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## AGRICULTURAL CHILD LABOR: AN APPROACH FROM THE MODEL ECOLOGICAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

Child labor is one of the most complex problems to analyze due to the economic, social, cultural, psychological and political factors that characterize it. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2021 estimated that around the world there were 160 million boys and girls in child labor, which means that one in ten children /as is in these conditions (UNICEF, s/f).

Specifically in Mexico, the 2019 National Child Labor Survey [ENTI] indicated that there are 1.3 million children and adolescents between five and 17 years old working. In relation to work linked to the agricultural sector, this same survey estimated that 39% work in these spaces (INEGI, 2019).

The characteristics of agricultural work during Mexican childhood and adolescence are: having a work day of around eight hours a day, being under the sun's rays, their activities are similar to those of an adult, coupled with the fact that the work is carried out in conditions unhealthy areas where it is constantly exposed to agrochemicals and pesticides (ILO, 2014; SEDESOL, 2009, 2012, Miranda, 2019). Additionally, boys, girls and adolescents, to carry out field work, may use dangerous tools such as machetes, knives or handle heavy machinery (SEDESOL, 2009, 2012; FAO-ILO, 2019), which puts their integral development and even his life. In general, studies report that the consequences of this activity are associated with school abandonment and desertion, gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases, contact with pesticides, accidents, non-attendance at recreational spaces, incorporation into migratory processes, family disintegration, separation of family members. the family, among other effects that violate their health, dignity and human rights (FAO-ILO, 2019; Miranda, 2019; Moreno & Saravino, 2021, López, 2023).

Based on the above, this holistic research proposal to understand agricultural child labor in Mexico was carried out.

The first difficulty when studying child labor in the agricultural sector is the lack of a universal definition. Therefore, for this research, a conceptualization was generated in which concepts such as: payed work, unpaid work, and factors associated with the agricultural sector were incorporated. From the above, it was concluded that agricultural child labor is: that which includes girls, boys and adolescents under 18 years of age who work directly in agricultural fields or who help their family in day labor. Likewise, those who carry out non-training work within the home that places them in a vulnerable situation because they carry out activities that are not appropriate for their age (SEDESOL, 2009; ILO, 2014).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL CHILD LABOR IN MEXICO

Based on the definition, the characteristics, contextual and family factors that are linked to children and adolescents who work in the agricultural sector were studied, the main findings were the poor family economy, culture (family traditions) and even idiosyncrasy (belief training and education). In fact, farm work is conceived from a perspective in which the family as a whole is a provider of economic well-being, and through this philosophy, responsibility is educated and promoted, hoping that they become adults committed to their own well-being and acquire values. such as autonomy and tenacity (De la Garza, et al., 2012; Avendaño & Castillo, 2021; Moreno & Saravino, 2021).

In Mexico, children who work in agricultural fields are located in three possible scenarios: 1) in agricultural regions of native residence, 2) in temporary migration processes

or 3) in permanent migration to other regions of the country or other countries. (Vargas, 2012; Garibi, 2019).

During the harvest stage is where they are most used because they are considered efficient for activities such as cutting small fruits or vegetables, as well as leaf removal (Peñaloza, et al. 2020). In addition to the fact that childhood and adolescence are considered a docile, obedient, productive population with fewer conflicts towards authority (Garibi, 2019).

Regarding the gender perspective, in agricultural fields, activities are clearly differentiated: the “dangerous and heavy” (cutting, carrying and accumulating) for men and the “easy” (preparing food and housework) for women. (Peñaloza, et al., 2020). It must be noted that there is a high incidence of non-training domestic child labor that involves activities such as caring for younger siblings, caring for older adults, and performing chores that do not correspond to their age (Bazares, et al. al., 2014; Avendaño & Castillo, 2021) that separates them from expected activities for their age such as attending school.

The United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL-UNICEF, 2006; SEDESOL 2012) estimated that it is from the age of 6 that they are incorporated into both activities, although the The range of 10 to 13 years old is the one with the highest presence rates (Peñaloza, et al., 2020). Despite the fact that Mexican legislation in 2014 indicated that from the ages of 15 and 16 is when they can be legally involved in this activity.

## ECOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL CHILD LABOR

Research that deals with the population that works in the child and adolescent agricultural sector is derived from different disciplines (ILO, 2009; Garibi, 2019; Avendaño & Castillo, 2021; Moreno & Saravino, 2021; López, 2023) therefore, it is carried out a multidisciplinary analysis with the purpose of establishing a preamble that allows understanding the viability of addressing this issue from the Ecological Model of Human Development (Table 1).

Discipline	Main interest
Economy	He is interested in the salary they generate for the family income. As well as, the income that is allocated to savings and remittances.
Anthropology	It analyzes how the inheritance of sowing has been transformed into a profession, and the family migratory conditions.
Pedagogy	She is interested in the educational gap, in the programs and study plans implemented, coupled with the subsidies that are granted.
Right	Analyzes the legal agreements regarding agricultural child labor, as well as the minimum age for admission to employment.
Medicine	Evaluates the physical effects of contact with agrochemicals and pesticides. As well as diseases that are directly related to activities in agricultural fields.
Agronomy	Study which are the main regions, crops and periods where the largest child and adolescent labor is hired.
Clinical psychology	Analyzes the psychological effects of child agricultural labor and the migratory process. As well as their socio-emotional development.
Social psychology	It studies agricultural child labor as a social phenomenon and attempts to describe community behavior based on this phenomenon.
Educational psychology	Analyzes the learning and cognitive development processes that occur in children and adolescents who carry out work related to the agricultural sector.

Table 1. Analysis from the different disciplines

Each discipline partially covers one or several relevant aspects of child agricultural labor; However, the lack of integration stands out, which as a consequence denotes the absence of a holistic understanding of this problem. Based on the above, a viable theoretical approach was sought for the study of child labor in the agricultural sector; finding that from Psychology there is the Ecological Model of Human Development (MEDH) proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

The basic postulate of the MEDH stipulates a mutual relationship between a person in the process of development and the changing properties of the immediate scenarios in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rodrigues, et al., 2015). Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1990) and Bronfenbrenner, et al., (1994) explained that there are five levels or subsystems that operate directly and indirectly in the development of people.

At the closest level it is called *Microsystem*, which implies each of the activities, roles, functions and interpersonal links in which the person analyzed participates (Kostelnik, et al., 2009). In the case of children and adolescents working in the agricultural sector, the microsystem with which they interact not only involves the school, the family or the group of friends with whom they play, but also includes the agricultural fields where they go to work. or help.

The next level, known as *Mesosystem*, involves the interrelationships between the actors that are located within the microsystem (Kostelnik, et al. 2009). For example, the relationships established between the people who make up your home, those who are at school, and the people you work for in the agricultural field.

The third level, called *Exosystem*, corresponds to the environments in which the person is not directly included, but is a level in which events occur that affect them

directly or indirectly (Kostelnik, et al. 2009). In this case, the agricultural fields related to the work carried out by their parents or primary caregivers, the institutional programs designed for the benefit of the population and migration, whether family or partial, where only some members of the family go out to work.

At the fourth level, cataloged as *Macrosystem*, it includes the cultural, ideological, political and institutional frameworks that affect or can transversally affect lower order systems (Kostelnik, et al. 2009; Rodrigues, et al. 2015). This macrosystem incorporates the laws related to child labor, as well as the cultural and idiosyncratic perception regarding the issue. Finally, there is a subsystem that crosses transversally, called *Chronosystem*, which demarcates the time in which the development process of each child or adolescent working in the agricultural sector is observed.

From this conceptualization, the following research question was generated: *What is the microsystem that generates greater vulnerability in the development of children and adolescents in the Mexican agricultural sector?*

## METHOD

The proposed objective for this research was: Establish the microsystem that generates greater vulnerability in the development of children and adolescents in the Mexican agricultural sector; and what are its associated variables. This was intended to be achieved through a non-experimental cross-field and descriptive methodology (Hernández, 2018) in 19 municipalities representative of Mexican child agricultural labor located in Sinaloa, Veracruz and Oaxaca.

To collect information, simple proportional sampling was carried out in the municipalities located in Sinaloa and Veracruz, as well as simple maximum variance sampling in the municipalities of Oaxaca. The reference

sources were *National Survey of Agricultural Laborers ENJO (SEDESOL, 2009)* and the *Maps of Poverty and Social Delay* of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, 2005).

The estimated total number of instruments by municipalities and states was 578 applications under the following inclusion criteria: 1) Girls, boys and adolescents between 5 and 17 years of age, 2) They had at least one adult family member who is an agricultural laborer and 3) That they lived temporarily or permanently in the selected communities.

The instrument was used: "*Survey for girls and boys, children of agricultural laborers*" (OIT, 2014); which evaluates factors associated with the comprehensive development of girls and boys between 5 and 17 years of age and consists of 62 items divided into 6 components: 1) *Agricultural Child Labor*: Evaluates the type of work (payed-unpayed), working conditions, salary received and use of money. 2) *Home and Unpayed Activities*: Evaluates non-formative domestic tasks, the time spent carrying them out and the care of other people, especially little sisters and brothers. 3) *Education and Vocational Aspiration*: Evaluates their academic grade, educational gap, enjoyment of school, attendance time and aspirations for adult life. 4) *Family and Socio-emotional Interaction*: Evaluates the family relationship, communication, establishment of rules and limits, decision making and expression of feelings. 5) *Health*: Evaluate the type of diet, the illnesses they have suffered and the medical care. 6) *Game*: Evaluate the recreational activities carried out, the type of game and the perception of this activity.

The scores of the instrument indicate that the lower the score, there are more risk factors and, on the contrary, the higher the score, there are greater protection factors. The instrument has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of 0.83 and a variance through *main components* which

together explain 56.1% of the total variance (Becerril, et al. 2016).

The ethical criteria for application were as follows: since this is a minor population, informed consent for participation was requested, which was signed by parents, guardians and/or primary caregivers in charge of their care. Subsequently, and prior to implementation, verbal consent to participate was also given to each of the participants. In both consents, the purpose of the research was explained to them, explaining in detail the implications and considerations of their participation; the confidential use of the data, as well as the possibility of abandoning the research at any time.

## RESULTS

A survey of 558 cases was achieved because 20 did not meet the inclusion criteria, the number of applications per state were: Sinaloa 209 cases (37.5%), Veracruz 159 cases (28.5%), Oaxaca 190 cases (34.1%). Despite the lost cases, this amount was representative because a margin of error of 10% was taken for each of the samples.

## SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Of the total number of participants, 46.8% were women and 53.2% were men. Their age range ranged from 5 to 17 years, with a mean of 11.84 and a standard deviation of 3.54. Of the total universe, the representative age (mode) was 14 years (12.7%).

Regarding the Family Typology of the participants, the majority belonged to nuclear (59.8%) and extended (34.8%) families. In the case of the nuclear ones, 14.5% of them separated at some period of the year to go out to work as day laborers, while the rest remain together either in the community of origin or migrating.

## RESULTS BY COMPONENTS

From the application of the *Survey for girls and boys, children of agricultural laborers* The following results were found:

### AGRICULTURAL CHILD LABOR COMPONENT

It was found that 65.9% of the participants presented risk factors. In fact, when performing the comparative analysis by state, those with the highest risk factors were located in Veracruz with 91.8% and Oaxaca in 66.8% of the cases. On the contrary, the state that provides the greatest protection was Sinaloa with 53.1%. It must be noted that only 0.9% of the participants work in good, as well as legal, conditions; situation that has the greatest incidence in the state of Sinaloa. These results determine that this variable significantly reduces the development of the participating sample.

### HOME COMPONENT - UNPAID ACTIVITIES

It was found that 67.9% of the participants presented expected factors in relation to support activities at home. However, when analyzing the data by state, the highest percentage of risk occurred in Oaxaca (46.3%), a figure that decreases considerably in Sinaloa (21.1%) and Veracruz (13.2%). Collaterally, in this last state the highest proportion was presented in relation to the protection factor with 18.9%.

Due to the disparity of the data in the state of Oaxaca, this component was crossed with the variables sex and age to see if they were associated. In this regard, it was found that Oaxacan adolescent women presented higher risk factors compared to those from other states.

## HEALTH COMPONENT

It was found that 86.8% (sum of the expected and protective factors) of the participants reported that, although they had suffered some type of illness, they had a nearby health center where they were treated. When comparing them by state, it was found that in Veracruz there were greater protective factors with 59.1% and in Oaxaca with 44.7%. However, in Veracruz the highest risk factors were also present at 17.6%.

The data disparity in Veracruz was directly related to the crop. That is, it was found that greater protective factors were present in coffee where agricultural work is done by the family, therefore, the girls and boys are cared for by a parent or guardian. On the contrary, in the case of sugarcane cultivation, adolescents travel alone and although there are health centers nearby, they opt for home remedies or self-medication. In general terms, it could be found that this component did not present a significant risk in the participating sample.

### EDUCATION COMPONENT - VOCATIONAL ASPIRATION

It was found that 46.8% presented protective factors, which means that they attended school and had a vocational project. However, 24.9% present risk factors because they have abandoned their studies, some were illiterate and they did not have an adequate vocational project. When analyzing the results by state, it was found that in Sinaloa the highest protective factors were present (60.8%) and on the contrary in Veracruz there were the highest risk factors with 39.6%.

Although 75.1% of the participants go to school, 44.4% of them combine this activity with work in the field. In this sense, the state that presented the greatest risk factor was Veracruz. On the contrary, in Sinaloa the participants attend school regularly and did not present educational lag. From these

results it was possible to establish that this activity is attended by parents or guardians and, therefore, it can not be considered as a component that represents vulnerability.

### **SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPONENT AND FAMILY INTERACTION**

In relation to the information provided by this component, it was found that a high percentage of the participating boys and girls (96.6%) presented strong family ties (expected and protective), this data allows us to understand how they assume the roles they play within of their family and the activities they carry out regardless of whether they were educational or not. In a non-significant way, in Veracruz the highest risk factors were present (4.4%) in contrast to the highest protective factors (64.2%).

The characteristic population characteristics of those who presented higher risk factors were that they traveled alone, that they were already parents and that they collaborated in the cultivation of sugar cane. On the contrary, the characteristics of those who presented greater protective factors were related to attending school, living with their family and, therefore, staying together. In general terms, this component or variable is the one that represented the greatest protection in the participating sample.

### **GAME COMPONENT**

In this research, it was found that 64.9% carried out expected recreational activities according to their stage and condition of development, especially in those who do not migrate and who belong to the state of Oaxaca. On the other hand, Sinaloa presented the highest protection factors (26.8%) where girls and boys had more opportunities to play and have fun. The state that presented the highest risk or vulnerability factors was Veracruz with 15.1%, especially in those adolescents who

combined study with work and, therefore, had few opportunities to have fun or play during the day. This component or variable was not vulnerable in the development of the participating boys and girls.

According to the results of the applied instrument, it was found that the child labor and home-unpaid activities components were the ones that represented the greatest risk in development, the expected components were education-vocational aspiration, as well as play; Finally, the components that were classified as protective were socioemotional-family interaction and health.

### **PROBABILISTIC MODEL OF AGRICULTURAL CHILD LABOR**

Given that the microsystem, component or variable Agricultural Child Labor was the one that represented the greatest risk in the development of participating children and adolescents; A *probabilistic model* was developed to determine the associated risk factors or variables. To achieve this, a logit model was used in which payed work was analyzed as the explained variable (Y) that could take two values 1 and 0, (1) if the participant was at risk of work and (0) if He was not at risk for work. Likewise, the explanatory variables were established, which were: age (in years), gender (0 man and 1 woman), type of family (0 local or settled and 1 migrant), ethnic condition (0 does not speak an indigenous language and 1 if you speak an indigenous language), education (0 does not study and 1 studies). To carry out this prediction, the function of the data distribution was evaluated in relation to the following formula:

$$Pr ob(Y_i = 1) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\alpha + \beta_k X_{ki})}} = \frac{e^{\alpha + \beta_k X_{ki}}}{1 + e^{\alpha + \beta_k X_{ki}}}$$

Where:

Pr (y = 1 | X) is the probability that y takes

the value 1 (presence of the characteristic studied), in the presence of the covariates X;

X is a set of n covariates {x0, x1, ..., xn} that are part of the model;

b0 is the model constant or independent term;

b i the coefficients of the covariates

The first statistical procedure consisted of determining the number of cases (N) that were selected for the analysis and those excluded or cases lost due to some missing value. The model determined 535 valid cases that were analyzed.

Subsequently, a comparison was made between the predicted values with the observed values and a cut-off point of the probability of Y was used to classify the individuals of 0.5. This meant that a probability <0.5 was classified as work=0 (Does not work), while if the resulting probability is >0.5 it was classified as work=1 (If works). In this first step the model had correctly classified 95.9% of the cases.

The cases were grouped into risk deciles and the observed probability was compared with the expected probability of each one. The high contrast value indicated differences between the predicted and actual values. The chi-square values associated with a level of statistical significance  $P \geq 0.05$  were obtained and it was determined that the model had had a good fit, since there were no statistically significant differences between what was predicted and what happened (Table 2).

Step	Chi Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
1	12.947	8	0.114
2	11.085	8	0.197
3	14.686	8	0.066

Table 2. Hosmer and Lemeshow test

Once the goodness of fit was defined and the usefulness for making estimates confirmed, the variables that were included and the degree of significance of each of them were established. For this, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) generated an output in which the variable appears, the value of the parameter, the sampling error committed when estimating the population parameter and the degree of significance.

The model correctly classified the children and adolescents who did not work, as well as the variables that were used in the equation, their regression coefficients with their corresponding standard errors, the value of the Wald statistic to evaluate the null hypothesis ( $P_i=0$ ), the associated statistical significance, and the value of the OR ( $\exp[B]$ ) with its confidence intervals were located in Table 3.

From the model coefficients it was possible to predict the probability of risk of working. The model showed that of the selected variables, age and migratory status directly predict agricultural child labor.

According to the results, the participants who presented the greatest risk and, therefore, high vulnerability were boys and girls from 10 years of age who belonged to migrant agricultural families, while for boys and girls from local families or established, the risk age is at a younger age since it was 8 years old.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the background and results, it can be noted that this research contributed to the comprehensive understanding of boys and girls who work in agricultural and rural regions of Mexico in two aspects: in relation to the conceptual framework and the findings obtained that allowed us to answer the questions. research.

Regarding the conceptual framework, the MEDH proposed by Bronfenbrenner



Variables									I.C. 95% for	
		B	E.T.	Wald	Gl	Sig.	Exp (B)	lower	Higher	
Step 1	Job	0.293	0.031	89.884	1	0.000	1.340	1.262	1.424	
	Age	-2.925	0.363	64.822	1	0.000	0.054			
Step 2	Job	0.297	0.032	87.872	1	0.000	1.346	1.265	1.432	
	Sex	-0.767	0.202	14.356	1	0.000	0.464	0.312	0.691	
	Age	-2.594	0.375	47.853	1	0.000	0.075			
Step 3	Job	0.298	0.032	87.425	1	0.000	1.348	1.266	1.435	
	Gender	-0.778	0.204	14.603	1	0.000	0.459	0.308	0.685	
	Migration	0.430	0.207	4.314	1	0.038	1.537	1.025	2.305	
	Age	-2.778	0.390	50.747	1	0.000	0.062			

Table 3. Child Labor Prediction Model

(1979) undoubtedly allowed us to obtain a comprehensive and holistic vision of the development of children and adolescents who work in the Mexican agricultural sector. However, given its breadth, it was impossible to cover all the subsystems it includes. Due to the above, the research delimited its field to the subsystems considered relevant according to the reviewed literature. That is, the following were analyzed: child agricultural work, unpaid activities within the home, schooling, the family and its interpersonal relationships, play, as well as the health of the participants.

In the review of the literature, it was found that previous research pointed out that the majority of children and adolescents who work in the Mexican agricultural sector, their development is significantly diminished due to environmental conditions. However, their analyzes were partial and/or delimited where they did not consider socio-emotional aspects, as well as the family environment which, according to the results found in this research, both variables promote their development in a significant and effective way, giving them a sense of belonging and identity.

In relation to the above, it was established that the participating children and adolescents who migrated with their parents acquired greater emotional ties because they knew and

recognized the conditions in which they live, migrate and work. Therefore, they were more supportive, as well as empathetic with their parents and relatives, even if this meant their incorporation into payed agricultural work, abandoning or dropping out of school, and even migration.

Regarding child agricultural labor, through this research it was possible to identify that it was the component that represented the greatest vulnerability due to the long working hours and the workload that was equal or similar to that of an adult. Identifying that in communities of origin the starting age is from 8 years old due to the lack of existing opportunities for parents, which makes it essential to insert them into payed work that allows for stability in the family economy, especially in the Oaxaca state.

For its part, in migrant families the insertion age was raised to 10 years because agricultural work requires greater physical effort and the families considered that their physical development at this age is appropriate to start as an agricultural worker.

It is relevant to mention that through these findings it can be concluded that promoting the establishment of preventive programs on child labor considering age, sex and migratory status will be more effective in eradicating child labor. Likewise, these findings served

to plan preventive and remedial community programs of the International Program for the Eradication of Child Labor (IPEC), whose

primary objective was to contribute to the eradication of agricultural child labor in Mexico.

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