Child Labour: Alive, Well, and Entertaining

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Abstract

According to the International Labour Organisation (2016), child labour can be defined as work that denies children the opportunity of a normal childhood, a child’s potential and dignity, and work that can cause harm either physically or mentally. Further, the definition also calls into question any work that requires children to combine school and excessively long work. In addition, data from the ILO indicates that no child labour exists in Western countries such as the United States of America, Britain, France and Italy. Yet, when applying the ILO’s definition of child labour, this paper finds that child labour does indeed exist in the West. Not only does child labour exist, but it is seen as “positive” and legitimate despite clearly overstepping the bounds of the child labour definition, as well as clear evidence that working in the identified industries can cause harm. Specifically, child labour is used in the entertainment industries such as acting, modelling and sports. If child labour within these industries is deemed legitimate despite clear evidence linking child acting, for instance, to greater exposure to mental illness, moral harm, and exposure to alcohol and drug abuse (see Kwitter, 2010), a clear rationale needs to be provided as to why the entertainment industry is exempted from the ILO’s child labour definition. This rationale is non-existent, and this paper points out these inconsistencies in the application of the ILO’s child labour definitions and subsequent policies.