

New mothers should receive a mental health checkup six weeks after giving birth to help tackle possible postnatal depression and other problems related to having a baby, ministers have been told.

Child slavery refuses to disappear in Latin America

Child labor has been substantially reduced in Latin America, but 5.7 million children below the legal minimum age are still working and a large proportion of them work in precarious, high-risk conditions or are unpaid, which constitute new forms of slave labor.

For the International Labor Organization (ILO) child labor includes children working before they reach the minimum legal age or carrying out work that should be prohibited, according to Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, in force since 2000, ipsnews.net reported.

The vast majority of these children work in agriculture, but many also work in high-risk sectors such as mining, domestic labor, fireworks manufacturing and fishing.

Three countries in the region, Brazil, Mexico and Paraguay, exemplify child labor, which includes forms of modern-day slavery.

In Paraguay, a country of 7.2 million people, the tradition of 'criadazgo' goes back to colonial times and persists despite laws that prohibit child labor, lawyer Cecilia Gadea wrote.

"Very poor families, usually from rural areas, are forced to give their under-age children to relatives or families who are financially better off, who take charge of their upbringing, education and food," a practice known as 'criadazgo', she explained.

"But it is not for free or out of solidarity, but in exchange for the children carrying out domestic work," said Gadea, who is doing research on the topic for her master's thesis at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Flacso).

In Paraguay, the country in South

America with the highest poverty rate and one of the 10 most unequal countries in the world, some 47,000 children (2.5 percent of the child population) are in a situation of criadazgo, according to the non-governmental organization Global Infancia. Of these, 81.6 percent are girls.

"People do not want to accept it, but it is one of the worst forms of work. It is not a solidarity-based action as people try to present it, it is a form of child labor and exploitation. It is also a kind of slavery because children are subjected to carrying out forced tasks not appropriate to their age, they are punished, and many may not even be allowed to leave the house," said Gadea.

According to the researcher, most of the so-called 'criaditos' (little servants), ranging in age from five to 15, are "subjected to forced labor, domestic tasks for many hours and without rest; they are mistreated, abused, punished and exploited; they are not allowed to go to school; they live in precarious conditions; they are not fed properly; and they do not receive medical care, among other limitations".

Only a minority of them "are not abused or exposed to danger, go to school, play, are well cared for, and all things considered, lead a good life",



JOAQUÍN CORTEZ

she said. The origins of criadazgo lay in the hazardous forced labor to which the

Spanish colonizers subjected indigenous women and children, said Gadea. Paraguay was devastated by two

wars, one in the second half of the 19th Century and another in the first half of the 20th Century, its male population decimated, and was left in the hands of women, children and the elderly, who had to rebuild the country.

"The widespread poverty forced mothers to give their children to families with better incomes, so they could take charge of their upbringing, education and food, while the mothers worked to survive and rebuild a country left in ruins," she said.

The practice continues, according to Gadea, because of inequality and poverty. Large low-income families "find the only solution is handing over one or more of their children for them to be provided with better living conditions".

On the other hand, "there are people who need these 'criaditos' to work as domestics, because they are cheap labor, since they only require a little food and a place to sleep", she said.

Campaigns to combat this tradition that is deeply-rooted in Paraguayan society face resistance from many sectors, including Congress.

It is a "hidden and invisible practice that is hardly talked about. Many defend it because they consider it an act of solidarity, a means of survival for children living in extreme poverty", she added.

Mexico is another of the Latin American countries with the highest levels of child labor exploitation, in sectors such as agriculture, or maquiladoras — for-export assembly plants.

In Mexico, with a population of 122 million people, there are more than 2.5 million children working — 8.4 percent of the child population. The problem is concentrated in the states of Colima, Guerrero and Puebla, explained Joaquín Cortez, author of the study 'Modern Child Slavery: Cases of Child Labor Exploitation in the Maquiladoras'.

Cortez researched in particular the textile maquilas of the central state of Puebla.

Children there "work in extremely precarious conditions, in addition to working more than 48 hours a week, receiving wages of between \$29 and \$40 per week. To withstand the workloads they often inhale drugs like marijuana or crack", the researcher from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) said.

In some maquilas "strategies have been used to evade accountability. As in the case of working children who, in the face of labor inspections, are hidden in the bathrooms between the bundles of jeans", said Cortez.

"They work in truly inhuman, overheated spaces. They are not given even the minimum safety measures, such as facemasks so they do not inhale lint from jeans, or gloves for tearing seams, which hurts their fingers. The repetitive work of cutting fabric with large scissors hurts their hands," he said.

In short, Cortez noted that "they are more at risk because they work as much as or more than an adult and earn less".

Minority children develop implicit racial bias in early childhood

New research from York University suggested that minority children as young as six years old show an implicit pro-White racial bias when exposed to images of both White and Black children. But how ingrained these biases become, and whether they persist into late childhood and adulthood might depend on their social environment.

Faculty of Health Professor Jennifer Steele conducted two studies with graduate student Meghan George and her former PhD student Amanda Williams, now at the School of Education, University of Bristol. They were interested in looking at implicit racial bias in traditionally understudied populations. The goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of children's automatic racial attitudes, sciencedaily.com wrote.

In both studies children were asked to complete a child-friendly Implicit Association Test (IAT) which measures automatic associations that children may have

toward different races. In this computer task, children were asked to pair pictures of people with positive or negative images as quickly as possible.

The first study was conducted in the large urban city of Toronto, Canada and included 162 South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, as well as Black minority children; children were divided into younger and older age groups with average ages of seven and nine respectively. Children were recruited from racially diverse areas with a large Black population within their schools and local community.

"We found that non-Black minority children living in a racially diverse part of Toronto showed an implicit pro-White bias from six years of age," said Steele.

"However, what was interesting was that older children, who were on average nine years of age, showed less pro-White bias than younger children. This suggests to us that racial biases might not be as

stable across development as researchers first thought. In this case, there could be factors in their racially diverse environ-



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ment that are leading older children to show less bias, such as cross-race friends, mentors, positive Black role models, or a more Afrocentric curriculum that are

helping to reinforce positive associations with this racial group."

In contrast, the second study was con-

ducted in the urban city of Bandar Seri Begawan, in the small Southeast Asian country of Brunei Darussalam and included Malay majority and Chinese

minority children and adults. These children had limited opportunities for direct contact with members of either White or Black outgroups in both their immediate environment, as well as the larger Southeast Asian cultural context of Brunei.

In this study, younger children, older children, and adults were quicker to pair positive pictures with White faces and negative pictures with Black faces on the IAT. However, the magnitude of bias was greater for adults.

Steele believes that this could be because they have had more time and opportunity than children to develop positive associations with people from White racial outgroups, due to their depiction and overrepresentation in high status roles in the news and online.

More research will be needed to determine what exactly led to these age differences in implicit racial bias. However, the results point to the role that the environment can play in shaping implicit racial

attitudes. These results, combined with other research, indicate the importance of giving children the opportunity to connect with people from diverse groups early in life in order to challenge racial biases, says Steele.

"It is important for children to be exposed to diversity in their lives and for them to learn to appreciate this diversity. That can include reading stories with main characters from different backgrounds when people live in more racially homogeneous environments, or through positive experiences in multicultural cities," said Steele.

"In our educational system, it is important that our materials reflect our increasingly diverse communities, and that children have the opportunity to learn about successful, contributing members of society from all walks of life. This can help to challenge racial biases and can help to contribute to a more equitable society for everyone."

Poverty may be bad for brain

Aging Baby Boomers have taken a variety of approaches to keep their cognitive abilities sharp, from meditation to specially designed games to (my personal favorite) eating chocolate.

But new research finds one factor that influences the rate at which our brains age is largely outside our control: Our socioeconomic status, psmag.com reported.

"We provide evidence that there exists a powerful relationship between an individual's present environment and their brain," a research team led by Micaela Chan and Gagan Wig of the University of Texas, Dallas wrote in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

In its study, middle-aged adults of lower socioeconomic status "exhibited steeper both functional and structural brain aging earlier in adulthood" than their better-off peers.

"Engaging and resourceful environments associated with higher socioeconomic status may provide a buffer or delay aging associated," the researchers wrote.

"Inadequate health conditions associated with lower socioeconomic status environments (such as exposure to toxins and poorer nutrition), together with continual

stress, may accelerate the aging process."

The study featured 304 participants between the ages of 20 and 89, who were recruited in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Their socioeconomic status was determined by their years of education and occupation.

Using neuroimaging, the researchers evaluated participants' brains in two ways, measuring "functional network organization and cortical gray matter thickness".

They found both measures demonstrated greater aging in people of lower socioeconomic status, even after accounting for demographic differences and personal health.

The results raised an obvious question: Was this a long-term effect of a difficult life, or can it be traced back to their childhoods? To find out, the researchers noted the childhood socioeconomic status of 168 of the participants (which was estimated using their parents' education level as a marker).

Taking that information into account did not change their results, which suggested the more pronounced neural aging appears to be cumulative.



psmag.com

While the reasons for this aren't entirely clear, the researchers point to some obvious possibilities. People who are struggling to get by tend to have less access to nutritious food, high-quality health care, and opportunities for "continuous and sustained learning", they wrote.

Besides living in a "less stimulating environment", they are subject to "environmental and social stressors", which can have long-term negative effects on the brain. A 2014 study found African-Americans age more rapidly than whites, presumably due to the stress of dealing with racism.

"We've long been told that a mind is a terrible thing to waste. Perhaps we need to remember it's also a terrible thing for a mind to waste away."

Dangerous social media challenges could leave behind lifelong injuries

Dangerous challenges on social media are becoming much more common among teens.

Videos showing teens harming themselves to gain attention or follow the latest social media trends are surfacing all over the Internet. Medical experts say this is only the beginning, valleycentral.com wrote.

"These kids really don't know the dangers, they're just doing it for the likes, the followers. In reality, they don't know the health issues that could arise from these challenges," said Erika Gomez, who works at the McAllen Primary Care Clinic.

The most recent of the dark social media trends is "the deodorant challenge," where someone sprays deodorant onto bare skin for as long as possible.

"It can go from first degree, second degree, even third degree burns. You are obviously going to end up with scars," said Gomez.

Another dangerous trend popping up on the Internet is the "Ice and salt challenge," where teens

pour salt on a part of their body and then place an ice cube over it. The salt can lower the temperature of the ice cube to one degree within five minutes leaving the teen with serious and permanent burns.

Although this trend has been seen in past years, local doctors say it's

hand. "I think they're pretty stupid. It can be fun for adults, but kids, it's pretty unsafe," said Mauricio Flores.

Experts agree that better parental supervision will help decrease the number of dangerous accidents



napoliaw.com

still happening right here in the Rio Grande Valley.

"I've had a couple of patients with the actual scars of the burning, the ice and the salt burning," said Gomez.

Parents say it's getting out of

caused by social media challenges. "We go back to them feeling pressured to fit in. But it has to do a lot with how they're raised and we as parents need to always be aware and monitoring them so it doesn't happen," said Gomez.