

WORKFORCE OF MINORS: AN APPRAISAL OF CHILD LABOUR IN NIGERIA**Dr. Chinenye Nkiru Chibueze**Department of History and International Studies,
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Email: cn.chibueze@unizik.edu.ng**Abstract**

Every nation strives towards ensuring that the futures of its children are bright. Where such future is jeopardized by natural or human factors, the nation is indeed threatened. This paper posits that the major reason for child labour in Nigeria is economic poverty among majority of Nigerians. It is the high rate of poverty in Nigeria that encourages most parents to allow their children to engage in child labour. The study identifies some prevalent forms and causes of child labour in Nigeria. It also examines the negative impact of child labour on the victim, the socio-economic development of the nations among others. The study recommends there should be effective enforcement of existing legislation against child labour with adequate measures to rehabilitate the victims. It also recommends better economic reforms by the government to enable parents and wards take adequate care of their children without recourse to child labour.

Keywords: Child, Child Labour, Socio-Economic, Poverty, Nigeria

Introduction

Children constitute a significant social category. Not only do they symbolize the joy of the present, they present the hope of the future of society. Thus, child training in different societies usually conform to the culture, religious beliefs, practices and values of the society in which a child is raised. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) regard a child as a person under the age of eighteen.¹ The Child Right Act of 2003, also affirms that children are persons under the age of eighteen. According to Olayinka S. Akinwumi, in his work, "Legal impediment on the Practical Implementation of the Child Rights Acts 2003", a child is a person below fourteen years while a young person is a person who has attained the age of fourteen years but is below seventeen years.³ Nevertheless, the popular consensus remains, that persons under eighteen are regarded as children and this position is adopted by this study.

According to the ILO, child labour refers to those type of work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and deprives them of opportunities for schooling and development.⁴ Sharma A. et al, opined that child labour refers to when children engage in work that is dangerous to their health or the work that hinders their education.⁵ while Edmonds.E. and Pavenik.N viewed child labour as a form of child abuse, where children work in bad conditions and hazardous occupations.⁶ Child labour is when a child is deprived of his or her fundamental human rights, sent into hard labour or subjected to un-favorable and inhuman conditions.

It is important to state here that not all work done by children are classified as child labour. Children or teenagers' involvement in work that doesn't affect their wellbeing and self-improvement or disrupt their academics is for the most part viewed as being a positive thing. This includes jobs like aiding their folks around the home, aiding a privately-run business or earning extra money outside school hours and during school vacations. These sorts of jobs add to their learning and can equip them with abilities and experience that assist them to be useful citizenry when they become adults.

Whereas "child labour" is characterized as work that denies children of their childhood, innocence, dignity, and that is destructive to their physical and mental development. It alludes to work that is mentally, physically, socially or ethically perilous and unsafe to youngsters; and obstructs their education by obliging them to leave school rashly or by expecting them to participate in school with unnecessarily additional work. In its most outrageous structures, child labour includes children being enslaved, isolated from their families, presented to serious dangers and diseases as well as left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities. Therefore, whether specific types of "work" can be classified as "child labour" depends on the child's age, the type and periods of work being undertaken,

the circumstances under which it is performed and the individual nations legislations or laws. The response shifts from one country to another, as well as among difference regions within a country. The prevalence of child labour is one of the socio-economic problems menacing the globe today, more especially in developing countries, of which Nigeria is inclusive. In many parts of Nigeria, many children between 5 to 17 years of age engage in child labour. Often times such children are faced with challenging way of living, in which they are exposed to various forms of tedious jobs such street hawking, carrying of loads, bus conducting, among others. This widespread practice has endured till today despite existing legislation against it, limited government reforms and other forms of advocacies against it.

In many States in Nigeria today, it is common to see many children struggling in the streets, parks and odd places to make ends meet for themselves, parents or guardians. This exposure to such harsh life is regarded as anti-human practices ⁷, as such children could be faced with resultant terrible experiences such as sexual abuse, denial of basic education, poor upbringing, and other forms of child abuse. This act affects the mental health of these children negatively, and when manifested, it could lead to demoralized and negative personalities with inferiority complex in future.⁸ The ILO, stated that the problem of child labour can have more bad consequences besides all the concerns of investment or its relations to economic activity.⁹ Some of the resultant social havoc it could cause in the society is by limiting the development of children thereby crippling natural developmental stages and in turn affecting the United Nations Development Goals. The Nigerian NGO's Report reveals that a staggering 15 million children under the age of 14 are working across Nigeria, of which many of these children are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments, while carrying too much responsibility for their age.¹⁰ Despite several measures put in place by the Nigerian government to combat child labour, such as making primary education free and compulsory for all children, many children do not attend school. More so dropout rates for primary school are higher across Nigeria.¹¹ This issue continues to remain a great concern in Nigeria. It is in view of the various manifestations of the child labour, that this paper turned to examine the various effects of child labour in Nigeria.

Forms of Child Labour in Nigeria

Domestic Service: is a form of Child labour which is difficult to quantify because this form of work is performed mostly in private residences as seemingly normal practice across Nigeria. It is often used as cover for the exploitation, control and subjection of children to tedious 'domestic chores' such as childcare and other domestic tasks. In many cases, such children are vulnerable to ill-treatment, humiliation, verbal abuse, physical assault and deplorable living conditions. Most people prefer taking minors as their servants because they are malleable unlike adults.

Hiring under aged domestic servants is a common phenomenon in Nigeria. More often than not this involves vulnerable children from poor backgrounds coaxed from parents by guardians in exchange of being sent to school and being made to work as unpaid or paid live- in domestic servants mostly in urban households. Sadly some of these children endure exploitation from employers and guardians and end up living in slave-like conditions.

Street Hawking: this involves selling commodities in the street or by road side to the final consumers. Such street hawking is a mobile business done by children from poor families as a means of livelihood or to support meager income of their parents or guardians. A visit to traffic-laden spots of major cities in Nigeria such as Lagos, Anambra and Abuja, reveal an ugly scenario that adequately typifies the unfortunate Nigerian situation; children are seen hawking snacks and wares to commuters and other road users even during school hours, to the detriment of their well-being. Hawking is a thriving business in Nigeria engaged in by both old and young and patronized by many. This is in spite of the many dangers it poses for children such as kidnapping, rape, rituals killings, road accidents, health issues and undue exposures.

Child prostitution: is prostitution involving a child, and it is a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The term normally refers to prostitution of a minor, or a person under the legal age of consent. In most jurisdiction, child prostitution is illegal as part of general prohibition on prostitution. Child prostitution sometimes manifests in the form of sex trafficking, in which a child is

kidnapped or tricked into becoming involved in the sex trade, or in survival sex, wherein the child engages in sexual activities to procure basic essentials such as food and shelter.

Most of the children involved with prostitution are girls, despite an increase in the number of young boys in the trade. Children are often forced by social structures and individual agents into situations in which adults take advantage of their vulnerability and sexually exploit and abuse them by selling their bodies. Structure and agency commonly combine to force a child into commercial sex. Prostitution of a child sometimes follows from prior sexual abuse, often in the child's home.¹³ Most of the victimized children who face prostitution are vulnerable children who are exploited. Many predators target runaways, sexual assault victims, and children who have been harshly neglected by their biological parents.

Hazardous Jobs: Hazardous child labour is the largest category of the "worst forms" of child labour.¹⁴ An estimated 115 million children, aged 5–17, work in dangerous conditions in sectors including agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, service industries and domestic service and this is found in both industrialized and developing countries globally while about 22,000 children are killed at work every year worldwide.¹⁵ The numbers of those injured or made ill because of their work are not known.

Children have a greater risk of ending in hazardous child labour in informal, small size establishments and agricultural processing due to them being less regulated generally and there being lack of proper awareness of labour protection to be provided to children of legal working age. Children in hazardous work in all occupation groups of all child labourers are aged 5–17 years. Hazardous work is usually attributed to unhealthy conditions and long hours.

Causes of Child Labour

Poverty: poverty is a major factor that drives child labour in many developing countries like Nigeria. In some poor families, child labour contributes to a significant source of income for the family. Decisions about child labour and schooling are generally made by parents or guardians. But when a family lives below the poverty line, parents could begin to see children as part of contributors to their family income. Basu K et al, reasoned through their theoretical model that the only reason parents send children to labour is because of their low income.¹⁶ More so, poverty is a trigger factor in many human rights abuses on children.

Family size: closely related to poverty, a large poor household usually have more children involved in child labour than children from smaller households. Parents oblige their children to work because they are not able to manage the demands of a large family size.

Cultural factor: Culture is another factor that drives children into the labour market. Certain cultures encourage children to start work at a young age as it is presumed that children need to learn skills that can be good for their future. Many families prefer their children to work because they consider it beneficial for them as they learn work skills and contribute to the family's income. In some cultures such as in northern Nigeria where the education of girls are less valued (which means they are not considered to have any formal education), they are encouraged to venture into early marriage pushed or sent into child labour such as house maids. In the Northern part of Nigeria, the Almajiri system is a popular religious and cultural practice where children are given begging plates and forced into the streets to beg for a living.

Family value: This has to do with the values held by some families on how to nurture and raise their children. Some families force their children into child labour such as street hawking with the belief that it is a normal way of life. Some see it as a way of boosting their small incomes when the returns are remitted to them at the end of the day.

Urban migration: In cases where some families migrate to urban areas because of rural push and urban pull factors but do not have means of earning a livelihood, they could be forced to live and work in poor conditions. And due to lack of availability of basic requirements such as food, shelter etc, their children may become street workers as vendors.

Environmental Factors: At times parents and children are influenced by their various environments to engage in child labour as the norm. A good example can be seen in rural South-South Nigeria, especially those residing at the riverine areas, where many children are vulnerable to existing environment occupation and way of live such as fishing, hunting and farming at very tender ages, of which their parents cannot do much to ameliorate.

Effect of Child Labour

Impact on Child: Working can impact a child's social development because the child spends time doing labour instead of with peers in social play or in learning how to interact properly. Even adolescents who work are impacted negatively. Teenagers, who spend more than 20 hours per week working, are at a higher risk to develop problematic social behaviours such as drug abuse and aggression.¹⁷

The risks additionally influence their instructive advancement as they are likely to perform inadequately in school and loose the little training they are conscious of. Child labour likewise influences the general social improvement of kids, since they don't get to invest energy with others their own age or even sufficient time with relatives. Kids need to interact with their peers without undue burden to flourish and be confident. Spending extended periods at work, even part time, keeps the youngsters from appropriately fostering these connections, leading to insecure adults who are also at risk for other emotional problems.

Kids who work may experience disengagement and despondency, which frequently keeps them from proceeding to foster solid feelings as they develop, and can prompt numerous actual impacts. They are at higher risk for developmental delays as a result of the high health risks both from dangerous working conditions and from taking on physical tasks that are too advanced for them. Such children are often more withdrawn than the people who are permitted to play and developed normally. They are likewise at a higher risk for diseases like respiratory sicknesses and could be exposed to hurtful synthetic compounds that can likewise influence their future. Other mental and physical effects vary depending on the sector those children are working in.¹⁸

Impact on Societal development: child labour involves exploitation of children, but it is vital to understand how it is not only the child that is the victim but the entire society suffers when it is implemented. This damage isn't one which can be sidelined and overlooked by those who are only concerned with their own selfish interests – it affects every single individual, immediately as well as in the long term. Across industries, this means that the potential talent of children who have been deprived of primary and secondary education will be lost. Instead, they could only be capable of manual and menial labour, in skills like serving tea, cleaning tables and working in continuous hazardous situation. In the long run, an economy is being engineered to rely on the dispensability of desperate children, not the energy of eager and productive men and women. That is dangerous for a community's societal development, and also unacceptable internationally considering the aggressive initiatives the United Nations has taken to end child labour in all forms.

Impact on Health: Victims of child labour may suffer from depression, anxiety and develop poor habits such smoking, alcoholism or drug abuse as a result of long exposure to such lifestyles. Formative environments of abuse might also trigger a lifetime of low self-esteem, depression, and relationship difficulties.

Psychological and emotional conditions such as panic disorder, dissociative disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression, anger, posttraumatic stress disorder, and reactive attachment disorder have also been noted in children who have grown up in such harsh conditions. Child labour can have a range of both mental and physical health effects on a child that often continue into adulthood, these vary and include long-term health issues due to abuse, injuries, malnutrition, exhaustion, psychological harm or exposure to chemicals, among others.

In agriculture, children are often exposed to working with hazardous toxic fertilizers and pesticides, as well as heavy and dangerous tools or blades. In domestic work, children face the risk of being abused by their employers, working excessively long hours or being isolated from their friends and family. In construction, children face the risk of injury from working with dangerous and heavy loads and lack adequate personal protective equipment. In mining, children are exposed to working with explosives,

poisonous chemicals and face the risk of being placed in dangerous environments such as mines which are regularly the source of collapses that can lead to serious injury or death. In manufacturing, children are exposed to unhealthy toxins, hazardous chemicals and poor health and safety working regulations.

Ethical and Moral Decline in Society: Moral deterioration is another effect of child labour in society because a child could develop unchecked habits and behaviours learnt from their employers or guardian. When an employer lacks morals and good conduct in his way of dealing with the children under his charge, it is easy for the children to emulate their master's attitude and behaviour and this could forever impact them.

Abuse: Children are exposed to accidents and other injuries at work. They should thus be protected to prevent social, economic and physical harm, which could continue to affect them in lifetime. Generally children could sustain injuries such as cuts, burns, lacerations, fractures, tiredness and dizziness, excessive fears and nightmares.¹⁹ They are also exposed to abuses such as sexual abuse, particularly sexual exploitation of girls by adults, rape, prostitution, early and unwanted pregnancy, abortion, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcoholism. Physical abuse could also involve corporal punishment, emotional maltreatment such as blaming, belittling, verbal attacks, rejection, humiliation and bad remarks.

Emotional and physical neglect such as deprivation of love and affection could result to loneliness, hopelessness, lack of adequate provision of food, clothing, shelter and medical treatment. And worse, lack of schooling results in missing educational qualifications, higher skills and experiences thus subjecting their lives to perpetual poverty.

Conclusion

The negative impact of child labour is dire to both child and the society at large. It is a practice that has endured and appears to have no end in Nigeria as many Nigerians are active participants as victims, actors or beneficiaries of child labour. The work has examined several forms and causes of child labour and it is clear that this practice is natural to society and the ordinary Nigeria. It is a phenomenon that can be combated by individuals. No individual, no organization, even the largest one, can begin to stop child labour on its own, and no action, even the smallest, can be dismissed as being too small to bring about change. It is only through joining the forces of goodwill on all levels of society that we can hope to put an end to child labour.

Recommendations

- 1) Government should intensify awareness to combat child labour across the country, by advocating for the ratification and enforcement of international laws that protect children, and they should support the passage of the Child Rights Act at every State.
- 2) Increased enrollment of children into schools either formal or informal should be encouraged by all institutions in the various thirty-six States in Nigeria such as religious, community, individuals, groups and international agents either through scholarships or subsidy considerations.
- 3) Government should make sure the inspection of school, children at the primary and post-primary is effective, and follow up measures should be put in place to checkmate excess truancy. Especially as free education has been instituted across the nation to cater for those financially incapable of sending their children to school.
- 4) Government should also address poverty which is one of the major causes of child labour. More effective and transparent effort of Government should address people-oriented programmes such as effective poverty eradication, small and medium scale loans scheme, subsidy on petroleum and agricultural products in order to provide adequate source of livelihood for parents and guardians to enable them take care of children without resort to child labour.
- 5) There should be binding legislation against child labour. This will help to checkmate any perpetrator. Such persons must be apprehended for effective process as well as provide adequate measures to rehabilitate children who are victims of child labour.

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