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About us

The Understanding Children's Work (UCW) project is an inter-agency research cooperation initiative involving the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNICEF and the World Bank.

The Project is guided by the Agenda for Action adopted at the 1997 Oslo International Conference on Child Labour. The Oslo Agenda identified the need to improve data and information on child labour, and called for stronger international co-operation in efforts towards child labour elimination.

UCW research activities are designed to inform policies that impact upon the lives of child labourers in countries where they are prominent. Research efforts help provide a common evidence base on child labour, and a common basis for action against it. For further information on UCW, see the Project website at www.ucw-project.org.

Featured research

1. Industrial structure and child labour demand in Brazil. A study conducted as part of the UCW Working Paper series (Manacorda and Rosati, 2008) investigates whether the differential evolution of children's work across Brazilian states between 1980 and 2000 can be explained by the states' different patterns of specialization in industries where children have a putative comparative advantage. Children work in a variety of economic sectors, but little is known about the role that the characteristics of production in each sector play in determining the extent of child work. If there are sectors that demand a disproportionate share of children in their workforce, then interventions targeting specific sectors of the economy could be warranted. On the other hand, if the presence of children in the workforce is mainly determined by supply, then policies should be targeted to vulnerable household. The study is aimed at beginning to address this issue by using micro data from the Brazilian population census.

Empirical results from the study indicate that industry composition accounts for a sizeable share of the difference in the likelihood of rural children working across states. Specifically, the results show that between 20 and 40 percent of the cross-sectional differences in rural child labour across states, and around 30 percent of the differential evolution of child labour across states, are explained by states' different industry mixes. Taken at face value, these results suggest that policies targeted to specific sectors could go a long way in reducing child labour in rural areas. But it should be kept in mind in interpreting the results that the analysis does not allow for endogenous adjustments of industry output to children's work. The positive correlation between children's work and the industry mix might be, for example, ascribable to that fact that a more abundant child work supply in a state creates an incentive for child intensive industries to flourish. The results therefore are not necessarily causal.

2. Labour market uncertainty and school-leaving decisions in Brazil. A second UCW Working Paper looks at the impact of uncertainty concerning employment and wage outcomes on when young persons decide to leave school in Brazil (Guarcello, Rosati and Scaramozzino, 2008). Empirical results confirm that influence of labour market variables on school-leaving decisions are significant: a higher share of youth employment makes it more likely that young individuals stay at school or are idle, and less likely that they are at work. This could be interpreted as a labor

supply effect, which is exogenous to the individual participation decision. By contrast, a higher employment-to-population ratio has a negative effect on the probability of young people studying. This ratio can be interpreted as a proxy of the demand for labour, which can be regarded as exogenous to the individual decision. The most important finding of the analysis concerns the role of risk on activity status: greater uncertainty on labour market outcomes is associated with a higher probability of staying on the school. These results are consistent with a real options approach to education as an investment under uncertainty.

3. Indicators for measuring the educational impact of child labour.

A third recent UCW Working Paper looks at ways of improving the measurement of the educational impact of child labour (Kovrova, 2008; draft). Understanding the interplay between education and child labour important to achieving both EFA and child labour elimination goals. The working paper forms part of broader UCW efforts towards improving this understanding. It elaborates an expanded list of education indicators available from common household survey instruments that can be used for assessing the educational impact of child labour. These indicators cover not only school attendance but also school progression and survival, and therefore extend beyond the information on child labour and education typically provided in the research literature to date.

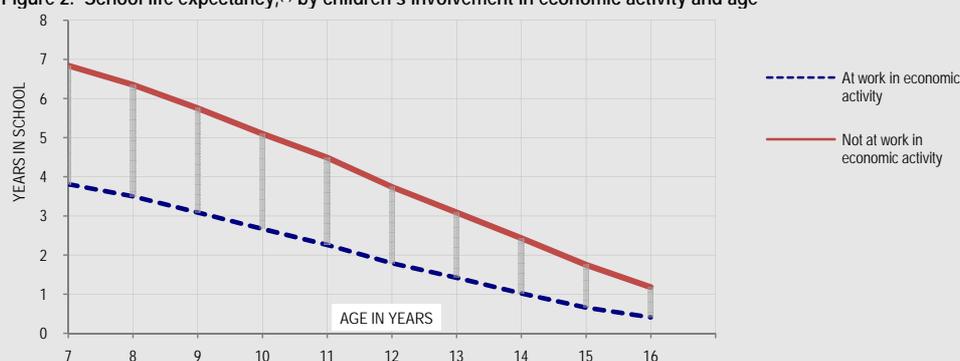
As an example, preliminary evidence in Mali shows different results of working children with respect of their non-working counterparts in terms of school life expectancy (Figure 2) and grade progression (Figure 3). About half of 7-14 year-olds children attend school, but only about 30 percent of this age group attends school unimpeded by work. Working children in school can expect to stay for a much more limited period of time compared to non-working children. At age 7 years, for example, school life expectancy for working students is three years less than that of non-working children. Working children lag behind in terms of grade progression from age 13 years onwards.

Figure 1. School attendance rate, by children's involvement in economic activity and age



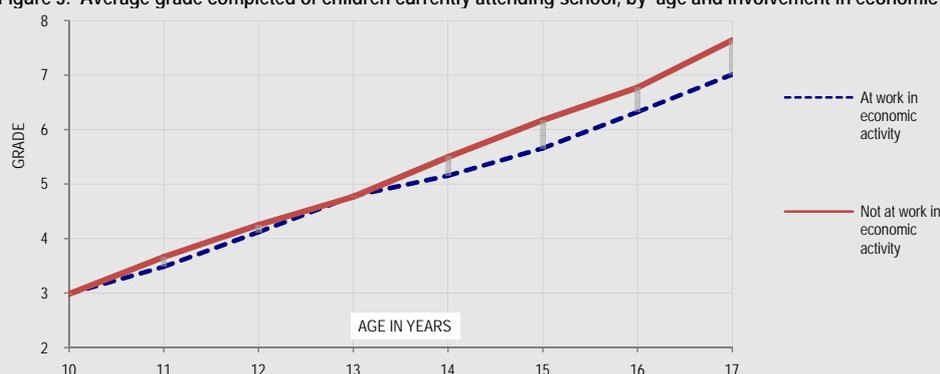
Source: UCW calculation based on Mali, Simpoc 2001

Figure 2. School life expectancy,^(a) by children's involvement in economic activity and age



Source: UCW calculation based on Mali, SIMPOC 2001

Figure 3. Average grade completed of children currently attending school, by age and involvement in economic activity



Source: UCW calculation based on Mali SIMPOC 2001

When disaggregated by children's work status, the expanded list of indicators discussed in the paper can provide insight into differences between working and non-working children in terms of their ability to enter and participate in school, and to persist and progress through the school system once there. The indicators can also be used to assess differences in school participation, survival and progression *within* the population of child workers, e.g., child working in different economic sectors, under different work modalities, in different seasons or for different amounts of time each day. This is important in light of the possibility that it is not work *per se* that interferes with schooling, but the rather the specific nature of the work or the conditions and time intensity with which it is performed. The paper also discusses the data requirements for the expanded indicators list.

Project news and events

1. Study on NPA costing in Cambodia completed. Work was completed on the cost of extending the intervention package contained in the Cambodian national plan of action for the elimination of worst forms of child labour to the entire concerned child population over a 10-year period. Results of the study will be summarised in a future edition of the Newsletter.

2. Seminar on child labour, education and youth employment (*Madrid, 11-12 September 2008*). As reported previously, this third UCW seminar, to be organised jointly with the *Instituto Figuerola (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)*, will present recent research on child labour and its linkages with educational and youth employment outcomes. The agenda will shortly be downloadable from UCW website, and information on papers presented and discussions at the seminar will be included in the next (December 2008) edition of this Newsletter.

3. Study on child labour in Bangladesh. The research cooperation project will operate under the supervision of an inter-agency Working Group comprised of representatives from the ILO, the World Bank and from UNICEF Bangladesh, as well as the Government of Bangladesh focal point (i.e., the Head of the recently established Child Labour Unit). Other concerned Government ministries and bodies, multi- and bi-lateral development partners, employers' and workers' organisations and representatives from key civil society stakeholders will be involved in this inter-agency research collaboration. The study will provide descriptive evidence of changes in the size and composition (i.e., age, sex and residence) of the child labour population in Bangladesh. Possible changes in the structure and characteristics of child labour (i.e., sector, modality and intensity) will also be examined. Resource requirements and economic benefits associated with eliminating child labour will be estimated, augmenting the child rights argument for child labour elimination by providing a compelling economic case for combating child labour, highlighting the constraint that child labour poses to broader national development goals.

4. Study on child labour in Andhra Pradesh. The study, to be conducted in conjunction with the Centre for Good Governance (CGG), the State government and ILO Delhi, will assess factors underlying the decline in child labour in the State of Andhra Pradesh over the last 10 years. An ILO Delhi mission to Rome took place in June 2008 for discussions on the study parameters; a follow-up UCW mission UCW to Hyderabad is planned for late August to finalise the study terms of reference and timeline.

5. Internships at UCW. Two interns from the Master in Development Economics from the Instituto Figuerola (Universidad Carlos III) were hosted at UCW secretariat in June-July 2008, as part of an on-going programme of cooperation with the university. The interns had the opportunity to deepen their theoretical knowledge about child labour issue, as well as to apply this knowledge in a variety of research efforts. Their contribution to UCW research was highly appreciated and fruitful.

References

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