

# Parents' Perception on the Effects of Child Labour in a community in Anambra State, Nigeria

Ubajaka C<sup>1</sup>, \*Duru CB<sup>1</sup>, Nnebue CC<sup>1</sup>, Okwaraoha OB<sup>1</sup>, Ifeadike GO<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** According to a survey conducted by the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) in 2003, more than 15 million Nigerian children under the age of 14 are working, mostly to help pay for the cost of going to school. The prevalence of child labour in Nigeria ranges from 20% to 30% and this is not without some untoward effects. This study, on parents' perception of the effects of child labour, becomes relevant since most of these children are forced to work by their parents.

**Objectives:** This study is to determine the parents perception and the effects of child labour.

**Methods:** This is a descriptive cross-sectional study carried out among 352 parents in Nnewi, Anambra State. A multi-stage sampling technique was used in the study, and involved simple random sampling and the modified WHO cluster sampling techniques. Information was obtained using self-administered semi-structured questionnaires, and was analyzed with computer softwares.

**Results:** The majority of the parents 79.26% (279) have good knowledge of child labour. Most of the parents 66.19% (216) consider child labour as hazardous, while 33.81% (136) believe it is beneficial. Adverse effects of child labour perceived by parents' ranges from sexual harassment, teenage pregnancy, termination of formal education, to the contraction of sexually transmitted disease. Out of the 352 parents, 27.96% (78) admitted they practice child labour while 72.04% (201) did not.

**Conclusion:** A careful consideration of the findings of this study will equip stakeholders with the necessary input for the enactment of policies, legislations and profering a lasting solution to this menace.

**Key words:** Parents, perception, child labour.

*Afrimedical Journal 2010; 1(1):15-19*

## INTRODUCTION

UNICEF defines child labour as work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of a

child and on the type of work. Such work is considered harmful to the child and should therefore be eliminated. A child is considered to be involved in child labour under the following conditions: (a) Ages 5-11: At least one hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week, (b) Ages 12-14: At least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week, (c) Ages 15-17: At least 43 hours of economic or domestic work per week.<sup>1,2</sup>

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the number of working children between the ages of 5 and 14 years in developing countries is estimated to be 250 million. It is believed that 61% of them are in Asia, 32% in Africa.<sup>2</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa around one in three children are engaged in child labour, representing 69 million children. In South Asia, another 44 million are engaged in child labour.<sup>2</sup> Millions of children are engaged in hazardous situations or conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in home. Child labour is common in developing countries and has become typical of most economic activities in most urban and even some rural settings in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

The major factors leading to child labour and exploitation in most low income countries like Nigeria are poverty which may be seen as the most powerful force inducing these children into hazardous labour, followed by lack of relevant education, which may also contribute since keeping children in school has proven difficult in the face of hardship. Others are restrictions imposed by the child's sociocultural factors which may also play a role in propelling children into forced labour.

Studies have shown that majority of child labourers work in agriculture, industries or other hazardous environments.<sup>4</sup> In 1992 in Pakistan alone, over 2/3 of the estimated 1.5 million people employed in the carpet industries were children.<sup>3,4</sup> As a consequence of child labour, most of these young people are exposed to numerous serious hazards. Some of these include physical deformities, sexual abuse, with risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, psychological and mental problems, and even the risk of death in extreme cases. With the thriving era of industrialization, the problem of child labour has become an ever-increasing concern. Child labour has become a large topic of debate and this has led to several research questions globally.<sup>5</sup>

Studies in Ghana have shown that youths, who live and work in the streets, doing some form of menial job for socio-economic survival, were aged 10-24 years. In cases

<sup>1</sup>Department of Community Medicine Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi. \*E-mail: chukwumaduru@yahoo.com

where the parents are alive and cohabiting, the child works to supplement the family needs. Some activities they indulge include: labouring in farmlands, shoe shining, porter (*kaya kaya*) and occasionally prostitution, drug peddling, hawking and pick-pocketing. In recent times, young people have been found to engage in armed robbery.<sup>6</sup> Another study in Canada on street youths and AIDS showed that over 90% of these youths have some knowledge about how HIV is transmitted and how its prevented but majority of them engage in risky sexual behaviour.<sup>7</sup> Studies, have shown that parents and guardians often induce or force their children into employment in 62 percent of cases. Children make their own decisions to work only in 8% of cases.<sup>8</sup> A possible reason why parents in developing countries have children is because they can be profitable. Children seem to be much more of an economic burden in developing than in developed countries. Children in developing countries also contribute more time to a household than they deplete, as compared to their counterparts in developed countries. Therefore, parents in developing countries make use of children's ability to work.<sup>9,10</sup>

In Nigeria precisely in Ogun state, Fetuga et al noted an overall prevalence of child labour which was 64.5%: 68.6% among primary and 50.3% among secondary school pupils. Major economic activities included street trading (43.6%), selling in kiosks and shops (25.4%) and farming (23.6%). No child was involved in bonded labour or prostitution. Girls were often more involved in labour activities than boys. Most of the children (82.2%) involved in labour activities did so on the instruction of one or both parents in order to contribute to family income. Children of parents with low socio-economic status or of poorly educated parents were significantly involved in labour activities. Child labour was also significantly associated with increasing number of children in the family size. A higher prevalence rate of child labour was observed among children living with parents and relations than among those living with unrelated guardians.<sup>11</sup> A study done in Enugu State by Akpala et al, on sexual abuse among juvenile female Street hawkers in the state showed that one of the commonest forms of child labour in most urban settings in Nigeria is street hawking. Out of a total of 382 female street hawkers, 88.9% had experienced at least one form of sexual abuse while hawking. Most of the girls (76%) were aware that they could become pregnant, while 41.6% were aware of the risk of STDs. The girls who had experienced sexual intercourse at least once while hawking on the streets, were 18.1%. Among those who did in the past, 30.4% said they were forced while 58.8%

submitted willingly to the act. The sexual partners were adults in 76.8% of cases compared to 17.4% who were children. The partner was unknown to the hawker in 40.6% of cases. The various locations where sexual intercourse took place included business premises (63.3%) and residential homes (17.3%).<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to note that UNICEF reported in 1991 that a large number of child labourers in the streets in Nigerian cities, were more vulnerable to crime, alcoholism, drug use and other related conduct problems.<sup>13</sup> Also data from the 1991 survey on road traffic accidents as seen in Benin City, Nigeria, showed that out of 3724 cases recorded, 58% were children and young adults. A significant number (19.7%) of these children and adolescents died as a result of these accidents and 16.6% of the affected, were pedestrians.<sup>14</sup>

The result of a study done by Osinowo, in Benin city in 1996, on psycho-medical consequences of children living and working on the streets, reported that they manifest low self esteem scored high on anxiety and depression, displayed aggressive behavior and had a tendency to be aggressive with little provocation. It also disclosed that more than 15.4% of the female adolescent hawkers had committed induced abortion at least twice, had been pregnant without knowing who was responsible, had experienced and suffered rape and also contracted sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDs.<sup>15</sup> This study aims to determine the parents' perception and the effects of child labour.

## METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study to determine the perception of parents in Nnewichi, of the effects of child labour and the prevalence of child labour in selected study site by using interviewer administered semi-structured questionnaire of 352 respondents. Nnewi town, is in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Nnewi is a fast developing commercial and industrial community. The town has an estimated population of 155, 443 with 77,517 males and 77,926 females<sup>16</sup>. The Modified WHO multistage cluster sampling technique was used to conduct the study. First stage involved the selection of one community out of the four communities that made up Nnewi town (Umudim, Nnewichi, Otolo, and Uruagu.). Thus Nnewichi was randomly selected as the community for the study. Second stage involved the selection of five wards out of the eight wards that made up Nnewichi (Okpuno, Mkpoka, Eziabubo, Akwu and Odida) by simple random technique through balloting without replacement. The final step in

the sampling process involved the selection of 70 respondents each from the five wards. Thus respondents who met the criteria were enrolled into the study. The centre of each community was identified, and an empty beer bottle was spun at that spot. The direction of the neck of the bottle was taken as the direction for the study, the household closest was taken as the starting household, and then movement was in anticlockwise direction. On entry into any household, simple random selection was done. In households enrolled a parent who met the eligibility criteria into the study where there are no eligible respondents the next household was taken until the sample size for each ward was completed.

## RESULTS

Of the 352 respondents interviewed, 99 (28.1%) were aged 30-39 years. Thirteen (3.69%) respondents were  $\geq$  70 years with mean age of 39.5 years. Table I shows the age distribution of the respondents. One hundred and forty nine (42.3%) are males while 203 (57.7%) are females. Nineteen (5.4%) of the respondents were

single, while 326 (92.6%) were married, only 7 (2%) were divorce. The highest education attained by majority of respondents was secondary education 184 (52.3%) followed by tertiary education 96 (27.3%), and primary 32 (11.4%). Thirty-two (9.1%) have no formal education. Eighty-three (25.6%) of the parents were traders while 61 (17.6%) were civil servants. Sixty-six (19.7%) stood for other occupations. Two hundred and seventy-seven (79.26%) had good knowledge child labour while 73 (20.74%) do not. Most of the respondents received their knowledge from books 75 (26.88%) Table II shows the sources of knowledge. Most of the respondents 233 (66.19%) believed that child labour was hazardous, as against 119 (33.81%) who believe it was beneficial.

Respondents said the harmful effects include of child labour keeping of bad company, smoking and alcohol abuse. Among the 279 respondents, 78 (27.96%) admit to practicing child labour while 201 (72.04%) said they do not. Table III shows the various forms of child labour practiced by respondents.

**TABLE I: AGE OF RESPONDENTS (IN YEARS)**

AGE (YRS)	FREQUENCY	%
15-19	6	1.70
20-29	57	16.19
30-39	99	28.13
40-49	80	22.73
50-59	75	21.31
60-69	22	6.25
$\geq$ 70	13	3.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>100</b>

**TABLE II: SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD LABOUR**

SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Friends	19	6.81
Newspapers and Magazines	61	21.86
Television	69	24.73
Radio	43	15.41
Books	75	26.88
Other	12	4.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100</b>

**TABLE III: FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR PRACTISED BY PARENTS**

FORM OF CHILD LABOUR PRACTISED	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Domestic house help engage in heavy domestic work	43	55.1
Sending of children to learn a trade	23	29.5
Child prostitution	0	0
Children hawking in streets	8	10.3
Children in farms and industries	4	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>100</b>

## DISCUSSION

Child labour is a global problem, though common in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The study revealed that majority of the respondents were traders (23.58) and a good percentage of them had only secondary education (52.27%). This supports the sociodemographic characteristics found in Nnewi, where its inhabitants are predominantly traders in the Nkwo market. The study further elucidated that the majority of the parents have between 4-6 children 178 (50.57%), and even more. This in keeping with the study done by Fetuga which showed that child labour is associated with increasing number of children in the family size<sup>10</sup>.

The study showed that 279 parents (79.26%) admitted having some form of knowledge about child labour. This is generally high but their level and depth of knowledge could not be ascertained in this study. This wide popularity in recent times could be attributed to the relentless efforts made by both local and international organizations including security outfits to disseminate information and prosecute offenders if found guilty of child trafficking and forced child labour.

Osinowo in his study disclosed that more 15.4% of the female adolescent hawkers studied, had committed induced abortion at least twice, had been pregnant without knowing who was responsible, had experienced and suffered rape and also contacted sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDS.<sup>15</sup>

The prevalence of child labour among the 279 parents/families with knowledge of child labour was 27.96%(78). This is within the figures for national which stood within 20% and 30 % for males and females respectively. It is lower than the figures obtained by Fetuga et al in Benin (64.5%)<sup>10</sup>. This could be because Benin is a larger urban center than Nnewi and most forms of child labour are under reported especially the worst forms like prostitution. The forms of child labour engaged by children of these parents were domestic house help engaged in heavy work 43 (55.13%) which topped the list followed by sending children to learn trade 23 (29.49%), hawking in the streets 8 (10.25%), children in farms and industries 4 (5.13%). No parent practiced child prostitution and child begging. Prostitution have negative social implications and very difficult to be ascertained from respondents in many studies. Okpala noted that street hawking is the commonest form of child labour in most urban settings in Enugu<sup>11</sup>. This is not in agreement with the finding of this study. This may be explained by

the difference in educational and socioeconomic factors in Enugu and Nnewi.

In most of the cases (32 out of 78), the affected child was parents own child, followed by non-relatives. According to Fetuga, a higher prevalence rate of child labour was observed among children living with parents and relations than among those living with unrelated guardians.<sup>10</sup> The reason why they practiced child labour, as reported by respondents were to help them become responsible adults (53.85%), and to provide them with skills that would make them independent. This differs from other studies whose main reasons were for economic reasons.<sup>10</sup>

The study further elucidated that most parents, 100 (35.84%) out of the 279, with knowledge of child labour believe that child labour would be reduced in communities through creating awareness among parents about family planning to reduce the burden of too many children. Some of other ways suggested by these parents were the making of basic education free and compulsory for all children and the provision of a place where affected children would come to discuss their problems and be taken care of.

## CONCLUSION

This study has clearly illustrated that many parents have knowledge of child labour and could identify forms of it. It also observed that a good number of parents think it is appropriate for children to work but many would not allow any of their children work between the ages of 5-17years to work. Furthermore, many of the parents perceive child labour as being hazardous and believe that sexual harassment, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, adverse effects on education, as well as other hazards could be encountered in its course. Though this study may not have shown the perception of all parents, of the effects of child labour, it will serve as a baseline for further studies and research in this respect. In view of these reasons the following recommendations are necessary:

- (1) Government should enact policies and legislations that will protect children from child labour
- (2) Campaigns should be organized to educate parents and children on the evils of child labour
- (2) Awareness about family planning should be created among parents to alleviate the burden of too many children.
- (3) Basic education should be made free and compulsory for all children.
- (4) Government should alleviate poverty through economic empowerment of its citizenry.

**REFERENCES**

1. UNICEF. Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse. [http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)>Child: Accessed on 6th March, 2008.
2. Child Labour', The state of the world child, 1997; (2):859
3. Country Reports on Human Right', Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Right and Labour, 2002:2
4. United Nations High Commissioner for Humans; Rights of the Child: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography
5. Ezeilo JN. Child Labour Abuse and Neglect. Women's Aid collective, 2002.
6. One World Child Labour Guide. [www.uk.oneworld.net/guides/childlabour](http://www.uk.oneworld.net/guides/childlabour), June 2009.
7. Kjereh DA. Daniel Home for Children 2003. [www.geocities.com/ghana.cd/children.html](http://www.geocities.com/ghana.cd/children.html), June 2009
8. Canadian Public Health Association, National Aids Clearing House, 400-1565 Carling avenue, Ontario, 1990
9. Syed N. Household and Family Characteristics of Child workers. African Journal of Medicine, 1991; 30 (1-2): 81-5
10. Weiner J. Social Stratification and Its Effects on Child Labour [www.biomedical.com](http://www.biomedical.com), June 2009.
11. Fetuga BM; Prevalence, Types and Demographic Features of Child Labour among School Children in Nigeria. Biomed Central, International Health and Human rights; 2005 (5):2
12. Okpala CO, Uzochukwu BS. Sexual Abuse among Juvenile Female Street hawkers in Enugu. Orient Journal of Medicine, 2000; (12): 6
13. UNICEF report on Nigerian children, 1991: 112, 113.
14. Ogbeule O. Some Road Traffic Accidents as seen in Benin city, Nigeria. Nigerian Medical Journal, 1994; (26):2
15. Osinowo AO. Street Children and Psychomedical Consequences. African Journal of Medicine. 1996; (2): 24.
16. Federal Republic of Nigerian Official Gazette No. 2 Abuja, 20th February, 2000.