These photographs were produced by secondary school children (aged between 11 and 15 years) in England and Wales. They were taken as part of a qualitative research project examining the employment of children in modern day Britain.\textsuperscript{1} Using simple and inexpensive one-use analogue cameras to make photodiaries, some of the 69 children involved in the project produced around 850 photographs of their working lives. The result is a distinctive and unique visual insight into what is a rarely discussed but nonetheless ‘majority experience’ of modern childhood.\textsuperscript{2} The children who took these photographs gave their permission for them to be published; names have been changed.

As a research device, the children’s photodiaries contribute to our knowledge and understanding at several levels. They provide visual data that confirms what children have told researchers in surveys, interviews and group discussions:\textsuperscript{3} that school-age employment extends well beyond dog-walking and newspaper deliveries. Reinforced by repetition, they also go beyond simple corroboration by giving us previously unavailable details of an economy of child employment patterned by work in

Terry, 14, South Wales, labourer on a static caravan holiday park

Becky, 15, South Wales, hairdresser’s assistant

Mark, 15, Inner City Midlands, arena cleaner

Jayda, 14, Inner City Midlands, home-worker
Ronan, 15, City Midlands, catering in a large automotive parts factory

Ben, 15, City Midlands, glass collector at a social club

Gillian, 13, East Anglia Coastal Town, child care

Suzanne, 15, East Anglia Town, small fast food restaurant

Harinder, 16, City Midlands, shelf stacking and serving in a small supermarket

Sarah, 14, East Anglia Town, domestic cleaner
small bars, restaurants, cafes, public houses, clubs and hotels, shops, market stalls, homes and offices, farms, on delivery rounds and home-working. As visual records, the photographs contain pointed comments on the nature and quality of many children’s employment. Through their photographs we see close-up and in detail, many of the specific tasks that occupy children at work: stacking shelves, cleaning offices and homes, washing up in commercial kitchens, waiting tables, fetching and carrying in shops and eating places, serving and preparing food, manual labouring and deliveries door-to-door.

Estimates consistently suggest that around 1.5 million school age children in England and Wales are employed in these types of jobs and that around two-thirds of school age children have worked before the age of 16. It seems that most of this employment is illegal, as the regulatory framework of permits and risk assessments is rarely used, few employers register their young workers, many children are employed to do proscribed jobs and most work outside of permitted hours. Training and induction programmes are rare and health and safety provision is unknown. Accidents among school age workers, it seems, are commonplace.4 Given scant knowledge about such an extensive area of children’s lives, further examination of both the immediate impact of school age working and its longer-term consequences for children’s psychosocial development are much needed.

References

1 Work, Labour and Economic Life in Late Childhood (L129251035), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, as part of their programme Children 5–16: Growing into the 21st century. My thanks also to Chris Pole and Angela Hutton for their collaboration on this project.