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Why Millions of Girls Are Doing Unpaid Care Work This Summer

Lisa Dodson, Boston College

Amanda Lynne Freeman, University of Hartford

With summer in full swing, kids across the country are enjoying dawn to dusk free time, heading to myriad summer camps or enrichment programs, and traveling to far flung family vacations. But girls like Maya (all names in this piece are pseudonyms to protect the identities of research subjects), who we met during our research, don't have that chance. They spend summers stuck at home, filling in for mothers who must work long hours.

Recently, there's been public outrage as child labor has broken through into the headlines. Over the past two years alone, Republicans in 10 states have passed or introduced bills to relax regulations on child labor to address post-covid worker shortages. But the hazards of kids and teens working in a meat packing facility may just be easier to imagine. Family care work, demanding and endless, happens inside the home, behind closed doors. It is done mostly by girls who step into grown up shoes while parents do whatever they can to buy shelter and food. And like other kinds of child labor, this one comes at great cost.