SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE CHILD LABOUR SURVEY IN PANAMA

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The results presented here come from the Child Labour Survey (ETI) conducted in the year 2000 by the Statistics and Census Directorate (DEC) of the National Audit Office (CGR) of Panama with support from the Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), of the International Labour Office (ILO).[1] The purpose of ETI was to collect information on school, domestic, economic, and recreational activities of children aged 5-17 years in the country. The survey was applied only to households with at least one member in the 5-17 year bracket at the time of interviews, thus excluding households with no members in this age group.

The 5 to 17 year old population

In 2000, ETI identified 755,032 persons aged 5-17 years in the country. Of these, 51.6% are male and 48.4% female; 56.8% are urban residents and 43.2% live in rural areas; 39.8% are in the 5-9 year age group, 39.2% are children aged 10-14 years, and 21.0% are adolescents aged 15 to 17 years.

On average, households of persons with ages between 5 and 17 years consist of 5.4 members, with 2.6 of them being under 18 years of age. Some 21.2% of households of these 5-17-year-olds identify a woman as head.

Living conditions for many of these children are often not the best for their development, particularly in rural areas of the country. Whereas in urban areas 97.2% of people aged 5-17 years have access to both piped water and electric lighting, in rural areas these figures are 71.9% and 46.5%, respectively. Similarly, the percentage of households in the lowest socio-economic quintiles is significantly higher in rural areas.

Household chores in their own homes [2]

In analysing household chores in the own home, the focus is on children in the 5-9, 10-14, and 15-17 age groups who spend at least 2, 3, and 4 hours a day as an average on household chores, respectively.[3] According to survey data, 9.4% of all children in Panama are engaged for

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[1] For a more detailed presentation and analysis of ETI results, please refer to *National report on the results of the Child Labour Survey in Panama* (ILO, 2004), *In-depth analysis of child labour and education in Panama* (ILO, 2004), and *Analysis of child labour in Central America and the Dominican Republic* (ILO, 2004).
[2] Questions concerning household activities in the own home were only applied to children who claimed not to work in economic activities.
[3] The idea behind these minimum hours is only to illustrate the extent to which many children bear the burden of domestic chores at home, which could be considered excessive for their age, and also to set forth the differences between sexes, age groups, and areas of residence. These minima are not meant to become a standard for future studies, but are based on previous research. See, for example, *Understanding Children's Work in El Salvador* (ILO, 2004), and *Understanding Children's Work in Guatemala* (ILO, 2003), where a minimum average of 4 hours a day (28 average hours per week) is used in the analysis, and *Estudio analítico e interpretación de los resultados de la encuesta sobre caracterización de la*

at least these hour minima in housekeeping tasks at home, an average of 11.8% females and 6.6% males. It is worth noticing that the percentage for the 5-9 year age group (15.6%) is higher than the share of children aged 10-14 years (4.5%) and adolescents (10.6%). Likewise, there is a higher prevalence of long hours devoted to household chores in rural areas (13.4%) than in urban settings (6.5%). On the other hand, a reason for concern is that the school attendance rate among these children is a mere 73.0%.

As an average, these boys and girls devote 3.5 hours a day to household chores, but the average increases to 4.9 for those who do not attend school. Girls spend more hours on these activities, 3.8 hours a day as an average, compared to 2.9 average daily hours for boys. Rural resident average is slightly higher than that for urban residents - 3.6 and 3.4 hours, respectively.

Children's schooling

Out of the total population aged 5-17 years in Panama, 84.9% attend an educational centre. Attendance is slightly higher for girls (85.4%) than for boys (84.4%), and there is a significant gap between areas of residence – 91.0% in urban areas and 76.8% in rural areas. Approximately 92.9% of children aged 10-14 years attend school, whereas this figure becomes 84.4% for children in the 5-9 year age bracket, and goes down even further to 70.5% for 15- to 17-year-old adolescents.
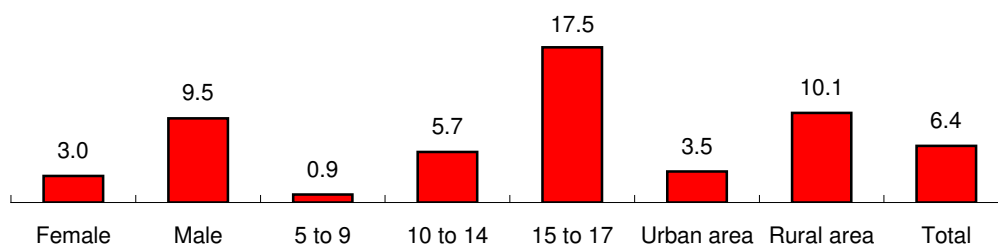
Children in economic activities

ETI estimates that in 2000 there are 47,976 persons aged 5 to 17 years who are working, which amounts to 6.4% of the population in this age group.[4] The rate of children's work is higher for boys, in rural areas, and increases with age. It is worth noticing that the percentage of working boys and girls in Panama is the lowest in the Central American region by sex, age group, and area of residence, as well as for the group of all children.

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población entre 5 y 17 años en Colombia (ILO, 2003), where the analysis is based on a minimum of 15 hours per week devoted to household chores.
[4] According to survey data, of those who are not working at the time of the survey, 19,499 had worked at some point during the 12 months prior to the survey.

Children's work rate by sex, age group, and area of residence

Most of these working children are male – 76.9% versus 23.1% of females. Similarly, 68.8% are rural residents and only 31.2% live in urban areas.

On the other hand, children aged 5 to 9 years are just 5.8% of this group, while those in the 10-14 year age bracket are 35.8% and adolescents 58.4%. This implies that working children are 14.4 years old, on average, which is above the minimum age for admission to employment provided for in national legislation, namely, 14 years. Average age is higher for girls (14.9 years) than for boys (14.3), and higher in urban areas (15.0) than in rural settings (14.2). In total, in the year 2000, an estimated 14,266 children under 14 years are working, i.e., 29.7% of total working children are under the legal age.

Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing is the sector employing most children – 53.9% of them work in this industry – followed by services[5] at 17.2%, trade at 16.4%, manufacturing at 4.0%, and the remaining sectors[6] at 8.5%.

The percent distribution by industry varies significantly according to working children's characteristics. Whereas agriculture is the main employer of boys, far ahead of trade and services, the service sector is the main industry for girls, followed closely by agriculture and trade. The relative importance of agriculture decreases with age, whereas manufacturing, trade, and the "other" categories gain importance with age. Lastly, agriculture dominates in rural areas, whereas urban areas show a more equitable distribution among industries, with services being the main sector.

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[5] According to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), the services industry includes: public administration and defense, compulsory social security; education; health and social work; other community, social, and personal service activities; and private households with employed persons.
[6] The remaining sectors are: mining and quarrying; electricity, gas, and water supply; construction; transport, storage and communications; financial intermediation; real estate, business, and rental activities; not well specified.

Percent distribution of working children by sex, age group, and area of residence, by industry

Industry	Sex		Age group			Area of residence		Total
	Female	Male	5-9 years [a]	10-14 years	15-17 years	Urban	Rural	
Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing	29.6	61.2	81.8	63.5	45.6	4.8	76.2	53.9
Manufacturing industries	8.4	2.6	0.0	2.9	5.0	4.0	3.9	4.0
Wholesale and retail trade, hotels, and restaurants	22.0	14.8	4.3	17.2	17.2	36.1	7.5	16.4
Community, social, and personal services	34.2	12.1	13.8	12.7	20.2	38.1	7.7	17.2
Others	5.9	9.3	0.1	3.7	12.1	16.9	4.7	8.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a] Results must be interpreted with caution due to the small number of observations on which estimates are based.
Note: Sum of items may not be exactly equal to total due to rounding.

Characteristics of working girls and boys vary considerably with their occupations. Over half of working children (54.7%) are farm and related workers; however, only 29.5% of working girls aged 5-17 years are engaged in this occupation, and only 6.9% of urban working children perform these tasks. On the other hand, 21.0% of total workers aged 5-17 years are peddlers, although this percentage is higher for girls (29.3%), and particularly in urban areas (48.4%).

Percent distribution of working children by sex and area of residence, by occupational group

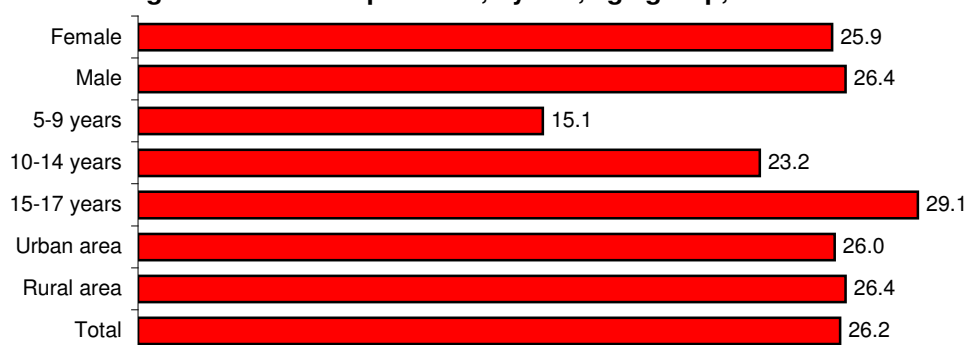| Occupational group	Sex		Area of residence		Total
	Female	Male	Urban	Rural	
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	26.5	11.4	27.1	9.4	14.9
Farm and related workers	29.5	62.2	6.9	76.2	54.7
Peddlers	29.3	18.5	48.4	8.6	21.0
Others [a]	14.7	7.9	17.6	5.8	9.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a] Includes: Office clerks; plant and machines operators and assemblers; craft and related workers, construction and metalworking workers; armed forces and not identified occupations.
Note: Sum of items may not be exactly equal to total due to rounding.

Of total working children, 43.9% work for their own family without getting any kind of remuneration. This percentage is higher among boys (45.0%) than among girls (40.6%).

Working children spend an average of 26.2 hours per week at work. No remarkable differences are found between sexes or between areas of residence, although a growing trend is apparent as age increases.

Average hours worked per week, by sex, age group, and area of residence

	Hours
Female	25.9
Male	26.4
5-9 years	15.1
10-14 years	23.2
15-17 years	29.1
Urban area	26.0
Rural area	26.4
Total	26.2

Perceptions

According to the responses given by parents or guardians of working children, the main reasons for letting them work at an early age are related to the economic support they provide, whether by supplementing family income (31.3% of total responses) or by helping in the family company, business, or farm (30.0%). The relative importance of these arguments does not vary significantly with the sex of working children. Nevertheless, a marked growing trend is found in the family income supplement argument as age increases, whereas a greater relative importance of the contribution to the family company, business, or farm is seen for younger children. This last argument is also markedly less important in urban than in rural areas.

Percent distribution of reasons given by parents or guardians for letting children work, by sex, age group, and area of residence
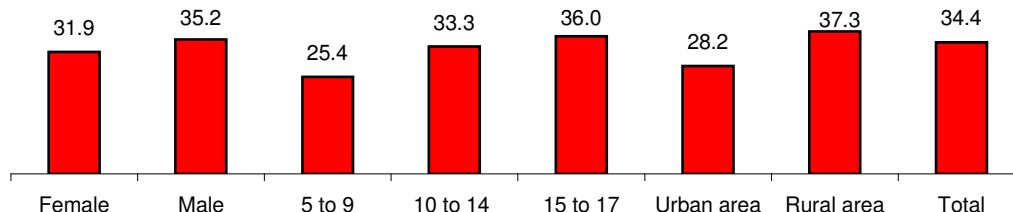
Sex, age group, and area of residence	Supplement family income	Help in family company, business, or farm	Other [a]	Total
Female	28.9	27.2	43.9	100.0
Male	32.1	30.9	37.0	100.0
5-9 years	22.9	46.7	30.4	100.0
10-14 years	27.5	35.0	37.5	100.0
15-17 years	34.4	25.4	40.2	100.0
Urban area	31.6	9.4	59.0	100.0
Rural area	31.2	39.3	29.5	100.0
Total	31.3	30.0	38.7	100.0

a/ Includes the following reasons: "Paying off outstanding debts", "The school programme is inadequate", "School is too far away", and "Other". The first 3 arguments get each less than 1% of total responses.
Note: Sums of items may not be exactly equal to totals due to rounding.

Concerning the impact of removing children from work, 34.4% of parents or guardians claimed the household standard of living would go down, with this response being relatively more important in the case of boys, as age increases, and in rural areas.

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Percentage of parents or guardians claiming the household standard of living would decrease if children stopped working, by sex, age group and area of residence

	Female	Male	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 17	Urban area	Rural area	Total
	31.9	35.2	25.4	33.3	36.0	28.2	37.3	34.4

Child labour

The child labourer population consists of working boys and girls whose involvement in economic activities violates national legislation and/or international agreements because it is physically, mentally, socially, or morally harmful or detrimental to children, or because it somehow interferes with their schooling.[7] According to this definition, in Panama over 40% of working children are engaged in child labour. Around 79.4% of them are boys, 13.5% are aged 5-9 years, 35.6% are 10-14-year-old children, 50.9% are in the 15-17 year age group, and 63.8% are rural residents.

Some 44.2% of working children in the service sector are engaged in child labour, whereas this percentage is 38.3 for agriculture, 33.4 for trade, and 20.2 for manufacturing. School attendance of these children engaged in child labour is a mere 42.5%.

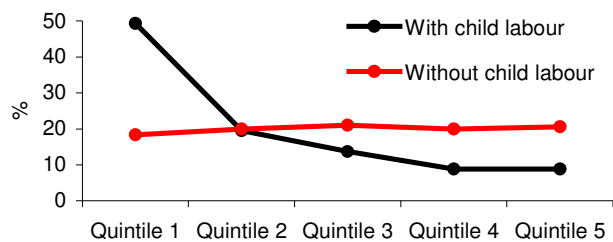### Characteristics of child labourers' households

A woman heading the household is more common in households with persons aged 5-17 years who do not work, or who are workers not engaged in child labour (21.5%), as compared to households where child labour is found (17.1%).

On the other hand, households with people aged 5-17 years who are engaged in child labour have an average of 7 members, whereas households with persons aged 5-17 years, but none of them engaged in child labour, have an average size of 5.3 members. Much of this gap comes from differences in the average number of underage household members: 4 in the former and 2.6 in the latter. Finally, this implies a higher degree of demographic dependency in households with child labour with respect to the other households. In the former, for every person of working age (from 18 to 64 years in this analysis) there is an average of 1.4 dependants (persons under 18 and above 64 years), whereas in households without child labour the number of dependants per person of working age goes down to 1.1.

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[7] Pursuant to national legislation, relevant international conventions, and previous studies, in analysing data from ETI the groups defined as child labourers are working children who, additionally, meet at least one of the following conditions: 5- to 17-year-olds working in mining and quarrying; construction; electricity, gas, and water supply; transport, storage, and loading; 5- to 17-year-olds working night shifts; working children under 12 years of age; 12- to 15-year-olds working over 36 hours per week; 16- to 17-year-olds working over 42 hours per week. These parameters are used for illustration purposes only, and are not to be construed as proposals for legislation.

In addition to these higher levels of demographic dependency in households with child labour, these households are concentrated in the lowest socio-economic[8] quintiles.

Percent distribution of households with and without child labour, by socio-economic quintile

Conclusions

- Household chores lay heavy workloads on at least 9.4% of children aged 5-17 years in the country (as per the minimum hours used in this analysis). One highlight, however, is the relatively high percentage among girls (11.8% of total females in the age group), and children aged 5 to 9 years (15.6%).

- School non-attendance problems are evident in all regions of the country, with a 15.1% national non-attendance rate, but mostly in rural areas and among adolescents, with non-attendance rates of 23.2% and 29.5%, respectively.

- The survey identified 47,976 persons aged 5-17 years working in Panama, amounting to 6.4% of the population in this age group. The prevalence of work affects boys (9.5%) more than girls (3.0%), rural residents (10.1%) more than urban (3.5%), and increases with age.

- It is estimated that 14,266 children, 29.7% of total, do not have the legal age to work (14 years).

- Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing is the main industry for working girls and boys (53.9% of total). However, services is the main sector for working girls (34.2% of them) and for urban residents (38.1% of them).

- Although many parents or guardians claim they allow children in their households to work for economic reasons, 65.6% of parents or guardians think that the household standard of living would not be affected if children were removed from work.

- Over 40% of working children are engaged in child labour. The sector with the highest percentage of working children engaged in child labour is services (44.2%), followed by agriculture (38.3%), trade (33.4%), and manufacturing (20.2%).

- Households with child labour are not only larger than households with people aged 5-17 years who are not in that situation (an average of 7 and 5.3 members, respectively), but also face harder socio-economic situations.

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[8] The socio-economic level was measured through an index that summarises information about housing (prevailing wall and floor materials, average number of persons per bedroom), sources of water, lighting and cooking fuel; and asset ownership (TV set, radio, telephone, automobile, etc.). For more details on the construction of said index, refer to *Analysis of child labour in Central America and the Dominican Republic* (ILO, 2004).