

Child work, attendance and school performance

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Sri Lanka ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 1990. The Children's Charter and the National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka, were designed to identify areas of need and to set a framework for the protection, empowerment and delivery of services to children. The minimum age of employment, 12, was established by regulations made under the Employment Ordinance (Employment of Children Regulations 1957). These regulations also list a series of occupations in which a child over 12 but under 14 cannot be employed, making specific reference to physical or moral damage.

Engagement in work can affect children in different ways. Work may interfere with children's attendance at school and their performance in school. Work sometimes enables children to afford schooling. Engagement in work can have adverse effects on children's development or can contribute to their socialization for future adult roles.

The study carried out for the ILO used the survey method to collect information. The 32 schools in the sample were selected from eight divisions. The sample consisted of 935 working children and 1002 children who were only studying, in the 12-14 age group, 123 parents and 120 teachers. Four instruments of data collection - a record sheet with information on attendance and performance, and three questionnaires for children, parents and teachers were used.

The study found that the attendance of children engaged in economic activities within or outside the family was better than that of children who were either studying only or studying and doing household duties. Performance of all categories of children in all eight divisions with the exception of one, at all tests had been poor, scores mostly below 30. Average annual scores revealed that children studying only in all eight divisions had scored highest with children doing work outside families receiving lowest scores in seven of the eight divisions. This relationship between work-study status and performance suggest that work has exerted a negative impact on performance. A considerable number of children who do either household work or other economic – related activities responded that they feel sleepy or exhausted at school because they feel too tired after work previous day or not had enough sleep previous night.

Key words: Child Work; School attendance; School performance; Family economic activities; Sri Lanka