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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 directly impact upon the lives of child labourers in countries where they are prominent. They help provide a common understanding of child labour in specific national contexts, 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. Impact of shocks on child labour: A recent but growing body of literature indicates that shocks matter for household decisions concerning children's work and schooling. In the absence of other risk mitigation instruments, households appear to use child workers as a buffer against the ill effects associated with exposure to negative shocks. But while this general research finding appears increasingly robust, the literature to date says little about how household responses to shocks may differ in accordance with the specific type of shock experienced.

Guarcello, Kovrova and Rosati (2007) look at the relative impact of three distinct shocks - drought, crop failure and flood - in the context of rural Cambodia in order to begin to address this latter question. The results from both estimation techniques utilised (i.e., propensity score matching and double difference) confirm that not all shocks are alike in terms of their impact on child labour and schooling. In the case of rural Cambodia, a crop failure is the most damaging event in terms of school attendance and child labour, while the impact of a drought is smaller and the impact of a flood is insignificant.

Data constraints prevented inclusion of other common idiosyncratic shocks such as job loss or the illness of a breadwinner, but the results nonetheless underscore that different shocks can have very different consequences, and that risk mitigation policies should be designed and targeted accordingly. The study is currently under final review and will be posted on the Project website shortly.

2. Understanding youth employment outcomes in Senegal. As part of on-going UCW research on youth employment and child labour, Guarcello (2007) examines the labour market outcomes of Senegalese young people and key factors influencing these outcomes, including early labour market entry and human capital accumulation. The paper also looks at the process of labour market entry, and, for those who attended school, the duration of the transition from school to work.

The empirical evidence presented in the paper indicates that low levels of school attainment and an early entry in the labour market (i.e., child labour) both negatively influence patterns of employment, job quality, and remuneration later in life. The evidence shows that education helps to eventually secure better jobs, but that initial difficulties in finding a job

also increase with the level of human capital. The study provides an empirical basis for formulating policies and programmes promoting youth employment and successful school to work transitions in the context of Senegal. The study is currently under final review and will be posted on the Project website shortly.

3. School distance and decisions concerning child labour. Another recent study analyses the role of school distance in influencing household decisions relating to children's schooling and work in Ghana and Guatemala (Vuri, 2007). The study presents evidence from a multivariate analysis indicating that easier school access has an important impact on children's time allocations in the two countries.

In Ghana, the distance to school discourages children school enrolment and makes it more likely that children work or do household chores. The longer the travel time to school, in other words, the more difficult it is for Ghanaian children to reconcile work and school attendance. In Guatemala, distance to primary school has an influence only girls' time allocations but not on the allocation of boys' time. The magnitude of the effect for girls is large: each 10 additional minutes of travel time to primary school decreases the probability of a girl of attending school by 2.4 percentage points and increases her probability of performing household chores by 2.2 percentage points. But unlike Ghana, the availability of post-primary schools does not influence the time allocations of primary school-aged children. In both countries, the results hold even when controlling for the endogeneity of school placement and per capita expenditures. The study is currently under final review and will be posted on the Project website shortly.

4. Policy responses to child labour. A recent UCW policy note (Lyon and Rosati, 2006) is aimed at providing a concise overview of policy options for addressing child labour. The note covers policies targeting three broad groups: (1) children at risk of involvement in child labour; (2) children already harmed by exposure to child labour; and (3) children in the worst forms of child labour. A menu of "prevention" policies is presented for the first group, targeting the economic and social environment and aimed at changing the "equilibrium" or long run level of child labour and school enrolment. A set of possible "second chance" policies are presented for the second group, aimed at avoiding large numbers of children entering adulthood in a disadvantaged position, permanently harmed by early work experiences. For the third group, possible "direct action" measures are presented, aimed at identifying and rescuing children from forms of child labour that pose a direct threat to their health and safety or that violate fundamental human rights.

5. Child labour and health: Several UCW working papers address the particular health and safety risks faced by children in the workplace. Rosati and Straub (2006) look at the long run impact of child labour on health in Guatemala by controlling for unobserved household-specific characteristics. The estimation results reinforce the conventional wisdom that child labour is harmful for health in the long run. The results can be interpreted as a lower bound of the true impact of work on health, since healthier children are most likely to offer themselves for employment and to successfully secure it.

Guarcello and Rosati (2004) address the relationship between the intensity of children's work and children's health outcomes, making use of data from Bangladesh, Brazil, and Cambodia. The empirical evidence presented in the paper indicates that the probability of work-related ill-health rises with the length of a child's workweek. The evidence also suggests that the work sector has an important influence on both frequency and severity of work-related sickness and injury. These findings imply that both working hours and cross-sectoral differences in risk need in principle to be taken into consideration in distinguishing permissible work from child labour.

Finally, O'Donnell O., Rosati F. and Van Doorslaer E. (2002) review the literature on the relationship between child labour and health, and sets a framework for further research on the issue. The review serves to underscore the complexity of the linkages between child labour and health: they can be direct and indirect, static and dynamic, positive and negative, causal and spurious. Disentangling these potential relationships is central to the design of policies that protect children from work activities most damaging to their health.

Project news

1. Introductory discussions on UCW inter-agency reports in Mali (Bamako, July 2007) and Zambia (Lusaka, June 2007). Preliminary UCW field missions were undertaken to introduce country-level research and to establish implementation modalities. In both countries, national steering committees will be set up comprised of representatives from Government, civil society and the partner agencies. UCW research cooperation will be aimed at (1) helping to establish a solid information base for policy formulation and (2) building capacity in child labour analysis.

2. Uganda National Statistical Office, Rome mission (July 2007). A mission from the Uganda National Statistical Office was in Rome in July 2007 for hands-on training/discussions on the analysis of data from the national child labour survey. The mission constituted the first step in planned research cooperation in Uganda.

3. Upcoming discussions on country research cooperation in Mongolia (October 2007) and Uganda (November 2007). The discussions will take place during preliminary UCW field missions scheduled for the last quarter of this year, and will be aimed at setting the parameters for research activities in the two countries.

4. Agreement on counterpart training. Agreement was reached with Project partners on UCW support to country-level training efforts in a number of additional countries (tentative list includes Egypt, Guinea, Mexico, Sri Lanka and Uruguay) during 2008 and 2009. These training efforts will coincide with national child labour surveys planned for the targeted countries, and will focus on the analysis and application of child labour data.

5. UCW website revision. A major revision to the Project website will go on-line in the third quarter of 2007. The changes to the website are aimed at further enhancing the site's ease of use and the accessibility of main Project research outputs. Newly posted reports and statistics will now be featured prominently on the front page where they can be quickly accessed and downloaded.

6. IZA conference on child labour in developing countries (Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Bonn, June 2007). UCW presented recent Project research on school quality and child labour (*Impact of school quality on child labour and school attendance: the case of CONAFE Compensatory Education Program in Mexico*).

7. Second IZA/World Bank conference on employment and development (Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Bonn, June 2007). UCW presented recent Project research on child labour and youth employment outcomes (*Twin challenges of child labor and youth employment in Ethiopia*).

8. Northern Cyprus seminar (June 2007). An introductory presentation was made by UCW providing a global perspective on child labour, and how it can be defined and measured. The seminar, organised by the Ozker Ozgur Peace and Democracy Foundation with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, was aimed at introducing child labour as a possible future social concern in the Northern Cyprus context.

9. World Day Against Child Labour (Rome, June 2007). UCW participated in the FAO/IFAD/ILO-organised event around the theme of child labour in agriculture. A short presentation was made providing an overview of children's involvement in agriculture work, drawing on data from UCW country statistics. The presentation will serve as a starting point for a specific UCW research effort on child labour and agriculture envisaged for 2008.

10. Upcoming seminar on child labour, schooling and youth employment (Paris, 13-14 December 2007). The 2-day seminar, to be organised jointly with the *Centre d'Economie de la Sorbonne (Université de Paris 1)*, will present recent research on child labour and its linkages with educational and youth employment outcomes (see previous newsletter).

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