



Underage and Unprotected: Psychosocial Effects of Child Labour on the Academic Performance of Learners in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT This article examined the psychosocial effects of child labour on the academic performance of form three learners in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. It also aimed at identifying mitigation policies and measures designed to reduce negative effects of child labour on children's academic performance. Child labour is a sensitive and significant social and human rights problem growing in the world today. In Zimbabwe, child labour is found in several sectors including large commercial farms, communal areas, domestic work, small-scale mining and gold panning operations, micro-industries and the informal sector. To investigate the research problem, a qualitative phenomenological case study design was used with focus group discussions, interviews and observations as data collection instruments with ten form three learners and four teachers. The study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Mixed feelings were noted on the psychosocial effects of child labour on academic performance. The study established that child labourers provided a source of income to sustain families although the majority of the participants opined that their working conditions were severe, often not providing the stimulation for proper physical, cognitive, personality and intellectual development. Furthermore, the study established that child labour does more harm than good to the cognitive development of form three learners. The study recommended that the government should take sound social security measures to take care of children affected by child labour. There is also a need to address the root problems of child labour and poverty.