

## Translation of “*Infortúnios Paternos, Infâncias Perdidas?*”

Originally published in *Revista Conjuntura Econômica* – March 2001.



TEMAS SOCIAIS

Uma pesquisa domiciliar revela que em momentos de crescimento econômico as crianças abandonam mais a escola e crescem repetidas e o trabalho infantil. Paradoxalmente, o mesmo fenômeno ocorre quando os pais perdem o emprego. Nesse caso, a repetência e o abandono dos estudos são 21% e 23% maiores do que nas famílias que não houve perda de renda.

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## Infortúnios paternos, infâncias perdidas

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O trabalho precário cresce quando se julga e teme com a possibilidade de crescer. Isto acontece com crianças pobres de regiões ricas ou filhos de pais empregados durante bons e ruins tempos.

Um tempo em que, quando os custos sociais das transições macroeconômicas, individualmente cada indivíduo teria disposto, em média, a contribuir para que a situação cairia melhor e melhor fosse criada de um lado. Mas por que? Não há dúvida, pois trata-se do caso dos EUA, onde, por hipótese, o Estado não os trata, como consequência ao ocorrer toda instabilidade observada.

O problema desta conta é que durante a recessão — por exemplo, a grande depreciação dos anos 90 — a renda média não cai a níveis próximos do zero, ao passo que na prática alguns indivíduos têm suas rendas reduzidas drasticamente. No entanto, muitos outros não são afetados, pois os custos são suportados por outros indivíduos que não são afetados pelo mesmo fenômeno.

As situações instáveis que afetam as famílias são múltiplas. O nível mínimo para garantir a sobrevivência econômica

de uma família é como também as suas consequências. A realidade do adotar um indivíduo que trabalha em locais de alta renda, ou dos trabalhos realizados na produção de bens transacionáveis, como o caso do caso dos EUA — diferentemente dos países que vendem produtos no nível de trabalho. É preciso considerar a heterogeneidade das situações vividas.

Apesar de não ter longa história, há poucos estudos sobre os custos sociais permanentes da instabilidade. Abordamos aqui os efeitos de longo prazo da instabilidade macroeconômica. Em particular, o impacto de choques na renda sobre os níveis de acumulação de capital humano, como o caso de escolaridade e trabalho infantil.

O ciclo de vida pode ser dividido em três fases: a primeira é a infância, a segunda é a adolescência, a terceira é a vida adulta. Depois de nascido, o indivíduo vai para a escola, depois para o trabalho para se preparar para a vida adulta, ou seja, tra-

balhar e não estudar. Quais seriam os efeitos de infortúnios paternos em termos da transição precoce da criança no mundo adulto?

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## **Parental misfortunes, lost childhoods**

Marcelo C. Neri

A household survey reveals that in times of accelerated economic growth, children are more likely to drop out of school, as child labor and the rate of failing to conclude the school year and consequently, having to take the same courses again (the repetition rate) increase. Paradoxically, the same phenomenon occurs when parents lose their jobs. In this case, the repetition and dropout rates are 21% and 23% (respectively) greater than in those families where an income loss was not experienced.

Underage labor increases when it is combined with hunger and the possibility of eating. This occurs to poor children in wealthy regions or to children of unemployed parents during economic booms.

An eminent economist quantified the social costs of macroeconomic fluctuations, pointing out how much each individual would be willing, on average, to contribute so that the alternation between booms and recessions would be eradicated: one Big Mac per year! A low value, as the case considered is that of the US, where hypothetically, the state would not only try, but also succeed in cushioning all instability.

The problem with this calculation is that during a recession—for example, the Great Depression of the '30s—average income does not fall to levels close to zero, whereas in reality, some individuals have their respective incomes reduced to nothing. In crises, many suffer a little, while few suffer a lot. This causes the value of a hamburger to whoever is dying of hunger to be a high one.

There are multiple limitations incurred in aggregated analyses. The micro level allows us to measure not only the costs of instability, but also its consequences. The reality of an American teenager working at a fast food restaurant or that of Brazilians involved in the production of transactional goods, such as shoes or orange juice—both devotedly studied in the US—differs from that of a child selling gum at the stoplight. It is imperative to consider these situations' heterogeneity.

Despite our long history, there have been few studies on the permanent social costs of instability. We approach the long run effects of macroeconomic instability. In particular, the

impact of parental income shocks on human capital accumulation variables (such as: dropout rates, repetition rate, and child labor) is significant.

A life cycle can be divided into three phases: in the first, the child works and doesn't study, then studies but also works, so as to entirely abandon childhood in the last phase, by working and not studying. Which would be the effects of parental misfortunes in terms of a child's early entry into the adult world?

The data from a household survey attained in short time intervals was used to estimate the impacts of change in parents' situation on shifts in the child's time distribution between work and study. The analysis is restricted to families residing in the six major metropolitan areas during the last two decades and composed by a father, a mother and at least one child between the ages of ten and fifteen.

The main variables used are dynamic impulse and answer estimations, that is: on one side, parental income shocks and on the other, the probability of the child abandoning school, retaking the year and/or starting to work. We explore events controlled by the child's characteristics (gender, age, if the child is behind in school), the parents' characteristics (education and income) and other temporal and regional variables. In sum, we compare children in observable identical situations.

The results suggest that the adverse parental income shocks are positively correlated to dropout and repetition rates. The respective chances of these events occurring to children whose parents have suffered an income loss is 21% and 23% higher than those who have shown a shift in parental status. However, the results do not present a significant relation between the parent losing his job and the child beginning to work.

On the other hand, when we work with the shock variable interacting with the parents' initial income level, we find a significant impact in the three lowest initial income quintiles. Meaning only the poorer children tend to enter the labor market when faced with paternal misfortune.

The aggregated analysis differs from the obtained results using the individual data, already mentioned: in macroeconomic booms, underage labor reaches its peak and academic performance declines. 1986, the year of the Cruzado's boom, was the peak in underage

labor, school dropouts and repetition. This result seems to show that the better opportunities, associated to macroeconomic expansion, can be harmful to the child's future.

The data regarding child labor, repetition and school dropouts allows two levels of analysis for their main economic determinants. Microeconomic variables, such as the parents' educational level, indicate the needs to be supplied by the early work offer, leading to dropping out and being held back in school.

At the macroeconomic level, represented not only by boom periods, as well as by regional developments, the pressure exerted by the growing demand of child labor, dominant in the metropolitan regions of São Paulo and Porto Alegre than Recife and Salvador is revealed.

In sum, the worst child-related performance occurs when you combine need with opportunity: poor children from wealthy regions or children whose parents are unemployed during booms. In these cases, the chances of the child sacrificing her future is greater, as it combines hunger with the possibility of working for a meal.

The PNAD/IBGE offers us an insight to the problem at the national level, allowing us to differentiate rural from urban circumstances: in the rural areas, 36% of children between the ages of ten and fourteen were working. In the urban areas, 8% were working. During the last two decades, on average, there have been twice more boys working than girls. 90% of individuals coming from poor households did not finish high school, and 74% did not complete fourth grade.

In the poorer groups, 45% are less than sixteen years old. Concurrently as enrollment rates are high in Brazil, the educational level reached progresses slowly due to the irregular academic attendance (many absentees), the high repetition and dropout rates (of 13% and 8.9% respectively). In accordance to the PNAD, 15% of all children in this age range were working—although there has been a two-percentage points decrease since 1995.

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