

Impact of Working Conditions on Children's Development and Educational Outcomes

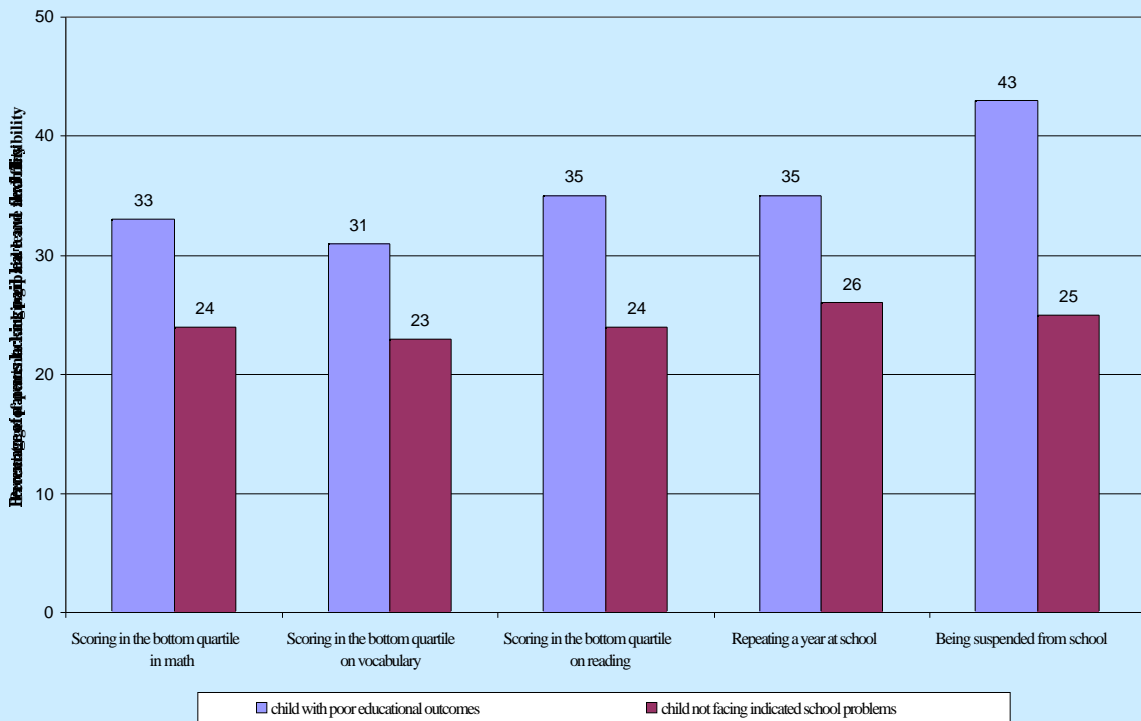
Barriers to Parents' Involvement In Education

One of the most important factors affecting how children fare in school is parental involvement^{i ii iii}. When parents are involved in their children's education, children achieve more in elementary school, junior high school^{iv}, and high school^v. Parental involvement is associated with children's higher achievement in language and mathematics, improved behavior, greater academic persistence, and lower dropout rates^{vi}
vii viii ix x xi

We looked nationally at whether working parents could take time off from work to meet with teachers, principals, and learning specialists, to visit schools, and to help guide their children through difficult periods. We used national data to examine how often parents had paid leave from work or other forms of flexibility that they might use to address these essential needs. At an even more fundamental level, we looked at whether parents could be available in the evenings to help their school-age children. We examined the conditions faced by all families and paid particular attention to families in which a child scored in the bottom quartile on tests of reading, vocabulary, and math. We also looked at the conditions faced by families in which a child was having even more marked problems, as when a child had to repeat a grade or was suspended from school.

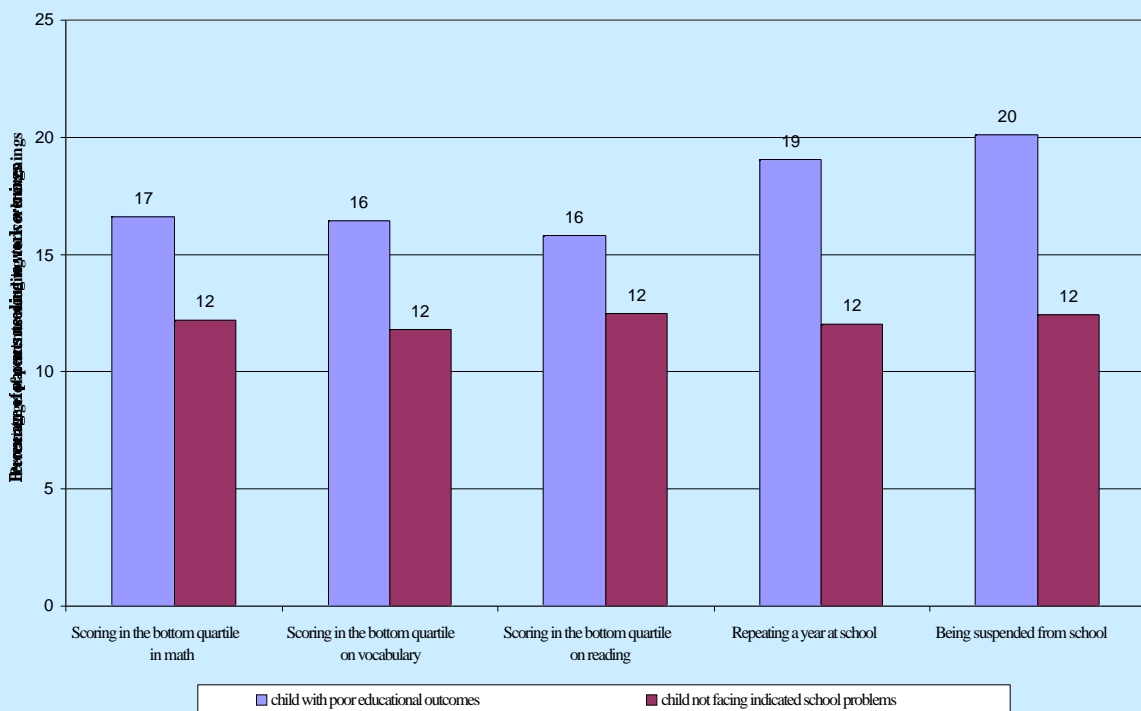
We found that across the country, too many parents lacked the paid leave and flexibility they needed to take time from work to help their children with school problems. Disastrously, those who most needed such benefits had the fewest. Families in which a child was in the bottom quartile in reading or math were significantly more likely to face working conditions that made it difficult or impossible for the parents to adequately assist their children. Of parents who had a child scoring in the bottom quartile on math, more than half at times lacked any kind of paid leave and nearly three-fourths could not consistently rely on flexibility at work. One out of three found themselves at multiple jeopardy, simultaneously lacking paid vacation leave, sick leave, *and* work flexibility (see Figure 3.1). One in six were not able to be available routinely in the evenings because of work, and more than one in 10 had to work nights (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Figure 3.1 Children at Risk Educationally and Parental Leave and Flexibility



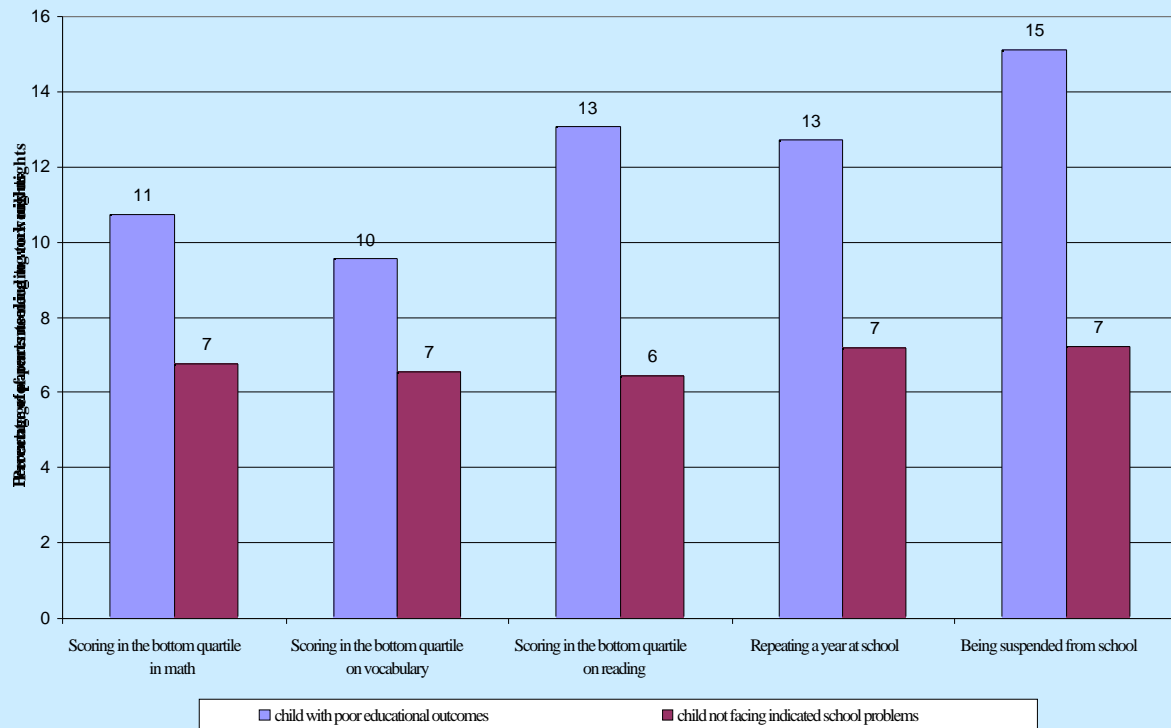
Notes: The above figure is based on analyses we conducted with data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. We examined whether parents lacked paid sick leave, paid vacation leave or scheduling flexibility in their primary job some or all the time between 1990 and 1996. Parents were classified as having paid sick or vacation leave if they reported receiving at least one day of paid sick or vacation leave at their job.

Figure 3.2 Children at Risk Educationally and Parental Evening Work



Notes: The above figure is based on analyses we conducted with data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Parents needing to work evenings reported working an evening shift at their primary job for some or all of their working years between 1990 and 1996.

Figure 3.3 Children at Risk Educationally and Parental Night Work



Notes: The above figure is based on analyses we conducted with data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Parents needing to work nights reported working a night shift at their primary job for some or all of their working years between 1990 and 1996.

Families in which a child scored in the bottom quartile in reading were equally constrained by working conditions. More than half of these parents lacked paid leave some of the time they worked and nearly three out of four lacked flexibility they could rely on. More than one out of three found themselves in one or more jobs between 1990 and 1996 in which they simultaneously lacked paid vacation leave, sick leave, and flexibility (figure 3.1). Furthermore, as in the case of the parents of children scoring in the bottom quartile on math, one in six of the parents of children scoring in the bottom quartile in reading worked evenings, and more than one in ten worked some nights, (figures 3.2 and 3.3).

These potentially ruinous patterns also held for the parents of children who were at greatest risk: those who had to repeat a grade in school or who had been suspended from school. More than half of these parents found themselves at some times lacking any kind of leave they could take to address their children's problems. Four out of ten of these parents found themselves, some or all of the time, in multiple jeopardy (figure 3.1). Nearly one out of five of these parents worked evenings at some time, and one out of seven worked nights (figures 3.2 and 3.3).

In all these cases, poor parental working conditions disastrously limited the extent to which parents could be available to help children once their education was in trouble. Not having parents available to help in the evenings and nights also appears to have led to children having greater troubles in the first place. Can the relationship between parental working conditions and children's poor school performance be explained by other

factors? Even when statistical methods are used to control for differences in family income, parental education, marital status, and total hours parents worked, the more hours parents are away from home after school in the evening, the more likely their children are to test in the bottom quartile on achievement tests. Similarly, after controlling for other differences, parents who work at night are still 2.7 times as likely to have a child who has been suspended from school (see Appendix C).

Appendix C: Parental Working Conditions and Children's Educational Outcomes

Table C.1 Relationship between Parental Evening Work on Children's Academic Achievement on Math PIAT	
Stepwise Regression Model Controlling For	Odds Ratio for Evening Work
Family income	1.18
Parental education	1.16
Marital status of parents	1.16
Child's gender	1.16
Total number of hours worked by parent	1.17*

Note: The above table is based on multivariate regression analyses we conducted with data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

* For every hour a parent works between 6 and 9 p.m., his or her child is 1.17 times as likely (or 16 percent more likely) to score in the bottom quartile on Math tests. This is the case even after taking into account family income, parental education, marital status, the child's gender, and the total number of hours the parent worked. This finding was statistically significant, with $p < 0.03$.

Table C.2 Relationship between Parental Night Work and Probability Child Is Suspended from School	
Stepwise Regression Model Controlling For	Odds Ratio for Night Work
Family income	2.91
Parental education	2.91
Marital status of parents	2.71
Child's gender	2.73

Note: The above table is based on multivariate regression analyses we conducted with data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

* The children of parents who work nights are 2.72 times as likely (172 percent more likely) to have gotten into trouble and been suspended from school. This is the case even after taking into account family income, parental education, marital status of parents, child's gender, and age of child. This finding was statistically significant, with $p = 0.007$.

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