Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Social Sciences
ISSN: 2284-5747 | e-ISSN: 2458-1054
Covered in: ERIH PLUS, CEEOL, J- GATE, CrossRef, CrossCheck, Google Scholar, Ideas RePeC, Econpapers, Socionet, KVK, WorldCat, ICI Journals Master List - Index Copernicus.

2024, Volume 13, Issue 2, pages: 1-28 | doi: https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenss/13.2/104

Social Values, Family Work Involvement and School Education of Children in a Rural Area of Satu-Mare County

Florica FERNEA [1]
Gavril FLORA [2]

[1] University of Oradea, Doctoral School of Sociology, 1 Universităţii Str. Oradea RO-410087, Romania, floricafernea@yahoo.com
[2] Partium Christian University, Department of Human Sciences, 36 Primăriei Str. Oradea RO-410209, Romania, gavrilflora@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This article presents the results of a research carried out in a rural area of Satu-Mare County, which aimed to identify the practices regarding work in family agricultural households of rural children in connection with their school education. Our study is an exploratory research on the involvement of rural children in household work, as well as of the meanings that parents give to family work and school education, taking into account their value systems, expectations, relationships with their families and other relevant factors. For the collection of quantitative data, we used a questionnaire based survey on a representative sample of children and their parents, while for the qualitative data semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and focus group interview with teachers. The research results reveal that the involvement of children in the work of family households is considered by parents as a natural component of the family socialization of children, related to the need to acquire work skills characteristic of the rural way of life. Among parents there is a preoccupation for the balance between school education and household activities, with an emphasis on the relevance of practical education. Child labour can negatively affect school performance; however, rural life offers children valuable hands-on learning opportunities.*

Keywords: *rural children, rural families, family values, family work, school education.*

How to cite: Fernea, F. & Flora, G. (2024). Social values, family work involvement and school education of children in a rural area of Satu-Mare county. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Social Sciences, 13*(2), 1-28. https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenss/13.2/104

©2024 Published by LUMEN Publishing. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Introduction

In traditional Romanian rural communities up to 89% of children in rural households are involved in agricultural work (Ghinăraru, 2004; Sîrca, 2017). The majority of economically active children in Romania work in agriculture; their work is performed manually, mainly in family households, together with adult family members. Although poverty is frequently presented as the "cause" of child labour, economic research demonstrates that this relationship is not linear (Pantea, 2008, 99). In this article, we aim to contribute to the clarification of this issue by presenting the results of a research that we carried out in a rural area of Satu-Mare County.

Our study is based on exploratory research of the involvement of rural children in the work of family households in connection with their involvement with school education as well as the meanings that parents give to family work and children's school education, taking into account their value systems, expectations, relationships with their families and other relevant factors. Thus, our investigation focused on the following research questions:

1 What is the ratio between the time dedicated to work and that allocated to school activities?

2 How does involvement in family work influence children's school performance?

3 What is the effect of the social values of rural families on parental decisions regarding children's work involvement and school education?

The following sections provide essential benchmarks of the theoretical framework that was the basis of our scientific approach and outline the main characteristics of the Romanian social context of the child labour phenomenon. After the presentation of the research methodology, the main results of the research follow, structured according to the research questions. The article ends with the discussion of the results from the perspective of the relevant theoretical approaches from the specialized literature and conclusions.

Literature review

Work involvement, family values and school education of rural children

To define child labour, it is first necessary to define the age limits of childhood. The boundary between childhood and adulthood is usually the age of 18 (ILO, 1973). However, it should not be forgotten that there are

cultures (in Anglo-Saxon countries) where people are not considered adults until the age of 21 (Grootaert & Kanbur, 1995). In general, it can be found that there is no consensus in the literature and the specific legislation of different countries regarding the appropriate ages to define child labour. The age category between 5 and 17 is used in many UN reports. However, it is necessary to differentiate work at different ages, as children in their teenage years are less vulnerable to abuse at work. The age categories of 5-11 and 5-14 years are most frequently used (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2016).

In the methodology developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), several types of work were delineated to define child workers. Thus, children over 8 years old can do light physical work, and those over 15 years old can already do ordinary/general work. Hazardous jobs are only allowed for over 18s (ILO, 1973, 2006). At the same time, in the case of developing countries, it is possible, exceptionally, to perform light physical work from the age of 12, and ordinary or general work from the age of 14.

Some studies distinguish between 'working children' and 'busy children', while using the terms 'working children', 'economically active children' and 'busy children' interchangeably. In such cases, the former ('working children') are considered a subset of the latter ('employed children' or any of the interchangeable terms mentioned above). (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2016).

As several studies have shown, children's work engagement can harm their ability to enter and survive in the school system and make it difficult for children to gain educational benefits from schooling once in the system (Guarcello et al., 2008). School failure, dropping out, and repeating school years can be common among working children (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2012). Children also often become alienated from school due to the perceived incompatibility of their family cultures with classroom educational practices and value systems promoted in educational institutions (Patrinos & Grootaert, 2002). Both the quality of the school and access to the school can play an important role in parents' decisions regarding the orientation of their children to study or to work.

.There is a number of reasons why, conceptually, child labour could indeed be caused by poor living conditions. For example, children could only work if the parents could not meet the conditions of existence; or it could happen that parents allocate more of their children's time to school because they can afford the resources needed for schooling (Ortiz-Espina & Roser, 2016). Since time is a limited resource, the extent to which children are engaged is related to the frequency at school and depends on the type and number of hours worked. In countries where children tend to work longer hours, it is more common for working children to stay out of school.

It is most difficult for a child to go to school when they approach full-time work. In this regard, there are no significant differences depending on the type of work: domestic or commercial (Edmonds, 2008).

The specific choice of the work career of rural children is influenced directly or indirectly by the family life patterns and the career options of the parents. In this sense, the level of education and employment of the parents are the most important determining factors of the household. Neumayer & De Soysa (2005) point out that in families where parents have received a higher level of education, greater efforts are made to provide their own children with better educational opportunities. The more educated parents are the less likely children are to work. In contrast, in rural peasant families, further education tends to be neglected by children working in their own families as a possible career-building option.

Child labour can harm children's ability to enter and survive in the school system and make it more difficult for children to gain educational benefits from schooling once in the system (Guarcello et al., 2008). Children are often alienated from school also because of the perceived incompatibility of their family cultures with classroom educational practices and value systems promoted in educational institutions (Patrinos & Grootaert, 2002).

In contrast, other research results highlight the fact that many children successfully combine work and school. While work sometimes interferes with schooling, it can itself have beneficial educational effects in developing the child's "personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (UNCRC, 2001). An important indicator of the social and moral benefits of work is how working and non-working children constructively integrate into their communities and establish stable and functioning families (Aufseeser et al 2017, 11).

Child labour often represents an important contribution to their families and contributes to the status of children within them; in some cases, work contributes to children's schooling by improving nutrition and covering school-related expenses. Even more important can be the contribution of work to child development: children learn life skills through work; such learning can sometimes be more important than the learning provided by available schooling, which is often of poor quality and of limited relevance to their situation (Bourdillon, 2011). Although child labour is predominantly present in countries with a low level of economic development, the results of contemporary research from different countries show that the phenomenon can also persist in families that preserve a traditional peasant way of life and traditional family values, even in the

conditions of the process advanced rural and agricultural development and modernization (White, 2014).

Cultural differences also influence the salience of the phenomenon. In many traditional societies work is believed to be a part of socialization that teaches children the ability to survive through work (Grootaert & Kanbur, 1995). In the traditional rural family, the central position of values related to work and family solidarity, especially the requirement of unconditional mutual help within the family, has a crucial role in shaping the educational model and relationships within the family.

Holmes and Jones (2009) highlight in this regard that to be sustainable and truly beneficial in the long term, such protection must be holistic, following trends in social protection that aim to be transformative by addressing inequalities and promoting opportunities, rather than focusing only on avoiding harm. As Myers and Bourdillon (2012) note, a holistic approach should address the overall situation of the children concerned, so that protection does not lead to more harmful effects elsewhere.

Educational problems, family work and quality of life of rural children in Romania

Inequality of educational opportunities represents one of the fundamental challenges of the Romanian education system. 37.9% of children under 16 and 37.4% of young people aged 16-24 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Also, 57.6% of families with more than two children and 48, 8% of single people with dependent children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Florian & Țoc, 2020).

This situation is also reflected at the level of the educational system. Of the total number of graduates in 2020, 83% were from urban areas and only 17% from rural areas, reflecting the educational level gap between the rural and urban populations. In the same year, 87,071 graduates were from rural areas however their number was 13% lower than in 2011, reflecting a downward trend in the level of education (Popescu et al., 2022). According to the most recent studies on educational inequalities (Florian & Țoc, 2020), these disadvantages are later reflected in the national tests at the end of the 8th grade, where the average grades in rural and urban areas differ by up to 1.20 points, meaning differences in access to the next stage, in which graduating students from rural areas continue their studies at the high school level.

Probably the most pertinent analysis of today's situation is represented by the studies carried out by World Vision Romania, "Child's well-being in the rural environment", conducted for the first time in 2012 and repeated in 2014 and the following years, which is unique in the field of research concerning the level of child well-being in Romania and is part of

the continuous series of periodic analyses carried out by World Vision Romania (WVR) starting in 2005. This study presents a longitudinal comparative analysis of the main indicators regarding child well-being, compiled in a data set representative for the Romanian rural society regarding the evolution of the measured indicators.

Following the child's development from a physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional point of view, the research carried out by World Vision Romania details aspects related to health and nutrition, education, covering material needs, protection, participation in decision-making in the family and community, the psychological level, the implementation of Christian values and the effects of parents' migration on children.

The results of World Vision Romania research confirm a strong involvement of children in household activities, the main source of maintaining the standard of living. From a young age, children take part in various jobs, starting with the easy ones, until, as they grow older, and the most demanding and even dangerous ones. It is natural for adults to position themselves in relation to children as well-informed people, able to guide them on the way to maturity, and in such cases, children expect from adults (parents, teachers, other specialists) clear recommendations regarding the possibilities of practice of different tasks, occupations, activities, including work that would allow them to become familiar with adult life. However, there are also families that, due to unfavourable economic and social situations, and also some preconceptions, force their children to perform including hard and dangerous work, and the parents not only support these activities, they also take advantage of the children's income. Thus, many teenagers decide to abandon their studies in favour of an unskilled job, which would bring them a real income for the time being.

Approximately half of the children for whom data was provided by the parents help their family clean the household, and 32.5% contribute to the care of the animals the family owns. About 12% of children provide care support to other family members. A much smaller percentage (3.3%) of children is working in the households of neighbours or other citizens (WVR, 2014, 49-50).

The parents say that the child's involvement in activities is done more for educational than productive purposes, that the activities that the children do are strictly adapted to the child's age and level of development and that these activities are done after the homework is finished and in no case do the children they are detained from school for these. However, parents believe that the effort their children make today does not compare to their childhood experience: "Today's children no longer work the way we did when we were

children. They complain even after working for 10 minutes" (WVR, 2014, 50), agree some of the parents. There are also parents who admit that they use their children's work for agricultural activities, that sometimes their older children are absent from school, especially in the spring, during agricultural campaigns. These statements are consistent with the information provided by some secondary school principals who noticed an increase in absenteeism among 7th and 8th grade students in the spring, during agricultural work.

A quarter of rural children say they are tired because they have to work in the household (before or after school). 12% do not come to school because they had to work (Bădescu & Petre, 2012). One in three teenagers (37%) sometimes or always misses school because they have to work in the household. The average workday is two hours, which, along with school schedules, commuting and homework puts an extremely heavy burden on teenagers' schedules: 46 percent of them blame fatigue from work (World Vision, 2022).

In addition to children's involvement in work, school performance can be influenced by multiple variables, including family attitudes towards education, which differ significantly between rural and urban environments (Hatos, 2006; Bălţătescu & Bacter, 2015), being lower in rural areas than in the urban environment (Popescu et al., 2022; Florian & Țoc, 2020). Rural children spend more time commuting to and from school (about 90 minutes a day) and spend two hours a day helping their parents clean the house, take care of animals or care for other family members. 13% of rural children say they work at least 4 hours a day. Working at home is clearly a disadvantage in terms of the quality of life of rural children, a sociological survey reveals. The study shows that poverty among children leads to a series of vulnerabilities, such as limited access to services, marginalization, poor school performance and school dropout, which have a significant impact on children's later development (Bădescu & Petre, 2012).

The main problems identified are related to the differences in the distribution of resources between rural and urban environments and the differences in school enrolment rates. Added to these are the economic and social difficulties faced by many families with children in the country, which causes an increase in absenteeism and school dropouts, having a significant impact on children's development and later on their integration into work and society (Bădescu & Petre, 2012).

Several studies show that the child's education reproduces the educational aspirations developed within the family, where adults with a high level of education have the skills to adapt to the demands of the education system to a greater extent than those with a lower level of education (Neagu

et al., 2009; Vătăşescu, 2009; Ţoc, 2018). The material situation of the family also influences the possibilities of continuing studies in the next cycle of studies. In these situations, due to the low financial resources of the family, it is very unlikely that the student will be supported in continuing his studies. In addition, the placement of school networks in general, and accessible secondary schools in particular, in rural areas is unsatisfactory, with the distribution of secondary schools showing an urban concentration to the detriment of rural ones (Fartuşnic, 2015; Vasile et al., 2020). The situation, along with additional contextual and objective variables, determines the likelihood that students from poorer families will not continue their studies after high school (World Vision, 2020,122).

Methodology

Our research took place in the geographical area of rural localities located in the Someş Valley between the cities of Satu-Mare and Baia Mare, which extends over a distance of approximately 60 kilometres. The villages in the area are connected by DN193, which is the only access road to these localities in the absence of railway lines. In this area, the traditional occupations were carrying out various agricultural activities and raising animals, and in the last decades several commercial companies and many individual enterprises with the field of activity in dairy cattle breeding, have also appeared. These companies offer jobs for the residents of the area, and certain intellectual professions are also found in a smaller number, such as teachers, professors, medical staff, respectively public administration staff. Neighbouring cities such as Satu-Mare and Baia-Mare offer more employment opportunities for commuters in exchange for more attractive salaries. Children can be enrolled according to the choice and possibilities of the families in urban school units in Satu-Mare or Baia Mare, respectively in the four secondary schools in the localities of Pomi, Culciu Mare, Valea Vinului and Păuleşti.

In order to reveal as detailed as possible the social-educational aspects and phenomena related to child labour, we opted for a research based on both quantitative methods that present the advantage of identifying general trends and qualitative methods that present the advantage of studying the issue in depth. For the collection of quantitative data we used the questionnaires, for the qualitative data the semi-structured interviews with parents and focus group with teachers, as the main means of research.

The questionnaires were applied in pairs, so we obtained data from the students in grades V - VIII and from one parent, either their mother or

their father. From the students we obtained, in addition to demographic data and information on the work carried out in the household, the type of snot and the time allocated to these activities, data on school activities and performances, respectively recreational and free time activities. From the parents, we learned a lot of details about the family, their educational and occupational status, information about the home and the assets owned by the family, data on the family's sources of income and standard of living, respectively the parents' intentions regarding the children's future from an educational point of view.

The total population consists of 327 children, enrolled in grades V-VIII, of which we will include 50% in the sample with the non-random method of quotas while maintaining the distribution by grades (Table no. 1). This method is capable of producing "results close to random sampling if the population is homogeneous" (Andrei, 2001, 82). We consider that the population of students from the V-VIII secondary schools is relatively homogeneous because they have an identical school program, and also the families have similar characteristics, they have similar social, material and occupational status, the living conditions are specific to peasant households in the sense that the vast majority of them carry out agricultural or animal breeding activities at least for their own consumption.

Table 1: *Population and sample structure*

	Total population		**Sample with the share of 50%**	
Class of students	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Fifth grade	76	23,2	38	23,2
Sixth grade	80	24,5	40	24,4
Seventh grade	89	27,2	45	27,4
Eighth grade	82	25,1	41	25
Total	**327**	**100**	**164**	**100**

In addition to the 164 students, the sample includes one of their parents, so the sample can be divided into two groups, the group of students (n = 164) and the group of parents (n = 164).

The interviews were conducted with 10 parents of children from the four rural schools included in the research. The interviews were based on a semi-structured guide that covers topics such as family life, household and agricultural work in which children are involved, respectively perceptions

about the relationship between work and school. The interview subjects represent parents from different socio-cultural and economic situations. The interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed for in-depth analysis. The participants were informed about the fact of the recording and were assured about the anonymity of the conversation. In the presentation of the answers, the subjects were identified by numbers.

The focus-group interview was carried out with a number of six teachers from the Păuleşti Secondary School based on the interview guide written after the collection and processing of data from students and teachers, thus during the group interview it was possible to reflect on the previous partial results. We opted for this order of data collection so that the results could also be checked from the perspective of the teaching staff.

Results

The relationship between time slots allocated to work involvement and school education of rural children

The interviews show that agricultural activities represent an important source of primary or secondary income for families. What is common to the families interviewed is that they all carry out agricultural activities, the nature, volume and intensity of these activities, the way production is organized, the degree of mechanization, the degree of orientation towards consumption and/or sale, as well as the interweaving of agricultural and non-agricultural incomes showing a wide variety of situations from one family to another. Subsidies and state aid are often insufficient to meet the needs of families, which puts pressure on households to work harder.

As it follows from the responses to the questionnaires, in general children (n = 164) are involved in various household and family work: 90.2% (n = 148) of children perform one or more activities, as can be seen in Table no. 2; only a percentage of 9.8% (n = 16) is not involved in such jobs at all. The most frequently encountered work activities are cleaning (75%, n = 123), animal care (64.6%, n = 106), gardening (54.9%, n = 90), and also field work (29 .9%, n = 49), in addition to other activities (25%, n = 41).

Table 2: *Jobs in which children are involved*

Type of activity	N	%
cleans the house		
Yes	123	75,0
No	41	25,0
Total	164	100,0
take care of animals		
Yes	106	64,6
No	58	35,4
Total	164	100,0
help with gardening		
Yes	90	54,9
No	74	45,1
Total	164	100,0
helps with field work		
Yes	49	29,9
No	115	70,1
Total	164	100,0
care for other members of the household		
Yes	42	25,6
No	122	74,4
Total	164	100,0
they work with their neighbours or in other households in the village		
Yes	14	8,5
No	150	91,5
Total	164	100,0
perform other work activities		
Yes	41	25,0
No	123	75,0
Total	164	100,0

In the families interviewed, children are often involved in household activities, and also in agricultural or animal husbandry activities. Children are mainly involved in feeding the animals and gardening. Parents try to give their children responsibilities that are consistent with their level of physical and intellectual development. The tasks are adapted to the children's physical ability.

"The child occasionally participates in agricultural activities, such as bringing water to the animals or accompanying the parents to the farm. She is never asked to perform excessively demanding tasks. At home, the little girl performs various light household chores, such as vacuuming, mopping the floor and washing the dishes." (1)

"The older ones occasionally contribute to household activities, especially during the holidays. Children help with feeding animals and gardening, but avoid activities that require heavy physical effort. They are always supervised when they work."(2)

"The little girl is in charge of picking and sorting the vegetables, brings water and food to the animals in the stable, and other things, everything that is needed in the household and in the house. There were cases when I also took her to the market to help sell."(6)

"Children are actively involved in various household activities, such as raising animals and handling agricultural products, cleaning and using all kinds of tools, even motorized ones."(7)

"The youngest son contributes to the sorting of vegetables and distribution, but also to feeding the animals, within the limits of his available time. In addition, it promotes family products, but especially boarding services among friends and on the Internet. He also does various household chores, even supervises the boarding house, and distributes bedding, towels." (10).
When the teachers were asked about the activities carried out by the children in or around the household, several answers emerged: One participant claimed that he questioned the children about the products they have in the garden, and the children could not answer, they really didn't know what kind of varieties were grown by their parents. Another teacher specified that there are children who really go to work with their parents even abroad to plant, to pick strawberries, to pick apples, vegetables, greens, even when working abroad, the families being motivated by money. A third participant mentions that he has knowledge of many cases where children, especially as spring approaches, go to work to earn pocket money. There are also situations where children help their parents with various household chores or in the garden. The father, alone, would not be able to cope with the work. In these situations older children help the most.

Based on the valid answers of the children participating in the research (n = 163), the time allocated to work around and inside the

household was outlined (Table no. 3). 64% (n = 105) of children help their parents in these jobs for 1-2 hours a day, 11% (n = 18) give this type of activity 3-4 hours, and only 3.1% (n = 5) work 5 hours or more. The percentage of those who do not consider home activities as work time amounts to 21.5% (n = 35), specifying that from the data presented above only 9.8% are not involved in any kind of activity.

Table 3: *The time allocated for work in or outside the household*

		N	%	% valid
Valid	Not working	35	21,3	21,5
	1-2 hours	105	64,0	64,4
	3-4 hours	18	11,0	11,0
	5 or more hours	5	3,0	3,1
	Total	163	99,4	100,0
NR		1	,6	
Total		164	100,0	

In some cases, the involvement of children in various jobs is a necessity for the family's livelihood. The time affected by these activities can also have a seasonal character, depending on the household's need for labour depending on the season, and also on other factors that influence the child's available time budget, such as the schedule of the school year and vacation periods.

"The little girl helps us especially during the summer, in the spring or autumn only within the limit of the available time, because education at school has priority. Her working hours vary according to the needs of the household." (6)

"The children help us every day with something, but not for a very long time. The time required for work also depends on its type, the subject not being able to accurately specify its amount. The daughter is only involved in the lighter jobs. The daily working time for the children does not exceed four hours; the daughter helps to sell the products only occasionally."(7)

"The child's working time differs depending on the school situation, but there are also days when he helps all day, especially during the summer. Sometimes it helps for an hour, two, three, depending on the need. The

child generally does very well with any work, but there are also more demanding, tiring activities for him, for example harvesting crops, when the weather is warmer." (10)

Children's household work can affect their well-being in approximately a quarter of cases: 22.8% (n = 36) sometimes feel tired, while exhaustion is always present in 7% (n = 11) of cases (Table no. 4).

Table 4: *Children feel tired because they worked before or after school hours*

		N	%	% valid
Valid	Never	111	67,7	70,3
	Sometimes	36	22,0	22,8
	Always	11	6,7	7,0
	Total	158	96,3	100,0
NR		6	3,7	
Total		164	100,0	

The results of the questionnaires with the students in the sense that about a quarter of them show up at school in a state of fatigue due to work, were refuted by all the participants in the focus group. A participant reported that she does not know concrete cases, however she knows from hearsay about children who complained that they were very tired because they were at work or in the forest and that they could not cope at school. Instead, she knows for sure about cases where when it came to schoolwork, children said that they did not have time to learn or do their homework because they had other activities or other work to do. However it is not known with certainty whether this reason cited was real or an invented one, used as an excuse.

Due to work, 91.8% (n = 146) of the children never missed school, even though there were isolated cases in the proportion of 8.2% (n = 13) when this sometimes happened (Table no. 5)

Table 5: *Students miss school because of work*

		N	%	% valid
Valid	Never	146	89,0	91,8
	Sometimes	13	7,9	8,2
	Always	0	0,0	0,0
	Total	159	97,0	100,0
NR		5	3,0	
Total		164	100,0	

In the focus group conducted with the teachers, the opinion emerged that sometimes children cannot come to school, because they have to stay at home and take care of the house or the little ones. This happens when the parent has to travel to the city for work or other business. Children may also miss school on certain days when they are given work, such as fixing the fence. In another case, when the mother went to work, the child did not come to school because he/she had to stay with his/her younger brother or sister.

School assignments are solved in an interval of 1-2 hours in the vast majority of cases (71.6%, n = 116), however there are also students who spend more than 2 hours a day reading (25.3%, n = 41). Only 5 children representing 3.1% of the respondents do not allocate time at all for homework (see Table no. 6).

Table 6: *Time allocated daily for schoolwork*

		N	%	% valid
Valid	I don't allocate time	5	3,0	3,1
	1-2 hours	116	70,7	71,6
	more than 2 hours	41	25,0	25,3
	Total	162	98,8	100,0
NR		2	1,2	
Total		164	100,0	

A distinct aspect addressed in the interviews referred to the children's free time, compared to the necessary time allocated to school activities. Although divided opinions were expressed, there was a consensus on the need to provide the child with optimal, quality leisure opportunities.

"The older girl has enough free time to meet her friends. But communication in our family is very good; we can openly discuss anything, including the girls' friends."(4)

"A reduction in the volume of school subjects would be beneficial, so that students have time to form certain hobbies. The rural environment offers more space for relaxation, thus being an advantage for the child." (5)

"In the family, all members spend a lot of time together; they talk about what happened at school, what their friends say. Usually the child meets with

friends at the end of the week, but he also keeps in touch with them on social networks or on the phone. We also spend free time together during holidays. We have different activities that everyone in the family likes, like fishing. Sometimes we even invite the children's friends to these family programs." (10)

Focus group discussions reveal that students do indeed have free time however they do not know how to use it properly, noting that many children admit to spending their afternoons mainly using their phones. Phones with different applications have become ubiquitous and children no longer know how to play traditionally, which is also noticeable during school breaks. Students do not know the childhood games characteristic of their age, do not spend time outdoors, even if they live in the country, and have difficulties with socialization. A negative consequence of the excessive use of digital technologies is that students no longer know how to mediate conflicts.

Family work involvement and school performance

The time spent preparing and solving homework seems to be sufficient considering the relatively high averages of children between grades 9 - 10 (58.3%, n = 81), and between grades 8 - 9 (20.9%, n = 29). These grades (Table no. 7) reflect school performance in the last school year, i.e. 2021-2022, when partial online education took place due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 7: *The average obtained by the children in the last school year*

		N	%	% valid
Valid	under 6,00 - 6,00	4	2,4	2,9
	7,01 - 8,00	15	9,1	10,8
	8,01 - 9,00	29	17,7	20,9
	9,01 - 10,00	81	49,4	58,3
	Total	139	84,8	100,0
NR		25	15,2	
Total		164	100,0	

Based on the children's answers, it appears that students have relatively high averages. The teachers in the focus group were asked to comment on the situation. One teacher said that they had the same grading system both during the online education period during the pandemic and before and after. She believes it also lowered the overall expectation in each

class and then the high grades are used to motivate her students a bit. Learners and teachers may feel the need to reward every effort, even if the effort is less than it should be. They don't want to discourage the students. Nevertheless this practice cannot be generalized. Rather it can be about the less important subjects, such as physical education, music, and drawing.

The students participating in the research who answered the question (n = 159) generally have enough books and supplies for school (Table No. 8), based on the responses of a share of 82.4% (n = 131). A smaller share of children (16.4%, n = 26) did not declare themselves fully satisfied with the accessibility of these resources, and two children (1.3%) never have enough books and supplies.

Table 8: *Possession of books and school supplies*

		N	%	% valid
Valid	Never	2	1,2	1,3
	Sometimes	26	15,9	16,4
	Always	131	79,9	82,4
	Total	159	97,0	100,0
NR		5	3,0	
Total		164	100,0	

Regarding the quality of educational services, the interviewed parents expressed various opinions, sometimes formulating assessments at a general level, without addressing specific aspects. Regarding the criticisms made, the school program is considered quite loaded especially with theoretical subjects, with a preference for practical subjects. It was not possible to generalize, however in some cases the quality of school education is not deemed satisfactory: occasionally classes are not held, and some teachers do not enjoy the respect of parents.

"The school curriculum should focus more on subjects that are relevant to the students' profile."(1)

"The schedule is too busy, which is tiring for children. Unfortunately, practical education no longer exists in school, where only theory is taught."(2)

"In terms of the level of education, there is always room for improvement. Children still come and say that they don't do a lesson or that they do it in a certain way. Problems should be discussed and resolved in meetings with

parents. We don't know exactly what happens at school, because the child comes home and tells the story as he/she wants." (3)

"In my opinion, the school is not what it should be at the moment. The authority of the teacher seems to have disappeared lately and as I see it the school is mostly run by the parents. Most of these parents are not very educated. (9)

According to the teachers participating in the focus group, the differences in education in the rural environment compared to the urban environment are more of a psychological nature. Rural people are closer, they are a community. Communication between parents and teachers is closer, being fewer in number. The teachers know each child; they also know the situation of the families, i.e. if and when they have problems. Many more people live in the urban environment; they have no way of knowing the individual problems of the community members. Perhaps there are fewer or other problems, however they may not even be talking about these problems.

Another subject agreed and added that instead the interest in the child's schooling is different. In the urban environment, the parent wants the students to excel in their studies. In the countryside, the parent only wants the students to go to school and pass the years of education. Another participant believes that both urban and rural teachers work the same way. However, the life experiences of rural children are completely different from other children. Urban parents have very high expectations about their children's grades, probably to have better chances to continue their studies. Sometimes the parent unknowingly becomes very involved in the educational act. Thus, the authority of teachers that should exist traditionally decreases. Both the parent and the teachers have their own role in educating the child and it is not good if the roles are reversed. Also in relation to the parents from the country, it was highlighted that the share of those with higher education in the urban environment is much higher and then the children can be supported in carrying out the tasks by the parents. In rural areas there is this advantage.

According to a teacher, in the urban environment children's results are not only the results of the classroom teacher precisely because of these surroundings, such as parental support, individual classes and extra hours. In rural areas, there is a lot of work in the classroom and the teacher puts in much more effort, because he/she has no foundations, nothing to build on, and no support from anywhere, neither from another teacher nor from his parents.

Parental attitudes concerning work involvement and school education of children

From the answers of the interviewees it follows that the agricultural and household activities of the children are also seen by the parents as educational opportunities. Children get used to the value of work and will be able to appreciate other people's work as well. Household activities are perceived as opportunities for developing responsibility and a diverse set of physical skills. At the same time, children learn about nature and about traditional activities that can ensure their existence in the future.

"We could manage without the children's help, but their involvement is important for their development. Physical work also has a recreational effect, the boy becomes calmer, i.e. calms down after physical effort." (2)

"Work is beneficial for the child because it contributes to his education and the formation of a sense of responsibility towards nature and animals." (3)

"Housework helps them become responsible individuals."(5)

"It is to the advantage of the child to learn the responsibilities of life, the work helps to increase the physical endurance and thus he will be able to cope more easily in life." (6)

In the perception of the interviewed parents, work is seen as a positive necessity, which not only helps adults, it also has its role in the development of children, who thus get used to work and the value of hard-earned money.

"Children's work will help them in the future; they will be able to better appreciate the work of each person, including farmers. Household work influences the child to choose his priorities correctly."(8)

"It's part of their education. Responsibilities help the child develop."(9)

"It is good for the child's development that he interacts with other people and that he will also be good at raising animals. The fact that he gets used to the work will help him appreciate the work and activities in this field, both in agriculture, animal husbandry and tourism." (10)

Children's work socialization usually begins at an early age. The involvement of children in various jobs thus contributes to the transmission of traditional values from one generation to another.

"That's how we grew up to contribute to the household. Let's all be present in all activities, because that's good for everyone." (4)

"The little girl has been involved in the household work since she was little, she accompanied us to the field work and got used to these activities at first through play, then for pleasure. She was never forced to do anything, gradually on her own initiative she began to participate in all activities." (6)

"When the children were younger, they accompanied us to work in the fields so as not to remain unsupervised. (8)

"If something were to happen to us, then the child would have to know how to move on. Maybe the child's wish is to carry on the business started by the family."(10)

Motivating children to work is not a problem for parents, because children have been brought up to consider their participation in household activities as a matter of course. The jobs in which children are involved are considered as part of practical education, and also represent a way to spend time together as a family, thus providing opportunities for strengthening family and community relations.

"If he understands that work is rewarded, the child becomes even more motivated. In general, my kids participate with pleasure in the family work, although sometimes it is more difficult, it depends on the time and the large amount of work."(10)

"It's not good for the little girl to spend all her time in front of the laptop or the phone and she should experience and spend time outdoors." (1)

"Besides school and household chores, children have enough free time for play and friends. It is not a problem to motivate them, because they are happy to get involved."(5)

"Children enjoy their work, because while they are working they are with their family, they tell stories and joke."(7)

"Children can be motivated to participate in these activities, for example, through different programs spent together with the family after finishing work. They often gather around a round table, where they eat ice cream and cool off with juice, while talking to each other."(8)

About the support of children in the family, we included a number of three questions in the questionnaires addressed to the children. After computing the three variables we found out their score, which has an average from 1 to 3 of M = 2.89, Sd = .25, n = 155. This result indicates a high degree of children's trust in adults and members of the family, the children being supported whenever they need it.

Upon closer analysis of the data below (Table no. 9) it can be concluded that students can rely on their families in almost all cases (95.6%, n = 152), in general they can trust adults (91.1%, n = 144) and are always supported by their family (82.6%, n = 128).

Table 9: *Child support in the family*

The family is with the child when he/she needs help		*N*	%	% valid
Valid	Never	1	,6	,6
	Sometimes	6	3,7	3,8
	Always	152	92,7	95,6
	Total	159	97,0	100,0
NR		5	3,0	
Total		164	100,0	
The child trusts the adults he/she lives with				
Valid	Never	3	1,8	1,9
	Sometimes	11	6,7	7,0
	Always	144	87,8	91,1
	Total	158	96,3	100,0
NR		6	3,7	
Total		164	100,0	
The child feels supported by the whole family				
Valid	Never	2	1,2	1,3
	Sometimes	25	15,2	16,1
	Always	128	78,0	82,6
	Total	155	94,5	100,0
NR		9	5,5	
Total		164	100,0	

In order to determine whether these responses show significant differences, we performed the Friedman test. The test result is statistically significant $\chi 2$ (2, n = 155) = 26.87, $p < .01$), indicating the existence of some differences between the means of the variable ranks (the family is with the child when needed MR = 2.10, the child trusts the adults with whom the child lives MR = 2.02 and the child feels supported by the whole family (MR = 1.88).

From the answers of the interviewed parents it appears that from their perspective there is a concern for the balance between school education and household activities, with an emphasis on the relevance of practical education that is not provided by school. Based on these opinions, it could be argued that in the investigated rural families, school has priority over everyday activities. Children's school education is prioritized over their involvement in household work and activities. School absenteeism caused by the work in which the child is involved could not be identified.

"The schedule is quite busy, but it does not negatively affect the child's school performance. Household or agricultural activities do not take priority over school and the girl has enough free time to meet friends." (1)

Household activities do not negatively affect children's school performance, and even provide them with a welcome break from learning. There were no situations where these activities took priority over school." (2)

"The child only works occasionally and no more than an hour a day because he is busy with school and homework." (3)

"The children have never been absent due to urgent work. These jobs were handled by adults, and when necessary, we hired day labourers to finish the job. A responsible parent should not involve children in activities they do not want to do, especially if the child wants to read a book."(9)

Contrary to the opinions expressed by the parents, the teachers being asked during the focus group if school or work usually takes priority in the family, the negative answers were predominant. School is not a priority in the countryside; instead jobs can become a priority, not only in the spring and also in the fall, such as picking mushrooms or apples. A teacher pointed out that children's physical capabilities are not always taken into account when working.

The group discussions also show that most students are not helped at all with their homework. It was also emphasized that not all parents have the opportunity or the necessary knowledge to help children, either they do not have the level of education necessary to support them or they do not attach importance to the educational act. However, parents want visible results without efforts, without support, without involvement in the didactic act. Another teacher confirmed that she also sees that parents' interest in the educational act is decreasing. Children need school, although there is not enough awareness of what it is for.

During the discussions, the opinion emerged that household chores are beneficial when they are adapted to everyone's abilities and age. Children become more responsible and self-confident that they can do any activity that their parents do, especially when these jobs are done together with an adult. It was pointed out that this can be useful, creating a close bond between family members and allowing children to spend their time in a way that is won for all.

The importance of getting to know the child better and creating a bond between parents and children, eliminating the feeling of distance, was highlighted. In addition to physical exertion, household activities also facilitate communication, providing opportunities to discuss various topics while doing an activity together, which can strengthen relationships. By engaging in household chores, children learn about personal autonomy and responsibility, and this experience helps them manage problems and find solutions.

Limits and discussions

In the specialized literature, several sources have indicated that the Romanian socialist agricultural sector has transformed from one intensive to another oriented towards self-consumption (Mihalache & Croitoru, 2011). Under these circumstances, the contribution of each family member becomes necessary. It is not poverty itself, therefore, that is the main cause of child labour, rather, traditional modes of production, with low productivity and carried out only by family members. Thus, child labour is not seen as a temporary solution to escape poverty, rather as a state of normality, a social expectation maintained by the economic structure of households as small production units, where manual labour is an essential condition.

In the context outline above, our research results point to the fact child labour is predominantly oriented towards self-sustainability, not being directly correlated with the poverty level of the region. Instead, the traditional economic structure of households and family and community attitudes favour early involvement of children in work as a social norm derivable from cultural

characteristics of the traditional rural way of life and family/community values, which can survive in modernized or modernizing socio-economic conditions. This finding is convergent with the results of research that shows that child labour often comes together with the use by children and their families of modern communication and relationship techniques (such as smartphones, Facebook, etc.), signifying the perpetuation of traditional mind-sets in a world modernized (Bourdillon, 2011).

Child labour can harm school performance, as has been argued in the literature. (Guarcello et al., 2008). Dominant social values usually affect children's school performance through parents' latent orientation in their relationship with school and education (Voicu, 2010). Family attitudes towards education differ in the opinion of parents and teachers according to our results. Parents have a more positive attitude and state that school education is a priority, and there is an emphasis on children's practical learning by involving them in work and household activities. Teachers are of the opinion that education is affected by household work and the balance is difficult to find between school and household responsibilities. Teachers believe that parents living in rural areas do not pay the necessary attention to school education.

Parents claim that the work is always adapted to the children's physical capacity, precautions are taken, for example by supervision. Teachers have reported cases where students show up at school tired or explain the lack of homework with homework. It is not clear, however, whether this excuse is also real or just plausible. During the focus group, we noticed certain situations when the work performed by children is not fully adapted to their abilities.

On the other hand, child labour can also have positive consequences in empowering children (Aufseeser, 2012), as confirmed by our research. Household work teaches children to be responsible, disciplined; they learn teamwork (in the family). Joint activities strengthen family bonds and improve communication. By working, children can learn about nature, growing plants, caring for animals, using machines and managing resources. From the perspective of parents, child labour is often justified as necessary for the development of life skills. Child labour is more of a parental choice than an economic necessity, with only a small proportion of families indicating that their survival would be at risk without child labour.

The highlighted characteristics refer to the social reality of our investigation area and cannot be extrapolated to the Romanian countryside as a whole. Regarding the validity of this scheme in other rural areas, we need to take into account the fact that between the different regions of Romania there

are important similarities, and also considerable differences and even discrepancies in terms of the level of socio-economic modernization, the degree and the ways of perpetuation of the traditional way of life, as well as their transmission to the next generation. It is therefore necessary that in studying the complex phenomenon of child labour in the rural households of their own families, sociological researches should clearly formulate the social context of their own analysis and start from the specificity of concrete situations and local/regional combinations of the determining factors of this social phenomenon, to develop nuanced typologies based on the application of sociological theories to the concrete reality investigated.

Conclusions

The socio-cultural profile of the rural child emerging as a result of our research highlights a mix of opportunities and challenges for the rural child, with the focus on practical education and personal development within the family. At the same time, the characteristics presented here also provided us the opportunity to interpret the results of our research from the perspective of the relevant theoretical concepts, thus trying to obtain answers to the research questions that were the basis of our scientific approach.

Regarding the allocation of time dedicated to children's work in family households and the time allocated to school activities (research question no. 1); our investigation confirmed that the vast majority of families carry out some production activity, mostly for their own consumption. Among parents there is a concern for the balance between school education and household activities, with an emphasis on the relevance of practical education which they think is not satisfactorily provided by school.

Concerning the relationship between work involvement and children's school performance, (research question no. 2) the results confirm the existence of inequality between urban and rural schools, some of the factors mentioned by the specialized literature were also highlighted by our research. There are differences in parents' expectations: in urban the emphasis is on academic excellence, while in rural the main goal is for students to attend school and pass. Although teachers in both settings make similar efforts, rural and urban contexts influence children's life experiences differently. Urban parents, often having a higher level of education, can provide more academic support to their children than rural parents. However, rural life also offers children valuable hands-on learning opportunities. Joint activities strengthen family bonds and improve communication. By working, children can learn about nature, growing plants, caring for animals, using machines and managing resources.

Regarding the parents' perception of the role of the socialization functions fulfilled by children's involvement in family household work (research question no. 3), the obtained results revealed that, from the parents' perspective, children's work is often justified as necessary for the development of skills life. The involvement of children in the work of family households is considered by parents as a natural component of the family socialization of children, related to the need to acquire work skills characteristic of the rural way of life, the development of the child's ability to assume responsibility and the formation of personality traits considered essential for a future adult raised and educated in the countryside.

To sum up, child labour in rural households is a phenomenon influenced by a variety of social, economic and cultural factors. While it may have educational and developmental benefits in certain contexts, it also exposes children to some risks especially in the absence of adequate safeguards. A balanced approach is therefore essential which recognizes the value of work in the context of developing skills and autonomy, which also protects children's rights and well-being.

References

Andrei, T.(2001). Tehnici nealeatoare de eşantionare utilizate in practica statistica. *Informatica Economica*, *2*(18), 82-89.

Aufseeser, D., Bourdillon, M., Carothers, R., & Lecoufle, O. (2017). Children's work and children's well-being: Implications for policy. *Development Policy Review*, *36*(2), 241-261.

Bădescu, G., Petre N. (2011) *Bunăstarea copilului din mediul rural.* Risoprint.

Bălţătescu, S., & Bacter, C. (2015). *Bunăstarea văzută prin ochii copiilor români: rezultatele studiului internațional "Lumea copiilor" (ISCWeB).* Editura Universităţii din Oradea, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Bourdillon, M. (2011). A challenge for globalised thinking: How does children's work relate to their development? *South African Review of Sociology, 42(*1): 97–115.

Edmonds, E. V. (2007a). Chapter 57 Child Labor. In T. Schultz, & J. Strauss (Eds.), *Handbook of Development Economics* (Vol. 4, pp. 3607-3709). North Holland. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1573-4471(07)04057-0

Fartuşnic, C. (2015). Participarea la educaţie a copiilor cu oportunităţi reduse. O analiză din perspectiva dezavantajului socio-economic. In S. Sava (ed.) *Perspective pentru cercetarea în educație,* Editura Universitară

Florian, B., & Ţoc, S. (2020). Policy note: Educaţia în timpul pandemiei. Răspunsuri la criza nesfârşită a sistemului educaţional românesc. *Şcoala Naţionala de Studii Politice şi Administrative.* http://snspa.ro/policy-note-educatia-in-

timpul-pandemiei-raspunsuri-la-criza-nesfarsita-a-sistemului-educational-romanesc/. Accessed: 12.11.2021

Ghinăraru, C. (2004). *Munca copiilor în România,* Editura Ro Media.

Grootaert, C. & Kanbur, R. (1995). Child labour: An economic perspective. *International Labour Review*, 2, 187-203.

Guarcello, L., Lyon, S., & Rosati, F.C. (2008). Child labor and education for all: An issue paper. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth 1*(2), 254-266.

Hanson, K & Nieuwenhuys, O. (2013). *Reconceptualizing children's rights in international development.* Cambridge University Press.

Hatos, A. (2006). *Sociologia educaţiei.* Editura Polirom.

Holmes, R., & Jones, N. (2009). *Putting the "social" back into social protection: A framework for understanding thelinkages between economic and social risks for poverty reduction.* https://www.odi.org/publications/3286-social-protection-economic-social-risks-poverty-reduction

ILO (1973). *ILO's Minimum Age Convention*, 1973 (No. 138): Convention C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ilo_code:C138 Accessed 10.10.2023

ILO (2006). *The end of child labour: Within reach. Global report under follow-up to the ILO declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work.* International Labour Organization. Accessed 09.08.2023

Mihalache, F., Croitoru, A. (2011). *Mediul rural românesc: evoluţii şi involuţii. Schimbare socială şi antreprenoriat.* Editura Expert.

Neagu, G. (2009). Părinţii şi şcoala. Parteneriat pentru un obiectiv comun – binele copilului. In A. Hatos, S. Săveanu (eds.). *Educaţia şi excluziunea socială a adolescenţilor din România.* Editura Universităţii din Oradea (pp.239-262).

Neumayer, E., & De Soysa, I. (2005). Trade openness, foreign direct investment and child labor. *World development*, *33*(1), 43-63.

Ortiz-Ospina, E., Roser, M. (2016). Child Labor. *OurWorldInData.org.* https://ourworldindata.org/child-labor accesed 10.09.2021

Pantea, M. (2008). *Copiii care muncesc în România.* Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Patrinos, H. A. & Grootaert, C. (2002). *Child Labor in Bolivia and Colombia.* No. 9. World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/10404 Accessed 14.04.2022

Popescu, A., Tindeche, C., Mărcu, A., & Mărcuţă, L. (2022). Rural areas in Romania – discrepancies versus urban areas and European Union. *Scientific Papers: Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, *22*(1),515- 532. https://managementjournal.usamv.ro/pdf/vol.22_1/Art60.pdf

Sîrca, V. (2017). From legal regulations and theories to social and economic realities on the case of child labor in Romania. *Fiat Justitia.* 1, 273-284.

Ţoc, S. (2018). *Clasă şi educaţie. Inegalitate şi reproducere socială în învăţământul românesc,* Editura Pro Universitaria Bucureşti.

UNCRC. (2001) *UN Convention on the Rights of the child.* http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx Accessed 23.05.2022

Vasile, M., Muscă, M., Angi, D., Bădescu , G., Florian, B., Ţoc, S. (2020). *PISA 2018. Ce ne spun noile rezultate PISA despre inegalităţile educaţionale din România*, Institutul pentru Solidaritate Socială.

Vătăşescu, A. (2009). Accesul la învăţământul liceal al copiilor din satele isolate, In A., Hatos, S., Sorana (eds.). *Educaţia şi incluziunea socială a adolescenţilor în România* (pp. 145-174), Editura Universităţii din Oradea.

Voicu, B. (2010). Impactul valorilor sociale asupra rezultatelor educaţionale. Implicaţii pentru politicile educaţionale. In E. M., Dobrescu & N., Iancu (eds.) *Politici educaţionale.Relevanţă şi eficienţă,* (pp. 386-406). EuroLobby

White, B. (2014). Social science views on working children. In H.D., Hindman & H. Hindman, *The World of Child Labor* (pp. 10-17). Routledge.

World Vision (2022). *Bunăstarea copilului din mediul rural din România 2022* https://cdn.edupedu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/BUNASTAREA-COPIILOR-DIN-MEDIUL-RURAL-2022.pdf Accesed 18.07.2022

World Vision (2020). *Bunăstarea copilului din mediul rural din România 2020.* Risoprint

World Vision România WVR (2014). *Bunăstarea copilului din mediul rural 2014*. Risoprint