

CHILD LABOUR AND SCHOOLING: EVIDENCE FROM SRI LANKA, A DEVELOPING COUNTRY.

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Abstract: There is a marked upsurge in the concerns expressed on the practice of child labour, particularly in respect of the developing countries where it is endemic and reported to exist in varying degrees. Child labour is generally understood to mean the employment of children in any form of economic activity regardless of their schooling status. The observed high level of child labour in Sri Lanka calls for closer examination of the trend, the characteristics of child labour, and the effectiveness of the schooling systems which, by implication, provides at least an alternative to children's time in labour. The objectives of this study are:

1. To gain an insight to the direction of change in the incidence of child labour during the past half century.
2. to review recent evidence on selected characteristics of child labour and schooling, and.
3. to broaden our understanding on the association of child labour with the schooling status of the child, and the poverty-related characteristics of the family.

Two main data sources – the national censuses from 1946 to 1981 and the Child Activity Survey, Sri Lanka, 1999, provide the data for this study. A marked drop in one category of child labour, i.e. those engaged in work without schooling was observed. Drop in the females' participation was faster than of their male counterparts. Vast strides made in the sphere of social development with emphasis on education are attributed for the above decline. It is suggested that although children were getting increasingly enrolled in school, being attracted by the facilities completely delinked from the culturally accepted levels of, and norms on, participation in the household economic enterprise. It was observed that in every age group, (a) males are more likely to work than females, (b) the opposite relationship, in housekeeping, and (c) no difference, in school enrolment. Assisting the household enterprise and supplementing the family income are the two main reasons for children to work. More than 25 percent of working children without attending school resort to work because either the school or institute is too far or the education and training given is not suitable. This finding has far reaching implications on both policy as well as its implementation.