



INFANCIA Y ADOLESCENCIA EN UN MUNDO EN CRISIS Y CAMBIO

ETHICAL BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES ON CHILD WORK BY A GROUP OF ITALIAN YOUNGSTERS

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to gather youngsters' attitudes towards child work and their buying behavior in relation to this problem. The research has chosen young people as its target group, because they are the most directly involved in the question of child work, and because they are often targeted by non-governmental organizations to boycott products involving child exploitation.

The paper therefore presents the results of a research carried out in Italy, through the administration of a questionnaire to a group of about 1500 high schools students, aged 14-18, from all over Italy. Almost half of the participants are attending a grammar school and the other half a vocational schools.

The group interviewed showed a moderate awareness on the issue of child work. As far as policies of buying are concerned, a substantial disagreement emerged between attitude and belief and the consequent behavior: the majority of participants in fact affirm the importance of adopting concrete preventive measures to counteract child work but only a minority adopted a coherent behavior.

Keywords: child work, social representation, consumer behavior, attitudes, young people

INTRODUCTION

Little research has been done on the attitudes of buying of adolescents, as well as on the beliefs and attitudes of young people in the industrialized countries about child work (Benevene, 2008; Webley et al., 2001). Nevertheless, having a deeper knowledge about their opinion is important also because this phenomenon interests the economically developed countries (Dorman, 2001). In fact,



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the young people of these countries have been the target of different awareness-raising campaigns on the exploitation of children, organized by UNICEF and various non-governmental organizations, but we know little about their attitudes towards this ethical issue (Congdon Fors, 2010). In order to evaluate and assess the real impact of those campaigns, therefore, it is important to know their points of view (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2010).

The present research deals with the representation of child labour, the attitudes of young people towards this phenomenon, and the consequent willingness to adopt preventative buying policies.

1. METHOD

1.1 The questionnaire

The research was conducted through the use of a questionnaire, containing verbal stimulation, taken from literature on the subject. The instrument was mainly formed by questions with a closed number of answers, using a 6 point likert scale. The first part of the questionnaire was concerned with the knowledge of child work, the principal sources on information on this topic, the mental presentation of child work and the aspects that, according to those interviewed, characterize this phenomenon. The second part of the questionnaire focused on general evaluation, and attitudes towards preventative measures and the politics of buying. The final part of the questionnaire collects socio-demographic data of participant. Informed consent to take part in the survey was asked for all youngsters under age 18 to their parents/tutors, through the school Headmaster. Assurance of confidentiality of survey data was given to all participants and their parents/tutors.

1.2 Participants

The group interviewed consisted of 1600 students of Italian high schools, distributed throughout the country (namely: 25.2 from Northern Italy, 40.3% from Central Italy and 35.4% from Southern Italy), and whose ages ranged from 14 to 18 ($M=16.8$). The group reached included students from both grammar schools and vocational schools (50.4% and 49.6%, respectively).

Unlike the students who attend the vocational schools, the students attending the grammar schools constitute a group of young people who do not think of inserting themselves in the short term, and in a complete way, in the world of work, because they are much more likely to pursue university studies.

Males constitute 75.8% of the sample. This greater presence of male subjects can be explained in the light of the fact that a higher percentage of male attend vocational high schools.

The socio-cultural level of the families of the students can be defined as medium-high with respect to the corresponding national median of the adult population. Only 24% of the mothers and fathers have not pursued studies after completing the compulsory school. In actual fact, 48% of the parents had taken the high school diploma, and the remaining 23% are in possession of a university degree.

As regards employment, 36.3% of the fathers are public or private sector employees, while 27% are self employed professionals; as for the mothers, 37.1% declare themselves as housewives, while 32% are public or private sector employees.

1.3 The objectives

In recent years, the young people of the industrialized countries have been the target of various awareness-raising campaigns relating to the exploitation of children, organized by various NGOs, and aimed at promoting specific policies of buying. Given this reality, the research questions of this explorative research were as follows:



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1. Which knowledge youngsters have about child labour?
2. Which mental representation do they have of the phenomenon?
3. Which are youngsters' attitudes towards preventative measures and policies of buying?

2. THE MAIN RESULTS

2.1. Knowledge of child work

Those interviewed were asked to indicate the frequency with which they had heard of child work in the mass media, from friends, relatives, teachers, and organizations that deal with minors. They were asked to indicate the frequency on a scale from 1 to 6 (from 1=never to 6=very often).

The first place was given to teachers (42.9%, followed by organizations that deal with minors' rights (32.5%), then TV (32.5%). Next came newspapers (29.4%), relatives (26.5%), while friends (22%) came in the last place. Overall, 41% of the sample claimed to be sufficiently informed on the subject.

As for the information they had received on the subject, 40% of the sample affirmed that it heard 'often or very often' about child labour in relation to developing countries, 59% heard of it in relation to Asian countries, 56% in relation to African countries, and 51% in relation to Latin American countries.

On the contrary, 53% of them asserted that they had 'never' or 'very rarely' heard of child labour in relation to economically developed countries; 38% in relation to Central or Eastern European countries; 52% in relation to North America; and 46% in relation to Italy. 50% of the sample, furthermore, correctly identified Asia as the continent in which the greatest number of child workers is present. This corresponds to the data made known by UNICEF (1997) and the ILO (2010).

2.2 Representation of the phenomenon

A scale from 1 to 6 (from 1=a totally non-influential factor to 6=an extremely determining factor) was used to research the mental representation of child labour. The data was analyzed using a factorial analysis of correspondence, with the method of principal components; the three factors extracted were rotated with the varimax method and explain 55% of the total variance (see table 1 for more details).

The first factor (that explains 26% of the variance and which we have called 'consequence of the political and economic context'), brings out how certain aspects are considered important, such as the lack of inspections on the places of work, the disinterest or connivance of governments, the economic dependence of poor countries, and the lack of adequate laws and their enforcement, the presence of multinational corporations, the constriction on the part of the adults, and the maximization of profit for the employers. A highly critical representation of the phenomenon was evident.

The second factor extracted (that explains 17.5% of the variance, and which we have called 'personal and family experience') emphasizes the socio-environmental aspects of the mental representation of the phenomenon, in so far as child labour would depend in a significant measure on failure in school, the haste to learn a trade, the desire for economic independence, the desire to help the family, the demands posed by the cultural poverty of the individual.

The third factor extracted (that explains 11.5% of the variance, and which we have called 'lack of protection of the minor') shows that child work depends also on economic poverty, on abandonment or disinterest by the family.



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Table 1. Factors' Analysis on "Mental Representation of Child Work"

Factors	Actual variance	Cronbach's Alpha
F1 'consequence of the political and economic context'	26%	.8402
F2 'personal and family experience'	17.5%	.7628
F3 'lack of protection for the minor'	11.5%	.6042

The comparison between the mean of the responses of the students of the vocational schools and those of the grammar schools' students, conducted with one-way anova analysis, brought out results significantly ($\text{sig.} = .000$) different relating to the will to learn a trade, scholastic failure, the desire for economic independence, and the desire to help the family. Different from the grammar school students, the above-indicated variables were valued as extremely determining causes of the phenomenon of child labour by the group of students from the vocational schools, and can be traced to a dimension of the capacity of autonomous and responsible choice of the child towards insertion in the world of work.

The mental representation of 70% of the group considered, hold that work prevents the minor from developing friendships with his/her peers, while 60% hold that the exercise of a work activity (doing work?) compromises self-esteem. 77% of the sample indicates that the minors who work in show business are considered very fortunate, and 64% hold that work, which brings popularity and fame to the minor, cannot be considered a true and proper work. Significant differences have not emerged with relation to type of school, age, and gender.

2.3 Attitudes towards the phenomenon of child work

To measure the attitude towards child work, a seven-point semantic differential, constituted by 20 couples of bi-polar adjectives, was used. The analysis factorial and the inter-item correlation scale highlighted a negative attitude in almost all the couples of adjectives, with the exception of the couple 'de-responsibilising-responsibilising' in which the sample was oriented to the polarity 'responsibilising'. As for possible intervention on child labour, 41.3% of those interviewed considered it opportune to adopt different criteria, according to the cultural, economic and social situation of the country, while 32% expressed a different opinion.

When asked to express an opinion as to who should take the decision that a child should begin to work, 30.8% of those interviewed held that the criteria should be determined by law, 31% held that it should be the minor him/herself who should decide together with the family, while 20% believed that the responsibility should fall only on the child. A small percentage of the participants (11%) held that it was more adequate to entrust the matter to a tribunal or a judge for minors.

2.4 Attitudes towards preventative measures

A series of affirmations were given to the group of studies interviewed in which the measures used to prevent the exploitation of child work were described, and they were asked to value them on a scale from 1 to 6. The data was analyzed using a factorial analysis of correspondence, with the method of principal components; the two factors extracted were rotated with the varimax method and explain 49% of the total variance (see table 2 for more details).

From the first factor (that explains 29.7% of the variance and which we have called 'long-term measures of intervention on the part of governmental agencies, inter-governmental and NGOs') there emerges the necessity to prohibit by law child work, to carry out inspections on places of work, to enforce norms that punish exploitation and consent the adolescent to work, to improve the scholastic system, to put pressure on governments, to apply sanctions to companies that use child



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workers, to carry out information campaigns, to offer economic support to families and to hear the opinion of children that work.

The second factor (that explains 19% of the variance and which we have called 'short term preventative measures'), highlights a positive attitude towards boycotts of products made by child work, to take away from families the children that work, and to oblige the children that work to go to school.

Table 2 Factor Analysis on "Attitudes towards measures addressing child work"

Factors	Actual variance	Cronbach's Alpha
F1 'long-term measures of intervention on the part of governmental and intergovernmental agencies and NGOS'	29.7%	.8319
F2 'short term measures of intervention'	19.0%	.6599

A comparison between the mean of the responses for the technical-professional institutes and those of the lyceum students, conducted on the one-way anova analysis, has given significantly (sig. =.000) different results in relation to the four interventions: to carry out inspections on the places of work, to put pressure on governments, to remove child workers from families, to oblige children who work to go to school. While the grammar school students hold that the normative-enforceable measures are the more effective, the students of the vocational schools hold that direct intervention on the families and children are effective measures.

2.5 Policies of buying

A further scope of the research was the gathering of attitudes of the sample with respect to the adoption of policies of buying of goods produced by the exploitation of child work. 10 items were proposed, to which the interviewees had to respond using a scale (from 1 to 6) of agreement or disagreement. The data was analyzed using a factorial analysis of correspondence, with the method of principal components; the two factors extracted were rotated with the varimax method and explain 66.7% of the total variance (see table 3 for more details).

The first factor (that explains about 41% of the variance, and which we have called 'efficiency of the adoption of economic behavior at the micro level') brings out how effective interventions such as the application of economic sanctions, the application of codes of conduct on the part of producing companies that exploit child labour, making families and friends aware of the right of information for consumers.

The second factor (which explains 25.8% of the variance, and which we have called 'the effectiveness of the adoption of economic behavior at the meso level'), highlights the effective potential and the opportunity for intervention by the consumers on producers who sell goods produced with the exploitation of child work, and the consequent boycott of merchandise.

Table 3 Factor Analysis on "Effectiveness of the adoption of economic behavior"

Factors	Actual variance	Cronbach's Alpha
F1 'effectiveness of the adoption of economic behavior at the micro level'	40.9%	.9087
F2 'effectiveness of the adoption of economic behaviour at the meso level'	25.79%	.7821

As regards the choice of past buying, only 21.4% of the sample said they had refused to a product made through the exploitation of child work, the remaining part of those interviewed affirmed



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that either they had never posed themselves the problem (49.3%) or they had never come across a product with this characteristic (29.3%), which is surprising, considering the popularity of the Nike and the Gap garments among youngsters (just to mention a couple of well-known examples).

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Those interviewed possess a partial and generic knowledge of child work, and show that they are aware of their own level of information.

In the acquisition of information related to child work teachers play an important role, as do the organizations that are concerned with minors. This data is certainly to be put in relation to the campaigns of information carried out in a constant and grass roots way by the different realities of the Third Sector and the voluntary sector (Sebastian, 1997). Such campaigns have often involved, in a priority way, teachers and schools of every order and grade, distributed throughout the whole of Italy.

An important impact on the representation of child work has been carried out by the mass media, even though the sample stated that the attention given to this phenomenon is neither constant nor regular. It's worth emphasizing that, according to the data obtained from the sample, the information received on child work is concentrated almost exclusively on developing countries, and first among these are the African countries.

This could show a perception on child work correlated to economic poverty, since, on the contrary, the data and information offered by the media on the phenomenon do not relate to these geographic areas.

The close correlation between poverty and child work would explain also the selective memory shown by 75% of the sample that affirms that it received information on the presence of child work in Italy only rarely, or sometimes, despite the public debate aroused long ago by the research carried out by the CGIL (the biggest Italian Trade Union) (Paone & Teselli, 2000) and by ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) (Istat, 2002a, 2002b) on child work in Italy.

In spite of the fact that child work involved subjects of the same age as the sample interviewed, not only is it characterized by negative traits but it also seems to appertain to a reality external to their own, and to specific zones of poverty.

The mental representation of child work proposes a double perception of the phenomenon: on the one hand, their peers who work in show business are considered very fortunate, while on the other hand employment in the show business world is not considered work, despite the fact that the National Centre for the Documentation and Information on Childhood and Adolescence, linked to the Ministry of Welfare, considers it as such (Centro Nazionale di Documentazione ed Analisi per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2001).

As far as policies of buying are concerned, a substantial disagreement emerged between attitude and belief and the consequent behavior: the majority of participants in fact affirms the importance of adopting concrete preventive measures to counteract child work but, at the same time, past behavior in buying shows a discrepancy.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the group of very young people interviewed showed a moderate awareness on the themes that were the subject of the research. From an analysis of this, there emerges the need to carry out new campaigns of awareness and of information on the complex reality of the phenomenon of child work.



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