

Perceived Determinants of Child Labour in Nigeria: Implications for Healthy Growth And Development And Educational Advancement

¹Orisa-Ubi, Charity & ²Kpe-Nobana, Christiana Leesi

Department Of Human Kinetics, Health and Safety Education, Ignatius Ajuru University Of
Education Port Harcourt, Nigeria

¹Email: charilove75@yahoo.com; 08038882944

²Email: cnobana@gmail.com; 08033417421

ABSTRACT

In developing countries, children are involved in all manner of activities and exploitations which is detrimental to their healthy growth and development. This paper focused on the perceived determinants of child labour in Nigeria: implication for healthy growth and development and educational advancement. The paper discussed the concept of child labour and determinants of child labour in Nigeria which included poverty and low socioeconomic background, broken home and family instability, cultural factor, family size, ignorance and illiteracy, peer group influence and parental influence and greed. The paper also discussed child labour and healthy growth and development and child labour and educational advancement. Conclusion was drawn and it was recommended among others that, husbands and wives should guard their home jealously to avoid broken home or any form of instability which impact will be on the children. Government should enforce laws that prohibit any form of child labour.

Keywords: Advancement, Child, determinants, development, education, growth, health, labour,

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, many children have been used as source of labour to do work at both home and outside the home. According to UNICEF NIG (2016), an estimated 246 million children are engaged in child labour, nearly 70 per cent (171 million) of these children work in hazardous conditions – including working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or with dangerous machinery. Child labour is one thing that destroys the healthy growth, development and even education of many Nigerian children. In Nigeria, just like any other developing countries, many children are deprived of healthy living, good education and happy childhood through child labour. Most times these children are not seen yet they are seriously engaged in child labour. UNICEF NIG (2016) reported that they are everywhere, but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, labouring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations and the vast majority of working children – about 70 per cent – work in the agricultural sector. Again, the body estimated that children between 5-17 years old work as long as 12-15 hours a day and earn very little which is usually too meager to satisfy some necessities of life. This is a serious threat to children's health and education. According to International Labour Organization ILO (2016) 22 million children under the age of 15 are in labour force, one out of three children earn some money as street hawkers. Childhood is the most turbulent-free and innocent stage in human life. Anukam (2012) explained that it is that phase of life where a child is free from all tensions, fun loving, play and learn new things. Although, this could be one side story of childhood with the other side untold. The author added that this is only one side of the story while the other side is full of tension and burdens, where the innocent child is an earning machine working the entire day in order to satisfy the

needs and wants of the family. It is also pathetic to note that children who are not in any way responsible for the social injustices and malaise into which they were born, suffer and are involved in this societal act called child labour (Nuhu & Nuhu, 2010). This in the long run affects children's health, their growth and development. The female children are the most victims of this menace of child labour because of their apt in domestic activities. UNICEF NIG. (2016) explained that millions of girls work as domestic servants and unpaid household help and are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, millions of others work under horrific circumstances, they may be trafficked, forced into debt bondage or other forms of slavery, forced into prostitution and/or pornography or recruited as child soldiers in armed conflict. However, the case is not different outside Nigeria and other parts of the world. Regional estimates indicated that: the Asia and Pacific region harbour the largest number of child workers in the 5 to 14 age group, 127.3 million in total (19 per cent of children are working in the region); Sub-saharan Africa has an estimated 48 million child workers (UNICEF NIG., 2016). Almost one child in three (29 per cent) below the age of 15 is economically active, Latin America and the Caribbean harbours approximately 17.4 million child workers (16 per cent of children in the region are working), 15 per cent of children in the Middle East and North Africa are working; approximately 2.5 million and 2.4 million children are working in developed and transition economies respectively (UNICEF NIG., 2016).

Conversely, Rodman (2011) argued that not all work done by children irrespective of their background should be classified as child labour targeted for elimination which includes activities such as helping their parents around the home, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays. These kinds of activities contribute to children development and to the welfare of their families especially in this era of entrepreneurship and self-reliance. The author added that it provides children with skills and experience and help to prepare them to be productive members of the society during their adult life. History has it that in developing countries like Nigeria especially in cities, there is a deviation from the norms, ways and manners of raising children in the past and now even the perceptions, ideas and attitude toward child labour

Sometimes children overwork themselves in their own home or families without pay. This is because the society believes that children must work hard in other to meet up socio-economic and cultural expectations without considering the health and educational implications on the children. According to ILO (2016), some children suffer violence, poverty, lack of education, gender and ethnic discrimination even in their homes, exposed to toxic substances, body pains and experience constant hunger. A child should not be subjected to work at the expense of his or her wellbeing. Child labour deprives children of the opportunity to enjoy their childhood, go to school and have a decent lifestyle with good success. No matter the reason why children must work, child labour is an evil and criminal act that should be eliminated. It conditions children to a limited life opportunities. Therefore, if children must have healthy living and develop well physically, socially, morally and intellectually, the issue of child labour in our society must be addressed.

Concept of Child Labour

The concept of child labour has been defined by several authorities in recent times. Child labour refers to the use of children as a source of labour while depriving them of their fundamental right to childhood. Such right includes the opportunity to enjoy their child hood, attend school regularly, have peace of mind and live a dignified life that will prepare them for adulthood.

According to George (2010), child labour was defined as any task, paid, unpaid, exploitative, engaged in by a child less than 18 years of age, which places the interest of the beneficial well above those of the child and it is detrimental to the physical, social, mental, educational and moral development of the child. Also Obinne and Agbulu (2013), defined child labour as work that is mentally, physically socially and morally dangerous and harmful to the child, which interferes with the child's schooling process, and the child is often exposed to serious hazards, violence, abuse, illness and untold hardship. These authors maintained that this work deprives children of their potentials and dignity which in turns cause big damage in their mental development. The children are often enslaved, separated from their immediate families and left to care for themselves on the street. Similarly, Baland and Robinson (2000) explained

child labour to mean employing a person below the age of 15 years and paying him or her less than the minimum standard and against physical, mental, social and educational interest of the child. Again, child labour as defined by Ekpenyong and Nkereuwuen (2011), is the work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, dignity and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. Hence, child labour negatively influences the physical mental, social and educational development of children.

In Nigeria, it is common to see school age children roam about the streets, motor parks, filling stations, traffic jams and market stalls in cities begging for alms and hawking while others engage in domestic services, agricultural farm work and other menial jobs during school hours. ILO (2016) was of the view that domestic child labour is often called "hidden" as it is difficult to find the laborers or know the extent of their suffering. Aliyu (2006) estimated that the number of children involved in exploitative work in Nigeria is not known despite the wide dispersion of children laborers everywhere. It is therefore necessary to ensure that every child is protected and not exploited for cheap labour.

Determinants of Child Labour

Several factors may contribute to the wide dispersion of child labour in Nigeria which are discussed under the following sub-headings.

1. Poverty and low socio- economic background

Poverty is obviously a dominant factor for child labour in Nigeria and other developing countries. An individual is said to be poor when he or she lives below two dollars a day and cannot afford the basic necessities of life (United Nations, 2010). Nigeria as a developing nation is blessed with both natural and human resources unfortunately, absolute poverty, lack in midst of plenty, hunger, death, among others have been ravaging the country and her citizens which has led to the death of many Nigerians and the consequent paradigm shift. This can be attributed to political, religious and social instability in Nigeria. In this present dispensation coupled with poor governance and the "winner take all" syndrome which is characterized by Nigerian governance has created a wide gap and disparity between the rich and the poor. This disparity is observed where the rich is getting richer and the poor getting poorer. It is disheartening to note that the nation's resources are shared by few hands, and the rest people are left to work their fingers to bone while leaving many families in jeopardy. According to Aliyu (2006), the Nigerian child is the direct victim of the poverty level of the families and children are compelled by the circumstances beyond their control such as daily needs, to contribute to the family income. Therefore, the only way out is to engage them in child labour. Obviously, this will be detrimental to their health, wellbeing and education. George (2010) highlighted that parental socio-economic background or poverty is based on family income, parental educational level, parental occupation and socio-economic status in the society. The author added that families with high socio-economic status often have access to wide range of resources to provide their young children with high quality child care, books and toys that will encourage children in various area of human endeavour. However, Akindele (2011) was of the view that families with low socio-economic background often lack the financial, social and educational support for their family members as opposed and characterized by families with high income. Therefore, when children are not cared for by their parents and guardians, they resort to child labour just to survive.

2. Broken home and family instability

The home is the nucleus of the larger society. It is the first environment of the child after birth which serves as the agent of transformation and nurture for the child. Therefore, the impact of what happens in the home is usually observed on the children. Ojo (2010) observed that the consequences of broken home is attributed to the maternal and paternal neglect and deprivation cause by divorce or separation and total denial of fatherhood of the child which can lead them to child labour. In Nigeria, many marriages and family structures have collapsed, while others are struggling, just cohabiting, having indiscriminate squabbles and strives that prevents them from managing their families. This may lead to lack of care and affection, child abuse, neglect, among others, towards their children. In many broken homes, the proper and adequate training which would have been given to children by both parents will be sparingly done.

Akindele (2011), disclosed that a home atmosphere that is full of stress, dislike, malice, boredom, and unhappiness leads to delinquent behaviour in children. In such families, children with little or no money or income from their parents, guardians and relations engage in all manner of child labour to sustain themselves. The case is even worse with children who are orphans who may be forced by poverty and lack of care to become bread winners of the family due to loss of parents. For an under aged child to be able to do this, child labour will be inevitable.

3. Cultural factor

Different cultures have different perception towards children. Some cultures perceive children to be helpers at home who must work hard in order to become productive members of the society in their adulthood. The case may be different with another culture which sees children as 'tender leaves' and future hopes who were supposed to be cared for and invested on. Advinto (2000) opined that child labour may depend on culturally determined and institutional roles and functions of socialization process, and the normative attitude toward children in the society. Majority of Nigerian families believe that children are God sent helpers who should grow and be productive members of the society. According to Clark and Yesufu (2015), in such families, children are used as money making ventures by their parents and guardians. In Nigeria today, as the economic recession increases, you see many families engaging their children in all sorts of child labour, ranging from hawking, begging and domestic services without considering the detrimental effect on the health and education of the children. However, despite these diversities in cultural perception towards children, government laws effectively enforced can take precedence. UNICEF NIG. (2016) suggested that laws that prohibit child labour need to be in place and even more importantly, they need to be rigorously enforced. Governments and others need to know how many children are working in the various forms of labour, they also need information on the gender, age and ethnicity of the children to understand what made them vulnerable in the first place and to devise effective responses. Therefore, it is worthy of note that children need to be removed immediately from the worst forms of child labour and provided with care and education

4. Family size

Unlike the western countries, many families in Nigeria are too large due to polygamous marriages and extended family affiliations. In such families, it becomes difficult or almost impossible for parents to cater adequately for numerous children in the areas of nutrition, health care and education. According to Briggs (2011), family planning helps parents to regulate the number of children to have and the space in between them. For children to survive, many of them may be sent out to work outside homes and do jobs like house helps, baby sitting, sales girls and boys, barrow or truck pushing, among others just to make ends meet. Unfortunately, some of these children may be sent to wicked employers who may abuse them physically, morally, emotionally and even sexually. UNICEF NIG. (2016) suggested that children's views need to be taken into account in programmes aimed at helping child labourers, if children are going to be provided with real alternatives to hazardous labour and it is essential to make them active partners in identifying these alternatives. It is believed that when children leave their home for elsewhere, it is a relief to parents and guardians as their responsibilities will be reduced. Hence, it is advisable for people to avoid large family size in order not to give room for child labour and other forms of abuse and exploitations.

5. Ignorance and Illiteracy

Knowledge is power and what you know determines who you are. An individual cannot give out what he or she does not have. According to Muaksh (2012), knowledge is essential to determine both the extent and quality of information that people have about a particular issue or behavior before a change can be effectively initiated. Illiterate parents and guardians will not appreciate the value of education and will still engage their children in all manner of works even during school hours. Okeke (2010) observed that parents' educational attainment is a factor in determining whether a child will work or go to school. High level of illiteracy among parents and children may lead to child labour. In Nigeria, majority of illiterate families do not send their children and wards to school. Children are forced by some prevailing circumstances to go into doing all kinds of jobs at an early age of life in order to survive.

Again, knowledge comes through education which is a process of acquiring information for a specific period of time that can be useful to an individual, family and the society at large. George (2010) postulated that the parents' level of knowledge about child labour and its effects will determine their decision on whether or not to allow their children to entangle in child labour. Okeke (2010) also supported, parental educational attainment is a factor in determining whether a child will go to school. The author further added that some illiterate parents see nothing in educating their children rather they engaged them in apprenticeship skills, hawking, house helps, among others. Again, Luker (2010) argued that majority of children who engaged in child labour in Nigeria often display ignorance and innocence on the circumstances that forced them into it. Unfortunately, since some children may not be aware of the condition that forced them into child labour, it will be difficult to stop it.

Peer Group Influence

Children learn and copy behaviour, character and lifestyle faster from their mates than from adults. As children interact and mingle with their mates or peers, they exchange knowledge, ideas, information, character, among others. Akindele (2011) defined peer group as a small group of individuals of almost the same age group who come from roughly the same socio-economic background, attend the same school and share common ideas. Peer group refers to a group of friends who are either equal or have a little difference in age gap. According to Okeke (2010), children who spend much of their time both in and out of school hours and mixing in groups, have shown to have considerable influence in their behaviour and attitude.

According to Luker (2010), a peer group is both a social group and a primary group of people who have similar interests, age, background and social status. Often times, children prefer to share ideas and interpersonal relationship with their peers and let their peers influence them to engage in child labour even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. Some children who work to earn some money and who spend much of their time together with their peers both in and out of school, often inform them that they make a lot of money in what they are doing especially when they bring and show new things such as mobile phones, shirts and shoes as a proof. The material things they have seen at hand will convince them that child labour is a beneficial and profitable adventure. Okeke (2010) added that some children who felt that they were not ready for child labour will proceed anyway because they feared been ridiculed or rejected by their peers. This will no doubt negatively affect their social and psychological development.

Parental influence and greed

Some parents are very greedy, covetous and want to acquire the whole riches in the world. Such parents will establish numerous businesses at the same time and engage all the family members hence, force the children into child labour. Similarly, most parents especially the less privileged ones often think that the little contribution of their children to family income or assistance at home can make difference between hunger and survival (George, 2010). Parents in this category will prefer to have large number of children so that they can send them out for child labour or give them out early in marriage. So, children are sent out to work as servants in home and offices, hawkers, sales boys/girls, bus conductors, minders, among others to earn additional income to assist the family. Akindele (2011) supported that some children from low income families do not receive any formal education instead, they are forced or lured to serve as domestic servants, street hawkers or engage in other activities that are not favourable to their health, wellbeing, growth, development and educational achievements.

According to Okeke (2010), the incidences of parental influence on child labour seem to have accentuated during and after the oil boom in the 1970s which was as a result of increase in rural-urban migration and later economic deterioration, dwindling returns on investment with a coronary effects of workers retrenchment, unemployment and food insecurity. The author further added that all these culminated into disempowerment of many families who were in turn forced to send their children out to other families, to work, serve and hawk in order to alleviate economic hardship and crisis. Hence, harsh economic realities, the burden of paying school fees and upkeep for a large family size were some of the reasons why some parents and guardians compel or influence their children and wards to engage in child labour. All these

without doubt will negatively affect these children in terms of healthy growth, development and educational advancement.

Child labour and healthy growth and development

It is on record that the health status and wellbeing of children affect their growth and development. Child labour is one factor that has adverse effect on the health and wellbeing of children. Many children work under exploitative condition which has harmful effect on their physical condition and mental health. Achalu (2000) and Asogwa (2006) pointed out that long working hours are often responsible for fatigue and exhaustion that can cause accident and impair intellectual development. Often times street hawkers are prone to road accident because of some reckless drivers and their lack of sharp reflexes unlike their adult counterparts and this endanger their lives (George, 2010). The role of good nutrition on the healthy growth and development of children cannot be overemphasized. It is disheartening to note that some parents and guardians do not give adequate attention to proper feeding of their children and wards even when they engage them in all manner of activities. When this happens, these children become malnourished and sickly with the consequent stunted growth and development. Similarly, Ogunede (2013) argued that working children are more likely to suffer significant growth deficits compared to children in school and they grow up shorter and lighter and their body size continues to be smaller even in adulthood. It was reported by Agbulu (2013) that large numbers of children work under conditions which expose them to substances with long latency periods. Such substance includes asbestos, which increases the chances of contracting chronic occupational diseases such as asbestoses or lung cancer in young adult (Achalu, 2000; Asogwa, 2006).

Again, these children could be sexually abused while engaging in this child labour depending on their employer. They can contract sexually transmitted infection in the process, unwanted pregnancy, among others. According to Muaksh (2012), sexually exploited and -used children are also vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/Aids and unwanted pregnancy. Their vulnerability is high because they do not have choice (UNICEF, (2016). Also, these children suffer from body pains due to tedious domestic works, too much trekking with heavy loads during hawking, pains from rape, waist and muscle pains when lifting heavy or carrying heavy loads, some gets sick as a result of hunger, others are affected by pneumonia due to exposure to cold weather, snake and insect bites.

Okeke (2010) in a study attributed epidemic epilepsy to chronic exposure to pesticides, the benzene Hexachloride, which is used as a good preservative in many parts of the world. Ojo (2010) was of the view that the working conditions of child garbage pickers clearly increase the risk of disease and disability through the exposure to lead and mercury, presence of parasites and lifting of heavy objects as they search through the garbage. Again, they can also be exposed to sunscreen diseases as they work and walk under the sun. According to Willis and Wilby (2009), exposure to sun without sunscreen can cause sunburns and when it occurs before the age of 15, it doubles the risk of suffering from melanoma. If the case of children engaged in child labour is like this, then there is no hope for healthy growth and development.

Child Labour and Educational Advancement

No nation will grow intellectually and increase in technology advancement without giving adequate attention to the education of her citizen. UNICEF (2016) emphasized that all children have the right to education therefore, children and parents need to see school as a better option than work and Governments need to ensure that all children have access to compulsory education as a front-line response to child labour. The body also added that building a protective environment for children, education services need to be in place and they must be free, compulsory, relevant and attractive. Education is power and it provides a good platform for children to learn, acquire knowledge, abilities and skills. Children are future leaders and they learn through experience brought about by instructions and environment (Achuonye & Ajoku, 2008). Children who are engaged in child labour will rarely do well in school. It will negatively influence their performance and abilities despite their level of intelligent quotient (IQ). When education provides the children with the knowledge, skills, abilities and

competencies, the usefulness will be required later in adult life. Good education exposes the child with a world of opportunities for self-improvement, entrepreneurship, greater and better participation and contributions in the society.

Obviously, every child involved in child labour has one academic problem or the other. While reporting on child labour and education, challenges and future directions, Global Partnership for Education (2015) outlined the following:

- i. Child labour affects school attendance
- ii. Children who combine work and education do not perform well in the class.
- iii. Children who hawk before going to school are bound to arrive school late and are sure to miss some of the lessons, thus depriving the child of the opportunities to learn.
- iv. Children who engage in child labour do not have time for their homework, assignment and other learning activities outside school.
- v. Some other children are not even allowed to go to school at all. Hence, educational deprivation then becomes a log on the wheel of their progress in life.

However, Achuonye and Ajoku (2008) were of the view that the ability of young people to embrace opportunities for employment will depend to a large extent upon their level of education and holds the key towards successful livelihood while lack of it cannot be overemphasized. This conforms to this popular maxim 'if education and knowledge is expensive, try illiteracy and ignorance' In Nigeria, children who are engaged in child labour in some cases are totally or partially deprived of primary and or secondary school education. Even when they attend school regularly, they have little or no time to study at home due to fatigue and exhaustion. This deprives the child of good education and perpetuates poverty within the family and in the long term with the society (Anukam, 2012).

CONCLUSION

In a developing country like Nigeria, the concept of child labour was seen as a serious problem adversely affecting the healthy growth, development and educational advancement of her citizens. This was attributed to certain factors such as; poverty and low socioeconomic background, broken home and family instability, cultural factor, family size, ignorance and illiteracy, peer group influence and parental influence and greed. Children who engage in all sorts of labour such as hawking, begging, domestic services, carrying of heavy loads, among others are exploited and sexually abused which makes them vulnerable to contracting diseases. Also, child labour is associated with some health and educational problems such as road accidents, rape, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, malnutrition, stunted growth, body pains, poor education, poor academic performance, school dropout, high level of illiteracy, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should enforce laws that prohibit any form of child labour and strengthen child rights acts in Nigeria.
2. The Civil Society Groups should partner with the Government to make some provisions to alleviate poverty in the country since child labour was attributed to it.
3. Health professionals should take family planning as a priority for birth control so that parents can give birth to the number of children they can adequately cater for.
4. Government should monitor, supervise and revisit the existing free education for primary and secondary levels to ensure compliance in order to enable the poor attain any level of education they desire
5. Husbands and wives should guard their home jealously to avoid broken home or any form of family instability which impact will be on the children.

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