Agricultural Labor among School Children in Rural Assiut, Egypt

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Abstract:

Child labor is alarmingly prevalent in Egypt, a country with a population of nearly 75 millions; there are some 1.5 million (12%) child workers between 6 and 15 years. Agricultural work posses several characteristics that are risky for health: exposure to extremes of weather, close contact with animals and plants, extensive use of chemical and biological products, difficult working postures and lengthy hours and use of hazardous agricultural tools and machinery. Aim of the study: Determine the causes of agricultural child labor in Koom Abousheel village, Assiut, Egypt and highlight some of its related health problems. Methods: Descriptive cross sectional study included 630 randomly selected students enrolled in primary and preparatory schools aged from 6 to 17 years old in Koom Abousheel village 2008-2009. Data collection from the target population using structured personal interview. Anthropometric measures: weight, height and body mass index were measured. Laboratory investigations including urine and stool examination were done to detect parasitic infections in these children. Urine samples were collected, centrifuged and examined microscopically. Stool examination was done macroscopically and stored in two different fixative (10% formalin and sodium acetate-acetic acid-formalin), concentrated and examined microscopically by: direct wet mount using saline, iodine and lacto-phenol cotton blue and stained by modified Kinyoun acid-fast stain. Data analyzed using SPSS version 16. Results: 52.7% of the studied students worked in agricultural duties and 73.2% of them began work at early age (less than 10 years). Boys were more often involved in labor activities than girls. About half of the worked students helped their fathers in their work. Worked students reported negative impact on their education and social life. Health hazards at the farm such as exposure to high temperature, animal bite, and injuries were prevalent among them. Parasitic infections were more prevalent in worked students (69.3 %). The detected parasites were Ascaris lumbricoides, Ancylostoma doudenale, Hymenolepis nana, Enterobius vermicularis, Entamoeba histolytica, Giardia lamblia, Cryptosporidium parvum, Blastocystis hominis and Entamoeba coli. Conclusion: The problem of child labor is serious. In rural areas especially, children work as cheap labor because their parents are poor and do not earn enough to support the family, thus the problem of child labor will persist and it exposes the children to many health hazards and risks. Improving legislation and enforcement measures to establish a legal minimum age for work, community education and mobilization are essential and have been the traditional response to the problem of child labor.

Keywords:

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