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Abstract title: Ambiguous adventures: children driving tractors in rural Iceland  
Across historical periods and societies, capacity attributed to children varies. A case in point is changing views on the appropriate age of children driving tractors off-roads in Iceland where their use exploded after the World War II.

Background: Farmers had little experience in driving vehicles, and children were trusted with the task. Here we describe and analyse tractor driving of urban children who stayed on farms in Iceland during the summer, and evaluate the extent of fatal tractor accidents by age and gender.  
Qualitative study that uses secondary data, including reports from the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health and news reports of fatal tractor accidents, and stories of individuals who were sent to stay at farms during the summer as children. This is complemented with quantitative data from a representative survey data on adults who stayed on farms in childhood.

Method:

Results: Stories expose children's fascination with the adventurous experience of driving tractors, while many fatal accidents were simultaneously highlighted. Almost half of adults who had stayed on farms in childhood drove tractors (mean age 11.4 years; range 5-17), thereof 70% of boys and 24% of girls. Considering framers' need of child labour, in 1958 the Parliament decided to have no minimum age for driving tractors off roads (earlier 18 years); in 1987 the minimum age adopted was 13 years, and increased to 15 years in 2006. In the period 1960-1979, the risk was 3.1 (95% CI 1.3-7.6) times higher for a child compared to an adult to die in a tractor accident compared to earlier and later periods.

Discussion: Children driving tractors in Iceland exposes the diverse views on children's capacity. Preventive actions, for example through legislation and security measures, contributed to a sharp decline in child deaths in tractor accidents.

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