the family farming.³⁻⁵

According to the Brazilian Ministry of Labor and Employment, child labor is all work performed by children and teenagers aged less than sixteen years, whether for purposes of profit or not, in economic and/or survival activities. The only exception is the work conducted in a condition of apprentice, from the age of fourteen years, which is allowed with restrictions established by legislation in force. The term "child labor" also covers the age group between sixteen and eighteen years of age, when exercised in the worst working conditions.⁶

Researches⁵⁻⁷ in the field of social economy present the child labor as a practice resulting from the low socioeconomic status of the population, but it is known that only the financial aspect does not explain the magnitude of the early work in the country. The insufficient and inadequate educational system of the country, the cultural tradition, the social pattern, the lack of regulation and supervision, the profile of the labor market and the types of family arrangements existing in our country are other factors that might be associated with this practice.

Latest global estimates of the International Labor Organization (ILO) indicate that there are 215 million children who are victims of child labor in the world, and that more than half of them are involved in its worst forms. Accordingly, these data suggest that 74 million boys and 41 million girls perform working activities in their hardest forms.⁸

Although there are laws, statutes and programs to combat the child labor, it is estimated that there are 704 thousand children between 5 and 13 years working in Brazil, with highest concentration of children between 5 and 13 years (336 thousand) in the Northeast Region, due to economic reasons. In

the Paraíba State, about 27 thousand individuals aged between 5 and 14 years are exerting some sort of paid and informal activity, according to data of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) of the year 2011.⁹

The child labor in João Pessoa city comes first as regards the Paraíba State and also the first place in unhealthy activities performed by children and teenagers, given that most of the children are involved in domestic child labor. According to the figures of the IBGE 2000 Census, in João Pessoa city there were 129.425 inhabitants in the age group from 7 to 17 years and, among these, 5.204 children and teenagers worked, being that 2.749 were working in unhealthy activities.¹⁰

Every early employment changes the life habits of children and teenagers and might directly interfere in the activities necessary for the healthy and ordered growth and development, making the childhood and the youth remain in the background. Therefore, cultural, financial, educational and emotional deprivations are enhanced and might result in deficiencies in the intellectual and emotional development of children and teenagers.¹¹

There is a fine line between the limit of helping parents in the household activities or in other activities and the accomplishment of activity characterized as child labor, thereby justifying the relevance of this study, which aims at investigating the occurrence of activities related to the child labor in children and teenagers who attend schools in the municipality of João Pessoa/PB/Brazil.

METHOD

It is an exploratory and descriptive study, with a quantitative approach, conducted with children and teenagers enrolled in public schools of the municipal network of João Pessoa city - Paraíba State.

The sample size calculation was performed taking as target 20.800 children and teenagers enrolled in 49 schools from João Pessoa city, according to data of the 2009 School Census of the Municipal Secretariat of Education¹², with basis on the Student's t distribution, a parametric and statistical test that is used to analyze the difference between two averages.¹³ After statistical calculation, the outcome N=177 was determined as the sample size. The inclusion criteria involved children studying in the 4th and 5th grades of the Brazilian elementary school system (known as *Ensino Fundamental I*), regularly enrolled in the aforementioned amount of schools belonging to the municipal network, who had prior parental consent and agreed to

participate in the study. Exclusion criteria were the following: the refusal of parents or guardians and the student's absence at the time of interview held in the school.

The choice of the schoolchildren was held in a random manner, according to the following steps: stratification of existing schools in the five Sanitary Districts of João Pessoa city; random selection of a school in each Sanitary District; random determination of the students in accordance with the delivery of the Consent Form signed by the responsible.

To start the data collection, the directors of the selected schools were contacted for presentation of the study objectives, its methodology and possible clarifications about the research. After their agreement, we performed meetings with the schoolchildren's parents who received the same explanations, in addition to the invitation to allow their kids to participate in the study. Moreover, we have respected the rights of children who had parental consent to opt to participate or not in the study.

The data were collected through a questionnaire, which was applied between September and December 2009. The initial part of the questionnaire contained questions about socioeconomic and demographic issues, which was answered by parents. The second part was answered by the students participating in the research, with open and closed questions, regarding the activities conducted outside of the school environment, leisure, activities related to the working world and compensation.

The data were tabulated according to the variables related to the work type, required time, gender, age and working compensation and, subsequently, they were analyzed by using simple statistical calculations.

This is a subproject that is linked to the Research Project "Health Care of Schoolchildren of João Pessoa - Paraíba", funded by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), achieving approval of the Research Ethics Board (CEP) of the Health Sciences Center from the Federal University of Paraíba, receiving a favorable opinion through the Protocol nº 0183/2009, and guided by the guidelines and regulatory norms for researches involving human beings, established by the Resolution nº 196/96 of the Brazilian National Health Council.

RESULTS

According to Table 1, of 177 children and teenagers who were interviewed, 11 reported working in trade or in other activities, such as: helping people to carry their purchases in little markets, taking care of cars on the streets or as a babysitter. Among them, there were 12 children with 8 and 9 years old. Whereas an entire working day has about 8 hours a day, most of the students reported exerting some kind of activity for more than one shift per day. The study participants answered to more than one alternative, referring to perform more than one work type from the labor activities presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Activities performed by children and teenagers, according to the age group, João Pessoa, Set-Dec/09.

Situation*	Age group		
	8 -9	10 -11	12 -14
Helps their parents at work	12	26	04
Helps their parents at home	43	90	21
Works in the trade sector	01	04	01
Other activities**	-	02	03

Research participants answered more than one option.
**Caretaker of cars, carrier of purchases in markets, babysitter.

Table 2 shows the relationship between the practice of labor activities and the compensation received for performing these activities. According to the collected data, 27,7% of the surveyed schoolchildren reported receiving compensation for performing the activities, i.e., about 49 children and

teenagers. Of the schoolchildren who reported working in the trade, 4 (2,3%) reported receiving compensation for such an activity, 2 (1,1%) reported working in a homestay and 4 (2,3%) reported performing other working activities and receive for these services.

Table 2. Distribution of working activities performed by the students, according to received compensation, João Pessoa, Set-Dec/09, n= 177.

Activity	Receives compensation for performing Working Activities			
	Yes	%	No	%
Helps their parents at home	24	13,5%	99	56,0%
Helps their parents at work	15	8,5%	22	12,4%
Works in the trade sector	04	2,3%	02	1,1%
Works as babysitter or maid	02	1,1%	02	1,1%
Other working activities *	04	2,3%	03	1,7%
Total	49	27,7%	128	72,3%

*Gas station attendant, Caretaker of cars, carrier of purchases in markets, babysitter.

Furthermore, Table 3 shows that of the 27 schoolchildren who reported working, 10 are female and 17 male, with the highest incidence in the age group between 10 and 11

years, thereby totaling a sample of occupancy of more than 15% in relation to the interviewed children and teenagers.

Table 3. Accomplishment of working activity, according to age and gender, João Pessoa, Set-Dec/09, n=177.

Age/	Gender	Working Activity			
		Yes	No	n=177	%
8-9	Female	02	28	30	17%
	Male	06	14	20	11,3%
10-11	Female	06	45	51	28,8%
	Male	10	45	55	31%
12-14	Female	02	06	08	4,5%
	Male	01	12	13	7,4%
Total		27	150	177	100%

DISCUSSION

According to the presented data, there are children and teenagers who develop some activity along with their parents, whether at home or at their work. It is important that these children and teenagers spend some time in contact with their parents with sights to learn to perform some tasks, as long as there is no obligation, neither provokes some sort of physical and/or mental injury to this age group, since, in that way, these activities will not be considered as forms of child labor.¹³

When it comes to activities that are not developed together with their parents, as in the case of trade, tasks of domestic employees or other types of services, it is very likely that the infant is performing a child labor. Child labor perpetuates poverty. If the child has not at least 11 years of studies, ends up reproducing the cycle of family poverty, staying often in a worse economic situation than the status of their parents themselves.¹³ The early incorporation into the working world reveals the impossibility of building other life projects for children and teenagers and, despite the recognition of the importance of the school institution, the everyday reality of the child workers undermines the continuity of studies, because the workload affects the time dedication to their studies, as well as the performance of other cultural activities that contribute to the personal development of children and teenagers.¹⁴

With regard to the compensation for their developed work, of the 49 participants who

reported to be paid to perform some type of labor activity, only 27 reported working. Given this number, it is important to remember about the damages that the early labor might cause to the health status, the physical development, the continuity of schooling, as well as on the low compensation resulting from such a practice. Nonetheless, these effects are minimized by the parents, before the positive valuation of work in the formation and reproduction of new generations, since the children and teenagers who earn money through their work, to meet some need, feel valued by their family members and by the society itself.¹¹

The family is a product of the time and of the environment and is the key unit of the formation of a child. Hence, the way in which this unit solves their problems and awakes the maximum potential of its members will profoundly influence in the possibilities offered to them.¹⁵

It is imperative to note that, many families, with a view to solving problems of social and financial nature, encourage their children to seek some sort of occupation. Usually, the child labor is closely linked to the poverty, discriminations and social exclusion, however, the Brazilian culture also exerts great influence on the premature work, as this is seen by parents and by society as antidote to marginalization and criminality, since it occupies the time of children and teenagers.¹⁶ The social inequalities stimulate the occurrence of the child labor, due to the need

of the family in escaping from the poverty, leading to the deprivation of the benefits of health care and education services for children.¹⁷

The exploitation of the child labor imposes conditions of exposure to risks and damages to the growth and development of schoolchildren. Regarding the employers, child labor is presented as a cheap resource and without regularization.¹³ However, the current legislation in Brazil prohibits the child labor, whether it is wage-related or just paid, because it is considered like a prejudice to the full development of a human being in formation, taking into account its physical, emotional, moral, social and intellectual aspects. From this viewpoint, one seeks to consolidate the concept of childhood as a life stage destined to the study, the laughter, the fun and the innocence.¹⁸

The data confirm that only 11 children present concrete situations of employment bonding, that is to say, they report working in trade or in other activities. In light of this, it should be considered that these children have no sense of the burden related to the exercise of some kind of work, due to the fact that 49 schoolchildren reported receiving compensation for performing activities, perhaps because they develop work activities together with their parents. The main concern is that the payment/compensation further encourages the accomplishment of working activities to the detriment of studies. Moreover, this context suggests that there further children and teenagers at risk for the child labor, which were not identified, since only 27 of them reported working in a formal manner.

The exploitation of work force that characterizes the paid child labor takes place when the children and teenagers are compelled, persuaded or obliged to perform some duties and responsibilities of adults, which are inappropriate to their healthy growth and development. This is characterized as one of the worst forms of violence, because it might involve neglect, physical and psychological aggressions and even tortures that might result in death.¹³

Nevertheless, one of the main aggravating to the awareness of the authorities and of the society itself is underreporting of the numbers related to the exploitation of the child labor, and this is a limiting factor, both from the perspective of preventing the exploitation of children and teenagers and from the legal viewpoint.¹⁹ This fact might have occurred in this study, because some of the participants reported exercising labor activities for more

than one working shift, receiving compensation and, furthermore, they reported that these activities were hindering their studies, even so, they did not know their work status.

According to a survey conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO), in partnership with the Federal University of Paraíba, in João Pessoa city, children and teenagers, in situations of domestic work, were asked about the schooling delay related to the practice of working activities. Of these, 68,5% reported discrepancy between 1 and 9 years old. The research also shows that the longer work, the greater the number of school failures.

CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of laws and decrees, the child labor is still a reality in Brazil and, especially, in the Paraíba State. In João Pessoa/PB, the situation is not different, several programs are in operation with sights to reduce and even eradicate this sad reality, such as the Child Labor Eradication Program (PETI), Pro-youth Program, My First Job, Young Apprentice, among others.

Necessity, opportunism and misunderstanding are mixed to explain the premature work. The situation of poverty forces the parents to use their children, both as labor force and as a way to quickly introduce them into the labor market, by justifying the need to increase the family income and promote the education of children through the labor discipline. Hence, this paradigm takes place with the connivance of the majority of the public opinion.

The child labor should be extensively combated throughout the world, because it is an illegal exploitation that presents no benefit to the child, on the contrary, can cause major problems in the short and long term. The society is still silent in relation to this reality. It is necessary to abandon the posture of disinterest and responsibly act, letting the children free to play and study, as the law guarantees them. Thus, they will experience the full form of their childhood moments, with time to have fun, learn and also teach the joy of living to all the people surround them.

For preventing and controlling the exploitation of the child labor, it is important having programs to realize risk situations and to identify locations and types of activities that might foster risks for the occurrence of the child labor, so that, from this perspective, to consolidate the combat to all forms of exploitation of the child labor.

Every child is a citizen and, therefore, one being that have rights, who should freely enjoy all stages of its growth and development, playing, dreaming, producing, smiling, studying, so that, consequently, reaches the adulthood phase without forgetting to live all the steps that prepare it to become a productive and emotionally balanced adult.

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

Study carried out with financial support of the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - (CNPq).

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Submission: 2012/01/09

Accepted: 2013/04/19

Publishing: 2013/06/01

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