

Confirmation that studying and child labor are incompatible

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This shows a boy working in a mine in Bolivia. Credit: SINC

Labour conditions, the amount of hours and working during the morning are the factors that most negatively affect the academic development of children who work. Using data from the 'Educame primero Colombia' Project ('Educate me first Colombia' in Spanish), a group of researchers in which the University of Seville participates has confirmed the incompatibility between studying and child labour.

The International Labour Organisation states that, in 2010, approximately 215 million [children](#) across the world were working. This figure has been progressively decreasing in Asia, the Pacific, [Latin America](#) and the Caribbean especially with regards to jobs that are considered hard and dangerous carried out by the youngest children. However, according to the organisation, the number of workers between

the age of 15 and 17 years has increased in the last five years.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that working and the academic development of minors are incompatible.

Now, an international study analysing the situation of 3,302 children in Colombia states that there are three especially important factors that condition academic results: [working conditions](#), the number of hours worked in a day and working during the morning.

In Colombia, youngsters are allowed to work after the age of 15 years providing that their parents or legal guardians file for permission from a labour inspector. Between the ages of 15 and 17 years, they can only work six hours a day during a [day shift](#) and up to 30 hours a week.

According to a survey from Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics, DANE, in the last quarter of 2011, the country's child labour rate stood at 12%. Amongst 15 to 17 years old, this figure reached 27.7%.

Against this backdrop, the researchers interviewed 3,302 families that had a son or daughter participating in the "Educame Primero Colombia" programme, headed by the United States Department of Labour and the Ministry for Social Protection of the Republic of Colombia.

The average child worker is 9 years of age

It was generally the mother who answered the questions. In total, there were 1,453 girls and 1,849 boys, with an average age of 9 years.

"At first we only interviewed the families, who acted as the source of information on the family, labour and education situation of the children," as explained to SINC by Isidro Maya-Jariego from the

University of Seville and coauthor of the study.

The researcher explained how the interviews aimed to evaluate the sociodemographic and economic variables of families as well as the education and labour characteristics and conditions of the minors.

These included work conditions and type, hours worked on a daily or weekly basis and the age the child started working.

The fact that child labour has a negative influence on [academic development](#) is not new knowledge for the researchers.

However, following their project, they observed that certain aspects have more of a conditioning influence than others.

Physical and psychological risks

First, the type of work and exposure to situations that imply a physical or psychological risk had a negative impact on the academic results of the children. Measured by the time it takes up the working day, intensity appears in the study as an important conditioning factor. As for the number of hours worked during the week, "this negatively affects academic results since, compared to the work of adults, child labour is very irregular and on occasions the tasks involved in helping out at home can arise suddenly at any given moment," according to the study.

Lastly, working in the morning means that school has to compete more, since "they both clash and, in many cases, lead to youngsters dropping out of school."

Help needed in the family business

The results showed that 90% of children knew how to read and write and that in 65.7% of cases, children left school to help with the family business.

Likewise, becoming a parent at an early age, the need to fulfil family responsibilities and the high cost of education are other reasons for dropping out of school.

This study expands upon the relationship between child labour and academic advancement – something far from being simple given the clear competition between the two.

According to the researcher, "it is important to analyse the specific impact that child labour has on education in the context of their development."

In the future, "it would be interesting to include other variables that reflect the academic results in a more holistic way, such as the experience of the child in terms of the educational surroundings," concludes the researcher.

These types of studies allow more adequate intervention in eradicating child labour in those affected areas and the characteristics of work undertaken by children.

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