

## KOSOVO LABORER CHILDREN: THEIR AFFECTIVE AND COGNITIVE TRAITS VS. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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### ABSTRACT

Socio-economic problems in Kosovo inevitably influence the education system. The study investigates child labor (CL) phenomena, which is known as a poverty consequence. It mainly aimed to find how labor factor affects affective-cognitive traits and academic performance of children. Two groups of school children were compared, laborer and non-laborer children. A range of tools were applied to properly investigate their socio-economic status (both groups live in poverty), emotional disturbances, school performance, social support and the level of some cognitive traits such as self-evaluation, self-esteem etc. The research results show that affective and cognitive traits of laborer children are being negatively affected by their experiences when compared to the children who do not work but live in poverty. The study didn't show any difference in academic performance between the two groups, but there is enough evidence within the study which brings to a conclusion that the laborer children are being positively discriminated within the school system. The study investigates child labor phenomena though a psycho-social perspective and it came with a range of recommendations that were being piloted through a direct intervention project which resulted to be helpful for children and school curricula in general.

**Keywords:** Child labor, affective traits, cognitive traits, social support, Kosovo.

### INTRODUCTION

As a very new state, Kosovo has gone through a major transition period. It was and still is overwhelmed with a lot of socio-economic problems that inevitably influence the education system. The phenomenon of child labor was increasing through years after the war. Two socio-economic factors that are considered to be the main ones contributing in the appearance and maintenance of child labor (CL) in Kosovo are: 1/ the overall level of poverty and 2/ dynamic changes between rural and urban population (UNICEF, 2004).

Through a lot of researches, it is shown that child labor (a poverty consequence phenomenon), affects negatively children's physical and psycho-social development. It also interfere their education process (Woodhead, 1999; Hawamdeh, 2001). But, it is as well proven that poverty influences children's psycho-social wellbeing not only when the child is involved in labor. Also, academic performance is poorer to emotionally disturbed children. (Dukan, & Brooks, 1997; Thorat, 1999; Alan, 2001; Kauffman, 2001). This study was conducted in 2009 in order to evaluate if there is any link between the experiences being involved in child labor, poor academic performance and development of emotional disturbances to these school children?

The actual research's (named "Kosovo Laborer Children: Their Affective and Cognitive Traits vs. Academic Performance") main hypothesis are:

1. Laborer children have poorer academic performance than those who live in poverty but are not involved in labor,
2. Laborer children develop more emotional disturbances comparing to those who also live in poverty but are not involved in labor,
3. Certain cognitive traits (such as self-concept, self-esteem etc.) of laborer children are affected by their work experiences.

So, this research aimed to find: a/ if children involved in WFCL (Worst Forms of Child Labor) in Kosovo has emotional disturbances comparing to the ones who do not work but live in poverty, b/ if their academic performance is poorer than children who do not work but live in poverty, c/ if emotional disturbances and their poor academic performance come from the fact that they are involved in labor or from the fact that they live in poverty, d/ if schools are properly treating them, i/ if while working their self-concept, self-esteem and self-confidence is influenced negatively, f/ if they need special support for a better academic performance etc.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Design, methods and procedure***

It was an observational research with a cross sectorial design. As the most cross sectorial researches, this one also compares two groups in the same time and through different measures aims to show the differences and/or correlations between them. It tries to show the linkage between labor and children's affective and cognitive traits, and their academic performance. The research was conducted in four major Kosovo municipalities; it had a sample of 104 (one hundred and four) elementary school children divided into two groups: a/ working and b/ non-working children. Because of the study aims, only children who combine school and work were selected. In order to isolate possible external variables, an ILO (International Labor Organization) Questionnaire for Socio-Economic Situation was applied so all subjects' socio-economic status was approximately the same, except the fact of being involved or not in child labor. The whole research process lasted one year and a half. There was a great collaboration with different actors important of this field such as: MLSW (Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare), ILO, schools, and CSW (Centers for Social Work) etc.

### ***Measures***

The below written measuring tools were used in this research study:

1. Standard ILO Questionnaire for children's profile/ Screening for the Socio-Economic Status.
2. Visual Motor Bender Gestalt Test (for detecting the number of Emotional Disturbance Indicators).
3. An adapted questionnaire from IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) for emotional disturbances and development of self-esteem, self-concept and self-confidence of children within education system.
4. A declaration of main teachers for children's academic performance during the last semester. This declaration was based on schools' recordings on children's academic achievements.
5. Semi structured interviews with children. Statistical analyses of data were conducted through SPSS 17.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite researches showing that laborer children have poorer academic performance than those who do not work (Fekadu, Alem & Hagglo 2006), our ANOVA results show no statistically significant difference between the academic performance of children who are involved in work and those who are not,  $F(3, 99)=1.61, p=0.191, p \leq 0.05$ .

In general it is estimated that family income affects children's academic performance at school. Socio-economic background in the family determines success in education (Graetz, 1995). At least, parents with higher incomes are able to provide space for their children to learn as well as computer tools, adequate clothing, transportation, money to participate in additional activities etc. (Morris & Genettian, 2003), benefits that subject children, in our both target groups, didn't have. These literature findings support enough our results (children who live in poverty have poor academic performances), but, what about the impact of school attendance in academic performance? We gained facts that laborer children have more absences in school so should school attendance have an impact in the results of academic performance between the two groups? World statistics show that children involved in labor have a problem with the adaptation of teaching and working hours; they usually have more absences in school compared with children who do not work (the descriptive results from main teachers' declarations showed similar results). Logically, absences and loss of instructional courses increase the failure probability. Even in our survey, the main teachers reported large numbers of absences for the group of laborer children. So what has led this interference variable to stop influencing the academic performance of laborer children and differentiate them from the non-working group (who live in poverty as well but is more regular in the school and class activities)? So in this case we can suspect two things, 1/ it is worthy of a skepticism thrown on the number of total sample, leaving open the possibility that if the sample number would be higher, the probability for detecting a statistical significant will be increased and b/ there also could have taken place a positive discrimination attitude toward laborer children. Always the social dynamics, including social discrimination are reflected in the school practices. Studies show that teachers often have different approaches to children that belong to different social categories (such as children involved in CL, orphan children, etc.) (Thorat, 1999). In our case, there may definitely have taken place a positive discrimination, which led teachers to accept the absences and even give passing grades at the end of the semester, while this way leading to approximately identical school results between the two targeting groups. We raised this dilemma based on the CSW reports as well. These reports show that CSW case managers' and school teachers' early access to the child labor phenomena was characterized with a great sympathy for these children (Meaning attitudes immediately after the last war). This happened because in the poverty situation they saw the children's activity as a reasonable financial source for the family. Even our study's descriptive statistics from semi-structured interviews showed that 97.1% of laborer children reported to be highly supported by the school teachers. This percentage shows the indisputable support given to the laborer group of children in the school system (of course, always putting in doubt and/or reflecting if the form of support was adequate and in the child's benefit).

Furthermore our regression analysis shows that school success is determined by the age when children have started work. The earlier a child has started working, the better academic performance. This data may support the above raised hypothesis of adjustment and adaptation. By the time and experience, children may have managed to adopt a schedule

conform school activities and adjust to it. This is a hint hypothesis that remains to be examined and elaborated by future research in this field.

Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.362	1	5.362	4.802	.033(a)
	Residual	58.064	52	1.117		
	Total	63.426	53			

A preacher: (constant), start working. B dependent variable: success

**Table1.** School academic success vs. the age involved in labour

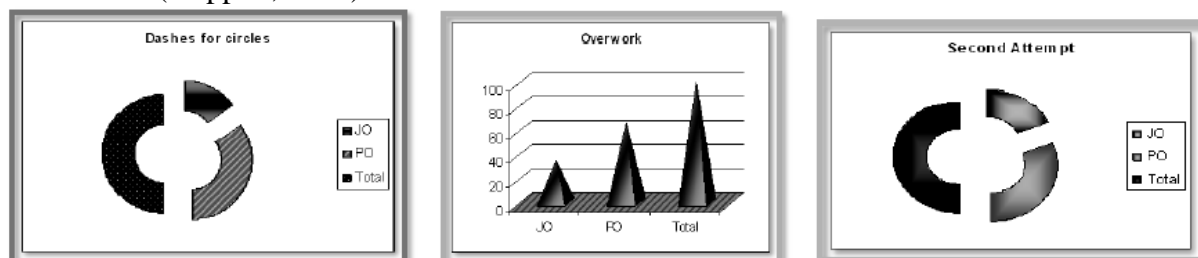
Studies show that emotional disturbances, even emotional and behavioral disorders are more common in children involved in CL than in those who do not work (Fekadu, Alem & Hagglo, 2006). Our ANOVA and regression results also show that labor is linked with a higher number of indicators for emotional disturbances. This means that children involved in CL are more likely to exhibit emotional distress than children who do not work but live in poverty. Table 2 shows these results  $F(3, 100)=2.754, p=0.046, p \leq 0.05$

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between gr.	18.457	3	6.152	2.75	.046
Within gr.	223.380	100	2.234		
Total	241.837	103			

A preacher :( constant), Labor. B dependent variable: total ED indicators according to BGT tests.

Table 2. The difference between working and non-working groups in showing more indicators for emotional disturbances.

According to Woodhead, if children feel shame and stigma for their work, this is one of the most harmful effects that may labor cause to their psycho-social welfare (Woodhead, 1999, p.49). Thus, a dose of stigma from their peers is evident in our study so far, descriptive analyses show that 51% of our non-labor children show different kinds of stigmatization toward the labor ones. They tend to etiquette them as “non educated”, “poor ones”, “with not careful parents” etc. It is important to mention that Dashes for Circles, Overwork and Second Attempt as indicators for Emotional Disturbances according to Bender Gestalt test, have higher frequency in our target group. This according to Koppitz scoring and interpreting system shows that laborer children are more likely to exhibit their emotional disturbances through aggression, lack of interest in school, impulsiveness and anxiety than through overall withdrawal (Koppitz, 1971).



**Figure 1:** Frequencies of Dashes for cycles, Overwork and Second Attempt as indicators for Emotional Disturbances according to Bender Gestalt Test

As a lot of studies' results in the field of affective and cognitive interactions, our study proves again that the affective parts are linked or are in a vicious cycle with the cognitive ones. The higher the number of emotional disturbance (ED) indicators, the lower levels of self-esteem, self-evaluation etc.  $F(1, 102) = 6.650, p = 0.011, p \leq 0.05$

model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.801	1	14.801	6.650	.011(a)
	Residual	227.036	102	2.226		
	Total	241.837	103			

Preacher: (constant), total ed indicators according to bgt tests. B dependent variable: self-concept, self-esteem, self-evaluation ect.

Table 3. The higher the number of emotional disturbance (ED) indicators, the lower levels of self-esteem, self-evaluation

## CONCLUSIONS

Affective and cognitive traits of laborer children are somehow being affected by their experiences in CL. The research didn't show any significant difference in academic performance between laborer and non-laborer children when both of them live in poverty. Descriptive statistics show differences in the school attendance which as an interfering variable should have had an impact in academic performance as well, but this is left open for being investigated in further studies of this nature. Also our descriptive results show that teachers' positive discrimination of the working group may be one another factor leading to the similarity on academic performance between the two groups.

Studies with pupils of primary and secondary schools show that pupils with emotional disturbances have academic deficits and perform worse in schools comparing with the ones without emotional disturbances (Mattison, Hooper, & Glassberg, 2002; Cullinan, Evans, Epstein, & Ryser, 2003; Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004). Also, while our research results show that labor "affects" emotional disturbances and cognitive traits such as self-confidence, self-evaluation and self-esteem, also the researches shows that affective and cognitive traits "affects" academic performance than it should have been a link between labor and academic performance as well. Based in our direct experiences with two groups of children and interviews with main teachers, we concluded that for many reasons linked with the impact of socio-economic transition, the professional attitude of the teachers was influenced so the laborer children were positively discriminated, they were granted with passing grades but there was nothing done from the schools in order to really help these children to learn. The research findings ended up with a range of recommendations for direct interventions, designed to be helpful to the children and general school curricula but needed to be applied in a collaborative approach between cross-institutional actors.

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