

Gender and child labour in agriculture

Gender roles and birth order often dictate occupations and tasks undertaken by boys and girls, the conditions and hours of work, and educational opportunities.

Agriculture is still a significant form of child labour for both boys and girls. While boys are more likely to undertake activities in agriculture (62.8% for boys versus 37.2% for girls) and industry (68.5% for boys versus 31.5% for girls), girls outnumber boys in services (47.4% for boys versus 52.6% for girls).¹ Between 2004 and 2008, the number and incidence of boys in hazardous work has decreased slightly (0.5%), while for girls it has decreased more significantly, by 24%. However, hazardous work is increasing for children between 15-17 years, by 20% - 10 million - between 2004 and 2008. Boys performing hazardous work outnumber girls two to one in this age group¹.

Both boys and girls work in fields and are often isolated for long hours, facing the risk of violence and abuse.

Many girls face the double burden of performing household chores within their own households (for example, cleaning, cooking, childcare, collecting water and firewood), combined with agricultural activities, such as sowing, harvesting and livestock holdings. Taking into account both the work involved in household chores as well as agricultural tasks, there is country specific evidence showing that frequently girls work more hours than boys. Additionally, a higher percentage of girl child labourers are unpaid; and in the situation that child labourers are paid, girls are often paid less than boys for doing the same job. In addition, community attitudes, such as not valuing girls' education (partially due to different returns to education for boys and girls) and not considering household chores as work, pose additional challenges to improving the situation of girls in rural areas.

Because of the prevailing division of labour, boys and girls are exposed to different risks and hazards:

In **farming**, boys are often responsible for operating machinery, using sharp tools, spraying chemicals, and they are more often exposed to amputations, cuts and burns, pesticide poisonings, and other adverse health impacts. Girls are often responsible for carrying water, collecting and carrying wood, risking musculoskeletal injuries, fatigue, and sexual abuse.

In pastoral communities, **livestock** herding requires boys to spend extended periods of time in remote, isolated areas, where they risk hypothermia, animal attacks, biological hazards, bacterial infections, and sexual abuse. Girls are more often in charge of poultry, and smaller animals, and they can be affected by transmission of biological hazards, such as salmonella and avian flu.

In **fisheries**, boys are often involved with capture fishing and thus are at risk of drowning, hypothermia, entanglement in nets and crushing injuries. Girls are often responsible for selling and processing fish, experiencing respiratory problems from smoke inhalation, and cuts and burns. Studies show that transactional sex is common in some fish landing areas, thus exposing girls to commercial sexual exploitation, sexually transmitted diseases and potentially sexual abuse.

Additional information

[Breaking the rural poverty cycle: Getting girls and boys out of work and into school. Gender and rural employment policy brief \(FAO, IFAD, ILO, 2010\)](#)

Explains why gender roles are important determinants of the extent and type of child labour, and in access to education of boys and girls. Emphasizes that legislation must address the root causes of child labour and promote decent work for adults in rural areas.

[Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty – Status, trends and gaps \(FAO, IFAD, ILO, 2010\)](#)

¹ IPEC: Global child labour developments: Measuring trends from 2004 to 2008 (Geneva, ILO, 2010).

Analyses gender dimensions in rural employment through the Decent Work Agenda, which calls for creating better jobs for women and men, obtaining social protection for all rural workers, ensuring application of labour standards and promoting member-based organizations that represent women's and men's interests.

[Mainstreaming responses for improvement of the employment conditions of the girl child in agriculture \(FAO, IFAD, ILO, 2009\)](#)

Reviews current thinking on approaches to mainstream responses to child labour, focusing on agriculture and the rural girl-child.

[Assessing the gender gap: Evidence from SIMPOC surveys \(IPEC, 2009\)](#)

Provides statistical evidence for some of the most important gender differences with regard to child labour. It is based on the analysis of 16 household-based national child labour surveys from all major regions of the world conducted between 1999 and 2007 with the assistance of IPEC's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC).

[Gender dimensions of rural child labour in Africa \(FAO, IFAD, ILO, 2009\)](#)

Looks into some key issues that should be considered in research and policies on rural child labour in Africa, by providing gender-specific data on rural child labour and children's economic activities in Africa and especially Ghana.

[Give girls a chance - Tackling child labour, a key to the future \(IPEC, 2009\)](#)

Provides an overview on the global estimates on girls involvement in child labour, the major sectors of work in which girls are involved, and the policy responses.

[Getting girls out of work and into school \(UNESCO, 2006\)](#)

Starting from an analysis of causes and consequences of girls' child labour on their educational opportunities, describes some strategies and good practices to reduce girls' labour.