

CHILD LABOUR IN SRI LANKA- AT A GLANCE

DEFINITIONS

Working children:

All children that engage in economic activities, paid or contributing in the production of goods and services that have an economic value, at least one hour during a reference period.

Child labour:

All children engaged in economic activities excluding:

5-11 year — less than 5 hours/week as contributing family worker in non-agricultural, non-hazardous work; less than 15 hours per week as contributing family workers in agriculture sector, non-hazardous activities

12-14 year — less than 15 hours/week in non-agricultural, non-hazardous work; less than 25 hours/week as contributing family worker in agriculture, non-hazardous work

15-17 year — less than 44 hours/week in non-hazardous work

Children engaged in hazardous forms of child labour:

A subgroup of child laborers, whose work are categorized as 'hazardous forms' based on the nature of industry, occupation, work duration, and working and exposure conditions.

CHILD LABOUR: DECLINING TRENDS IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has made substantial improvements in the child labour arena in recent decades— this is apparent from trends in working children, child labour and children in hazardous forms of child labour. Relative to 1999, Sri Lanka has observed a drastic decline in the population of working children, which currently stands at 103,704. A sizeable decline has also occurred in hazardous forms of child labour, as of 2016 (See Figures 1&2 below).

Yet, some challenges persist. In 2016, there was a total of 4,571,442 children in Sri Lanka, out of which 103,704 (2.3%) were working children (See Figure 1). Moreover, there are still 43,714 children (1%) in child labour as of 2016, of which 39,007 are engaged in hazardous forms of child labour.

Figure 1: Population trend of working children (1999—2016)

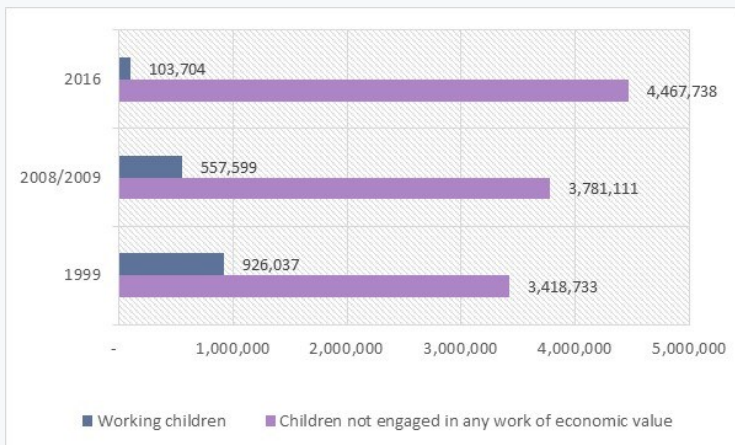
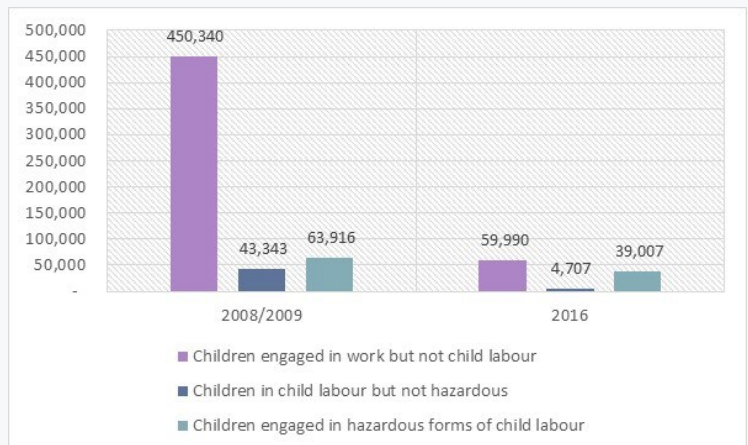


Figure 2: Subgroups of working children 2008/2009—2016



WHERE CHILDREN WORK: GEOGRAPHICAL DISPERSION

As many as 85% of Sri Lanka's working children reside in rural areas. The top 3 regions in terms of volumes of working children are Gampaha, Kurunegala and Moneragala (Figure 3). Many of these working children work as contributing family members (59%) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Distribution of working children by district, 2016

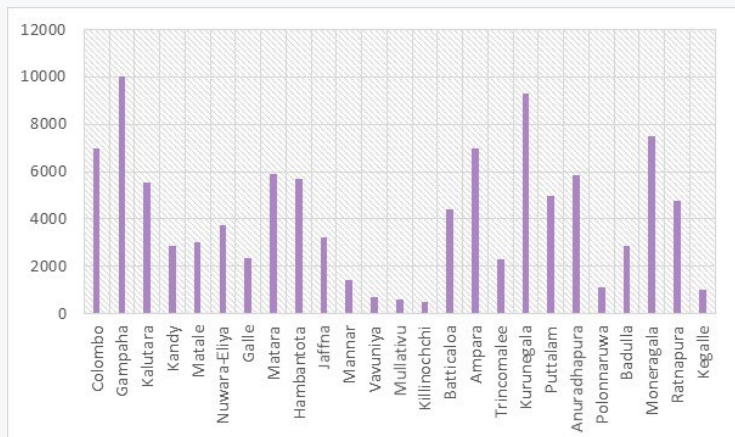
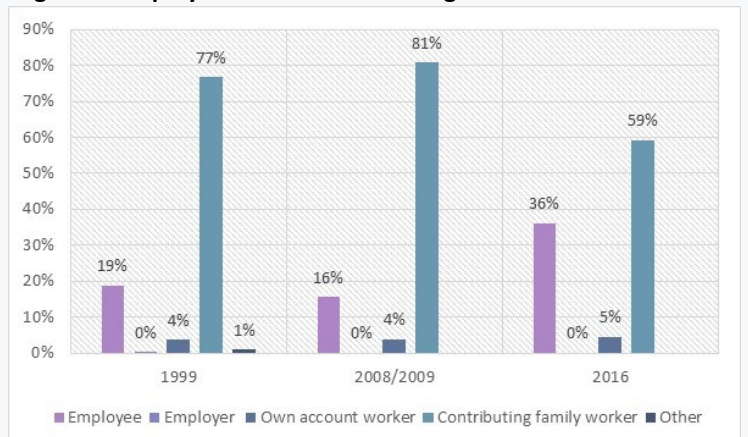


Figure 4: Employment status of working children



Note for Figure 3: See Table B23 in Annexure Tables.

Note: 1999 data excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces. 2008/2009 data excludes Northern Province. 2016 data is consistent with the 2016 National Child Labour Survey.

IN WHICH SECTORS/ PROFESSIONS DO THEY WORK

Majority of Sri Lanka's working children work within the service sector. However, children engaged in child labour as well as its hazardous forms, most commonly work within the industry sector. Overall, most working children are engaged in elementary occupations (43.8); service and sales (23.0%), plant and machine operators and assemblers (14.5%), craft (12.5%), and others (6.1%). Among children engaged in child labour, the majority was in elementary occupations (42.2%). Among those who take up elementary occupations, many are involved in labour-intensive tasks i.e. construction, manufacturing etc.

Figure 5: Working children by industry, 2016

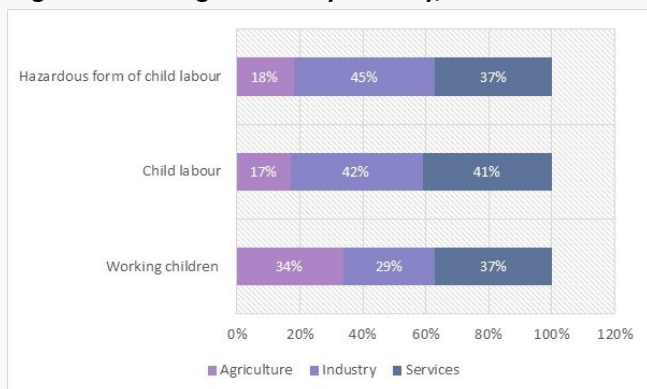


Figure 6: Percentage of distribution of child labour by elementary occupations, 2016

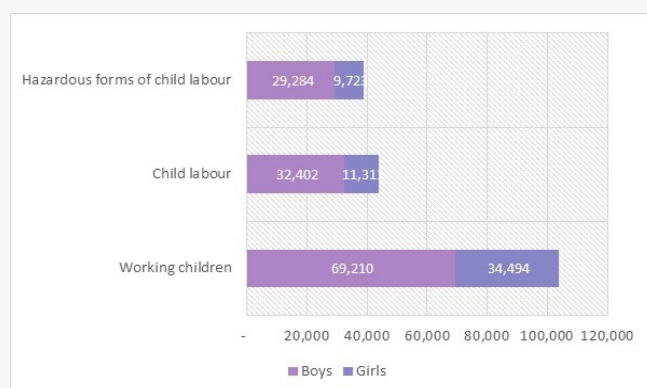


WHO ARE THESE WORKING CHILDREN

A GENDER PROFILE

The majority of working children, child labourers, and those that engage in hazardous forms of work are boys.

Figure 7: Gender distribution of working children, 2016



HOW ARE THE CONDITIONS – WORK HOURS AND PAY

The figures indicate a general trend: when girls engage in economic activities (working children, child labour, hazardous forms), there are greater deviations in the number of hours worked which tend to be more widely dispersed than for boys. The below figures depict monthly income by gender for working children (See figure 8), and the monthly income for child labour and hazardous forms of child labour (See figure 9).

Figure 8: Monthly income of working children by gender, 2016

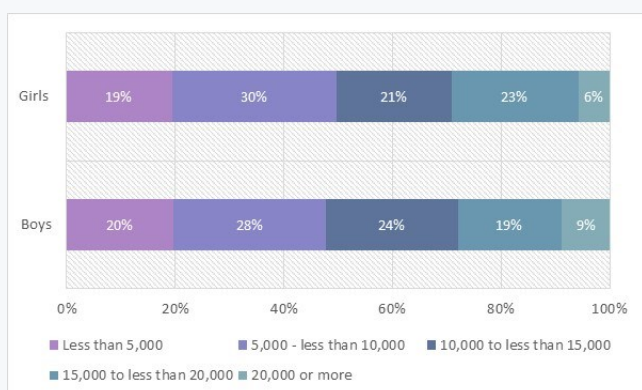


Table 1: monthly income and working hours among child labour and hazardous forms of child labour, 2016

	Child labour		Hazardous forms of child labour	
	Average monthly income (Rs.)	Average number of working hours per week	Average monthly income (Rs.)	Average number of working hours per week
Boys	11,180	35	11,665	37
Girls	10,823	48	11,294	54

Note: 1999 data excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces. 2008/2009 data excludes Northern Province. 2016 data is consistent with the 2016 National Child Labour Survey.

CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR

Parents allow their children to work in order to contribute to household finance by supporting household enterprise (36%) and generating income (19%). In addition, the overall pattern is that the level of education among parents of working children, children in child labour and hazardous forms of child labour, were lower than the parents whose children do not engage in economic activities.

In terms of family dynamics, the majority of the working children reside with their parents. At the same time, the data also shows that among children engaged in hazardous forms of child labour, the proportion of children who only live with their mothers or live without parents dramatically increases.

Figure 9: Reasons why parents allow their children to engage in economic activities

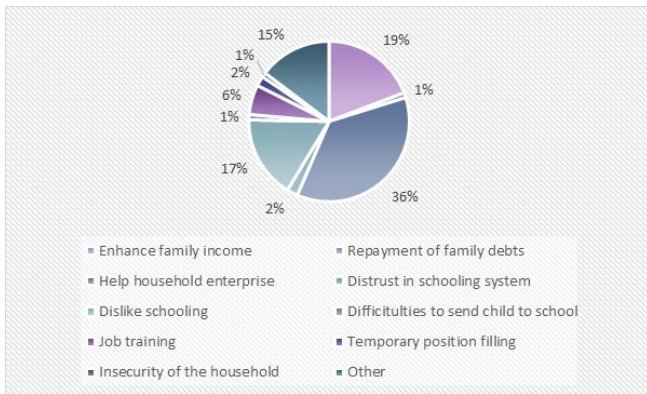
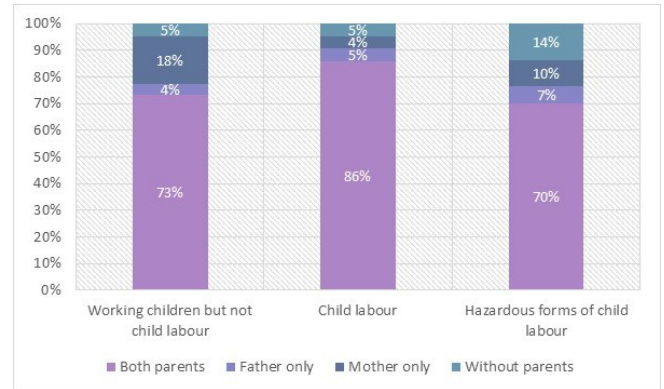


Figure 10: Family dynamic of children by economic activities, 2016



CONSEQUENCES – EDUCATION

Working children today face colossal challenges in terms of education — while 80% of the working children attended school in 2008/2009, only 39% of them did in 2016 (see Figure 11). The overall school attendance rate among children has dropped by 4% from 2008/2009 to 2016. The main reason for not attending school was “awaiting for G.C.E. (O/L) results.” School attendance among working children overall has dramatically decreased by 41%. This shows that educational gap between children who does not engage in economic activities and working children has widened, and working children are ever more vulnerable.

Across urban, rural and estate sectors, there were more working children that do not to attend schools than those who do. Boys were more likely to not attend schools than girls. Across age groups, the drop out rate was the highest among 15-17 year olds.

Figure 11: School attendance among children by economic activities in 2008/2009 and 2016

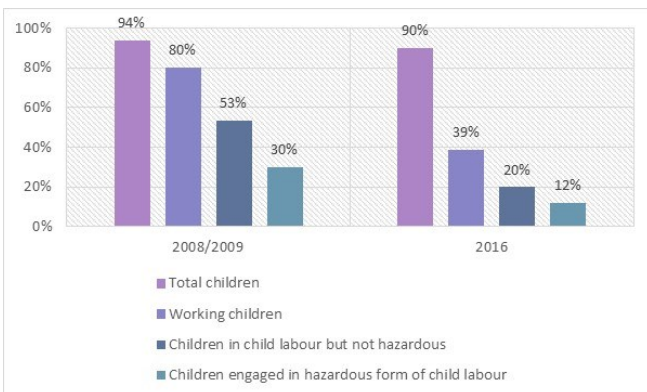


Figure 12: Percentage of working children not attending school by sector, gender, and age group, 2016

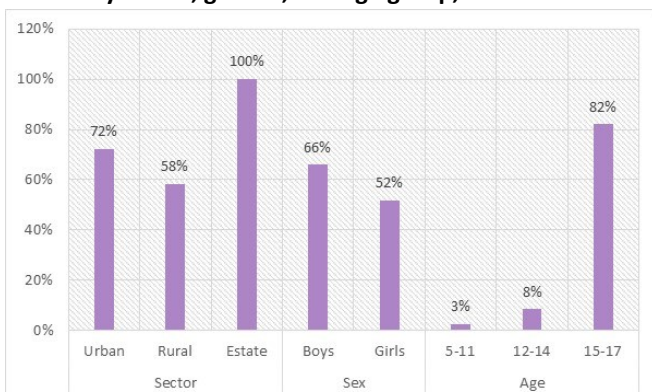


Table 2: Distribution of children not attending school by main reasons—2016

Main reason not attending school	Distribution
Awaiting for G.C.E. (O/L) results	52%
Not interested in education	17%
Too young to enter school	7%
Disabled	4%
Financial issues	3%
Studying for G.C.E. (O/L) at home	3%
Engage in economic activity, housekeeping activity, or caring of elderly person or persons with disabilities	2%
Vocational training	2%
Waiting to attend a suitable school or no school near home	1%
Chronic illness	1%
Unsafe school environment	1%
Other	7%

Note: 1999 data excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces. 2008/2009 data excludes Northern Province. 2016 data is consistent with the 2016 National Child Labour Survey.

CONSEQUENCES - HEALTH AND SAFETY

Working children are often in precarious conditions that harm their health and safety. As can be seen in the below figure, 36% of the working children in 2016 were exposed to undesirable or unsafe working conditions. (This includes dust/fumes, work machines in operation, sharp tools, excessive noise, etc.) These conditions have negative implications for the health and well-being of children (see Figure 14) and on some occasions force them to temporarily miss out on school (9%; see Figure 15). Furthermore, 38% of the parents of working children reported that their children's education are being jeopardized due to work, do not have enough time to play, and suffer fatigue/exhaustion and physical/psychological harassment, etc.

Figure 13: Percentage of working children exposed to undesirable or unsafe working conditions, 2016

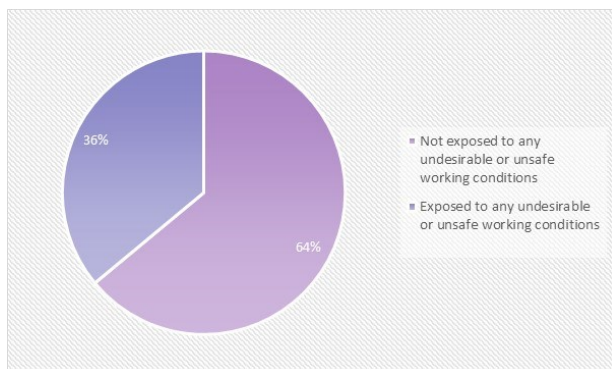


Figure 14: Frequency of injury/illness suffered by working children, 2016

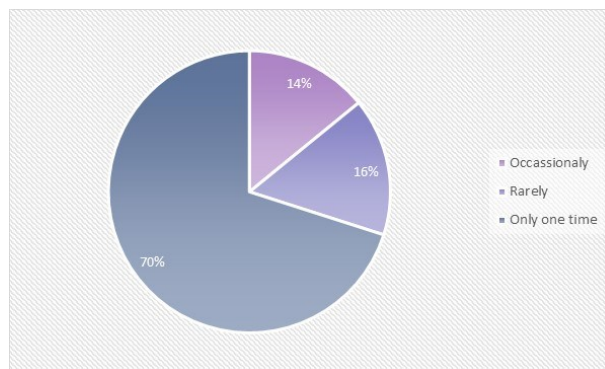
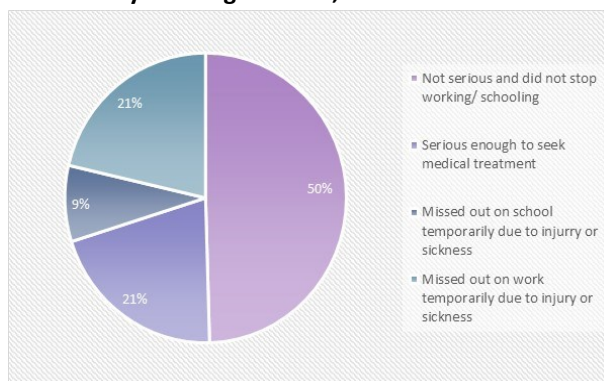


Figure 15: Degree of seriousness of injury/illness suffered by working children, 2016



Note: 1999 data excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces. 2008/2009 data excludes Northern Province. 2016 data is consistent with the 2016 National Child Labour Survey.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

- * **Need for further reduction:** There are still 103,704 working children in Sri Lanka, despite a major decline in the past years.
- * **Rural area focus:** Any preventive interventions need to focus on the rural areas, where 85% of the working children resides.
- * **Parental engagement:** As the majority of the working children work as contributing family members, reside with their parents and work to help household finances, interventions need to proactively engage parents to prevent children from engaging in any kind of economic activities.
- * **Awareness:** The school enrollment rate among working children is dramatically lower than children who do not engage in economic activities. Parents of working children themselves have relatively low levels of education. Hence, awareness on importance of education needs to be delivered with the help of local authorities.
- * **Gender-sensitive policies:** More boys engage in economic activities, child labour and hazardous forms of child labour. They are also more likely to have lower levels of education— these findings underscore the need for gender-sensitive policies.
- * **Improve working conditions:** 36% of the children work in unsafe working conditions. Illness and injury due to work jeopardize their school attendance. Though the minimum age for employment is 14 in Sri Lanka, workers are not allowed to join unions until the age of 16. Hence, government, trade unions and employers need to work together to improve working conditions and reframe the current policy frameworks to better address the needs of the working children.

All data and definitions are extracted from the "Report on Child Activity Survey 2016—Sri Lanka", published by the Department of Census & Statistics, Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs. The survey was conducted under the framework of the ILO project, Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labour (CLEAR). Funding for this project was provided by the United States Department of Labor. This material does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labor, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.

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