

Characteristics of research on child labor in Latin America

Características da produção científica sobre o trabalho infantil na América Latina

Características de la producción científica sobre el trabajo infantil en Latinoamérica

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Abstract

The current study analyzed the characteristics of research on child labor in Latin America from 2004 to 2014. A total of 114 studies were identified in the LILACS and SciELO databases. The articles were categorized according to the concepts of field and social agents, as in Pierre Bourdieu, highlighting the authors, places of publication, objects, and discourses. An increase was observed in the research output during this period, specifically since 2006. Brazil held a dominant position in the research with 80.7% of the total publications, followed by Colombia, Argentina, and Mexico. The objects of study are mostly qualitative approaches (55.3%), and half of the articles are indexed in Qualis B1 journals or higher. However, only 14.9% of the studies had received funding. The authors have various backgrounds, featuring participation by psychologists (26.3%), nurses (17.5%), and economists (13.2%). The studies are situated in subareas of the Human Sciences, consisting of the discourses of Social and Developmental Psychology; Health Sciences, featuring epidemiological studies, based on concepts from occupational health nursing; and the subarea of Applied Social Sciences with studies in economics. The objects of studies on child labor focus their interest on its relationship to health, education, work, and social assistance, with little interdisciplinarity in the publications.

Child Labor; Chil; Adolescent; Qualitative Research

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Introduction

Child labor, as a product of the social world, is structured by (and in turn structures) various social practices. In the scientific field, research on child labor has focused on understanding the multiple objects of study and discussions from various points of view referring to health, work, law, education, economics, politics, and social assistance. Despite progress in recent decades in the legal framework for the protection of children and adolescents in Brazil and the social mobilization in relation to child labor, there are still important gaps in confronting it, which poses a major social problem, especially in developing countries.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that in 2015, 168 million children and adolescents from 5 to 17 years of age were participating in the labor market worldwide. In Latin America alone, there were 12.5 million children. The ban and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including drug trafficking and homicides and sexual and commercial exploitation, is one of the Sustainable Development Goals, providing for its eradication in all its forms by the year 2025^{1,2}.

Despite the increase in research on child labor, such research consists of studies that seek to identify its general characteristics³ and/or assess social policies and program⁴ aimed at its elimination. The review studies address specific problems such as working children's socioeconomic and demographic characteristics⁵ and the consequences for their health and education⁶. No reviews were found that analyze the Latin American research output as a whole, considering the authors, methods, objects, and principal contributions.

Given the above, the current review investigates the characteristics of the scientific research on child labor in Latin America since ratification of two important International Labor Conventions conducted by the ILO, which constitute the two main pillars of the global struggle against child labor, namely n. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment (1973) and n. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor (1999), enforced since 2003 by the vast majority of the ILO member states⁷.

It is thus pertinent to understand how the space for research on child labor plays out in the scientific field, in order to analyze the objects of interest in greater detail, the ones considered important and interesting by peers to the point of meriting research efforts, as well the legitimate discourses, that is, the discourses on a given object of study that are recognized and consecrated by peers as adequate for explaining the reality. Since these discourses are the product of the scientific field, they may be competing with each other, according to the different positions occupied by the researchers^{8,9}.

As the theoretical reference, we adopt the approach of Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, specifically based on the notion of scientific field as a relatively autonomous space with its own laws and logics, including relationships of force and domination, and as such making impositions and requests; in this circuit, what is at stake is the monopoly of scientific authority and of scientific competence, defined here as the capacity to speak and act legitimately, which is socially acknowledged for an agent by the objective relationships between the agents in that space.

The space for research on child labor in Latin America includes the relations of force of the agents in the various subareas of the scientific field engaged in competition over a common object, i.e., the delineation of a field of problems, the methods, and the existing theories in the social hierarchy in structuring their capital of scientific credit^{8,10,11}.

The current study did not seek to reconstruct the entire structure of this specific and dated scientific space, but to describe the authors and analyze the set of objects of studies, the legitimate discourses, the places of publication, and the issues in the debate on this theme in Latin America in recent years.

In short, this study grasped some elements of the research and the social properties of the authors and their objects, drawing on analysis of the characteristics of the research on child labor in Latin America from 2004 to 2014.

Methodological aspects

A literature review was conducted of the articles published from 2004 a 2014, representing the first ten years since publication of the National Plan for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and for the Protection of Adolescent Workers, considered a milestone in the Brazilian state's action for the elimination of child labor. The databases LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Literature in the Health Sciences) and SCIELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) were chosen because they index studies conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean. We used the descriptors in Social Sciences in Health (DeCS) in Portuguese and Spanish: *trabalho de menores; trabajo de menores; trabalho infantil; trabalho de crianças; trabalho de adolescentes; trabalho infanto-juvenil; trabalho precoce*.

Two independent reviewers read the abstracts of the articles that had been identified. Eligibility criteria were studies published in article format, that addressed child labor, and with their full texts available. Articles were excluded if they did not address the theme of child labor, did not present the full text, or that were not available on the internet, as well as duplicate publications between the databases and texts in other formats such as book chapters, technical standards, manuals, theses, dissertations, monographs, technical reports, and institutional documents.

The data analysis was preceded by reading and cataloguing the articles and establishing a databank in Excel (<https://products.office.com/>) spreadsheet, systematizing information on the scientific periodicals, the authors, and the objects of studies, which were grouped in themes that emerged during analysis of the selected articles.

Analysis of the authors used the available information in the articles, considering only the first author. In the absence of such information, the second author was considered. Information on the authors was verified against the available information in the records from each country's respective unified information system, providing data on the former and current background of students and researchers.

This survey of the research output on child labor thus included four dimensions of the scientific field, based on the following categories ^{8,9,10,11}.

- (a) Characteristics of the articles' production: year de publication, countries of the studies' production, region, Qualis score of the scientific journals, research approaches, funding, and journals' areas of knowledge;
- (b) Authors' characteristics: schooling, place in the scientific field, and undergraduate background;
- (c) Objects of study: central theme of the articles;
- (d) Legitimate discourses: points of view presented by the authors that appear the most in each of the key themes.

Classification of periodicals according to the Capes (Graduate Studies Coordinating Board) Qualis system (four-year period 2013-2016) considered the area of the periodical's origin, i.e., the area of the journal's greatest affiliation, as described in its introductory material. As for the data on financing, research was classified as funded if such information was provided explicitly in the text.

Analysis of the objects of study and legitimate discourses used their saturation as the criterion in the assessment performed by the two researchers at separate moments.

Further, in order to facilitate the analysis, we used Stata (<https://www.stata.com>) version 12 for tabulation and calculation of frequencies, to be represented in tables.

Results

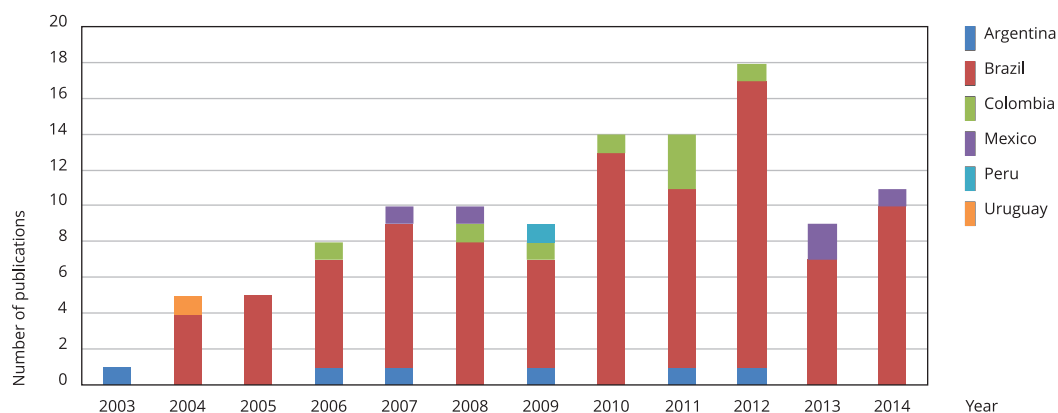
Research conditions

Combining the search criteria, 161 articles were located, referring to the theme of child labor in the target period. After exclusion of articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, since they only addressed child labor secondarily, 114 articles were selected that comprised this study's corpus.

The analysis of the research on child labor shows a growth in the last ten years (Figure 1), especially since 2006, reflecting greater interest both by the journals and by the researchers in publishing on this theme.

Figure 1

Distribution of research output on child labor by year and country of publication in the LILACS and SciELO databases, 2004-2014.



Brazil is the country with a dominant position in this research output in Latin America, with the most publications in all the years. Brazil published the majority of the studies (80.7%), followed by Colombia (7%), Argentina (5.3%), and Mexico (4.4%). This leading position for Brazil's research output is expected, since it was the first country in Latin America to implement (in 1992) the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC)¹², proposed by the ILO, earmarking funds to combat child labor in all its forms and wherever it appears nationwide; this fact may have sparked interest in conducting scientific studies (Table 1).

In Brazil, the Southeast region (57%) has most of the research output, in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, followed by the Northeast (23.7%), with studies in Paraíba, Bahia, and Rio Grande do Norte. There were fewer studies in the South (10.8%), in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, Central (4.3%), with studies in Distrito Federal, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul, and the North (4.3%), with studies in Pará only.

The fact that the majority of the publications were from the Southeast, Northeast, and South can be explained by the conditions allowing the existence of graduate studies courses that address child labor, as well as specific interests by research groups in these regions, which tend to have a structuring effect on the representations and practices in the scientific field and are capable of expanding the number of publications and of lending legitimacy to the interest in various themes.

As for the social conditions of the research, the articles are indexed in a variety of journals corresponding to three major areas of knowledge: Human Sciences, largely studies with approaches in psychology, education, and sociology; Health Sciences, precisely with approaches in nursing, public health and collective health; and Applied Social Sciences, related to economics, social work, and law. These studies are the product of a highly diversified scientific space with distinct forms of knowledge and points of view (Table 1).

These three major areas, Human Sciences, Health Sciences, and Applied Social Sciences, are considered subareas constituting the scientific space of child labor in Latin America and thus orient the debates in the research output. These subareas are relatively heterogeneous and autonomous and are constantly rebuilt and reshaped by the approaches to different objects of studies by the different authors.

As for classification of the journals in the Capes Qualis System (Figure 2), 50% of the articles are indexed in journals with high indicators, ranging from B1 to A1, with a considerable percentage of articles in Qualis A journals, representing 30% of all the articles analyzed. Further, only 15.8% of the articles are published in journals that have zero impact factor, classified from B3 to B5.

Table 1

General characteristics of research output on child labor in the LILACS and SciELO databases, 2004-2014.

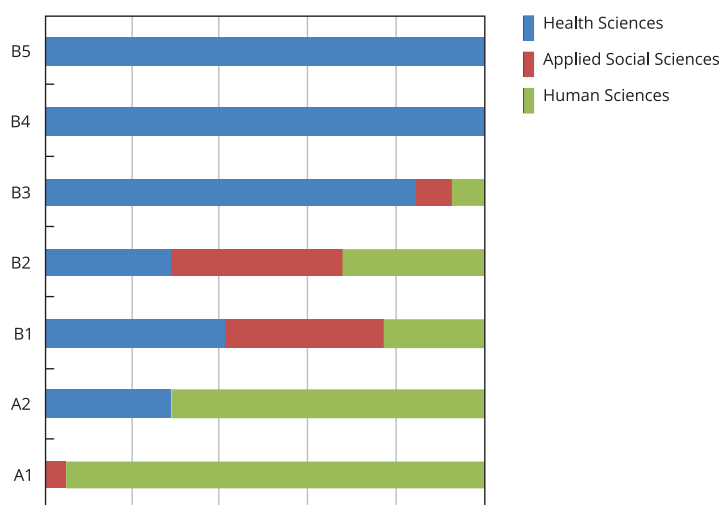
Variables	n (N = 114)	%
Year of publication		
2004	5	4.39
2005	6	4.39
2006	8	7.02
2007	11	9.76
2008	10	8.77
2009	9	7.89
2010	14	12.28
2011	14	12.28
2012	18	15.79
2013	9	7.89
2014	11	9.65
Country of production of articles		
Brazil	93	81.58
Colombia	8	7.02
Argentina	6	5.26
Mexico	5	4.39
Peru	1	0.88
Paraguay	1	0.88
Uruguay	1	0.88
Areas of knowledge		
Human Sciences	54	47.40
Health Sciences	39	34.20
Applied Social Sciences	21	18.40
Qualis scores of periodicals		
A1	21	18.40
A2	14	12.30
B1	22	19.30
B2	31	27.20
B3	13	11.40
B4	1	0.90
B5	4	3.50
Not recorded	8	7.00
Research approach		
Qualitative	63	55.30
Quantitative	45	39.50
Not specified	6	5.30
Financing		
No	97	85.10
Yes	17	14.90

The Human Sciences have published their research results in the most prestigious journals in the area, classified as A1 and A2. In the Health Sciences, the studies are indexed in journals with less academic recognition, with Qualis scores from B3 to B5. Finally, findings in the Applied Social Sciences have been published in medium-prestige journals, with Qualis scores from B1 to B2.

The data suggest a difference in the importance assigned to child labor. While the Human Sciences appear to value child labor as an issue, the Health Sciences apparently still view it as a peripheral issue,

Figure 2

Qualis score of articles on child labor published in the LILACS and SciELO daabases, 2004-2014.



probably producing difficulty in publishing studies in the best journals in the area and limiting the debate to less visible circles.

Qualitative studies comprise the majority of the research output (55.3%), which is also consistent with the predominance of publications on child labor in the area of Human Sciences. Since this is an area of knowledge that adopts the theoretical concepts of social representations, experiences, values, and practices; the use of methodological tools in qualitative research, such as individual interviews, observation, and focus groups, is possibly more fitting for understanding the social reality of child labor¹³.

The articles with quantitative approaches (39.5%) have the lowest output, and their objects of interest are distributed across journals in the areas of Health Sciences and Applied Social Sciences and produce data with questionnaires, physical examinations, and laboratory tests as well as secondary data and document searches.

The social conditions for the production of studies (Table 1) show that only 14.9% of the studies on child labor received funding, which shows a possible disinterest by public research funding agencies, government institutions, and institutions from the private sector in participating in the development of research on child labor. This also suggests a lack of investment in calls for research projects related to child labor.

Of the 17 research projects that received funding, 11 were linked to the area of Health Sciences, with studies conducted in Brazil only, followed by the Human Sciences with four projects funded, and the Applied Social Sciences with only one project funded. Funding for studies in Brazil came mostly from two agencies, the Capes and the Brazilian National Research Council (CNPq).

Government agencies mainly show interest in studies that report on child labor with the legitimate discourses of Health Sciences. In the three areas of knowledge, many of the studies were conducted by students supported by undergraduate, Master's, and PhD scholarships from the research support agencies in the respective countries for professional training at the undergraduate and graduate levels, possibly denoting low investment in scientific projects in the space of child labor.

Characteristics of the studies' authors

The analysis reveals that the authors' cultural capital (Table 2), measured by their academic degrees during the study period, shows a concentration of research output by authors with Master's, PhDs, and associate professorships (71.1%), mainly affiliated with the scientific field.

The authors' professional backgrounds (Table 2) are quite varied and correspond to the distribution of publications on child labor in the scientific subareas. In the journals in the Human Sciences, it consists mostly of authors trained in psychology (26.3%), in the Health Sciences in nursing (17.5%), and in the Applied Social Sciences in economics (13.2%). As expected, most of the authors publish in journals that are consistent with their own background, suggesting little integration between the subareas.

The various lines of the authors' professional training are consistent with the order of research output in the scientific space of child labor, that is, those who publish in a given niche are the ones with training in that area. There was little interdisciplinarity in the publications. This is in line with Bourdieu^{8,11}, according to whom the scientific order establishes the scientific interventions, places of publication, and objects of research. Thus, all the authors with a given social background have in common a set of fundamental schemes of perception, commonly used to classify and qualify the objects in the different domains of their practice¹³.

As for the social position of the authors' occupations (Table 2) within the scientific field, public university professors (51.8%) are the majority and mainly exercise activities in teaching and research; followed by students (33.3%), representing undergraduate, Master's, and PhD students belonging to research groups in public universities. Not surprisingly, in data on productivity requirements that are inherent to academic career advancement, university professors and students (89.5%) are the most interested in publishing on child labor. Meanwhile, the authors affiliated services (10.5%) are quite diverse and affiliated with government institutions, specifically municipal governments and departments, hospitals, and courts.

Whatever the position occupied by the authors, this position is an object of struggle and entails the relations of forces and objective relations between the different authors. That is, it situates the authors' points of view, related to their position in the scientific space, the legitimate objects, and the approaches to the objectivation of child labor^{8,11}.

Objects of studies according to subareas in the journals

Analysis of the research output revealed ten themes, the objects of interest that appeared in the three subareas comprising the scientific space of child labor. These are constitutive themes of the legitimate discourses⁹ (Table 3).

Child labor in the subarea of the Health Sciences

The analysis shows that the 39 articles indexed in the scientific journals corresponding to this sub-space present distinct priority questions and are distributed across six research themes: *Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics of Child Labor*; *Labor by Children and Adolescents and the Consequences for Health*; *Child Labor and Education*; *Child Labor and Social Vulnerability*; *Urban Child Labor*; and *Representations and Experiences in Child Labor* (Table 3).

The seven research themes featured three legitimate discourses. The first refers to studies that addressed the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of child labor, interested in identifying its patterns, trends, and conditioning factors.

The second legitimate discourse addresses the relationship between child labor and the consequences for health, such as: musculoskeletal disorders, work accidents, mandatory reporting, food security, health surveys, and quality of life in children and adolescents that are working.

In structuring their objects of study, these two discourses share reflection on (and arguing of) biomedical knowledge, based particularly on the concepts and practices of occupational health nursing, such as: occupational history, symptoms, and health problems in working children and adolescents.

Table 2

Characterization of scientific publications on child labor, indexed in the LILACS and SciELO databases, 2004-2014.

Indicator	n (N = 114)	%
Degrees		
PhD	48	42.1
Master's	28	24.6
Associate Professorship	5	4.4
Additional graduate training		
Post-doctorate	21	18.4
Specialization	5	4.4
Other	7	6.1
Undergraduate training		
Psychology	30	26.3
Nursing	20	17.5
Economics	15	13.2
Social sciences	10	8.8
Medicine	7	6.1
Teaching	4	3.5
Social work	3	2.6
Physical therapy	2	1.8
Physical education	2	1.8
Other	21	18.4
Occupation		
Public university professors	59	51.8
Public university students	38	33.3
Services	12	10.5
Private university professors	5	4.4

The objects of study in this subarea also use epidemiology as the main methodology, predominantly with cross-sectional and ecological studies. In recent decades, epidemiological approaches have impacted the relative contribution of Brazilian science to research output in Latin America and the world, focusing on issues such as health conditions, determinants, and the implementation of policies and actions ^{14,15}.

The third legitimate discourse in the subarea of health is the relationship between child labor and education, with interest in the following: students' practices in relation to school, work, and the future and school delay and school dropout, all commonly associated with entering and remaining in the work market.

Interdisciplinarity is more common in this subarea, which may be related to expansion of the field of collective health ¹⁶, especially in graduate studies programs, which favor the plurality and heterogeneity of epistemological and operational references in constructing the social reality ^{17,18}.

Child labor in the subarea of Human Sciences

The results show that the 55 articles indexed in the scientific journals in this subarea present distinct legitimate objects of study, but which can be grouped in six study themes (Table 3). These feature three legitimate discourses: *Experience of Child Labor*; *Domestic Child Labor*; and *Income Transfer Programs and Child Labor*. These objects are mainly structured in the discourses of Social and Developmental Psychology.

Table 3

Object of studies on child labor by areas of knowledge, in the LILACS and SciELO databases, 2004-2014.

Themes of studies related to child labor	Periodicals' areas of knowledge			Authors (year) *
	Human Sciences	Health Sciences	Applied Social Sciences	
1. Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of child labor		Time trends in child labor; Correlation between social indicators and social welfare programs; Socioeconomic profile; Lifestyle; Childhood development indicators		Guimarães & Asmus ³ (2010); Guimarães et al. ²⁰ (2009); Acosta et al. ²¹ (2012); Núñez Zambrano et al. ²² (2009); Tuñón & Salvia ²³ (2012); Acevedo et al. ²⁴ (2007); Carvalho ²⁵ (2008); Helal ²⁶ (2010)
2. Labor by children and adolescents and the consequences for health		Prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders; Work accidents; Health problems; Compulsory reporting; Food security; Health survey; Quality of life		Caetano et al. ²⁷ (2008); Acosta et al. ²¹ (2012); Asmus & Volney ²⁸ (2004); Vieira et al. ²⁹ (2012); Fraga-Maia & Santana ³⁰ (2005); Campos et al. ³¹ (2014); Pires et al. ³² (2012); Pimenta et al. ³³ (2011); Navarro-Mancilla et al. ³⁴ (2011); Silveira & Robazzi ³⁵ (2006); Silveira & Robazzi ³⁶ (2008); Robazzi et al. ³⁷ (2007); Meneses et al. ³⁸ (2012); Asmus et al. ³⁹ (2005); Barker et al. ⁴⁰ (2007); Pedraza Avella & Ribero Medina ⁴¹ (2006)
3. Child labor and education	Schooling process; Vocational training; Education and health; Subjectivity and disciplinary practices; Students' practice with school, work, and the future	Work and studies; School dropout	Determinants of work and schooling	Sousa & Aberto ⁴² (2008); Macedo et al. ⁴³ (2012); Abadía et al. ⁴⁴ (2009); Giarola Cecilio & Penha Silveira ⁴⁵ (2014); Ávila ⁴⁶ (2007); Silveira et al. ⁴⁷ (2012); Feitosa & Dimenstein ⁴⁸ (2004)
4. Child labor and social vulnerability	Risks	Child labor on the streets; Begging and prostitution; Prevention of sexual exploitation		Cruz & Assunção ⁴⁹ (2008); Baccarat & Mello-Jorge ⁵⁰ (2009); Alberto et al. ⁵¹ (2010); Machado & Silva ⁵² (2007)
5. Urban child labor		Profile of urban child labor; Relationship to health; Working teenagers	Income and labor market structures; Increase in the minimum legal age for working	Gonçalves et al. ⁵³ (2012); Martins et al. ⁵⁴ (2013); Ramalho & Mesquita ⁵⁵ (2013); Campos et al. ⁵⁶ (2011); Ferro & Kassouf ⁵⁷ (2005)

(continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Themes of studies related to child labor	Periodicals' areas of knowledge				Authors (year) *
	Human Sciences	Health Sciences	Applied Social Sciences		
6. Representations and experiences in child labor	Experience with play in their daily lives; Meaning of childhood; Recognition of rights; Meaning of work; Work and school; Motivation, family organization, and socialization practices; Job placement process; Informal labor; Formal labor; Unemployment; Experience of work for adolescents serving juvenile sentences; Daily experience with exploited labor; Research output	Work practices	Exploitation of child labor		Oliveira et al. ⁵⁸ (2009); Mattos & Chaves ⁵⁹ (2006); Santos & Chaves ⁶⁰ (2010); Alberto & Santos ⁶¹ (2011); Lima et al. ⁶² (2011); Oliveira et al. ⁶³ (2006); Silva ⁶⁴ (2011); Dias et al. ⁶⁵ (2007); Oliveira ⁶⁶ (2011); Thomé et al. ⁶⁷ (2010); Oliveira et al. ⁶⁸ (2006); Amazarray et al. ⁶⁹ (2009); Rodríguez ⁷⁰ (2004); Moreyra ⁷¹ (2007); Oliveira et al. ⁷² (2010); Lourenço ⁷³ (2014); Marchi ⁷⁴ (2013); Lima & Almeida ⁷⁵ (2010); Prado ⁷⁶ (2013); Kassouf ⁷⁷ (2007); Acevedo et al. ⁷⁸ (2011); Invernizzi & Tomé ⁷⁹ (2007); Cardoso & Souza ⁸⁰ (2011); Pico Merchan & Salazar Henao ⁸¹ (2008); Miranda Juárez ⁸² (2013); Feitosa & Dimenstein ⁴⁸ (2004); Fonseca ⁸³ (2010); Val & Tambellini ⁶ (2006); Rausky ⁸⁴ (2009); Morais & Fraga ⁸⁵ (2008); Frenzel & Bardagi ⁵ (2014); Innamorato & Reyes ⁸⁶ (2013); Jacobina & Costa ⁸⁷ (2007); Sales ⁸⁸ (2014)
7. Domestic child labor	Remuneration; Characterize the work activity; Schooling; Working conditions; Invisibility				Aberto et al. ⁸⁹ (2009); Aberto et al. ⁹⁰ (2011); Patriota & Alberto ⁹¹ (2014); Santana & Dimenstein ⁹² (2005); Dellazzana & Freitas ⁹³ (2010)
8. Income transfer programs and child labor	Program for Eradication of Child Labor; Scholarship; Brazilian Income Transfer Program; International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor; Program against sexual exploitation and child labor; Scholastic routines of adolescents under the Brazilian Income Transfer Program	Meal stipends, scholarships, and food cards; Jobs performed by adolescents and school status; Right to health	Program for the Eradication of Child Labor		Carvalho ⁴ (2004); Alberto et al. ⁹⁴ (2012); Rezende et al. ⁹⁵ (2012); Fonseca & Viana ⁹⁶ (2007); Guimarães et al. ²⁰ (2009); Conde ⁹⁷ (2013); Diniz et al. ⁹⁸ (2012); Cacciamali et al. ⁹⁹ (2010); Sartori ¹⁰⁰ (2006); Pires & Jardim ¹⁰¹ (2014); Sartori & Garcia ¹⁰² (2012); Luciani Conde et al. ¹⁰³ (2007); Gonçalves ¹⁰⁴ (2005)
9. Rural child labor	Dimension of play		Effects of family wealth; Tobacco growing; Negative impact on health; Mobilization of agribusiness interests; Childhood and labor flexibility in agriculture		Pedraza et al. ¹⁰⁵ (2008); Marin et al. ¹⁰⁶ (2014); Marin et al. ¹⁰⁷ (2012); Marin ¹⁰⁸ (2010); Kassouf & Santos ¹⁹ (2010); Nicolella et al. ¹⁰⁹ (2008)

(continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Themes of studies related to child labor	Periodicals' areas of knowledge				Authors (year) *
	Human Sciences	Health Sciences	Applied Social Sciences		
10. Inter-generational child labor			Diagnose existence of child labor; Living conditions; Effect of additional worker for children; Occupational status of reference person or head of family; Birth order of children		Aquino et al. ¹¹⁰ (2010); Oliveira et al. ¹¹¹ (2014); Cacciamali & Tatei ¹¹² (2008); Assunção & Alves ¹¹³ (2007); Ferreira-Batista & Cacciamali ¹¹⁴ (2012); Orraca ¹¹⁵ (2014); Paz & Piselli ¹¹⁶ (2011)

* Articles analyzed.

The studies that are closely linked to the legitimate discourses of experience of child labor largely focus on the economic, social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions that structure the perceptions, meanings, practices, and representations on child labor in different contexts.

Some specific discourses on The experience of child labor are associated with the various issues of the structural organization of the labor market: the right to play and playful experiences in the context of child labor; the process of job placement and occupational activities, especially in informal labor relations and specifically in urban areas (streets, commerce, residences, household production units, and services); family organization, motivations, and socialization practices; and daily experiences with exploited labor.

These discourses also include the investigation and problematization of formal labor by young Brazilians as “trainees” ¹⁶, concerning safeguards for their rights and the formation of their personal and occupational identity.

The analysis of the subarea of Human Sciences featured discourses on the characterization of activities in domestic child labor, with the presence of gender as an analytical variable in this subarea alone, which addressed (as the object of study) the conditions of child labor, types, and characteristics; description of the work activities by gender and age bracket; motivations for starting to work and payment standards; and the relationship to schooling and school performance.

Finally, the other legitimate discourse in this subarea relates to studies on income transfer programs and child labor with the understanding of its institutional aspects and the effectiveness of social policies, particularly in Brazil and Argentina. The studies share the analyses of the programs' operational conditions, limitations, benefits, and experiences. They also address socio-educational measures, school routines, school attendance, family dynamics, and generational changes based on the programs, as a function of receiving benefits.

The research approaches stated by the authors were mostly qualitative, consisting largely of empirical studies, followed by review articles and including cases studies, reports on experiences, and ethnographic studies.

In the field of possibilities for research on child labor, the three legitimizing discourses – *Experiences of Child Labor* associated with the labor market, *Domestic Child Labor* related to schooling, and *Income Transfer Programs and Child Labor* – are reflected in the objects of study that most attracted the authors' interest in the subarea of Human Sciences.

Child labor in the subarea of Applied Social Sciences

The establishment of possible discourses in the subarea of Applied Social Sciences, with 21 indexed articles, shows a smaller share of the total research output. The objects of studies are distributed across six themes, only three of which stood out as legitimate discourses, namely: *Urban Child Labor*; *Rural Child Labor*; and *Inter-Generational Child Labor* (Table 3).

The legitimate discourses on urban child labor address the determinants of child labor associated with income and the labor market structure, as well as the effects of increasing the minimum age for engaging in work activities. Meanwhile, the discourses on rural child labor are associated explicitly with the agricultural sector, in the discussion of the impacts produced by this sector on health, human development, and the production of poverty, and the reasons for the mobilization of agribusiness interests in the fight against child labor.

In this context, the objects of interest in the discourses on child labor and inter-generational transmission are living conditions, the effect of an additional worker on children, the children's birth order, and the occupational status of the reference person or head-of-family.

Considering the predominance of economic discourses in structuring this subarea, as highlighted by Kassouf & Santos¹⁹, we found that in the last ten years, thanks to the availability of microdata from household surveys in various countries and econometric analyses focused on child labor, the economists began to gain a better understanding of the determinants of early labor. Factors such as poverty, parents' schooling, family size and structure, head-of-family's sex, age at which the parents began to work, and place of residence, among others, are the most important determinants and are analyzed empirically.

Final remarks

The study revealed the characteristics of research output on child labor in Latin America from 2004 to 2014, according to the authors, objects of studies, and legitimate discourses in the three scientific subareas. The knowledge output is structured in three distinct subareas: Human Sciences, Health Sciences, and Applied Social Sciences.

The structure of this space results from the interaction between the authors' diverse points of view, occupying different positions in their respective subareas, aimed at demarcating the objects of studies, methods, and socially acceptable theories in the definition and elucidation of child labor.

Brazilian research was found to be dominant in Latin America, and the Southeast, Northeast, and South were the regions of Brazil that produced the most studies. The research is developed mostly in the academic setting by professors and students, who are thus the prime actors in constructing the scientific discourse on child labor. Health Sciences was the subarea that received most funding in this period. However, these data may reflect more generic aspects of Brazil's scientific field and are not necessarily a specific characteristic of the research output on child labor.

The objects of studies are largely qualitative, which is also consistent with the authors' backgrounds and the predominance of their publication in the Human and Social Sciences. Meanwhile, the objects of study with quantitative approaches are distributed across journals in the Health Sciences and Applied Social Sciences. This finding should be interpreted in light of the illegality of child labor in Brazil, which hinders research on it, especially of an epidemiological nature.

Regardless of the subarea, the logic of interest in certain objects of studies consists specifically of the development of research that relates child labor to the dimensions of health, education, labor, and social assistance, i.e., the objects of studies on child labor are constituted by establishing at least one point of view from one of these dimensions.

In short, child labor does not appear as a unique object or single identity, since it is structured in the diverse social practices in distinct fields, which hinders the demarcation of issues in the existing methods and theories in structuring the scientific field.

Some limitations should be considered, related to the selection of this review's corpus, namely: the databases that indexed studies conducted only in Latin America; the study period, spanning ten years; the languages of publication, Portuguese and Spanish; and the exclusion of non-indexed studies, book chapters, technical standards, manuals, theses, dissertations, monographs, technical reports, and institutional documents, which might otherwise have covered new approaches in the scientific field, and which the current review did not analyze. New efforts should be made to extend the investigation to other databases and other country affiliations, in addition to encompassing other types of research besides articles.

This review mapped the knowledge on research on child labor, based especially on the timeliness of identifying and systematizing the heterogeneity of objects of studies and the homogeneity of the legitimate discourses in the scientific subareas, as well as offering elements for understanding this phenomenon in order to support measures to eradicate child labor in Latin America.

Contributors

G. C. O. Silva worked in the study's conception, data collection and analysis, and writing of the manuscript. J. A. B. Iriart oriented the study and worked in the data interpretation and final revision of the manuscript. S. C. L. Chaves and E. A. F. Abade worked in the data interpretation and final revision of the manuscript.

Additional informations

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Resumo

O presente estudo analisou as características da produção científica sobre trabalho infantil na América Latina, de 2004 a 2014. Foram encontrados 114 trabalhos, nas bases de dados LILACS e SciELO. Os artigos foram categorizados com base nos conceitos de campo e agentes sociais de Pierre Bourdieu, destacando os produtores, os locais de publicação, os objetos e discursos. Observou-se um crescimento da produção no período, especificamente a partir de 2006. O Brasil ocupou a posição dominante na produção científica com 80,7% do total, seguido da Colômbia, Argentina e México. Os objetos de estudo são majoritariamente de abordagem qualitativa (55,3%) e metade dos artigos está indexada em revistas Qualis B1 ou superior. Apenas 14,9% das pesquisas, no entanto, receberam financiamento. Os produtores são de origens diversas, com a participação de psicólogos (26,3%), enfermeiros (17,5%) e economistas (13,2%). Os estudos estão situados em subáreas das Ciências Humanas, constituídas pelos discursos da Psicologia Social e do Desenvolvimento; Ciências da Saúde com destaque para os estudos epidemiológicos, pautados nos conceitos da enfermagem do trabalho e na subárea de Ciências Sociais Aplicadas com os estudos econômicos. Observou-se que os objetos de estudos relacionados ao trabalho infantil focam seu interesse na relação deste com a saúde, a educação, o trabalho e a assistência social, com pouca interdisciplinaridade nas publicações.

*Trabalho de Menores; Criança; Adolescente;
Pesquisa Qualitativa*

Resumen

Este estudio analizó las características de la producción científica sobre el trabajo infantil en Latinoamérica desde 2004 hasta 2014. Se encontraron 114 trabajos en las bases de datos LILACS y SciELO. Se categorizaron los artículos a partir de los conceptos de campo y agentes sociales de Pierre Bourdieu, destacando productores, lugares de publicación, objetos y discursos. Se observó un crecimiento de la producción en este período, específicamente a partir de 2006. Brasil ocupó la posición dominante en la producción científica con un 80,7% de la producción, seguido de Colombia, Argentina y México. Los objetos de estudio son mayoritariamente de abordaje cualitativo (55,3%) y la mitad de los artículos están indexados en revistas Qualis B1 o superiores. No obstante, solamente un 14,9% de las investigaciones recibieron financiación. Los productores tienen orígenes diversos, hay psicólogos (26,3%), enfermeros (17,5%) y economistas (13,2%). Los estudios están situados en las subáreas de las Ciencias Humanas, constituidas por los discursos de la Psicología Social y del Desarrollo; Ciencias de la Salud con énfasis en estudios epidemiológicos, según conceptos de enfermería laboral y dentro de la subárea de las Ciencias Sociales Aplicadas con estudios económicos. Se observó que los objetos de estudio relacionados con el trabajo infantil enfocan su interés en la relación de éste último con la salud, la educación, el trabajo y la asistencia social, con poca interdisciplinaridad en las publicaciones.

*Trabajo de Menores; Niño; Adolescente;
Investigación Cualitativa*

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