



**Statistics on Working Children and  
Hazardous Child Labour in Brief**

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## **Statistics on Working Children and Hazardous Child Labour in Brief<sup>1</sup>**

### **I. WORKING CHILDREN**

#### **1. Introduction**

It is common knowledge that data on child labour are extremely scarce. The reason for this is the absence of an appropriate survey methodology for probing into the work of children which, for the most part, is a "hidden" phenomenon. Consequently, the ILO designed special sample survey methodologies and experimented them in four countries. These were further refined and adopted for investigating at the national level the child labour situation in a number of countries.

The child labour problem being multi-dimensional, the information sought through the specialised survey approaches involved answers to the following questions, among others:

- Who are the working children and how many are there in the individual countries?
- How old are they when they start to work for the first time and how do they live?
- Why do they work and in which sectors are they engaged?
- What are their specific occupations and the conditions of their work?
- What types of exploitation and abuse they face at work?
- How safe are they physically and mentally at their workplace or in their occupations?
- Do they also go to school? If they do, what are the consequences of their non-schooling work? And if they do not go to school, what are the reasons?
- Who are their employers? Why do they use them? And how do they treat them in comparison with their adult workers?

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the terms "working child" and "child labour" have been interpreted to mean "economically active child", "child workforce" or "child labour force" and all these terms have been used interchangeably. Similarly, the broad terms "labour force" and "economically active population" are used to mean the same thing. However, according to the revised international standard of concepts and definitions as adopted by the 13th ICLS in 1982, the former term refers to the "currently active population" as measured in relation to a very brief period such as one day or one week, whereas the latter term relates to the "usually active population" as measured in respect of a long reference period, such as 12 months.

- How many children are engaged on a full time basis in housekeeping activities of a purely domestic nature in their own parents' or guardians' households thereby sacrificing their education and also exposing themselves to various injuries and health hazards?
- Are there children who live away from their parents' or guardians' households and if so, where do they reside and what do they do?
- What are the perceptions of parents about their working children? What are those of the children themselves and their employers?

Based on the findings of the experiments as well as the results of national surveys carried out since then using the newly developed methodologies and, also taking into account other demographic and socio-economic factors, the ILO produced estimates on the size of working children at regional and global levels which have been internationally accepted and quoted as ILO figures. Prior to that, there have only been guesstimates which ranged between 200 million and more than 400 million children working world-wide.

## **2. Level and distribution of working children**

### General level

According to the new estimates, there are some 250 million children 5-14 years old who are toiling in economic activity in developing countries. For close to one-half of them (or 120 million), this work is carried out on a full time basis, while for the remaining one-half it is combined with schooling or other non-economic activities. Among school going children, up to one-third of the boys (33%) and more than two-fifths (42%) of the girls are also engaged in economic activities on a part-time basis.

The overall estimates of 250 million working children are exclusive of children who are engaged in regular non-economic activities, including those who provide services of domestic nature on a full-time basis in their own parents' or guardians' households.

The number of such children is relatively large (about 15%-20% of the total child population of the same age-cohort).

### Gender

The data so far obtained through methodological experiments and in countries where national surveys were conducted using the newly developed and tested methodologies show that more boys than girls work — close to three boys to two girls, on average. It should be borne in mind, however, that the number of working girls is often underestimated by statistical surveys

which usually do not take into account unpaid economic activity carried out in and around the household, including household enterprises.

Also more girls than boys perform full-time housework of non-economic nature - e.g., housekeeping in their own parents' household - many of them between 8-12 years old - in order to enable their parents or guardians to go to work, or to take care of sick or handicapped members in the household. Such work is reported to be the main reason for about one-third of the youngsters who do not attend school - they were either never enrolled or were obliged to drop out of school because of the full-time housework. If such full-time housework were taken into account, there would be little or no variation between the sexes in the total size of working children, and the number of girls could even exceed that of boys.

### Regional

For obvious reasons, child labour is most prevalent in the developing regions of the globe. In absolute terms, it is Asia (excluding Japan), as the most densely populated region of the world, that has the most child workers (approximately 61% of the world's total as compared with 32 % in Africa, 7% in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one-fifth of one per cent in Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand). But in relative terms, Africa comes first in economic activity participation rate of children which is estimated at a little more than two children out of five (or 41%) of the total children 5-14 years old. The corresponding proportion in Asia is around one-half of the level in Africa (i.e., more than one in five children or 22%), and it is one in six (or 17%) in Latin America, and close to one in three (29%) in Oceania.

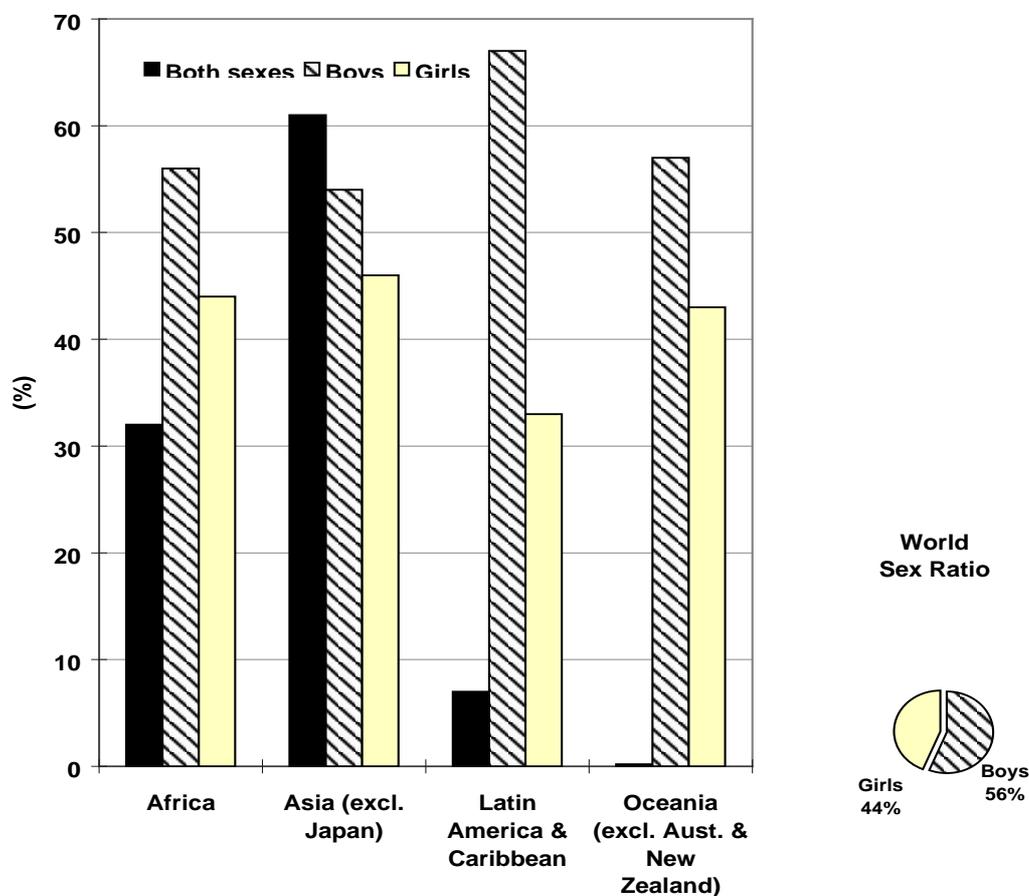
In all regions, more boys than girls participate in economic activity. The highest participation rate of boys is in Africa (46%) as compared with the rates in Oceania (33%), Asia (23%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (22%). The gender differential in the rates is greatest in Latin America (22% for boys to 11% for the girls), followed by Africa (46% to 37%, respectively, and the latter is also the highest participation rate of girls by region); and Oceania (33% to 26%). The differential between boys and girls participation rates is smallest in Asia (23% to 20%).

### 1. DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN 5-14 YEARS OF AGE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, BY REGIONS AND SEX. 1995

Region	Both sexes	Boys	Girls
World (estimates in millions)	250	140	110
Regions (in per cent)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Africa	32	56	44
Asia (excluding Japan)	61	54	46
Latin America & Caribbean	7	67	33
Oceania (excluding Australia & New Zealand)	0.2	57	43
Sex ratio (World)	100	56	44

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics, (Geneva 1996). The estimates are based on the findings of recent experiments in four countries as well as the results of national surveys conducted using the newly developed sample survey methods and relevant demographic factors.

### 1. DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN 5-14 YEARS OF AGE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, BY REGIONS AND SEX. 1995



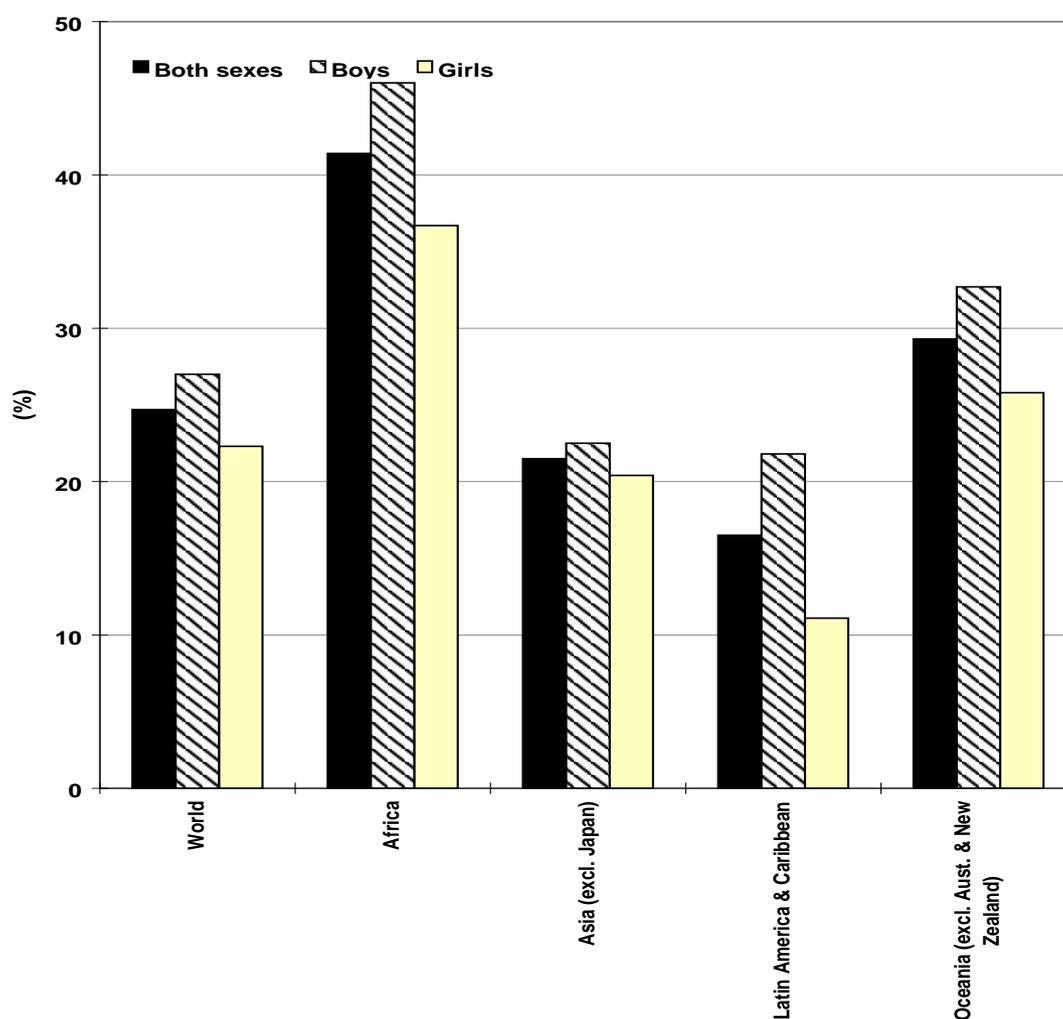
Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics, (Geneva 1996). The estimates are based on the findings of recent experiments in four countries as well as the results of national surveys conducted using the newly developed sample survey methods and relevant demographic factors.

**2. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION RATE OF CHILDREN  
5-14 YEARS OF AGE, BY REGION AND SEX. 1995**

Region	Both sexes %	Boys %	Girls %
World	24.7	27.0	22.3
<b>Regions</b>			
Africa	41.4	46.0	36.7
Asia (excluding Japan)	21.5	22.5	20.4
Latin America & Caribbean	16.5	21.8	11.1
Oceania (excluding Australia & New Zealand)	29.3	32.7	25.8

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics, (Geneva 1996).

**2. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION RATE OF CHILDREN  
5-14 YEARS OF AGE, BY REGION AND SEX. 1995**



Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics, (Geneva 1996).

### Rural/Urban

Participation rates of children in economic activity are much higher in rural areas than in urban centres. Based on the surveys so far undertaken, including the experiments in the four countries, the propensity for children to engage in an economic activity is on average twice as high in the rural communities. However, with the rapid urbanization of most developing countries and, also with the increasing number of youngsters themselves migrating to towns and cities, the share of urban centres in the total volume of child labour would no doubt grow in the future. The vast majority of children working in rural communities are engaged in agricultural or similar activities (an average of nine out of ten children in most of the countries surveyed and more than two in every three children in the others). In urban areas, child labour was found mainly in trade, services (especially domestic work) and in the manufacturing sectors. Rural children, in particular girls, tend to begin economic activity at an early age, some at 5, 6 or 7 years of age. Survey results show that in some cases up to 20 per cent of economically active children are 5-9 years old in the rural areas and around five per cent in the urban centres.

### Industry and occupation

It is evident that the less developed a country is, the greater the proportion of the child population who work. It is also clear that the more elementary the type of economic activity or the kind of occupation that does not need specific skills, the larger the relative size of the working children in that particular industry or occupation. These factors influence the level of distribution of the total number of working children by branch of economic activity or by occupation in any specific country. As a result, the relative level of the child workforce in any industry or occupation could vary widely from one country to another. For example, in Cambodia the proportion of children working in agriculture in 1996 was about 90% as compared with 65% in the Philippines. On the other hand, the level of working children in wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels was 17% in the Philippines and 7% in Cambodia. Because of the predominance of agriculture in Cambodia, the number of children working in agriculture-related occupations was also close to 90% as compared with 75% in the Philippines.

Based on a number of countries (approx. 20) for which data have been collected recently, the average level of working children in the different branches of economic activity and occupations are shown in the following two tables and charts:

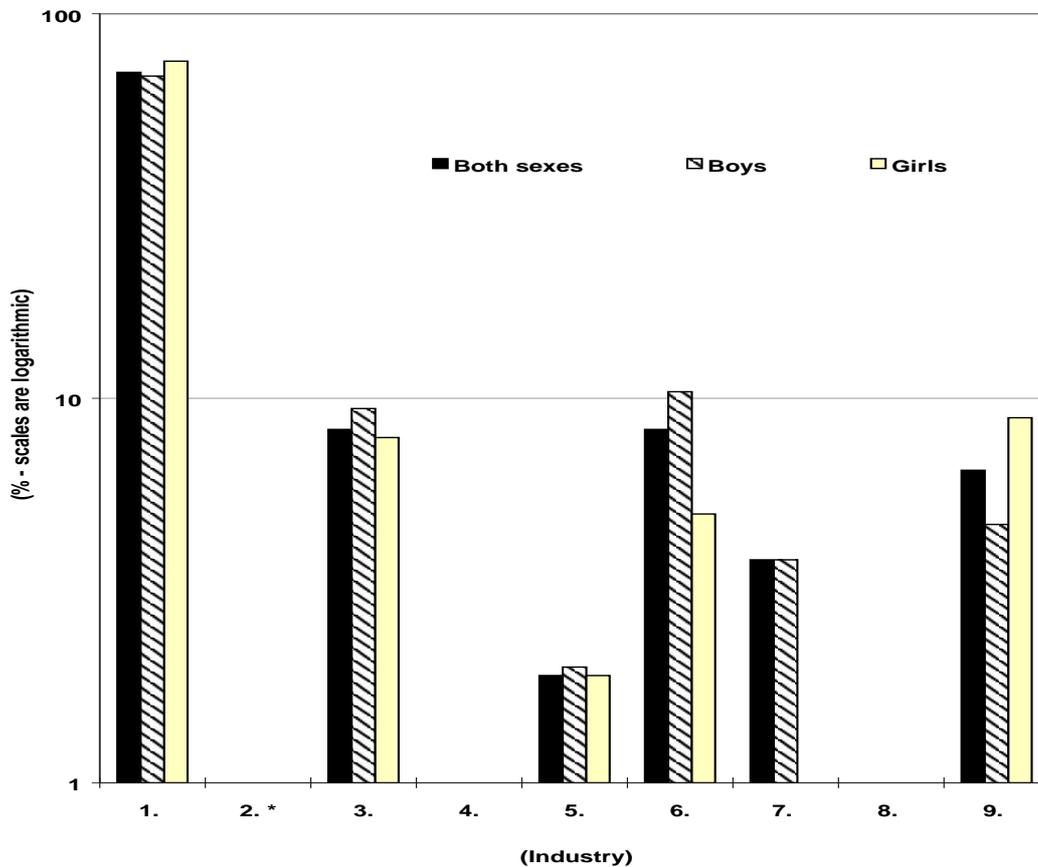
### 3. ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN IN 26 COUNTRIES, BY INDUSTRY AND SEX (AVERAGES).

Industry (major division)	Both sexes*	Boys*	Girls*
	%	%	%
1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	70.4	68.9	75.3
2. Mining and quarrying	0.9	1.0	0.9
3. Manufacturing	8.3	9.4	7.9
4. Electricity, gas and water	-	-	-
5. Construction	1.9	2.0	1.9
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels	8.3	10.4	5.0
7. Transport, storage and communication	3.8	3.8	-
8. Financing, insurance, real estate and business services	-	-	-
9. Community social and personal services	6.5	4.7	8.9

\* Due to rounding, totals may not be equal to the sums of individual components.

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

### 3. ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN IN 26 COUNTRIES, BY INDUSTRY AND SEX (AVERAGES).



Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

**Note:**

1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing
- 2.\* Mining and quarrying (Both sexes, Girls: 0.9%, Boys: 1.0%)
3. Manufacturing
4. Electricity, gas and water
5. Construction
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels
7. Transport, storage and communication
8. Financing, insurance, real estate and business services
9. Community social and personal services

#### 4. ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN IN 20 COUNTRIES, BY OCCUPATION AND SEX (AVERAGES).

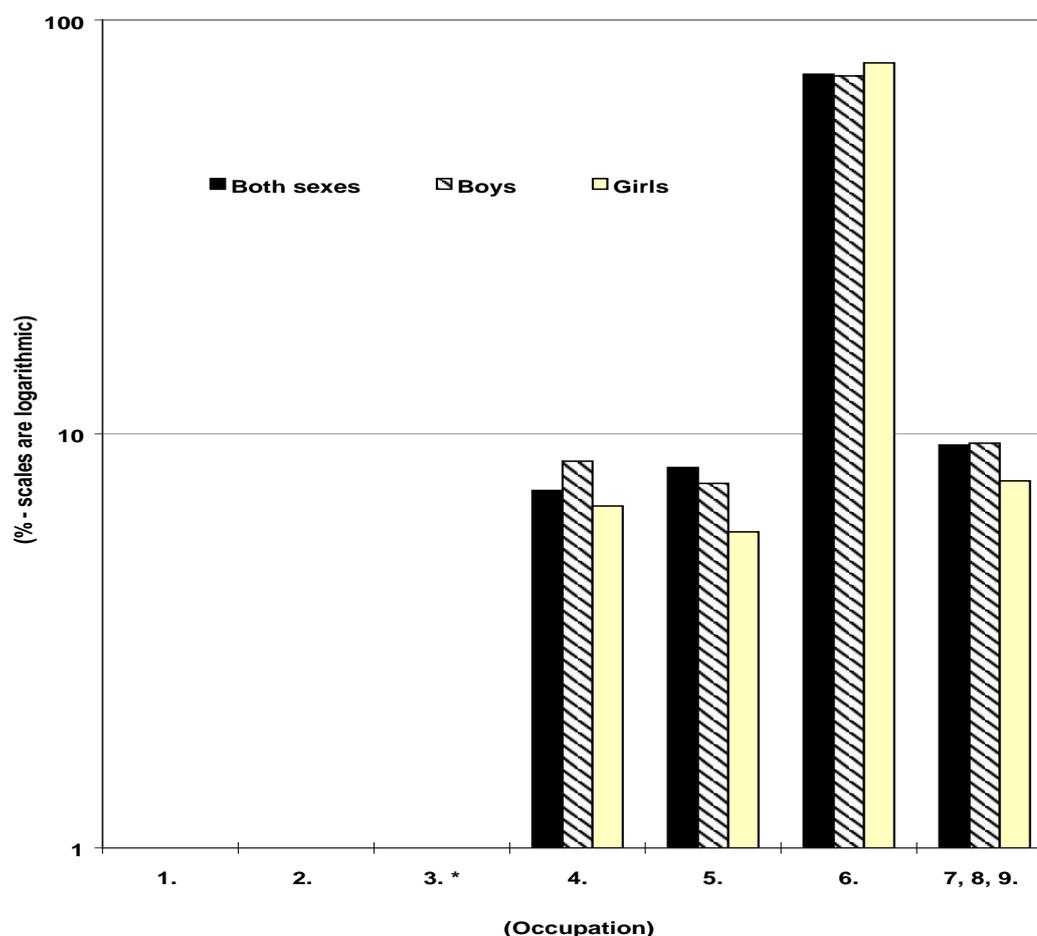
Occupation* (major group)	Both sexes**	Boys**	Girls**
	%	%	%
1. Professional and related workers	-	-	-
2. Administrative and managerial workers	-	-	-
3. Clerical and related workers	1.0	1.0	1.0
4. Sales workers	7.3	8.6	6.7
5. Service workers	8.3	7.6	5.8
6. Agriculture, animal husbandry and related workers	74.0	73.3	78.8
7, 8, 9. Production and related workers, transport equipment and labourers	9.4	9.5	7.7

\* ISCO-88

\*\* Due to rounding, totals may not be equal to the sums of individual components.

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

#### 4. ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN IN 20 COUNTRIES, BY OCCUPATION AND SEX (AVERAGES).



Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

Note:

1. Professional and related workers

2. Administrative and managerial workers

3.\* Clerical and related workers (Both sexes, Boys, Girls: 1.0%)

4. Sales workers

5. Service workers

6. Agriculture, animal husbandry and related workers

7, 8, 9. Production and related workers, transport equipment and labourers

As can be seen, economic activities and occupations related to the agricultural sector are predominant in the proportion of child workers. Although the average number of children in agricultural activities and occupations are, respectively, 70% and 74%, these ratios could be as high as 90% in the former and 95% in the latter. In both, the ratios for the girls (75% and 79%) are higher than for the boys (69% and 73%).

The proportions of children working in trade, restaurants and hotels (ranging from 8% to 17% in a few instances), manufacturing (8% to 15%), and services (7%) are relatively high when compared with the ratios in the other non-agricultural sectors. Most of the former activities are performed in the urban centres.

### Hours and Earnings

Many children work long hours every day of the week. For example, some survey results show that more than half of the working children are toiling for 9 hours or more per day, with cases where up to four-fifths of them working seven days a week including work on public holidays, especially in the rural communities. There are cases where children work 56 hours or more per week. In paid employment which is concentrated in urban centres, the number of children working long hours is smaller (about two-thirds of them) and the majority work six days a week.

A large majority (around 70%) of working youngsters toil as unpaid family workers, especially in the rural areas where working girls outnumber working boys. More than four in every five children (or 81%) work without pay. Most of those working as paid employees are paid much less than the prevailing rates in their localities, even when compared with the legal minimum wages, receiving only one-sixth of the minimum rate in one survey finding. Also the younger the working child, the lower the wage payment. On average, girls work longer hours than boys and are paid less than their working brothers doing the same type of work. Comparatively larger numbers of girls work as paid domestics where the pay scale is usually low. Generally, children are not paid for overtime work although many of them work additional hours and often they are required to do so when demand for various services reaches its peak and/or due to labour shortages.

Many children work during the evenings or nights as well. In one major survey, close to two-thirds (64%) of the child labour force in the agricultural sector are found to be working during these periods - three-quarters of the boys and more than two-fifths of the girls. However, in the retail trade and particularly in personal services, the proportions of the girls working in the evenings and nights are considerably greater than those of the boys - 27% as compared with 10% in the former sector, and 16% against 3% in the latter. A large number of the girls working as housemaids are often obliged to spend the night in their employer's household thereby also exposing themselves to various abuses, especially sexual.

## **II. HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOUR**

Being tender physically, children are susceptible to various work - related injuries and illnesses more than adults doing the same kind of work. Also because they are not yet matured mentally, they are less aware, even completely unaware, of the potential risks involved in their specific occupations or at the workplace itself. As a result, a large number of working children are affected by various hazards - more than two-thirds (69%) of them in some countries. Many of them suffer actual injuries or illnesses, from 5% to more than 20%, some of whom stop working permanently.

Recent surveys at the national level have demonstrated that a very high proportion of the children were physically injured or fell ill while working. These included punctures, broken or complete loss of body parts, burns and skin disease, eye and hearing impairment, respiratory and gastro-intestinal illnesses, fever, headaches from excessive heat in the fields or in factories,... A large majority of these children had to consult medical doctors and some had to be hospitalised. Many affected children had to miss work for a time, with some stopping work for good.

In absolute terms, more boys than girls are affected by injuries and illnesses mainly because of the total size of working boys - (the ratio is almost three working boys to two girls). Also, since a large majority of working children are in the rural areas engaged in agricultural activities, the number of injuries and illnesses related to the agricultural sector is by far the largest. However, in certain specific economic activities or occupations, the incidence of injuries and illnesses is significantly higher for the working girls than for their working brothers.

Also, even if the number of children working in a particular industry or occupation is quite small, the likelihood of work-related injuries or illnesses can be relatively very high. Therefore, such industries and occupations should be out of the reach of the child labour force even if allowed to work. For example, as shown in Table 3 and the tables and charts below, the total number of youngsters who work in the agricultural sector represent more than two-thirds (70%) of the total working children and, as a result of this large number, those who experience injuries and

## 5. DISTRIBUTION OF INJURIES/ILLNESSES BY INDUSTRY AND SEX.

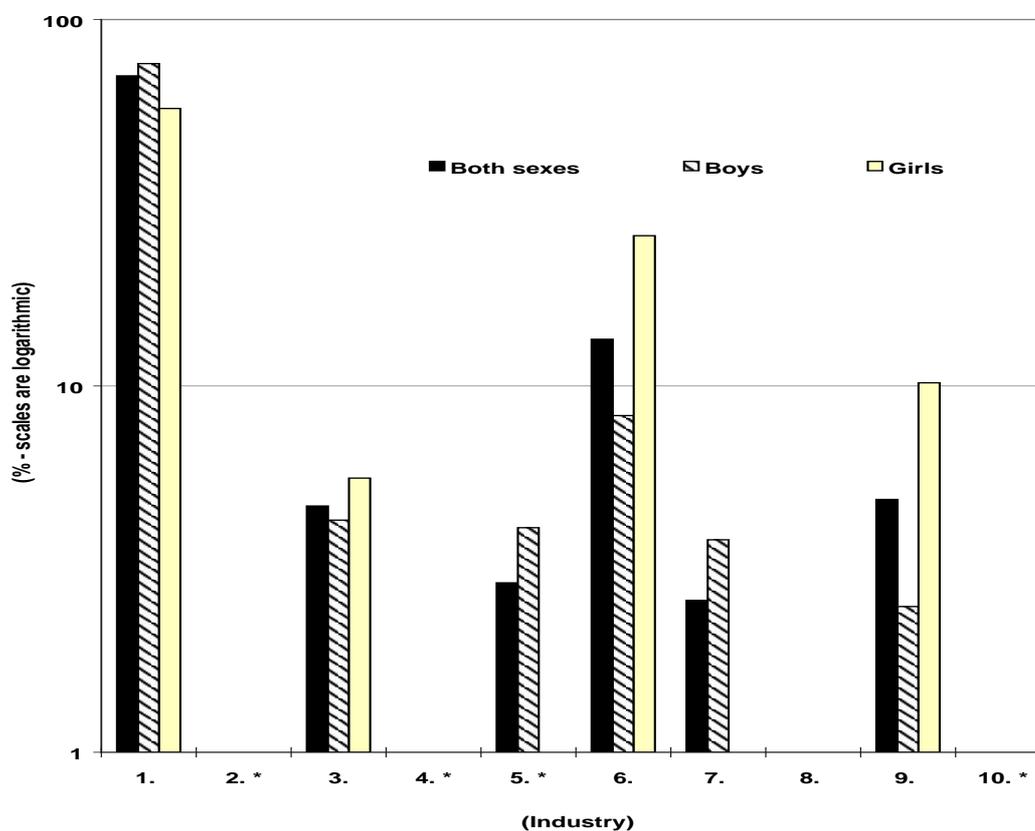
Industry (major division)	Both sexes*	Boys*	Girls*
	%	%	%
1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	70.2	75.8	57.2
2. Mining and quarrying	0.5	0.5	0.4
3. Manufacturing	4.7	4.3	5.6
4. Electricity, gas and water	0.1	0.0	0.1
5. Construction	2.9	4.1	0.3
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels	13.4	8.3	25.7
7. Transport, storage and communication	2.6	3.8	**
8. Financing, insurance, real estate and business services	0.0	0.0	**
9. Community social and personal services	4.9	2.5	10.2
10. Unspecified industries	0.6	0.7	0.6

\* Due to rounding, totals may not be equal to the sums of individual components.

\*\* Negligible

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

## 5. DISTRIBUTION OF INJURIES/ILLNESSES BY INDUSTRY AND SEX.



Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

## Note:

1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing
- 2.\* Mining and quarrying (Both sexes, Boys: 0.5%, Girls: 0.4%)
3. Manufacturing
- 4.\* Electricity, gas and water (Both sexes, Girls: 0.1%, Boys: 0%)
- 5.\* Construction (Girls: 0.3%)
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels
7. Transport, storage and communication
8. Financing, insurance, real estate and business services
9. Community social and personal services
- 10.\* Unspecified industries (Both sexes, Girls: 0.6%, Boys: 0.7%)

**6. DISTRIBUTION OF INJURIES/ILLNESSES PER 100 ECONOMICALLY  
ACTIVE CHILDREN, BY INDUSTRY AND SEX.**

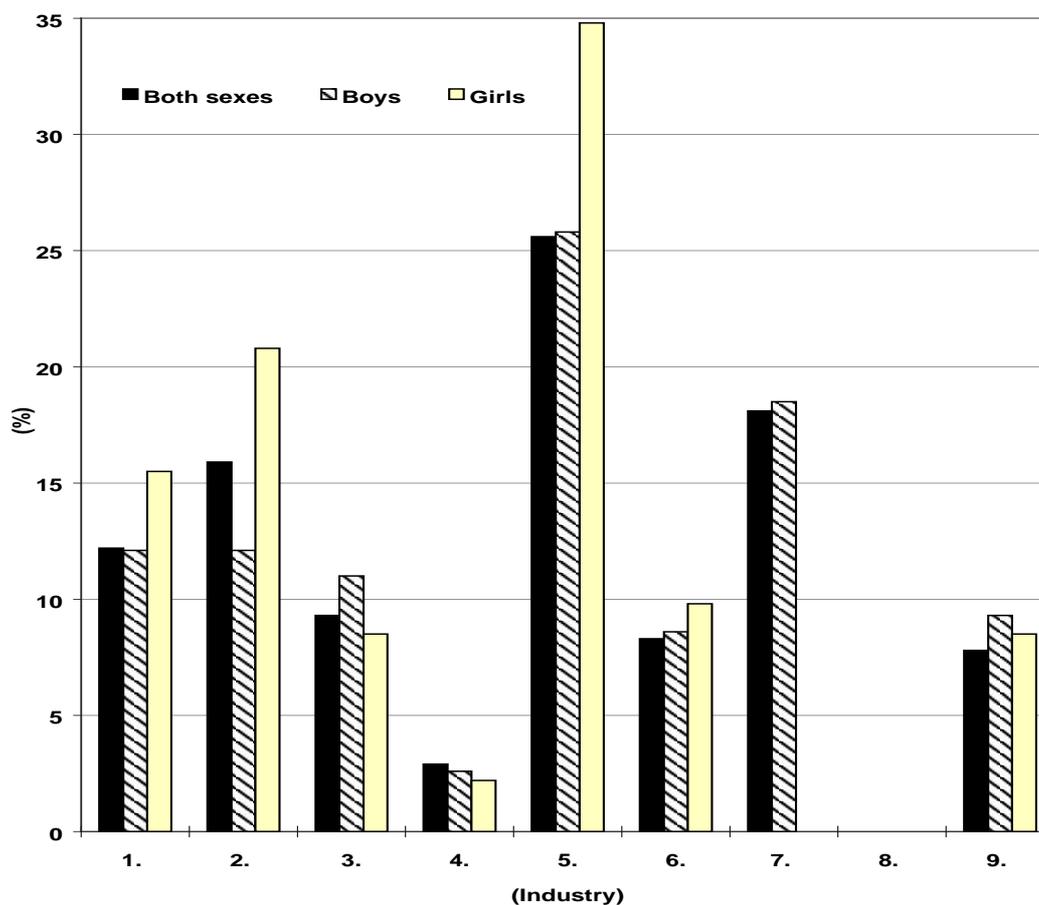
Industry (major division)	Both sexes* %	Boys* %	Girls* %
1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	12.2	12.1	15.5
2. Mining and quarrying	15.9	12.1	20.8
3. Manufacturing	9.3	11.0	8.5
4. Electricity, gas and water	2.9	2.6	2.2
5. Construction	25.6	25.8	34.8
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels	8.3	8.6	9.8
7. Transport, storage and communication	18.1	18.5	**
8. Financing, insurance, real estate and business services	**	**	**
9. Community social and personal services	7.8	9.3	8.5

\* Due to rounding, totals may not be equal to the sums of individual components.

\*\* Negligible

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

**6. DISTRIBUTION OF INJURIES/ILLNESSES PER 100 ECONOMICALLY  
ACTIVE CHILDREN, BY INDUSTRY AND SEX.**



Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).

Note:

1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing
2. Mining and quarrying
3. Manufacturing
4. Electricity, gas and water
5. Construction
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels
7. Transport, storage and communication
8. Financing, insurance, real estate and business services
9. Community social and personal services

illnesses in the sector also account for a considerably high proportion (70%) of the total suffered by all working children. The corresponding injury illness levels by gender in the sector are approximately 76% of the total working boys and 57% of the total working girls.

In contrast, the incidence of injuries and illnesses in the sector is 12% of the total children working in the sector, the same level for the boys and 16% for the girls. Although the size of child labour in mining or in construction is very small (respectively, about 1% and 2% of the total child workforce), the occurrence of injuries and illnesses is significantly high in both sectors. These two are by far the worst sectors for working children, particularly for the working girls - more than one girl in every three (35%) and one boy out of four (26%) are affected by injuries and illnesses if they work in the construction sector; and if working in mining, the incidence is one in every five girls (21%) and close to one boy out of eight (12%). While the total size of workers in the transport sector is also very small (less than 4% of all child workforce), about one in every five (19%) of the boys working in the sector suffer from work-related injuries and illnesses which is the second highest for the boys working in any other sector.

In one recent large survey undertaken at the national level for probing into all dimensions of child labour for the age-group 5-17 years, much information was collected particularly on the health and safety aspects of working children. The results revealed that out of a total of 3.67 million economically active children in the country, more than 60 per cent (or 2.21 million) were exposed to hazardous conditions which included biological (19% of all working children), chemical (26%) and environmental (51%) hazards<sup>2</sup> during their work. Not only because a large majority of children work in agriculture and related activities, but also due to the hard working conditions in this sector and in mining, much of the exposure to injuries and illness took place in the rural areas - approximately two-thirds of all exposures as compared to about one-third in the urban centres. Again because of their large number, most of those exposed were boys (approximately 70% of the total working boys and girls); but in relative terms, the level of exposure was close between the two sexes - 64% of the working boys compared with 53% of the working girls.

Of the total exposed children of 2.21 million, there were more than 870,000 children (39%) who suffered injuries or illnesses - divided almost equally: 49% of them (or 426,000 children) suffered injuries and the other 51% (or 444,000 children) suffered illnesses. This amounted to almost one child in every four children economically active (or 24% of 3.67 million); injuries affected close to 12% of all children engaged in economic activity and illnesses a little more than 12%. The number of boys who suffered was considerably larger than that of the girls (72% verses 28% of the total sufferers); but the ratios were closer when compared within the same sex

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<sup>2</sup> Biological includes: viral, bacterial, fungal, parasitic, etc; chemicals: liquid (oil, gasolin, mercury), mist fumes, vapors (paint, insecticide, pesticide), gas (oxygen, ammonia); and environmental: radiation/ultraviolet/microwave, temperature/humidity, pressure, illumination,...

(26% of the working boys and 19% of the girls). Close to three-quarters (74%) of the injuries and illnesses were in the rural communities and the rest (26%) in the urban areas.

Numerically, the most frequent injuries were cuts/wounds/punctures which totalled close to 600,000 (or 69% of all injuries). However, there were also injuries which were much serious though their occurrences were less frequent - for example, burns (57,500, equivalent to 7% of the total injuries), dislocations/fractures/sprains (45,900, or 5%), crushing injuries (29,800, or 3%), and even amputation/loss of body parts (1,100, or one-tenth of one percent) - for a total of 134,300, equivalent to more than 15% of the total injuries and about four per cent of the total economically active children. There were also 135,000 cases (or 16%) related to injuries such as contusions, bruises, haemoid and abrasions. Other injuries totalled 12,400.

Among the illnesses reported, body aches/pains (head, neck, back, etc.) were the most frequent (518,000, representing 57% of all illnesses), followed by skin diseases (190,000, or 21%). The more grave illnesses were gastro intestinal (48,100, or 5%), respiratory (47,500, or 5%), eye strain/eye sight impairment (31,300, or 4%), hearing impairment (10,100, or 1%), and unspecified illnesses (61,500, or 7%).

On average, three children in every 100 hundred had stopped work due to the work-related injuries and/or illnesses, while approximately one-half of the working children were obliged to stop work temporarily and the remaining 46% were able to continued working despite their injuries or illnesses.

### **III. SUMMARY**

Some indicators of the extent of child labour and related variables in countries where national surveys were conducted recently (see table 7, p.15).

**7. SOME INDICATORS OF THE EXTENT OF CHILD LABOUR IN COUNTRIES  
WHERE NATIONAL SURVEYS WERE CONDUCTED RECENTLY.**

Indicators	Proportion of children 5-14 years of age		
	Both sexes %	Boys %	Girls %
Economically active children	25	27	22
Boy/Girl ratio at work	100	56	44
Children attending school	39-87	49-90	23-84
of whom			
with economic activity	00-33	00-25	00-42
Not attending school	13-61	10-51	16-77
of whom:			
in economic activity only	39-56	56-74	23-38
in housekeeping activity only	12-32	8-14	15-49
working 40 hours or more per week	37-38	41-42	24-32
working 49 hours or more per week	12-17	11-19	12-17
working 56 hours or more per week	9-13	9-15	8-13
completely idle (not going to school, nor with economic or housekeeping activity)	27-37	27-37	23-37
Children whose work is hazardous	33-68	33-67	27-69
Sectors where actual incidence of injuries/illnesses is higher than 10%:			
Construction	26	26	35
Mining/quarrying	16	12	21
Transport/storage/communication	18	19	n/a
Agriculture	12	12	16
Children:			
whose work is stressful		up to 50% of working children	
who came home from work exhausted		up to 60% of working children	
who have no day off/no free time		up to 80% of working children	

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997).