

Child labour in hazardous occupations and sectors

The extent of injuries and illnesses to which working children are exposed is a cause for great concern. Because children differ from adults in their physiological and psychological make-up, they are more susceptible to and more adversely affected by specific work hazards than adults. Because they are not yet matured mentally, they are less aware of the potential risks involved in the workplace.

The effects of hazardous working conditions on children's health and development can be devastating. The impact of physically strenuous work such as carrying heavy loads or being forced to adopt unnatural positions at work can permanently distort or disable growing bodies. There is evidence that children suffer more readily from chemical hazards and radiation than do adults, and that they have less resistance to disease. Children are also much more vulnerable than adults to physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and suffer more devastating psychological damage from living and working in an environment in which they are denigrated or oppressed. It is, therefore, necessary in assessing the dangers of child labour to go beyond the relatively limited concept of "work hazard" as applied to adults, and expand it to include the developmental aspects of childhood. If child workers in general are vulnerable to work-related hazards, very young children and girls are even more so.

Girls are often discriminated against, denied the right to education and found in hidden work situations which expose them to physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

The special situation of girls

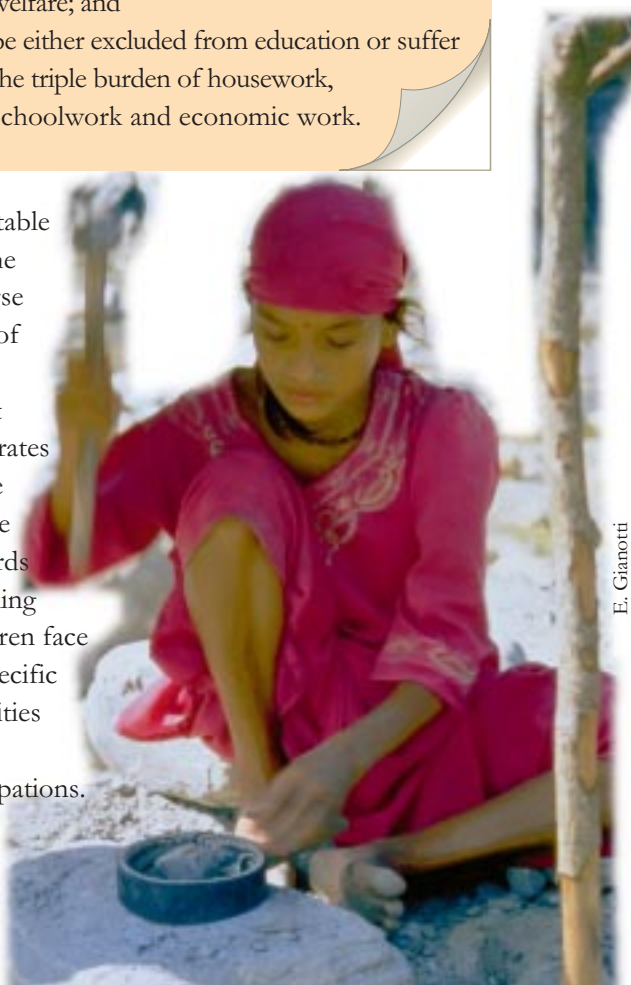
Girls are more likely to:

- begin working at an earlier age;
- be paid less than boys for the same work;
- be concentrated in sectors and areas that are characterized by low pay and long hours;
- be working in industries which are hidden and unregulated, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse;
- be concentrated in industries which pose excessive dangers to their health, safety and welfare; and
- be either excluded from education or suffer the triple burden of housework, schoolwork and economic work.

Younger children are even more vulnerable

The younger the child, the more vulnerable he or she is to hazards at the workplace and to the economic exploitation of his or her labour. Children who start work at an early age have a longer period of exposure to cumulative hazards. For instance, exposure in early life to substances with long latency periods, such as asbestos, increases the possibility of contracting chronic diseases like lung cancer in young adulthood. Younger children are also less likely to be able to perceive danger or to know what to do if accidents occur.

The table on the reverse side of this sheet illustrates some of the hazards working children face in specific activities and occupations.



Examples of hazardous occupations

OCCUPATION/ INDUSTRY	MAIN TASKS	HAZARDS	POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES
MINING	Underground digging; carrying heavy loads	Exposure to harmful dusts, gas, fumes and extreme humidity and temperature levels; awkward working positions (bending, kneeling, lying); cave-ins	Respiratory diseases that can develop into silicosis, pulmonary fibrosis, asbestosis, emphysema; musculo-skeletal disorders; fractures and death from falls/cave-ins
BRICK- MAKING	Processing of clay (extraction, crushing, grinding, screening and mixing)	Exposure to silicate, lead and carbon monoxide; excessive carrying of weights; burns from ovens; accident-provoking equipment	Musculo-skeletal deformation; injury
AGRICULTURE	Working with machinery, agrochemicals, animals; picking crops and loading	Unsafe machinery; hazardous substances (insecticides, herbicides); heavy lifting; extreme temperatures	Chemical poisoning (chronic and acute); cuts and other bodily injuries; diseases
CARPET WEAVING	Weaving hand-knotted carpets on a loom	Inhalation of wool dust contaminated with fungal spores; poor (squatting) work posture; poor lighting; poor ventilation; hazardous chemicals	Respiratory diseases; musculo-skeletal diseases; eye strain and defective vision at premature age; chemical poisoning; aggravation of non-occupational diseases
CONSTRUCTION WORK	Digging earth; carrying loads; breaking stones or rocks; shovelling sand and cement; metal work	Being struck by falling objects; stepping on sharp objects; falling from heights; exposure to dust, heat and noise; heavy lifting	Health impairments from noise, vibration and exposure to harmful substances; incapacitation through accidents and injury such as from falls
TANNERY	Tanning and preserving hides and skins	Exposure to corrosive chemicals and bacterial contamination of the hides	Anthraxosis, dermatitis and fungal infection
DEEP-SEA FISHING	Diving to depths of up to 60 m to attach nets to coral reefs	Exposure to high atmospheric pressure; attacks by carnivorous and poisonous fish; congested and unsanitary conditions	Decompression illness (rupture of ear drums); death or injury; gastro-intestinal and other communicable diseases
GLASS FACTORY	Drawing molten glass, carrying molten loams	Radiant heat and thermal stress; noxious fumes; silica dust; stepping on or handling hot broken glass	Accidental trauma; eye injuries; heat stress; respiratory diseases; serious burns and cuts
MATCHES AND FIREWORKS	Mixing hot (steaming) chemicals, making matchsticks and stuffing cracker powder into fireworks	Exposure to hazardous chemicals; fire and explosions	Synergistic effects of chemical intoxications; respiratory diseases; burns; injuries and death from explosions
SCAVENGING	Demeaning, unsanitary work; reclaiming usable material from garbage heaps including dangerous waste from hospitals and chemical plants, often with bare hands	Cuts from glass/metal; exposure to hazardous substances; inhaling stench from putrefied matter; infestation by flies; temptation to eat leftover food	Cuts resulting in death from tetanus; chemical poisoning and risk of contracting or carrying infectious diseases; food poisoning; burns (from build-up of methane gas and explosion)
SLATE MAKING	Carrying heavy loads; making pencils and slates	Effects of carrying loads; exposure to siliceous dust	Musculo-skeletal diseases; lung diseases and premature incapacitation