

## **CHILD LABOUR ACTIVITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD: EVIDENCES FROM A METROPOLIS IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The incidence of child labour is fast increasing in Nigeria with many children becoming victims of illiteracy, violence, rape, kidnap, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections which they may not have the capacity to cope with because of their age. This study explores child labour activities in a metropolis in Nigeria. The aim of this study is to unravel the factors responsible for the increase in incidences of child labour in the study population. The study was conducted among children who engage in child labour in Ilorin metropolis, North-Central Nigeria. This study employed qualitative research approach using unstructured in-depth interviews that were conducted in Yoruba, pidgin and English languages. Twenty (20) participants, who were purposively selected, were included in the study. The study focused on two groups of participants namely: children that engage in hawking and children who engage in house help activities in households in the metropolis. Findings from the study revealed that, poverty as a result of low income in many families is a strong determinant of child labour among the participants. Other factors such as the need for children to exchange child labour activities for education and personal development, the need to live a better life, the need to earn a living and the need to fend for themselves were also revealed in the study as determinants to child labour in the metropolis. The study recommends that government should impose stiffer punishments for offenders of child labour offences to serve as deterrents for parents and wards who engage their children in labour activities

**Keywords:** Financial support, Family needs, Poor, Hunger, Mal-treatment.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The International Labour Organization (2012) has defined child labour as the employment of children in any form of work that deprives children of their childhood and interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to them. However, not all work that is done by children can be classified as child labour. Children's participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling such as, running errands for their parents, assisting in family business cannot be regarded as child labour (ILO, 2012). This is because, some of these activities contribute to children's development, the welfare of their families and provide them with skills and experience which will prepare them to be productive members of society during their adult life. Although, the term childhood actually varies from society to society, for the purpose of this study, a child will be defined as a person under the age of 18 years as defined by UNICEF (1997). But for the purpose of this study, child labour shall be defined as labour activities engaged in by children below 18 years for the purpose of exploitation of economic gains.

The incidence of child labour may have decreased globally from 25% to 10% between 1960 and 2003 (Norberg, 2017) yet, the total number of child labourers remains high. The sub-Saharan Africa accounts for the highest incidence rates, with several African countries recording over 50% of children aged 5–14 working (UNICEF, 2012). Majority of this are however found in urban setting (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005). Child labour has been found to serve as a way out of poverty especially for many poor families as children contribute as much as one-third of household income in poor families (Basu, 1998). Although, a study conducted by Nielsen (1998) could not establish any positive relationship between poverty and child labour thus raising doubts about the claim of poverty being a main determinant of child labour. Other researchers like Rimmer (1992) and Psacharopoulos (1997) have established that most cases child labour is determined by the poverty status of the family and level of parental education.

In Nigeria, child labour is prevalent in urban centers because a large number of people move from the rural areas to urban areas (Osment, 2014). As of 1995, the number of children who engage in child labour in Nigeria was estimated at twelve million and by 2006 the number has risen to fifteen million (Adegun, 2013). This has been as a result of the prevailing poverty affecting the country in which child labour provides a major source of income for the many poor family in the country (UNICEF, 2006; Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2006). About six million children equally split between boys and girls who work in Nigeria, while one million children are forced to drop out due to poverty (UNICEF, 2006). In some locations in the country, families send children from rural to urban areas where they are often forced to beg on the streets (International Trade Union Confederation, 2011; Shepler, 2012), while some other locations are said to be a major human trafficking hub where children in Nigeria are trafficked internally and are subjected to forced labour (James and Maggie, 2015; ITV News, 2015).

Unfortunately, forcing children to work at an early age in life and subjecting them to long hours of work daily may deny them access to education, which is imperative to breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy (Okereke, 2002). Awosusi and Adebo (2012) have argued that many children who engage in child activities in Nigeria are abused

physically, mentally, sexually and psychologically. They are also expected to work hard and are sometimes subjected to sexual exploitation in the household while they receive harsh treatment with life-threatening injuries (UNICEF, 1997). However, despite the Nigerian Government effort to eliminate child labour in Nigeria (Elijah and Okoruwa, 2006), many children are still involved in child labour (Ekpenyong and Sibirii, 2011). It is against this background that this study explores child labour activities in Ilorin, North-Central Nigeria.

## **2.0 Theoretical Orientation**

The study employed the Rational Choice theory. Rational choice theory was pioneered by the sociologist George Homas in 1961. It is a framework designed to understanding social and economic behaviour (Blume, 2008). The theory hypothesized that behaviour in society reflects the sum of the choices made by individuals. According to the theory, individuals make their choice based on their own preferences and the constraints they face and therefore choose the action they most prefer where such actions can be evaluated in terms of costs and benefits. The theory believes that a rational individual will choose action that provides the maximum benefit when compared to the cost incurred in taking such action.

As a platform to explaining this study, it can be assumed that due to constraints experienced by parents in meeting their financial obligations in the family as a result of the prevailing economic problems in the country, the choice of child labour in the family to augment family income cannot be avoided. Thus, parents and guardians make the choice of engaging their children in child labour to augment the family income because of the constraint experienced in meeting needs in the family. The theory was criticized for overemphasizing benefit and cost in decision making while undermining the place of reasoning in individual's decision making.

## **3.0 Methods**

The study focused on two groups of participants, they include: children who engage in hawking and children who engage in house help in households. The study was conducted in Ilorin, capital city of Kwara State, North Central Nigeria. The participants were purposively selected for the study. Twenty (20) participants who were purposively selected were involved in the study while information was retrieved from participants through in-depth interview. Informants' consent was sought before the interview was conducted and informants' identities were treated with anonymity to gain the informants' confidence. The study employed the qualitative research approach. Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted in Yoruba, pidgin and English languages. Yoruba language is the local dialect of people in the study population. Yoruba language was used for informants who could not speak English while pidgin language was used for those who could not communicate fluently either in Yoruba or English language. The interview questions were constructed based on the literature reviewed on this study and also in line with the objective of the study.

The criteria used for purposively choosing informants is that they must be engaging in labour activity and must be 18 years and below. Therefore, 8 informants who were

house helps were chosen for the study while 12 informants who were street hawkers were also chosen making both groups to be a total of 20 participants. The interview sessions were conducted by three authors of this study which consist of a female and two males. The informants were given the opportunity to opt out of the research before or during the interview; therefore, they were given freewill to participate in the research. To protect the confidentiality of the informants, street hawkers' informants were identified with alphabet A with numbers ranging between 1 and 10. Informants who engage in house help activities were identified with alphabet B with numbers ranging from 11-20.

#### **4.0 Findings and Discussion**

The study explored the major factors responsible for child labour activities among informants and the following findings were made.

##### **4.1 To Augment Family Income**

In the quest of exploring the reasons why children engage in child labour activities among the informants, some of the informants expressed the need to support their parents financially by engaging in labour activities to augment the family income. The study revealed that majority of the informants parents have very little income to cater for the needs of the family, many of the parents of the informants involved in the study belonged to very low status in the society and are either engaging in petty trading or small businesses which could not provide the money needed to run the affairs of the home therefore prompting the need for the children to engage in labour activities to augment the family income. Some of the informants have these to say:

I am 15 years old, I am in senior secondary school 1, and my parents are just managing to make ends meet. My father is a local transporter who operates a taxi for someone within the town while my mummy sells vegetables; I sell sachet water for my parents to help my parents because my parents do not have enough money to take care of the family needs (Informant A1, Female).

Another informant had something similar to say:

I am 17 years old, I am in Senior Secondary 2, my father operates a small patent medicine store in our house while my mother sells cooked maize, I engage in hawking of maize in order to help my mother and to support my parents financially because it is from what we sell that we get money to go to school. (Informant A3, Female).

In the same vein, another informant revealed that he needed to engage in hawking to help augment the family income so that they can have food on their table. Take a look at this:

I am 16 years old, I am in Junior Secondary School 3, and my Daddy is a bricklayer who helps people to build houses while my mother sells pepper. I am hawking pepper for my mother in order to help her because my

parents are very poor and we do not want to die of hunger. (Informant A6, Female).

The next informant equally revealed that she had to go into street hawking because her parents needed to meet a need for her which was critical to her educational development and which her parents were financially handicapped to provide. Let us look at this:

I am 11 years old, my daddy is a security in a local company in town while my mummy is a tailor, I have just concluded my primary school education. We were asked to pay for our graduation and since my parents could not afford to pay for me, I have to hawk fruits so that I can raise the money to pay for my graduation. (Informant A7, Female).

This shows that some of the informants actually engage in labour activities in order to augment family income. This is as a result of the prevailing harsh economic condition in the country especially among the poor. The findings however, corroborate previous studies on child labour conducted in the country by UNICEF (2006) and Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2006) which submitted that, child labour is a major source of income for poor families which provides extra source of income for many families to run the affairs of the home.

#### **4.2 To Acquire Education and Personal Development**

Findings from the study also revealed that some of the informants involved in the study engaged in child labour to better their lives and enhance their personal development. Many children are sent to the city to acquire formal education or learn one form of trade or another to better themselves which their parents usually cannot provide. In many of such cases, money is not exchanged for these labour activities, rather, they are usually provided in exchange for education and vocational skills which are provided by their masters. For example, hear what this informant has to say:

My daddy died when I was a little child and my mummy has been responsible for our upbringing since I was small. My mummy sells eggs and works in a filling station. I am the 2nd out of three girls in the family, my sister got married at the age of 18 years because my mother could not afford to send her to school and cater for all of us. Because I have always desired to go to school and my mummy could not afford it, she had to send me to the city to work as house help. Here I take care of my employer's babies and do house chores and in return she is sending me to school so that I can be educated, I am 14 years old and I am in Junior Secondary 1. (Informant B3, Female).

This finding is in line with previous studies conducted by Basu (1998) and Dupont (2012), which suggest that child labour may not necessarily be negative to the child but also have a positive contribution to the child who engages in such activity as well as the family and the society at large.

Although in the process of these children trying to acquire formal education to better their lives, some of the informants admitted that all they got was just empty promises. Instead of being sent to school, they never got educated; rather they were being used and maltreated. Take a look at this:

I was just 10 years old when a woman came to my village from the city to tell my parents that she wanted to take me to the city to work so that while I am working, the people I am working for will be sending me to school. As we speak, I am 18 years now, I have been taken to work in three different places yet I have not been able to go to continue my education from where I stopped in my village. All I do is work from dusk to dawn sometimes without food with beating and all forms of maltreatment. I do not have secondary education hmmmm.... I really feel very sad, how I wish my parents could give me all that I want, life as a house maid is hell... (Informant B1, Female).

This finding agrees with earlier studies conducted by Okereke (2002) and Awosusi and Adebo (2012) on the implication of child labour on children in Nigeria which suggests that child labour denies children basic education and also exposes them to various forms of maltreatment.

#### **4.3 To Earn a Living**

Interestingly, the study also revealed that some children, who engage in child labour activities, actually do that to fend for themselves. Many of them do not have families or people to take care of them so they engage in labour activities in order to survive. This informant has this to say:

I am 14 years old, I am Ibo and I do not have any form of education. My parents are in the village and I am in the city to seek better life. I was brought to the city by my uncle who has since failed to fend for me. My father sells used clothes in the village while my mother is a full time house wife. They could hardly provide for us so, I hawk tooth brush around to fend for myself and make a living since I do not have anyone to take care of me (Informant A9, Male).

This finding corroborates previous study conducted by Bukar and Babajida (2015) on child labour in Maiduguri, North Eastern Nigeria, which observed that most of the children in the child labour are orphans or children without parental care.

#### **5.0 Conclusion**

The aim of the study was to explore the factors responsible for child labour activities in a metropolis in Nigeria. The study focused on two groups of participants which include: children who engage in hawking and children who engage in house help in households. The study was conducted in Ilorin, capital city of Kwara State North central

Nigeria. The participants were purposively selected for the study. In all, 20 participants were involved in the study while information was retrieved from participants through in-depth interview. This study employed the qualitative research approach. Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted in Yoruba, pidgin and English languages. Findings from the study revealed that, child labour activities is on the increase in the study population because, it helps to contribute to family income, it is used to acquire education and personal development and to earn a living.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

The study therefore recommends that the Nigerian government should impose stiffer punishments for offenders of child labour offences to serve as deterrents for parents and guardians who engage their children in labour activities. The study also recommends that government should do everything possible to make available for her citizenry basic necessities of life as well as improve the economy of the country so as to reduce the menace of poverty to the barest minimum.

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*Oluyemi, J. A. ; Abubakar, M. Y. ; Abdulateef, R.; Atolagbe, E. A.; Adejoke, J. A. & Motolani, W. T.; Child Labour Activities in a Changing World:*

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