

A Systematic Profiling of Child Labour in Nigeria: The Forms, Causes and Way Forward

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Abstract

Forced labour, particularly child labour, is a rarely studied issue in Nigeria using secondary data collection methods. This study aims to identify the prevalent forms of child labour in Nigeria and their implications for children's learning and social life. It also investigates the leading causes of child labour and their impacts on children's holistic development through a systematic review of existing studies. The research utilized secondary data from Scopus, Research Gate, ScienceDirect, and PubMed. Various academic sources, including peer-reviewed journals, theses, educational websites, textbooks, and educational books, were examined. An interpretive research philosophy was adopted to allow for extensive illustration and critical discussion of findings. Thematic analysis was conducted by sorting relevant data and coding it into themes for discussion. Prominent forms of child labour reported include street children, those with intellectual disabilities, unpaid domestic workers, and migrant children involved in sexual work. Key causes identified are poverty, illiteracy, household deprivation, and regional factors. The study concludes with recommendations for societal vigilance against child abuse by parents. By raising awareness and implementing protective measures, the practice of child labour in Nigeria can be addressed more effectively.

Keywords: Child Labour, Exploration, Children, Sexual Workers

Introduction

Child labour in Nigeria is evident in the exposure of children to hardships such as lack of food, inadequate housing, and exposure to harsh chemicals (pesticides and insects) (Samuel, 2024). Evidence of child labour include child street hawking, children working in factories etc., In some cases, it has been found that children are forced into prostitution and sexually abused (Samuel, 2024). Female children forced to work on a plantation in Akwa Ibom Nigeria have been reported to be sexually violated by other male trafficked victims and supervisors (Obinaju & Asa, 2023). Young girls forced to work as domestic servants also reported being sexually abused by male members of the families in which they worked (Akpotor, 2023). All these do not mean that child labour is delimited to sexual abuse, other forms of child labour will be discussed as this research unfolds.

Child labour inhibits the ability of a child to grow to achieve higher full potential and to meet the expected cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and cognitive development (Dhage & Nagtode, 2023). Azonuche and Ego (2023) defined child labour as the act of using children for forced and labourious activities. Child labour is child exploitation, that is, a situation where children are forced into deceit coercion, or bandage to engage in exploitative work. Hence, the children work as labourers and in dangerous situations e.g., on farmlands, plantations, markets, and many more when they should be in school learning (Fanton d'Andon *et. al.*, 2022).

Every child is born with the potential to develop to his/her full potential- teachers, parents and the community at large should fight against child labour so that the child can develop to their full potential in life (Onipede, 2024). The aforementioned shows that the childhood period would mistakenly determine the type of content that would be inculcated into the child. Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (2024) noted that the child is a precious material in society that must be attended to with all forms of seriousness and professionalism in order to become a good adult that would promote the values, norms, and beliefs of the society. That is, what a child learns would go a long way from what he or she would become as an adult. When the child at this stage has been taken through the negative rudiments of abuse and laborious tasks, becoming an enviable adult for the child would in the long run be a difficult task.

Thus, child labour is defined as any kind of work by children which interferes with the full development of

children (Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, 2024). Children are meant to be exposed to education so they can be fully grown and developed into enviable adults in society. Child labour occurs when children are faced with services and laborious activities to fend for themselves or the larger family. United Nations (2024) found that victims of child labour might be tricked, forced, threatened, or otherwise coerced into moving to a situation in which they are then exploited for complex situations, sexual acts, domestic services, identity abuse, removal of organs, or other criminal acts. This points to the fact that child labour has become a menace in Nigerian society which the national laws, regulations, and acts are against.

Child labour is a form of forced labour that has become famous in this part of the world. This is the prevalence of having the rights of the children stamped upon (Ibrahim, Abdalla, Jafer, Abdelgadir, & de Vries, 2019). In other words, child labour has been associated with the use of the child in tune with their ability to work for others all in the name of making profits. Radfar, Asgharzadeh, Quesada, and Filip (2018) asserted that Nigerian children experience child labour a lot based on the functions of culture and social norms. Children from northern Nigeria are mainly exposed to the danger of forced labour. It has been repeatedly said that the northern Nigerians use their children as a means of making money. As such, they expose their children mostly girls to child marriage. Studies by Radfar, Asgharzadeh, Quesada, and Filip (2018); Onipede (2024); mentioned that the dangers that child marriage exposes children to are many such as birth complications, lack of good parenting styles, and many more.

Samuel (2024) asserted that aside from poverty, some parents are carried away into the goodies of child labour and child trafficking because they are ignorant of what the menaces are. For instance, some parents or guardians do not agree that it is wrong for them to send out their wards hawking on the streets all because of the risks involved. Aside from the fact that children are minors and could be exposed to all forms of risks on the street, they might be misguided by others on the street and have their academic lives affected (Azonuche & Ego, 2023). This present study is needful to assess the complex re-occurrence of forced labour activities among children in Nigeria. Also, the study helps to torchlight different for forced labour that still exist among children in Nigeria.

National Policy on Child Labour

UNICEF in the year 2010 started an initiative tagged; Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (GOSCI) which started as a way of ensuring that the rights and privileges of children are guided and protected. Further goals of the organisation are to enable out-of-school children and street children to be taken to the classroom and properly educated. The specific purposes of the initiative are to; ensure that children are well taken care of and that all forms of discrimination against children are removed; and encourage school participation among children regardless of the social status of their parents (UNESCO, 2024a). The following are the specific tenets of the National Policy on Child labour:

- Provision of guidelines in the form of creating awareness, advocacy, and sensitization among the general populace about the effect caused by child labour as well as its prevention.
- Provision of guidelines and modalities for action creations in the forms of projects and programmes being carried out by critical stakeholders and government in fighting child labour in the country.
- Provision of guidelines for effective resource mobilisation and sustainability of action programmes and projects amongst implementing partners and agencies.
- Provision of guidelines for the coordinating and networking programmes among critical stakeholders and government with the view to streamlining and strengthening efforts.
- Provision of guidelines for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing policies, legislations on projects, and programmes on child labour.

The following are the Age Recommendations of supplementing the Minimum Age Convention No. 138 by the International Labour Organization Minimum Age Recommendation No. 146;

- Provision of sufficient educational facilities
- Facilitation of employment-oriented training
- Parental guidance and care ensure that parents work in a way of alleviating poverty and taking good care of their children.
- Social security and child maintenance;
- Ensuring that children are protected from all forms of harm and unsafe actions and inactions.

Theoretical Framework

The socialisation theory was developed by Charles Horton Cooley, a psychologist which was developed in the year 1902 and was enhanced by the scholar Max Weber (Siljanovska & Stojchevska, 2018).. The term "Socialisation" can be seen as the process of relating, interacting, and communicating with others in our immediate environment (Siljanovska & Stojchevska, 2018). Human beings unlike animals have ideas, ideologies, beliefs, philosophies, norms, and many more that guide their actions and inactions. Man is a social animal that functions differently in their various communities and societies. The attitude and behaviour of human beings which is displayed from time to time is a factor of actions and inactions learnt from the society.

It is believed that man is a biological being who needs some elements of interactions with others to live and for sustenance. Despite the extent of cultural diversities and complexities, man still needs to survive and adhere to his fundamental human rights. This is the case that everyone in the society has rights and privileges glued to them as the case maybe. Unlike other living species, everyone in the social structure has ways of interaction that must not be hindered.

This is one of the reasons why Charles Horton Cooley preached and emphasised that children are not only part of the family but also part of the bigger society and that, they must be treated as humans and not animals. They are the first to be cared for in times of need and attended to when they request help. They should not be treated on the contrary, they should not be treated as slaves or used for activities that do not align with their emotional, psychological, health, social, academic, and physical development as the case maybe (Hinkle, 2008).

The early days of children are categorised with different development ranging from academic to social to psychological and many more. In other words, early development is a time when the child must be allowed to experience development in the form of the cognitive, language, perceptual, and socio-emotional (Schubert, 2006). Children in their early years are often exposed to extreme vulnerability when they are not well attended to by their parents and caregivers (Hinkle, 2008). This is a pointer to the fact that the need for adequate protection, care, and stimulation is essential for the growth and development of these children. Hence, the need for the activities of preschool is essential.

Statement of the Problem

Children do not have access to formal education and they are still forced to work for other people regardless. This is one of the prime foci of this study. UNESCO (2024a) observed that children who are ripe for schooling are still made to go through the inconveniences. International Labour Organisation and United Nations (2018) added that there are many causes of child labour. Azonuche and Ego (2023) asserted that poverty is a basic cause of child labour. It is the case that typical Nigerian parents who are relatively poor would want their children to assist them in hawking goods for the effective sustenance of the family. Abject poverty keeps reoccurring in Nigeria leaving the children to have no choice but to be exposed to child labour activities, hence this study.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the forms and causes of child labour in Nigeria through the aid of a systematic review of existing studies. In the recommendation section, the way forward to child labour will be presented. On this note, the specific objectives of the study are to:

- determine the prevalent forms of child labour in Nigeria and their implications for children's learning and social life.
- investigate the leading causes of child labour in Nigeria and their impacts on children's holistic development.

Research Questions

The following questions have been asked to guide the findings of the study.

- What are the prevalent forms of child labour in Nigeria and their implications for children's learning and social life?
- What are the leading causes of child labour in Nigeria and their impacts on children's holistic development?

Methodology

This study engages the systematic literature review which aids in the collection of numerous data on the two objectives that have been raised. Using the secondary method of data collection, some of the advantages of

adopting the systematic literature review in this research include access to myriads of information, extensive discussion of findings, and representation of findings in a structural manner (Johnston, 2014). However, one of the limitations of engaging the secondary method of data collection in this study is the fact that the findings were delimited to the studies accessed. This is unlike the primary method of data collection that gives room for the use of raw data collected from participants in their environment. The researchers were able to access data from a range of databases such as Scopus, Research Gate, ScienceDirect, and Pub Med. Different academic sources such as peer-reviewed journals, theses, educational websites, textbooks, and educational books were used. The interpretive research philosophy was also explored in the study as it gives room for the extensive illustration and critical discussion of findings (Chowdhury, 2014). More so, using the inductive research approach, data formation was done in a bid to make implications and inferences (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). Recommendations were also designed to put an end to the practice of child labour in Nigeria. Thematic analysis was done by browsing relevant data, sorting the information, and coding them into themes used for discussions.

Findings and Discussion

Forms of Child Labour in Nigeria and Implications for Children's Learning and Social Life

Child Worker of Street Children Category

These are types of children who are not privileged to have homes to live being the fact that they do not have parents or they have lost their parents. Uyanga, Ekpo, and Davies (2019) noted that these children are very special because they need special attention. They are children who have been neglected by the hand of love by people in the society at large. Some of the children often work on construction sites and shops as helpers, some work in eateries, some in barbers' workshops, some in garages, and many more (Uyanga, Ekpo, & Davies, 2019). Uyanga and Emana, (2016) in "Education as an Instrument for Achieving Social Justice and Good Governance", street children increased because education has not been effective in different places around the Nation (Nigeria) and that some other regions of the country are still faced with socio-cultural challenges just the Northern part of Nigeria (Uyanga & Emana, 2016).

These children live and stay on the street. They are always on the street hawking when they should be in the classroom learning. A study by Stephen, Okon, Franklyn, Effiong, Okon, and Okoro (2016) titled; "Effect of Child Labour on Children's Education in Katsina State, Nigeria" revealed that children now sell sachet water and biscuits and many more in semi-urban and urban metropolitan centres mainly for survival among the children. Some of the children are said to have lost their parents or do not have family members to stay and live with (Abdu, Rabi, & Usman, 2020). Some of these children are said to flood a larger part of Lagos in the past. In recent times, they can now be found in other towns and capital towns in the country like Osogbo, Ondo, Ibadan, Uyo, and many other places. Some people have been observed to employ these children as parttime workers and are played on meagre salaries.

Children with Intellectual Disabilities Category

The inability of being able to reach the expected developmental stages in growth and consciousness is a great challenge with pupils with severe/profound general learning disability causing them to be exposed to the danger of child labour especially in a country like Nigeria (Cheng & Lai, 2023). Some people have been observed to use this kind of child for forced labour in the form of making shoes, weaving baskets, and many more. Some even transit the children to other countries to work with companies in illegal settings. Hence, all the money made from these ventures goes to the trafficker and a little just for the sake of feeding goes to the child.

One of the reasons why the use of children with disabilities has become famous is that they have significant challenges in being able to communicate their feelings and communication with other people around them. Abdu, Rabi, and Usman (2020) concluded that this is when some people take advantage of the children and ask them to wash clothes, and plates and do some other house chores for them in their homes. When they are through with this, they get a token.

According to Emana (2016), many of the children suffering from severe/profound general learning disability always have other intellectual disabilities ranging from autistic behaviour and sensory disabilities as the case may be, hence, they are misused and abused by some community members especially when their parents are carefree. This reveals that children with severe/profound general learning disabilities largely depend on other people around them (friends, teachers, parents, and the community at large) throughout their lifetime in other to

assist them with basic needs such as movement, bathing, feeding and toileting etc (Abdu et al., 2020). When they are not assisted with this, they are used and abused, and become less of themselves (Flink, Broberg, Strid, Thunberg, & Johnels, 2022).

Child as Unpaid Domestic Worker

In Nigeria, the reality of child labour where the child has to work on farmland with the parents is not unpopular. Parents are truly the first teachers of their children. Parents are partners in the educational process of their children, not to use the children as housemaids or workers. Findings according to Stephen, Okon, Franklyn, Effiong, Okon, and Okoro (2016) have shown that some parents are not directly the biological parents of their children, therefore they tend to use them for labourous activities. Though children are meant to carry out some roles for the parents, not such that would be injurious to their health and physical development.

On the other hand, Nnabuchi (2013) noted that parents are like gods, and children are meant to listen and obey the orders of such parents as a form of respect and honour. This implies that children are used to some activities in the home like fetching water, cooking, working in the garden, watching after livestock, and many more; Nnabuchi (2013) mentioned that when these activities continuously affect the academics, social, moral, and health life of the children, it is a form of overwork or hard labour. While these activities affect children socially, their academic performance is also affected negatively in school (Taiwo, Badiora, & Adebara, 2021)..

Migrant Child Labour as Sexual Workers

The use of children as sex workers is becoming popular in Nigeria especially in Enugu State according to the findings of Enebe et al. (2021). While many of the people in the country are educated- many remain unemployed, some of them make connections with people in other countries or states and send children who have become desperate to travel out abroad mainly to be used as sex machines (Enebe et al., 2021).

The origin of migrant child labour originated from labour mobility towards districts or states or outside where industry and employment opportunities are expanding. This is when the family migrates with the children mainly under economic compulsion apart for many reasons which could range from shelter to clothing to feeding (Uyanga and Emanu 2016). In most cases, these children are automatically deprived of schooling and are made to serve people mainly to make money for their family members anywhere they find themselves. Abdu et al., (2020) revealed that some children are now used for the main aim of impregnating them so that they can give birth to children- afterward, these children are sold or kept for one reason or the other.

Causes of Child Labour in Nigeria and Impacts on Children's Holistic Development

Several reasons have been found to have led or been leading to child labour in Nigeria. The following are some of the reasons.

Poverty and Child Labour

Research has shown that poverty is significant to child labour in Nigeria (Kaur & Byard, 2021). In the same vein, societal poverty has been found as a core contributor to child labour in Nigeria (Naeem, Shaukat, & Ahmed, 2011). By implication when parents are poor, they tend to use their children to make money by asking them to hawk goods on the street. A recent study has shown that the Nigerian poverty rate is 40.7% (Adebayo, 2024) which increases the extent of child labour.

Education and Child Labour

Child labour has become one of the most elusive and most difficult concepts in the social sciences children were imposed to a high level of formal education in Nigeria. Akpan and Oluwabamide, (2010) in their study "The Menace of Child Labour in Nigeria: A case study of street hawking in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria" found that unemployment and poverty are the major causes of child hawking in the study area which has been caused mainly because the children do not have access to education. Also, the study found that punitive measures should be taken against children who engage in hawking as well as their parents in the city of Uyo basically by making sure that there is free education for the children (Akpan & Oluwabamide, 2010).

Household Deprivation and Child Labour

Household deprivation is a situation where the child is deprived of a home and some other household equipment like food, shelter, love and belongingness, and many others. A study by Okoronkwo and Oprah (2024) on "Ocio-Economic Factors That Influence Child Labour in Nigeria" showed that sex, age, occupational and marital status of the respondents have a statistically significant relationship with the perception of chores that should constitute child labor in the study population. In the same vein, women are more likely to know which chores constitute child labour than men(Okoronkwo & Oprah, 2024). In all of these, there is a need to ensure that children are not allowed to engage in activities that can deprive them of their social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Religion and Child Labour

The religion of people could be seen as a determinant or cause of child labour activities. Samuel Effiong Ekong (2016) In "Nigeria Policy on Child Labour: An Evaluation of the Education Sector Preparedness for Effective Policy Implementation: A Case Study of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria." revealed that the state of infrastructure in the schools, particularly in the rural communities, was in a condition of neglect with a high teacher-pupil ratio, whereas, a few children who practiced Islam were not adequately brought to school. In this vein, Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2016) reported that most of the children in the northern part of Nigeria where the parents are religious fanatics are consistently exposed to different forms of practices like child marriage.

Health and Child labour

Badoe(2017) in "Perspectives on Child Abuse and Labour: Global Ethical Ideals Verse African Cultural Realities" found that there is a need to protect children against hazards and dangers (physical and psychological injuries), as well as provide basic needs for children so as not to make them responsible for their needs too early in life. However, it was revealed that what is considered an abuse in one culture may not be regarded as an abuse in another. International Labour Organisation (2024) in their findings on "Child labour statistics; manual on methodologies for data collection through survey" revealed that millions of children work under hazardous conditions which present dangers to their health, safety, and welfare. They toil in mines and quarries, are exposed to agrochemicals in agriculture, squat in crippling positions to weave rugs and carpets, and scavenge in rubbish tips(Ajayi & Torimiro, 2024). Too many are enslaved in bonded labour, isolated in domestic service, and traumatised and abused in the commercial sex trade(Badoe, 2017).

Recommendations

One of the ways to tackle child labour is to put pressure on companies that use teen children for labour, if any. Also, people in Nigerian society need to be on the look out for parents who abuse their children through excess flogging, errands, hawking, and many more. In the same vein, parents must ensure that they make efforts to work effectively and make money for their homes rather than depending on their children who should be in school. When this is achieved, a gross decrease will be brought to poverty among the people. Aside from the fact that the child is not made to work under the people, the government should be ready and able to create and make more jobs available to the people.

The use of time-to-time television, radio, and social media awareness on reasons why child trafficking abuse must stop is a necessity. More facilities and mediums such as billboards, newspapers, word of mouth, and many more can be engaged to put a stop to these menaces. In the same vein, rather than forcefully engaging children in forced labour, they can rather be exposed to some forms of vocational training for self-development.

Conclusion

This study has looked into the investigation the forms and causes of child labour in Nigeria through the aid of a systematic review of existing studies. It has been found that children often work on construction site and shops as helpers, some work in the eatery, some in barbers' work shop, some in the garage and many more due to many factors such as poverty and illiteracy on the part of their parents. The prominent forms of child labour in Nigeria that have been reported include child worker of street children category, children with intellectual disabilities category, child as unpaid domestic worker, and migrant child labour as sexual workers among others. The leading causes of child labour that have been found in the study are poverty, illiteracy, household deprivation and region among other themes that were raised. It was recommended that people in the society need to be on the

watch out for parents who abuse their children. Also, there should be an increase in the rate of awareness about child labour and their implications on the holistic development of children in Nigeria.

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