Title: Hazardous Child Labour in Peru: Lessons from Research

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Abstract:
According to the general definition of hazardous forms of child labour, work is hazardous when it is likely to harm, by its nature or the circumstances by which it is carried out, the health, safety or morals of children. The complexity lies in how and when to determine children’s work in a sector as a worst form of child labour to be included in national or international policies. Is it possible or relevant to label an entire sector as hazardous, and which factors should be taken into consideration when investigating children’s work? Anthropological research in Peru by the IREWOC Foundation, carried out in 2007 in Peru, focussed on working children in three economic sectors: mining, waste recycling and work at wholesale markets. To be able to label the sectors as “hazardous forms of child labour” or not, one should dissect the sectors and determine for every single labour activity its harm on children. The research aimed at contributing to the identification of hazardous sectors and activities in Peru and shows the relevance of including working and living conditions in the analysis.

Keywords: child labour; hazardous forms; Latin America; Peru; anthropological research

JEL Classification: J13 - Fertility; Family Planning; Child Care; Children; Youth

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Hazardous Forms of Child Labour in Peru: Lessons from Research
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Hazardous child labour: the identification of activities and sectors

Child labour in the late 18th century emerged with the arrival of capitalism as a social phenomenon and as a social problem. With the emergence of the anti child labour movement in England in the early 19th century, a long struggle against child labour began [Lieten 2008]. Currently, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is leading the attempt to regulate children’s work; norms on acceptable and intolerable types of employment by children are embodied in ILO Conventions 138 (minimum age) and 182 (worst forms). Most countries in Latin America have ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182.

C138 prohibits work for children from 6 to 12 years old, except for work in family undertakings and the household; 13 and 14 years old children are allowed to do light work outside school hours and for a maximum of 14 hours a week; for children from 15 years onwards regular work is permitted for a maximum of 43 hours a week. In developing countries in which the economic and educational system is insufficiently developed, including Peru, the minimum age for regular work was lowered to 14 years [ILO 1973].

The concern that not all forms of child labour could be considered equally harmful and that highest priority should be given to the worst forms of child labour was given shape in 1999 in ILO Convention 182: the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. C182 identified, on the one hand, the unconditionally worst forms and, on the other hand, the hazardous forms of child labour. C182 explicitly calls for immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of these worst forms as a matter of urgency. Ratifying countries can allow for local variations when defining hazardous forms in a tripartite consultation between government, workers organisations and employers’ organisations. Such consultation has been ongoing in most countries.

The ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has designed a guideline for all ILO members that should be considered when preparing the list of hazardous types of work [IPEC 2008]. Some sectors have been categorised as a hazardous form of child labour in one country, but not in another, such as the sugar cane harvest in Bolivia and Peru respectively. These sectors are advised by ILO Recommendation 190, an accompaniment to Convention 182, in which characteristics are listed that define the work as hazardous. National legislation can make mention of specific hazardous activities or sectors or describe aspects of work that are prohibited to be carried out by children.

According to the ILO, work can be harmful by its nature or by the conditions in which it is carried out. In the general definition, work is hazardous when it is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. This definition includes a wide variety of activities. Considering the variety of activities within one single economic sector, the challenge lies in how to determine children’s work in a sector as a worst form of child labour, and to include it in national or international policies. Is it possible or relevant to label an entire sector as hazardous, or should policies always distinguish between the several activities in which children are involved in order to be effective?
Anthropological research in Peru, presented in this paper, provides data on working children in three economic sectors: mining and quarrying, work in the collection and sorting of waste material, and work at wholesale markets. To be able to label the economic sectors as “worst forms of child labour” or not, one should closely study the sectors and determine for every single labour activity its harm on children. The research was conducted with a child centred approach, allowing us to see the way working children experience their world and the processes going on around them. The research findings contribute to the identification of hazardous child labour sectors and activities in which children should not be permitted to work, and suggests ways of how to deal with non-hazardous work within hazardous sectors.

This paper discusses hazardous forms of child labour in Peru, based on research conducted in 2007\(^1\). The paper first provides a short overview of the child labour incidence in Latin America. Subsequently, the main findings of the research are presented, focusing on labour and living conditions of the working children. In the concluding remarks policy suggestions will be presented.

**Child labour in Peru**

Looking at the regional distribution of working children in the world, Latin America and the Caribbean represent the region with a have a relatively low incidence compared to other non-industrialised regions\(^2\). The number of working children and the child labour rate in Latin America and the Caribbean declined impressively between 2000 and 2004. In 2004, one out of 20 children below 15 years worked in the region [Hagemann et al. 2006]. The agricultural sector employs most of these children, followed by domestic labour. Other activities include participation in mining, dumpsites, fireworks manufacturing and fishing. The IPEC states that “mapping child labour, particularly in its worst forms, and developing child labour monitoring systems remain challenges in the region” [ILO 2007].

The decline in child labour is not representative for Peru; the number of working children in Peru appears to be on the rise. According to ILO and INEI data, between 1993 and 2001, the working children in the age category 6-17 increased from 16% to 29% of the total child population; it was expected to increase to 32% in 2005. Especially the labour participation of children between 6 and 11 years old augmented impressively, from 2.5% in 1993 to 21.7% in 2001 [CPETI & MTPE 2005]. In 2008 a new census on child labour was carried out and although there is still no official publication, ILO personnel in Lima revealed that statistics again show an increase reaching an estimate of over 2 million child labourers\(^3\). The sectors that were studied, or at least some activities within the sectors, have been added to the list of hazardous child labour by the Peruvian government. Peru’s National Committee for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour (CPETI) stated in its National

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\(^{1}\) The research on hazardous child labour in Peru was part of an extended research program on hazardous child labour in Latin America by IREWOC. Besides the sectors in Peru, the research focused on sugarcane production and mining in Bolivia, and the coffee production and quarrying sector in Guatemala. See www.irewoc.nl

\(^{2}\) The Asian Pacific region in 2004 accounted for the largest incidence in the world, with a total of 122 million child labourers in the age category 5-14 years. In Sub-Saharan Africa ILO surveys reveal a total of 49.4 million child workers and in Latin America and the Caribbean 5.7 million children between 5 and 14 are believed to be working.

\(^{3}\) The information was revealed during a presentation on child labour at April 30, 2008 in Lima, Peru
Plan that children’s participation in mining, waste processing, or work as a porter, are among others considered to be hazardous forms of child labour [CPETI & MTPE 2005].

The research focussed on sectors with a high incidence of child workers. The numbers of child labour in mining in Peru are among the highest in the region: ILO surveys reveal that approximately 50,000 children work in mining, suggesting a serious problem [Romero et al. 2005]. There are no official numbers on children working in the collection and sorting of waste materials in Peru, or on children working at wholesale markets. Both are primarily present in urban areas. It is estimated, however, that approximately 30% of working children in Peru work in cities [Cesip 2007]. National statistics reveal that 43.1% of these children between 6 and 13 years old help in family businesses, 6.8% sell products and 5.9% help in preparing products for sale. The working adolescents in urban areas work as sellers at a market or a kiosk (19.3%), as street sellers (6.8%), or as porters (1.7%) [INEI & OIT 2002:38]. The high numbers and high risks for working children suggest the need for detailed research on exact working conditions, living conditions and consequences of children’s work.

For the study on child labour in mining, two Peruvian mining villages were selected: Santa Filomena, in the Ayacucho region, and La Rinconada in the Puno region. Waste collection and recycling was studied in Las Lomas de Carabayllo, a part of the Carabayllo district in the capital city of Lima. The wholesale markets for vegetables (No 1) and for fruits (No 2) are both located in La Victoria district in the central part of Lima.

**Children’s work: a wide variety of activities**

Children’s work in the mining and quarrying sector, at wholesale markets and in waste processing cannot easily be generalised. A wide variety of activities exist within the sectors. To be able to intervene, it is necessary to know who the working children are and which activities exactly they are involved in. Distinctions need to be made between children according to age, sex and setting.

In mining and quarrying, children and adolescents perform different tasks depending on age, sex and region in which the sector is located. Male adolescents in the two mining villages included in the research were found working inside the mines, drilling and carrying ore and debris, and in ore processing. Many of the boys work during holidays and weekends only. In La Rinconada there are also boys that work fulltime, usually to support themselves or their families. Purifying gold involves grinding the ore and then mixing it with mercury and water to create a mercury-gold amalgam, and subsequently heating the amalgam to evaporate the mercury and purify the gold. The ore is ground in a *quimbalete*; this is a contraption in which a half-moon stone is rocked back and forth, by one or more people, thereby finely grinding the ore and mixing it with the mercury. In La Rinconada boys and girls from 10 years onwards participate in this activity, while in Santa Filomena only boys from 14 years old are involved. Boys and girls younger than 10 years old help their mothers in manually sorting and crushing ore. They separate ore from debris and prepare this for further processing by breaking it into smaller pieces with a hammer. Especially in La Rinconada, this involves children from a very young age. In some cases the children join their mothers to the workplace due to lacking child care facilities and wait, but occasionally assist, while their mothers work.

Such division of child labour applies to the urban setting as well. In the garbage sector, boys and girls from 7 years onwards collect waste materials in the streets or sort through different types of material in small dumpsites owned by a local trader. At the dumpsite the materials are sorted for
sale. Waste materials include relatively innocuous materials such as paper or plastic, but also sharp objects, bottles with harmful liquids and even clinical waste material. Children under 14 years old work here only on weekends or help their parents after school; older children are also found working fulltime. The examples of Victor and Samuel, both working in the sector, show two possible positions of working children.

Samuel (12):

Sometimes I go with my mother and little brother to work at a dumpsite. We are usually involved in ‘peeling bottles’. We have to take the etiquettes of the plastic bottle and cut the plastic ring from the neck. To get the etiquettes off properly, we use a small fire to melt the glue. My brother only uses his hands, because the fire can be dangerous. If it is a schoolday, I work only half a day.

Victor (15):

I am the oldest son of a family with 5 children. I work fulltime here and don’t go to school this year. At the moment I work together with my cousin in clinical waste. We have to cut intravenous tubes with a scissors. My other cousin also works here and dismantles syringes. Next year I start work on a garbage truck. I have done that before, with my uncle.

Male adolescents from around 15 years old are also found working at larger garbage dumps or on garbage trucks, collecting and sorting through materials. Those activities involve carrying weights too heavy for children and girls. Due to the working hours, it is usually not possible to combine those activities with a regular education.

At the wholesale markets, most children work as porters and carry loads for individual purchasers. Porters are usually boys of 12 years and older; they live with their families in the areas surrounding the markets. Since the work is carried out mainly in the early mornings, they are able to attend to school. However, there are also young porters that quit school completely. The 14-year-old Leonel is an example of a young porter at the vegetable market in Lima who combines work and school.

Leonel (14), porter at the vegetable market:

I started to work after the death of my father. I knew the market because my mother used to sell products in this neighbourhood. When I was looking for a job I came here alone, went to the place where they rent the trolleys and started to work. I carry loads for people who buy vegetables here and bring them to their vehicles. I work in the morning and go to school in the afternoon. The money that I earn is for my mother.

Other children at the markets are informal sellers of vegetables, other foods and drinks. The informal sellers of vegetables pick-up discarded vegetables from formal sellers, and subsequently sell them for a lower price. A remaining group is involved in shoe-shining, the clothing industry, work in a restaurant, or waste collection in the evenings. Those activities are performed by boys and girls between 7 and 18 years old. Many of them work with their mothers before or after school hours. There are, however, also a significant number of children who work alone.
The diversity in activities places the general statistics on child labour in a different light. In the mining sector, for example, 50,000 are assumed to be involved in mining operations. Research data shows that male adolescents between 14 and 18 years old perform much heavier physical work and put their safety more at risk than younger children who only work occasionally. Also in other sectors, the participation of children is diverse and activities are not equally harmful. Working children are not a homogenous group and the differences must be taken into account when designing effective policies regarding child labour. Miners and their families took offence with the generalisation of child labour in mining; and the lack of a shared vision between policy makers and people involved can cause difficulties in policy design and implementation.

Thus, a careful reconsideration of designating sectors as a whole as hazardous is therefore necessary to be able to draw conclusions and make successful policy recommendations. Considering the variety of activities, drawing conclusions can be complicated. Sectors can, such as those that were studied, also include a number of activities that are “light” rather than hazardous. For them to be categorised as hazardous hardly seems justified. However, a closer look is required; alarming signs that are not obvious in the first instance can be determining for a child’s wellbeing, health and morals.

The role of children’s working conditions

Activities can be harmful to children because of their nature, but occasionally because of the conditions in which they are performed. A seemingly innocuous activity such as selling juice can become dangerous when it is carried out by the child alone, in an unsafe environment, and for an extended period. The working conditions and environment rather than the type of activity can determine the harmful effects of the activity. Working conditions include all factors that apply to children during work, such as working hours, the availability of holidays, working clothes, persons that children work with and their attitudes towards the children, specific tools that are used, forms of payment, the exposure to chemicals or other dangerous substances, climatic conditions, and so forth. Many of these conditions are also included in ILO Recommendation 190 [ILO 1999].

Working conditions for children are generally poor. The lack of protective measures is, for example, observed in most of the sectors. In the mining sector, most children work without proper protection or appropriate clothes, even when they enter small mines, work with heavy tools or come into contact with mercury. This can have grave consequences for children’s health. Unofficial mines are slippery, steep and stones can fall. Mercury, when handled with bare hands like the young persons in Peru do, can enter the body via the skin and, dependent on the amount of mercury and the period of exposure, causes serious damage to the brain, the nervous system, the skin, and many other organs. The young workers often underestimate the risks of working without protection, as is clear from the following quotes.

Mario (15), Santa Filomena

I worked during the summer for three weeks in my uncle’s mine. We worked in a team, most of them were adults. My tasks were most of the time entering the mine, and carrying the debris and the ore out. I was wearing a helmet, to prevent stones from falling on my head. I wear normal sneakers. It is not such a deep mine, so it is not dangerous. They won’t oblige you to wear other shoes; most of the men work with those shoes.
Arturo (16), La Rinconada

I work here every day, the lady who owns the centre gives me food and a place to sleep. I have to take the balls out of the mills, put the ore in, carry lots of water and add it to the mills. Then I filter the ore and mercury mix through the cloth. I don’t use gloves; this is not necessary.

This lack of protection is related to the general level of poverty and the absence or weak presence of regulation mechanisms.

In the collection and sorting of waste materials children also work without gloves or other protective measures. At small dumpsites, first aids kits to treat cuts or other injuries are rarely available. The direct contact with garbage causes yeast infections on children’s skin. Although some children are aware of the risks, adequate protection is not provided by the employer, as the example of eight-year-old Christian shows.

Christian (8):

The dangerous part of the work is when you can get infected with some disease. My mother once told me that someone died because she pricked herself with a syringe while working. I know that you should always be careful with liquids that come with the clinical waste. That’s why you should always take a piece of cloth. Although I work only with easy material like plastic bottles, I always take a cloth.

The lack of protection applies to all sectors; in many cases it leads to children’s exposure to hazardous substances. Recommendation 190 mentions exposure to toxic substances as a characteristic of a hazardous activity for children.

In addition, working hours can be long. The adolescents that process the ore in the Peruvian mining village Santa Filomena work about 72 hours a week. In La Rinconada the women who sort through debris usually start before dawn, even when their children join them. Children who work at the markets in Lima start early in the mornings, usually between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. Recommendation 190 states “work for long hours or during the night” as a factor to consider [ILO 1999]. These working hours not only deprive children of their necessary sleep, but also decrease security at the worksite. The wholesale markets are located in an area that is considered to be one of the most unsafe areas of Lima due to the presence of delinquency, selling and consumption of drugs, clandestine prostitution, and youth violence. Obviously, it is not a positive environment for children. Especially girls who work alone run the risk of abuse. 14-year-old Luisa argued: “adult sellers are sometimes bad; you are looking for potatoes to sell, and they grab your breast in a corner where nobody sees it.” Working children, due to their presence on the market, are exposed to an environment which has a negative impact on their morals. The following example is from the 14-year-old porter Leonel:

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4 Article 3 of ILO Recommendation 190 states that “in determining the types of work referred to under Article 3(d) of the Convention and in identifying where they exist, consideration should be given, inter alia, to: (...) d) work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substance, agents or processes, or to temperature, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health [ILO 1999: Art. 3].
The first time that I worked here I was a bit afraid. There were many drunk men who bothered me. Sometimes they get aggressive; they push you or pull your hair. Now I am not afraid anymore. I just don’t pay attention to the drunk men and they don’t bother me so much anymore.

For many children, the working hours have a negative impact on their school achievements. They are tired at school, skip a day or an entire period, or neglect their homework due to work. Work that hinders school attendance, according to ILO Convention 138, should not be permitted for children below 14 years old⁵ [ILO 1973].

Weather conditions can also determine the harmful effects of children’s work, especially since most activities within the sectors are performed outside. In La Rinconada, children live at a 5400 meter altitude, in an extremely cold climate. Santa Filomena, on the other hand, is hot, and youngsters involved in the amalgamation process complain about the heat during their work.

Finally, work in waste collection or at wholesale markets can put children in an isolated position with respect to other children. Eight-year-old Christian mentioned that some children make fun of him and his brother because of their work in waste collection: “Some children laugh about the fact me and my brother are peeling bottles. They say: ‘ha-ha-ha, you work and you earn very little money’.” Leonel, who works as a porter, was unwilling to tell his classmates about his work, afraid for potential mockery.

Work that seems light or occasional in the first instance can certainly, when carried out under hazardous conditions, be harmful for the children involved. Focussing only on the nature of the activities can give an incorrect image of the hazards children are often exposed to. Working conditions in the broadest sense should therefore be carefully studied before drawing conclusions. ILO Recommendation 190 functions as a guide in this process.

**Working children’s living conditions**

Working and living conditions are often related and reflect the general conditions for the well-being of working children. Children’s living conditions play an important role in analysing the impact of children’s involvement in a certain sector. When a child in a mining village suffers from heavy environmental pollution, for example, the exact activity that he or she does becomes less relevant.

When considering living conditions it is significant to look at the care persons around the child, the family’s economic position and existing family problems, the health problems within the community and pollution of the environment, the presence of schools and health care centres and the quality

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⁵ Article 7 (1) of ILO Convention 138 states that “National laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age on light work which is (a) not likely to be harmful to their health or development; and (b) not such as to prejudice their attendance at school, their participation in vocational orientation or training programmes approved by the competent authority or their capacity to benefit from the instruction received.” It furthermore state in Article 7 (4) that Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article, a Member which has availed itself of the provisions of paragraph 4 of Article 2 may, for as long as it continues to do so, substitute the ages 12 and 14 for the ages 13 and 15 in paragraph 1 and the age 14 for the age 15 in paragraph 2 of this Article.” [ILO 1973]
and accessibility of these services and other circumstances that relate to the quality of life of children. Poor living conditions enhance the negative effects of child labour, which in fact often takes place in poor living conditions.

Children who work in hazardous conditions are often found living in hazardous conditions as well. In La Rinconada, for example, the low quality houses made from corrugated iron are unable to protect children from the cold. The population lacks potable water and a sewage system. A health post with only one doctor has to meet the needs of a population of about 15,000. The closest hospital is 8 hours away and the health post doesn’t have a car in case of emergencies. The same can generally be said about the other mining village Santa Filomena; important services are deficient and life is harsh; there is no access to potable water. All children, whether they work in mining or not, are affected by these circumstances.

Poor living conditions apply to remote areas such as mining villages, but also to the slums of the capital city Lima. Children in Lima, whose parents own a small dumpsite, live literally among the garbage; their house and the dumpsite are in the same area. In the central part of Lima, in which the markets are located, children suffer from a safety problem. Some working children at the wholesale markets are, in addition, separated from their families, as is the case of Flor, a ten-year-old girl who sells potatoes at the vegetable market:

I am from the countryside of Huancayo. We lived with 10 children and my parents. My father worked on his land. I didn’t go to school because my parents didn’t have enough money to buy school supplies for me. Last year I decided to go to Lima. Although my parents didn’t want me to, I left. Now I live with my brother and his wife. My sister-in-law beats me a lot. Every morning I go to the market to sell potatoes and onions. I know some people at the market, but I work alone. I go to school in the evening. I regret having migrated because I realise that I like the countryside much more than Lima, but I don’t have money to travel back.

The case of Flor shows how an apparently light activity such as selling potatoes can go hand in hand with unfavourable and even hazardous living conditions.

Many working children have to cope with serious environmental pollution in their living area. In the mining sector, but also in the recycling of garbage, the lack of advanced techniques and the rudimentary use of chemicals cause serious degradation of the environment. Children who live close to these activities are constantly exposed to health risks. Studies have indicated how children living close to garbage or mining industries have altered levels of respectively lead or mercury in their blood [ISAT 2001; CIDAP 2006]. It is important to mention that living conditions play a role particularly because of the proximity of living and working areas.

Hazardous living conditions are often not discernible in the first instance. However, these conditions can be of utmost importance for the wellbeing of a child. They can expose the child to physical and mental health risks. These often hidden characteristics of working children’s lives play an important role in determining the harm a working child is exposed to. To correctly judge the situation of working children in certain sectors, it is therefore necessary to study both their working and living conditions.

**Concluding remarks: the need for specified policy**
IPEC’s Global Action Plan, which outlines key points of action, calls for time-bound targets to have the worst forms of child labour eliminated by 2016. It claims, furthermore, that the worst forms of child labour can only be eliminated when focussing on the country level and with the active participation of member states [IPEC 2008]. Countries that ratified ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour are assumed to actively participate in the determination of hazardous sectors and activities for children in their country. The ILO has studied hazardous child labour based on a Rapid Assessment Methodology and has covered a limited amount of sectors. This anthropological research shows how the variety of activities within sectors, and both working and living conditions, should be considered when identifying worst forms of child labour.

The multitude of activities within each sector, and the variations in age, gender, financial and demographic situations of the children who perform these activities, suggest that generalisations about hazardous sectors are difficult to make. On the other hand, some specific labour conditions in the sectors indicate an overall hazard for children. Poor living conditions often augment the impact of child labour. Children who work in the mining and quarrying sector, for example, are certainly working in a hazardous form of child labour, but the analysis has illustrated the grave consequences of merely living in the mining villages, for both working and non-working children. They are all likely to suffer from mine-related activities because of the pollution. Moreover, general living conditions in mining villages are often so poor that children’s health, safety and morals are put in danger, even if they themselves are not directly involved in hazardous work.

Work with waste materials could be considered a worst form of child labour; taking into account the serious consequences the work and related living conditions have for children’s mental and physical health. The care and precision needed to perform the activities puts child workers in a particularly vulnerable position. Indeed, the work at the markets has negative consequences because of the specific conditions and less because of the nature of the activities themselves. Harmful conditions were especially present in one market, which was poorly managed and lacked self-organisation. Here the focus of policy intervention could be on improving general working conditions at markets, strictly regulating adolescents’ work and keeping the youngest children out of work.

Defining sectors as hazardous child labour sectors could allow for a flexible policy in the sense that not all labour activities in that sector need to be hazardous. At the same time, however, one needs to be sensitive to the alarming working and living conditions that are related to their work. Sectors should be well defined in terms of activities involved, but also in terms of the ambient conditions surrounding their work. Appropriate policies can only be put into place after obtaining all the relevant information about the age of working children, the specific activities they carry out, the risks of those activities, the reasons for children’s exposure to these risks, their working and living conditions, and so forth. Activities that in themselves need not be objectionable may become so if the living and working environment is included in the analysis.

References

* Case studies are available on child domestic work, commercial agriculture, street children, garbage dump scavenging, the urban informal sector, fishing, mining, portering and ragpicking. The reports are available on www.ilo.org/childlabour under Child Labour Statistics: Surveys (Rapid Assessment Reports)
Cesip (2007 - unpublished) 'Construyendo un entorno social y familiar favorable para los y las adolescentes que trabajan.'


