



The impact of child and youth work on school performance in Brazil

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Key messages

- Working, whether at home or in the labor market, is detrimental to children's academic performance.
- Younger children are more susceptible to the negative effects of combining work and education.
- The school day should be extended, to both encourage additional time spent in education and reduce the time children spend on household chores or in work.

Child labor divides opinion in Brazil

Although Brazil has seen a significant decline in child and youth labor in recent years – from about 23% of Brazilian children aged between 10 and 15 working in 1992 to 7% in 2014 – it is still common to see children combining work and school.

While full time school attendance is compulsory for children aged 6 to 14 in Brazil, the 2014 national household survey (PNAD) indicated that over three million children and adolescents (representing almost 12% of the age group) still divide their time between school and work.

One reason that child labor continues in Brazil is that many poorer families rely upon the earnings of children and adolescents to meet their basic needs. Children are also often expected to carry out household chores. While some studies have shown that giving children chores can help form accountability and self-confidence, if a child is overloaded with chores to the point of working a significant number of hours each day then they will have less time for studying.

Despite a significant improvement in school attendance (from 87% of all 7 to 14 year olds in 1992 to 98% in 2014) Brazil continues to lag behind other Latin American countries in terms of educational outcomes and indicators (such as literacy rates and years of education).

A team of local PEP researchers suggests that Brazil's low education outcomes may, in part, be due to a high number of children having a too-heavy burden of work while studying, and therefore being distracted from or too tired to fully engage with their education. The team therefore set out to measure the impact of child work on learning outcomes to better understand the consequences of children combining work and study.

The research team aims to enhance the current understanding on the effects of child work on education by analyzing the direct impact of child work on the academic progress of students. In contrast to previous studies, this study differentiates between the time spent by children performing household tasks, labor market activities, and a combination of the two.



Data and methodology

The research team analyzed “Prova Brasil” census data from 2007 and 2011, which provides information on 5th and 9th grade students in urban public schools. Children in the 5th grade in 2007 were merged with students in the 9th grade in 2011 to create panel data. The team used fixed effect models of this data to measure the impact of child work on learning outcomes, indicated by test scores in Portuguese and Mathematics.

Of around 400,000 5th grade students who were followed to 9th grade, almost 35% do at least two hours of household chores each day (2.7 hours is the average time spent daily on housework), 9% work outside the home, and another 6% do both domestic and non-domestic work. As well as distinguishing between different types of work, separate analyses were also undertaken according to gender in order to observe any differences or discrimination that may occur. The data shows that 21% of 9th grade boys work in the labor market, compared to 10% of 9th grade girls. However, girls not only do more household work than boys (23% of girls do at least three hours a day of housework compared to 9% of boys), they also spend more time doing domestic work than boys spend working outside the home.

Key findings

The analysis indicates that **working, both at home or in the labor market, is detrimental to children’s academic performance**, as measured by their test scores in Mathematics and Portuguese.

Working in the labor market is most detrimental to school performance, likely due to a heavier workload, absence of parents, commuting times, and greater stress.

The group that showed the greatest negative effects on school achievement were girls working only in the labor market.

The researchers found that:

- The Portuguese test scores of 5th grade girls were 19% lower when they worked in the labor market
- The Portuguese test scores of 5th grade boys were 14% lower when they worked in the labor market.
- Younger (5th grade) children experience a greater negative impact than older (9th grade) children when combining work and studies.



Although less detrimental to school performance than working in the labor market, the results of this study indicate that domestic work – which is often not included in social statistics and not considered dangerous – does have a negative effect on children’s education outcomes (5th grade Portuguese scores drop by between 5.3% and 6.1% for girls and boys, respectively).

Additionally, the research team found that children who started school aged 6 or 7 had a better academic performance than those who started after the age of 7. This finding concurs with a World Bank report (2001) citing a large number of studies that show earlier entrance into education has positive effects on the physical, mental, and economic wellbeing of a person.

Implications for policy

The results of this study indicate that domestic work, which is often not included in social statistics and not considered dangerous, needs to be included in policies designed to combat child labor. In particular, the school day should be extended to encourage children to spend more time in school and to reduce the amount of time children spend on household chores.

With child labor, whether inside or outside of the home, being detrimental to school performance, it falls to policymakers to combat child labor through social programs, law enforcement and labor inspections while also raising awareness of the importance of education and the risks associated with early entrance into the labor market or a heavy burden of domestic work.

To address the issue of families who rely upon the earnings of their children to meet basic needs, social assistance programs – such as Bolsa Familia and PETI – can provide important sources of income and allow children to remain in education. Additionally, Brazilian students are likely to benefit from starting school earlier, better school infrastructure and more experienced teachers, all of which will help address the issues of school year repetition and school dropouts.



In 2012, with support of the UK Department for international Development (DfID) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, PEP launched a new program to support and build capacities in “Policy Analyses on Growth and Employment” ([PAGE](#)) in developing countries.

This brief summarizes the outcomes of [PMMA-12769](#) supported under the 3rd round of the PAGE initiative (2015-2016). To find out more about the research methods and findings, read the PEP [working paper 2016-27](#).

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