



**International Labour Organization
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**

**El Salvador
Child Domestic Workers:
A Rapid Assessment**

**By
Oscar Godoy**

Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Empresarial

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Preface

Unacceptable forms of exploitation of children at work exist and persist, but they are particularly difficult to research due to their hidden, sometimes illegal or even criminal nature. Slavery, debt bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in the drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work are all defined as Worst Forms of Child Labour. Promoting the Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and immediate action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, is a high priority for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Recommendation (No. 190, Paragraph 5) accompanying the Convention states that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms, as a matter of urgency.” Although there is a body of knowledge, data, and documentation on child labour, there are also still considerable gaps in understanding the variety of forms and conditions in which children work. This is especially true of the worst forms of child labour, which by their very nature are often hidden from public view and scrutiny.

Against this background the ILO, through IPEC/SIMPOC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour/Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) has carried out 38 rapid assessments of the worst forms of child labour in 19 countries and one border area. The investigations have been made using a new rapid assessment methodology on child labour, elaborated jointly by the ILO and UNICEF¹. The programme was funded by the United States Department of Labor.

The investigations on the worst forms of child labour have explored very sensitive areas including illegal, criminal or immoral activities. The forms of child labour and research locations were carefully chosen by IPEC staff in consultation with IPEC partners. The rapid assessment investigations focused on the following categories of worst forms of child labour: children in bondage; child domestic workers; child soldiers; child trafficking; drug trafficking; hazardous work in commercial agriculture, fishing, garbage dumps, mining and the urban environment; sexual exploitation; and working street children.

To the partners and IPEC colleagues who contributed, through their individual and collective efforts, to the realisation of this report I should like to express our gratitude. The responsibility for opinions expressed in this publication rests solely with the authors and does not imply endorsement by the ILO.

I am sure that the wealth of information contained in this series of reports on the situation of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour around the world will contribute to a deeper understanding and allow us to more clearly focus on the challenges that lie ahead. Most importantly, we hope that the studies will guide policy makers, community leaders, and practitioners to tackle the problem on the ground.



Frans Röselaers
Director
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)
International Labour Office
Geneva, 2001

¹ Investigating Child Labour: Guidelines for Rapid Assessment - A Field Manual, January 2000, a draft to be finalized further to field tests, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/simpoc/guides/index.htm>

Executive Summary

The International Labour Organization (ILO), through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC), has set as its main objective the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. At the International Labour Conference in June 1999 the ILO unanimously adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) and Recommendation (No. 190). By the end of January 2002, 115 members had ratified this Convention.

The mandate of Convention No. 182 is clear, requiring that countries that ratify it: “take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency.” Recommendation No. 190 stipulates that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms, as a matter of urgency.”

Against this background the ILO, through IPEC/SIMPOC has carried out 38 rapid assessments of the worst forms of child labour in 21 countries and one border area. These investigations have been conducted using a new rapid assessment methodology developed jointly by the ILO and UNICEF. Their objectives are: (i) to produce qualitative and quantitative information relating to the worst forms of child labour and to make this information publicly available; (ii) to clearly describe the magnitude, character, causes and consequences of these worst forms; and (iii) to validate and develop a set of methodologies—especially the rapid assessment methodology of the ILO/UNICEF—to investigate the worst forms of child labour.

The rapid assessments have been undertaken to meet these objectives. Combining statistical precision with qualitative analysis, they provide public policy makers with insights into the magnitude, nature, causes and consequences of the worst forms of child labour quickly and at low cost. These insights may be used to set strategic objectives for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in each country or region, to design public policies and to implement, monitor and evaluate those programmes.

This report is the result of investigations into the worst forms of child labour in the area of child domestic work, focusing on those aspects that make it among the most hazardous and abusive of activities. Researchers reviewed and analyzed specific aspects of the girls’ experiences relating to family, community, school and work. Each of those aspects was analyzed from a gender perspective and using a rights-based approach in order to identify the sociological, political and economic dimensions of child labour in El Salvador.

This investigation is an effort to assess the sociological, political and economic dimensions of child domestic work from the standpoint of the type of physical, psychological and social risks it entails.

Methodological aspects

The study was carried out following the guidelines of the rapid assessment methodology and reinforced through the incorporation of a rights-based approach and gender perspective.

This methodology was successful in enabling researchers to obtain a dynamic and objective perception of child domestic work, as well as of its actors, settings, characteristics and consequences.

The most important findings of the study have helped to identify key issues for the formulation of policies and actions aimed at preventing, reducing and humanizing this form of work.

Geographic location of child domestic work

In general, child domestic work is prevalent throughout the national territory, in urban and rural areas alike. However, there does appear to be a tendency for outlying and poorer communities to provide child domestic workers to urban areas that enjoy better economic and social conditions. Thus, relatively more affluent cities have become the main sources of demand for child domestic workers, while the more disadvantaged towns have become the main suppliers.

Profile of the girls interviewed

Child domestic work is essentially a feminine activity; of the 110 children interviewed, 103 (93.6 per cent) were girls and only 7 (6.4 per cent) were boys. Consequently, the report will henceforth refer to the members of this group as girls.

These girls have had little schooling, come from low-income families in suburban and rural areas and belong to family groups that have been part of an internal migratory flow that is the direct result of extreme poverty, political/military conflicts and the natural disasters (hurricanes, storms, and earthquakes) that have devastated the country.

This migratory pattern is reinforced as girls move from one town and/or district to another in search of employers for their domestic services. These are girls who are compelled to work as part of their family's strategy for survival. Their bodies show the effects of malnutrition and the exhausting work to which they are subjected, while their gestures, attitudes and language reveal their low level of education. What's more, their psychological profile is one of girls who have been mistreated and continually subjected to abuse and exploitation. Culturally violated and uprooted from their families and communities of origin, they become socially stigmatized and are stereotyped as a social group on the low end of the cultural scale.

Education

Domestic work is one of the activities that most adversely affect regular school attendance. Of the sample studied, only 30.9 per cent attend school; of these, 26.5 per cent (9 girls) do so irregularly, attending school only 2 or 3 times per week. The main reasons given for this lack of attendance were that the school is too far away, that it costs too much, or that class times are inconvenient.

In addition to the problem of non-attendance, a number of girls are over-aged with respect to the grade in which they are enrolled.

Work situation

Girls generally get started in domestic work between the ages of 9 and 11 years. More than 50 per cent of the sample reported having had one or two similar jobs previously, but had left them because of unfair wages, harassment, sexual abuse, withheld wages or physical mistreatment.

The majority of the girls become involved in domestic work at their parents' or guardian's initiative and at the request of future employers. The decision to become a domestic worker is also influenced by the girls' friends, friends of the family, and community or religious leaders. Only 21.8 per cent (24 girls) of the sample reported having sought the job at their own initiative. Others involved in the process are employment agencies for domestic services that intermediate the supply and demand of child workers.

In all cases, working contracts are verbal, thereby committing the girls for an unspecified period to performing arduous tasks that exceed their physical capacities. In addition, they assume levels of responsibility that are inappropriate for their ages.

Girls can work up to 16 hours a day, during which they wash and iron clothes, clean, cook, serve food, wash dishes and care for children, old persons and disabled adults. In addition to these responsibilities, they are often taken to the houses of their employers' relatives in order to perform similar tasks there. Some also work in their employer's businesses and are responsible for cleaning, loading and unloading merchandise, or attending to customers.

In rural areas they perform tasks in addition to those already cited, such as: carrying water, going to the mill, taking food to adult farmers, feeding livestock, and cleaning out animal pens and troughs. These tasks entail such direct risks as fatigue, psychological stress, work accidents and outright physical injury (burns, sprains, fractures, wounds, exposure to intoxicants, etc.). These risks are exacerbated by the girls' physical vulnerability as a result of their state of malnutrition, which ranges from slight to moderate.

Some 66.4 per cent of girls showed signs of physical and psychological mistreatment. Many of these girls have been sexually harassed, as their work often takes place in an environment subjecting them to employers' inappropriate advances.

Researchers also noted a number of social risks, given that child domestic workers have been uprooted from their hometowns, families and cultures and lead lives in which they are socially invisible, noticed only in connection with the work they perform. Moreover, they are considered as belonging to social groups of little value and are stigmatized through the use of language that damages their self-esteem.

As far as wages are concerned, 10 per cent receive nothing, working only in exchange for room and board; in exceptional cases, they obtain the necessary permission and assistance to attend school. The average monthly wage is 550 El Salvadorian colones (SVC), which is equivalent to US \$62.86. Most girls hand over what they make to their mothers, fathers or other responsible relatives. In some cases, employers retain part of the girls' wages, explaining that they are keeping them in reserve for the girls' future needs.

Concerning days off, 83 girls (75.4 per cent of the sample) were given ½ to 1 day of rest per week; others rested only every two weeks or each month. It was found that 7.3 per cent (8 girls) did not have any days off, and as a result did not have the opportunity to go back home on their day off.

The families who hire domestic child workers belong to the middle class, usually live in cities, and have families of 4 to 6 members. These are the families of business owners, white-collar workers and independent professionals. Some are also students. In 15.4 per cent of the cases, the families are relatives of the hired child worker.

The families who employ child domestic workers own their homes or have an option to buy them; some own up to two houses or more. Most own one car, although some have two or more.

The heads of these households have permanent jobs with average monthly incomes that range from 4,000 to 6,000 SVC (from US \$457 to 685.70). Their consumer patterns are those associated with their socio-economic group, or with the group immediately above their own.

In 66.4 per cent of these families, the girls are physically and psychologically abused; in 10 per cent of the families, they are sexually abused.

The girls interviewed come from large families (up to 9 members) who reside on the outskirts of the city and in rural areas. These families have a history of migrating within the country owing to the unavailability of work, political and military conflicts and natural disasters. The members of their families who work are employed as farm workers and labourers. Some of the girls' fathers and mothers have had little schooling and generally have not completed their basic education (20 per cent). The majority (80 per

cent) are illiterate. The average monthly income of these families is less than 2,000 SVC (US \$228.57).

Conclusions

Overall, child domestic work in the service of households is one of the worst forms of child labour.

It entails physical and psychological risks that threaten the normal development of the children who engage in it.

The moral and psychological trauma it produces in the girls has consequences that adversely affect their future fulfillment as adults.

Child domestic service is marked by mistreatment, sexual abuse and social exclusion.

It is a socially hidden phenomenon (although it is practiced extensively).

It is a form of work in which girls are treated inhumanely. Raised from an early age in an environment marked by the pressures of poverty, they then enter one of slavery and abandon, where their fundamental right to freedom is denied within a dynamic of narrow confines and grueling work.

Child domestic work contributes to alienating girls from school; it removes them from their own environment, where play and study constitute the natural ways of learning and practicing the roles of adult life. This is all the more worrisome when one considers that many of these girls already find themselves outside the school system even before becoming involved in domestic work.

Child domestic work is an activity that replicates and proliferates the tradition of female servitude and worsens family conditions of extreme and relative poverty.

From the gender perspective, these girls work in an underprivileged environment in which their employer—who is of the same gender and shares the same historical and social condition of exclusion—takes advantage of the relative power and authority she derives from the hierarchical labour relationship. This intensifies the social and cultural devaluation of the girls concerned on the basis of both their gender and their work as domestic servants.

With regard to rights, children under age 14 who work in domestic service do so illegally, in violation of El Salvador's Constitution and Labour Code.

Moreover, employers fail to comply with labour regulations concerning wages, days off, rest periods, leave, social security and dismissal compensation.

In terms of international regulations, they fail to respect the rights established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

They also ignore the provisions of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery concerning the exploitation at work of children or adolescents under age 18.

Employers also violate obligations contained in the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (Belem do Pará) concerning the right of women to be free from all forms of discrimination, and to be valued and educated without being subjected to stereotypical patterns of behaviour and social and cultural practices based on concepts of inferiority and subordination.

Recommendations

Considering that child domestic work is a practice that negates the fundamental rights of thousands of girls and adolescents, it is vital to implement actions aimed at preventing, reducing and humanizing it.

Owing to the specific nature of the problem, it may be tackled from a number of different angles within the general framework of a set of public policies aimed at providing adequate education and improving the community and family economy.

The education provided must be designed in such a way as to have a positive impact on the coverage and enrollment of boys, girls and adolescents from poor communities. It should provide them with a suitable, quality system whose curriculum is geared not only to reading and writing, but also to mathematics, to the development of occupational skills and aptitudes, and to the promotion of a set of values that integrates males into reproductive work. This educational system must gradually eliminate all the marginal costs associated with schooling that currently hinder the participation of thousands of children.

Interventions aimed at improving the community and family economy should be aimed primarily at reducing the alarming levels of unemployment, especially in rural areas. They should emphasize the improvement of women's and girls' material living conditions and development.

In implementing these core public policies, three levels of responsibility may be identified: those corresponding to the State, society, and the market.

More specifically, this study proposes that the following measures be developed and implemented by the appropriate agencies and organizations:

- Design and execute a national food programme for enrollment and completion of the school year.

- Design and execute a national scholarship programme based on scholastic achievement.
- Design and execute fiscal and municipal incentives for private investment in townships with low socio-economic profiles.
- Design and implement a national training and technical assistance bonus to enterprises that collaborate with the schools in their community.
- Expand national programmes of microenterprise promotion.
- Design and execute an ongoing campaign to raise awareness and combat child domestic work.
- Design and execute a training programme for social defenders of the rights of the child.
- Update, integrate and improve the legal and institutional framework for promoting the rights of the child.
- Substantially reform the country's Labour Code.
- Intensify and increase the scope of programmes and projects aimed at women's development, placing greater emphasis on rural communities.

The full text of this report is available in Spanish at
<http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/standards/ipecc/simpoc/elsalvador/ra/domestic.pdf>