

English summary

Child labour in tobacco cultivation in Santiago Province in the Dominican Republic



International Labour Office (ILO)

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

Eliminate Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation (ECLT)

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Purpose

The objective of this research was to generate quality information on the magnitude and characteristics of the population of girls, boys and adolescents, as well their families, working in tobacco plantations, in selected communities of the province of Santiago, Dominican Republic. This was done following the base line survey methodology of SIMPOC-IPEC, with financial support of the ECLT Foundation (Eliminate Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation).

Methodology

The methodology was based on qualitative and quantitative data collection, including literature review, field visits, focus group discussions, interviews with girls and boys and their parents and key informants (above all community school teachers, directors and personnel). There were 100 working children interviewed and 50 more in the focus group discussions. Furthermore, 40 parents were interviewed. Questionnaires were applied in 35 farms. Focus groups were conducted with 50 adolescents and in depth interviews were carried out with key informants including 5 school directors, 5 health center professionals, 5 community leaders, 10 employers (farm owners).

Child labour in the Dominican Republic

An IPEC-SIMPOC survey conducted in 2000 estimated there are 2.4 million children 5-17 in the Dominican Republic, out of which 429,000 were economically active. This represents 17.7% of children. Over 50% children working are in the urban areas since the population of the Dominican Republic is highly urban. The largest sector where children work is services (41.3%) followed by agriculture (18.5%). In rural areas 29.3% of boys versus only 9.1% of girls are economically active. As in most of Latin America, most working children attend school. School enrollment declines with age. Children in rural areas are more likely to work and not go to school.

Tobacco in the Dominican Republic and Santiago

The DR is one of the world's largest exporters of cigars. The Tobacco Institute (INTABACO) estimates there are 4,725 farms producing tobacco in the DR. 85% of tobacco is grown in the province of Santiago. The production of cigars is also concentrated in the province of Santiago. The target communities of this study are three rural communities in the Province of Santiago that produce 76% of its total tobacco production: La Canela, Villa González and Jacagua-Gurabo.

The three communities studied are among the poorest of the region of Santiago, and that may explain partially the presence of child agricultural labourers. They also do not have access to many basic services such as water, electricity, proper housing, etc. Furthermore, the illiteracy level of the parents is also very high.

The La Canela Community

This community hosts the rural settlements of Platanal Adentro, Hatillo San Lorenzo and the urban area of La Canela, which corresponds to a total of 17,100 people¹ (1993). Estimating that 35% of this population is under 17 would mean that there would be approximately 5,985 girls and boys. These communities have 3 schools, 2 rural clinics and 3 community centers.

Based on the available information sources, it is estimated that of the 180 students of the School *Platanal Adentro*, 15% (36) works in the tobacco plantations (this came out from a key informant interview in the school in November 2003). If one considers all the schools and the High School of La Canela, the

¹ Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda de 1993

estimated number would be around **360 students** of primary and secondary levels that work in the tobacco farms. The research points out that one of the key factors of school attendance and retention relates to school feeding programs. The children who were found to be in child labour were slightly under-nourished.

The Villa González Community

This community comprises the rural settlements of El Limón, Palmarejo, Palmar Arriba, La Delgada and la Ciénaga with a population of 9,200 people. (*Op cit*, 1993). Estimating that 35% of this population is less than 17 years of age, the study concludes that 3,220 girls and boys are within this age group. In this community there are 6 schools, 3 rural clinics and 5 community centers.

It is estimated that out of a total of 1,800 students in the Rural Sector of Villa Gonzalez, 20% work in the tobacco plantations, which would represent **270 students** of elementary and secondary levels. According to key informants (school directors) girls and boys that are working in the plantation do have some problems in school performance, and tend to repeat school years more often than those who do not work. Furthermore, as it was noted in La Canela, children seemed to be slightly under nourished.

The Jacagua-Gurabo Community

This community comprises the rural settlements of Gurabo Adentro, Gurabo Arriba, Jacagua al Medio and Jacagua Arriba making up a total of 13,500 people (*op cit*, 1993). It is estimated that a total of 4,725 girls and boys are less than 17 years old. There are a total of 1,200 students in the schools of the rural areas of Villa González, and it is estimated that 120 **students** of secondary and elementary levels work in the tobacco plantations. These settlements have normally 4 schools, 2 rural clinics and 4 community centers.

In this community there did not seem to be the same problem of repetition of school years by children working in the tobacco plantations, however there was also a problem of under nutrition and respiratory infections among this group of children.

Children working in tobacco cultivation in the Dominican Republic

Based on their findings, the researchers estimate between 5,352-6,044 children under 18 work in tobacco farms at a national level. The first estimate was arrived by extrapolating the number of children found in the farms visited to the number of farms producing tobacco. The second number is an estimate based on interviews with school directors and teachers about the children working in the communities. The researchers estimate that children work in 42-48% farms in Santiago.

The researchers concluded that no children were working in the cigars and cigarette factories in the Dominican Republic. The factories are formal enterprises located in the export processing zones subject to labour laws that prohibit child labour and which receive regular visits from labour inspectors. This assertion was corroborated in discussions with INTOBACCO and trade union leaders.

The researchers could not investigate child labour in the counterfeit cigar factories that exist in the Dominican Republic. This production is illegal and it is therefore very difficult and even dangerous to have access to the work site

Main Findings.

1. *Tobacco is mostly grown in small family farms and tobacco growing is a family activity.*

As with most family farms around the world children are involved in all activities of the family farm. Of the children interviewed, 93% of children were born in the municipality where they life and work.

Over 80% live with both parents. 73% children work with (for) parents or a relative with other family members. 94% children gave « Helping the family » as the reason for working.

2. *Increasing family income is the main motivation*

Parents and children consider children working as a way of increasing family income. Many children work in their parents' farm or with a relative. Employers do not hire children directly. Their parents bring the children. Only 50% the children receive wages and 34% of the children who receive wages give all wages to parents.

Average earning of the children or the saving to family is significant; \$17- 43 US per month

Children use money they keep mostly for clothing.

3. *Most of the children working in the farms are boys*

Researchers found 76 boys versus 27 girls working during their visits.

4. *Children are involved in all aspects of the farm work*

Most children work in the « amarrado » - preparing the leaves for drying - which is a traditional female occupation. Boys work in all tasks: in the preparation seedlings, preparation of the land, planting, weeding, pruning, spraying, harvesting, transporting and « amarrado » that is bundling the tobacco leaves and preparing the leaves for drying.

These activities were performed in different locations in the farm. It was noted that girls and boys followed the instructions of adults, and/ or of children 14 years old and above. The most common postures of children were bent in order to seed or harvest the tobacco leaves (predominantly boys do the seeding and harvesting).

Girls traditionally do not participate in the cultivation but in the preparing of the leaves mostly sitting. This gender division of the activities had to do with tradition, as well as, as to perceived « natural skills » of each sex for the different tasks.

5. *Work in tobacco is seasonal but children work year round.*

Children work in tobacco cultivation September-April and other agricultural activities the rest of the year.

6. *Children work most days but most of them work less than 6 hours a week*

58 % children work 6 days a week, 33 % 5 days a week during the months they work. 74% work less than 6 hours a day, 14 % more than 6 hours a day.

7. *Children were not exposed to serious risks*

The researchers observed and analyzed the activities in of 35 farms in which girls and boys were found working. The biggest risks, according to the research, to which girls and boys are exposed, are the exposure to intense sun during several hours and the use of sharp objects. Children sometimes hurt their fingers preparing leaves « amarrado » but not subject to serious accidents

Parents and children recognize that working with fertilizers and especially pesticides can be dangerous. Mostly adolescents perform this task. None of children suffered work related accidents the past year. On the other hand, it was noted that none of the farms has an « emergency kit » in case of accident.

The field research also did not find situations of drug abuse, sexual exploitation, etc. This was confirmed also by the interviews with the key informants.

8. *Attitudes and social values of parents and children favor child labour*

There is a very high level of “social tolerance” of the child agricultural labour. Parents and children do not perceive child labour as harmful and see working with parents and family as a way of learning. Some school principal, community leaders, employers and health professionals feel children have no choice but to work. 62% children said they like to work.

All parents interviewed had worked themselves as children.

71% of the children considered that it is vital to start working between 6-12 years old; furthermore, 82.5 % of the parents also believed in that. Children start working very young (under 9).

From the employers’ point of view (the owners of the farms), it also seemed acceptable to have children working from an early age, as long as the parents were looking after them.

Nevertheless children aspire to leave tobacco cultivation which given the level of schooling they have is not a realistic aspiration. Parents’ aspirations are to have better housing and living conditions.

9. *Working affects school enrollment, attendance and performance*

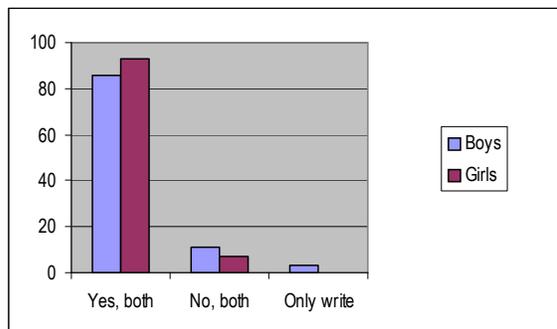
Parents and children value school and most children try to combine school with work. Nevertheless, most children drop out of with out completing primary school (6th grade). There is a serious problem of school of attendance; the main reason given is the need to work in the farm. Another important factor is the necessity of performing household chores, for girls; and in the case of boys, carrying water.

A poor attendance is normally followed by a high repetition rate. 55% children working have repeated a school grade. Almost half of those who have repeated have repeated more than once. There is a problem of overage, as 45% were not attending the classes that corresponded to their age group. Only 7 children interviewed were in the secondary education, whereas, according to the age composition of the sample compared to the national average it should have been 50.

13% of children surveyed are not enrolled in school. Most of the children who are not enrolled in school, feel they cannot read or write

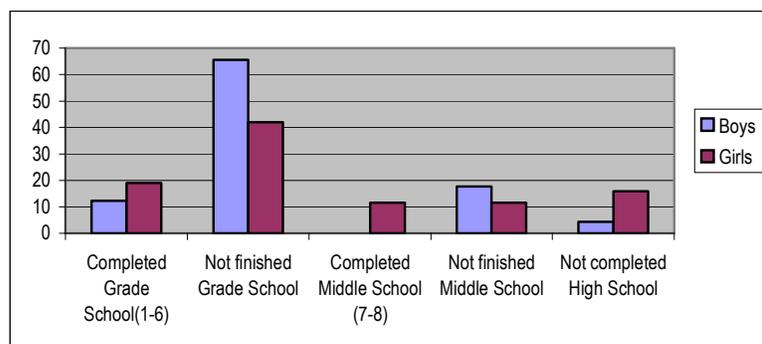
The tables below illustrate some of the schooling problems encountered, including repetition, poor performance, and low attendance, among others.

Figure 1: Level of literacy by sex



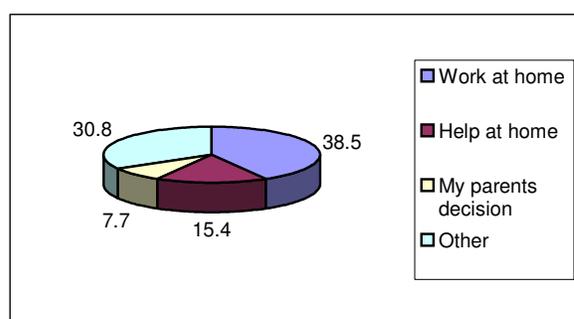
Males = 73 cases; Females = 27 cases

Figure 2: Level of Schooling by sex



N= 100 cases

Figure 3: Reasons for school drop out



N = 13 cases

10. School conditions are poor

There is an average of 49 children per class. There are sometimes 2 classes per classroom. Half the schools have no running water. Some have no electricity.

The levels of school attendance vary according to the different communities, while in Villa González 90% of the girls and boys interviewed go to school; in La Canela 83% of the interviewed children attend schools, while in Jacagua-Gurabo 73% of the interviewees go to school. Among the reasons for not attending school, the question of distance of the school to home is one of the factors mentioned.

One of the reasons given by key informants for repetition is the lack of supervision of school attendance by the school system.

Main Conclusions

The most important consequence of the involvement of children in the tobacco -growing sector is the low performance and attendance levels in schools. Children are involved in the cultivation in order to assist their parents economically. Furthermore, the children cannot fulfill their desire to engage in different activities outside since their future prospects are limited. There is great social acceptance of children working.

There seems to be little efforts from the local government and governmental institutions to change this situation. There is a general lack of awareness of the need for the elimination of child labour in the tobacco sector, and no monitoring.

Main recommendations

Due to the high number of child labourers that enroll in school, school based approaches are highly recommended. There should be systems in place such as “school stipends for poor parents who send their children to school or subsidies for school uniforms, school supplies. School feeding programs also seems to have a positive impact on diminishing the recurrence of child labour. Attendance programs that reward good school performance should be developed. Support for improving quality of instruction should be given. Non-formal education and after school programs should be promoted.

The researchers find that there is a need for the promotion of employment of different kinds for the mothers and fathers of the children working in the agricultural sector. One important step is the promotion of vocational and professional training for capacity building and skills improvement, especially targeted at women. Assistance could also be provided to the parents to increase their income by improving productivity, product quality and providing access to credit.

Regarding the lack of public policies in the field of elimination of child labour in the tobacco plantations, there should be capacity building programs and courses, for community leaders, parents and teachers, regarding the different hazards of tobacco plantations on the health of girls and boys

Therefore the researchers recommend UN agencies and institutions such as ILO-IPEC, UNICEF or ECLT should work in co-ordination with INTABACO on policies and planning on child labour elimination could start working in a more articulate ways. Furthermore, the communities should develop with INTABACO control, inspection and monitoring mechanisms for the elimination of child labour in tobacco plantations.

Finally, the research team recommends a greater investment in basic social services such as schooling, employment and health. Investment in community infrastructure such as water and electricity would reduce the need for children to be involved in household chores. Greater investment should also translate a transfer of investments in the urban areas to rural areas, and in particular, in La Canela, Villa González and Jacagua-Gurabo. This approach would, not only contribute to the elimination of child labour, but also decrease migration from rural to urban areas.
