THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Child Labour Practices in a Developing Country: A Survey of Urban Communities in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, South- East, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined child labour practice which is a common phenomenon in developing countries and one of the biggest obstacles to social development. Poverty is a major factor that influences this practice in third world nations. The study is anchored on symbolic interactionist theory. The mixed methods design was adopted in this study. The study population was 106,212 which is the population of adults aged 18years and above in awka south l.g.a.a samplesize of 200 was statistically generated using taro yamane formula for determining sample size. The multi-stage sampling procedure comprising simple random sampling and systematic sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents in the study. Questionnaire andin-depth interviews were the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection used in the study. The statistical package for social sciences (spss) software was used to process the quantitative data while manual content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between poverty and child labour in awka south l.g.a. Also, results of the study showed that family size and poor educational level of parents are determinants of this ugly practice. The paper therefore recommended the need for government and non-governmental organizations (ngos) to partner and carry out massive public enlightenment campaigns, workshops and seminars to educate and sensitize parents and care-givers on the dangers of child labour practices. Also, existing laws on child abuse should be strengthened to prevent the perpetrators of this act to desist from it since it is a form of child abuse.

Keywords: Child, child abuse, child labour practices, developing country, urban communities

1. Introduction

For many years, child labour has been one of the biggest obstacles to social development. It is a challenge and long-term goal in many countries to abolish all forms of child labour, especially in developing countries where it is considered as a serious issue these days. Child labour refers to children who miss their childhood and are not able to have basic amenities which a child should have. Child labour is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potentials, their dignity that is harmful to physical and mental wellbeing (Wellington, 2005). In the same vein, Damilola (2009) considers child labour as activities that involve generating money for the family or for any other person by children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child defines child labour as any work done by children that maybe harmful to their physical, emotional, social and intellectual development (UN, 2006). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2010) defines child labour as work that is mentally, socially, physically or morally dangerous and harmful to children. Considerable differences exist between many kinds of work children do. Some are difficult and demanding, others are more hazardous and even morally reprehensible. Children carry out a very wide range of tasks and activities when they work (ILO, 2010). Child labour encompasses every non-school going child – irrespective of whether the child is engaged in wage or non-wage work; whether he or she is working for his or her family or for others; whether employed in hazardous or non-hazardous occupations; whether employed on a daily or on a contract basis or as a bonded labour (ILO, 2010).

According to ILO (2013), the largest number of child labours are working in hazardous work and the total number of child workers is increasing, even though it is forbidden by law. These children are vulnerable to diseases and they struggle with long-term physical and psychological pain. The main cause that induces children to work is poverty. These

children work for their survival and their families. (Mapaure, 2009). Dessy and Pallage (2003) argued that not all the works that children do are harmful or brutal. Some work may provide successful learning opportunities, such as babysitting or newspaper delivery jobs, but not if the work exposes them to psychological stress, like human trafficking, prostitution and pornographic activities. It is against this background that the study examined the perceptions of residents of urban communities on child labour practices in Awka South local government area, Anambra State, South – East, Nigeria.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In most African countries, a large proportion of households still live below the poverty line of less than \$5 US Dollars per day, due to factors such as weak economic base, galloping inflationary measures, high rate of unemployment, the inadequate incomes of parents as well as ineffective machinery to enforce child welfare policies. The result is that affected children in Awka metropolis find it difficult to survive as a result of economic status of their parents. These adverse socio-economic situations as highlighted above which are also compounded by the challenging political and cultural crises in many countries, as evidenced by civil war, genocide, famine, drought, HIV/AIDS epidemic, and structural adjustment programs make life in Awka South unbearable for the children.

Consequently, children who are always at the receiving end are often placed in the margins of public arena through their joining both the wage and non-wage markets, some of these activities are sometimes hazardous to their health and education (Marcoux, 1994). At the household level, children's economic production has become an important aspect of economic survival strategies. Many children spend several hours working outside the home in order to bring additional income to the household. A significant proportion are involved in petty trading and services (as street hawkers, domestic servants, and in apprenticeship positions) or even working as street beggars in urban areas (Verlet, 1994). Therefore, their involvement in these activities poses serious threats to the continued survival of the society; distort government policy with respect to education of the youth due to high dropout rate. Also, physical stress due to the age and maturation of the child is affected leading to low concentration at school and breakdown of health of the child. Research has indicated the inherent hazards and risks that children often experience when working in exploitative industries. Physical consequences that range from malnourishment, diseases, muscular-skeletal disorders from heavy labour, physical and sexual abuse to injuries and exposure to toxic agents, and prolonged working in cramped and hazardous conditions have been well documented (Hasan &Debnath, 2000). These physical effects of the industrial sector have been detrimental to the well-being of the child worker. Socially, children in industries have been found to experience negative consequences on their educational development and performance. The prevalence of illiteracy, low school attendance, and low enrollment has been attributed to children's economic participation (Hasan &Debnath, 2000).In view of the aforementioned problems, the study focused on perceptions of residents of urban communities on childlabour practices in Awka South L.G.A., Anambra State.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the level of awareness of child labour practices in urban communities in Awka South, L.G.A., Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria?
- What are the perceptions of child labour practices in urban communities in Awka South L.G.A., Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria?

1.3. Review of Related Literature

1.3.1. Awareness of Child Labour Practices

We may see child labour as all work done by children, which prevent them from living through childhood processes that include play time, having a proper education, recreation and good rest devoid of harmful interferences. The ILO (1983) Convention attempts to resolve this by assessing the individual characteristics of different works as they apply to children. On this basis, child-labours would be referred to as children under the age below 18 years who are economically active as they offer services for wages. In this regard, a child is often engaged in more than lightwork and other related worst forms of labour in which the child is unwillingly enslaved, forcibly recruited, etc. (ILO 1995). Child labour practice is perceived differently. Ebai (2007) affirms that different societies consider child labour invarying dimensions based on norms and traditions. He maintains that there are differences between child work and apprenticeship but appreciated that both concepts are parts of African culture. Oruwari (1996) on his part argued that domestic work is seen as easy and safe work for children. Therefore, it should not be considered as child labour. Contrary to this view, ILO (2002) argues that domestic work can be very dangerous for children especially in a situation where such a child is not properly supervised by an adult. Though, in the rural communities, childrenare encouraged to work and help their parents in certain chores like cooking, sweeping, fetching firewood etc. Bhargava (2009) supports this view by asserting that it may be customary for parents to send their children to work as helpers in the houses of relatives. This is because such work could be part of training ground especially female ones that are seen as future mothers. Hunte (2009) in his study in Asia observes that most of the eldest sons in different households sacrifice their future for the interest of their siblings. Traditionally, it may be argued that certain work builds skills and character. Some children who participated in early work may assume the role of a breadwinner. Hunte (2009) concluded that child labour could give children opportunity to learn skills which may lead to viable employment. Work can provide the individual with a sense of

responsibility. Therefore, work may enhance a child's self-confidence and communication skills with both peers and adults.

Ndem, Baghebo and Otu (2012) investigated the existence of child labour, causes, constraints and economic implication in Calabar, Cross River state, Nigeria. A stratified random sampling method was used in selecting 500 respondents. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaire and focused group discussions. Simple percentages and frequency tables were used to analyze the data. Chi square was used to test the hypotheses. The study showed a significant relationship between child labour and poverty, unemployment and school dropout. The study recommended that government should come up with legislations that will tackle the problem of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria.

1.3.2. Perceptions of Child Labour Practices

The perception of child labour among different people depends on certain factors with each society considering the same in varying degrees all of which are paralleled along variables of who should be a child based on acceptable norms, values and traditions that influence the perceptions of the people of that society (Rodgers &Guy, 1981). Among Africans, it is argued that there is need for us to distinguish between child work and child labour in consideration of the African cultural practice (Ebai, 2007). Goergy and Leslie (1997) argue that domestic work in African context is easy and safe for children, some unsupervised domestic work may be dangerous for children thus advocating the need for such supervision tobe provided. In other circumstances, it has been argued that it is traditionally acceptable for children to work and help their parents in certain chores especially in the rural areas (ILO, 2002 & Bhargava, 2009). Awosusi and Adebo (2012) have argued that many children who engage in child activities in Nigeria are abused physically, mentally, sexually and psychologically.

According to Hunte (2009), for parents whose children must work there are a number of perceived positive features related to child labour that influence the decision-making process. These include the opportunity to learn a skill, which may lead to viable employment, and the perception that work provides the individual with a sense of responsibility. Work may also enhance a child's self-confidence and communications skills with both peers and adults. Children value the opportunity to socialize with their peers even though some parents believe that work keeps their children occupied and out of trouble and that some type of work make useful positive contribution to the development of the child.

Findings from researches indicate that parents have different preferences about whether their children will work and how long they will work. Kim and Zepeda (2004) used two-stage decision-making model to explain children's participation and labor supply on family farms using unitary and cooperative bargaining frameworks and found out that the higher the parents' educational level, the higher the probability that children will work but for a fewer hours. Sadashivan (2001) believes that parents contribute to child labour. In his study in India, he found that the number of illiterate parents who do not see (or are unaware of) the benefits school can bring to their children and their families was quite high. It has also been postulated that age can affect one's perception of child labour. For instance, Preethi (2002) found that younger respondents believe that work help them to prepare for the future so that they can become good heads of their families whereas older respondents do not think so. Also, Chandra (2000) in a primary survey in India between parents whose children are involved in child labour and those who are not involved reports that the perception of parents whose children are involved in labour greatly differ from those of parents whose children are not involved. Most of the parents revealed that participation of a child in labour would depend on the family background and economic situations. Most of them also opined that education is more important than work. However, due to economic and socio-cultural constraints, preference is given to work.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the symbolic interactionist theory. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective on self and society based on the ideas of George H. Mead (1934), Charles H. Cooley (1902), W. I. Thomas (1931), and other pragmatists associated, primarily, with the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century. The central theme of symbolic interactionism is that human life is lived in the symbolic domain. Symbols are culturally derived social objects having shared meanings that are created and maintained in social interaction. Through language and communication, symbols provide the means by which reality is constructed. Reality is primarily a social product, and all that is humanly consequential—self, mind, society, culture—emerges from and is dependent on symbolic interactions for its existence. Even the physical environment is relevant to human conduct mainly as it is interpreted through symbolic systems.

The label symbolic interactionism was coined by Herbert Blumer (1969), one of Mead's students. Blumer, who did much to shape this perspective, specified its three basic premises: (1) humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them; (2) the meanings of things derive from social interaction; and (3) these meanings are dependent on, and modified by, an interpretive process of the people who interact with one another. The focus here is on meaning, which is defined in terms of action and its consequences (reflecting the influence of pragmatism). In the case of symbols, meanings also depend on a degree of consensual responses between two or more people. The meaning of the word husband, for example, depends on the consensual responses of those who use it. Also, children are compelled to hawk in the street after school so as to be able to eat or pay for school fees by parents or care givers. The interpretive process entails what Blumer refers to as role-taking, the cognitive ability to take the perspective of another. It is a critical process in communication because it enables actors to interpret one another's responses, thereby bringing about greater consensus on the meanings of the symbols used. The determination of meanings also depends on negotiation—that is, on mutual adjustments and accommodations of those who are interacting. In short, meaning is emergent, problematic, and dependent on processes of role-taking and negotiation. Most concepts of symbolic interactionism are related to the

concept of meaning. The symbolic interactionism analyses society by the descriptive meanings that people have given to objects, events and behaviours. The behavioural pattern of the people will be based on these descriptive meanings because people behave according to their descriptive belief rather than objective truth. These descriptive belief and meanings are nothing but interpretations given by the people thus the theory suggest that society is based on the interpretations of the people. The people interpret each other's behavior and a social bond is thus created which is grounded on this interpretation. These interpretations are often called "definition of the situation' because they just define the situations.

This theory saw how humans develop a complex set of symbols that gives meaning to the world in their perspective. The meanings are molded from the interactions with the society. These interactions are subjectively interpreted by them to suit the meaning in accordance with the existing symbols. It can be said that if we need to understand the behavioral patterns of the society we need to understand the existing symbols. The Interactions which molded the symbols also create a social structure. Symbolic interactionism also articulates that the individuals build a sense of self identity through these interactions with the society. For instance, when a child is asked to buy a textbook at school and the mother may compel the child to hawk water after school in order to make money for the textbook and the meaning the mother gave to the action is for the child to value the textbook. Child abuse would depend on the person or the meaning they ascribe to abusing people, like for example, someone might abuse a child to make themselves feel powerful or superior.

Child labour practices are meaning the actions are been perceived by the actors that is people are symbol manipulators who create their social world through social interaction and consensus. The continued existence of child labour in Awka South is explained by this theory. As a result of the many benefits accruing there from, child labour constitutes a behavioural pattern that will remain in our society as people are willing to learn it due to the many advantages associated therewith occasioned by the inability of law enforcement agencies to enforce laws against the practice and make it less attractive.

3. Materials and Methods

This study adopted the mixed methods design. Awka South is one of the twenty-one LGAs in Anambra State. It is made up of nine towns which are Awka, Amawbia, Nibo, Nise, Mbaukwu, Umuawulu, Okpuno, Ezinato and Isiagu. Natives of Awka were known to be blacksmiths, farmers and great hunters and warriors in the olden days. Awka South has an estimated population of 189,049 according to the 2006 National Population Census. The target population consisted of adults who were 18years and above. A sample size of 200study participants was chosen by the researcher through the application of Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula. Multi- stage sampling procedure which involved simple random and systematic sampling techniques of probability method were used to select communities, streets, households and respondents in the study. Questionnaire and In- depth Interview (IDI) were used for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. Three respondents were selected for IDI with the use of purposive sampling technique of non-probability method. The essence of this was to ensure that people with the requisite knowledge were interviewed. Collated quantitative data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows, Version 17. Research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, simple percentages and graphic illustrations. The qualitative data collected through the use of IDI were transcribed and analyzed using the thematic method of content analysis.

4. Findings/Results

Out of 200 copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents, 192 copies were correctly filled, returned and used for analysis while 8 copies were wrongly filled, discarded and were not included in the analysis. Therefore, the response rate was 96%. The findings and results of the study are presented in the tables and figures below:

VARIABLES	n=192	%=100	X
SEX			
Males	99	51.6	
Females	93	48.4	
AGE			
18-27	86	44.8	
28-37	45	23.4	
38-47	41	21.4	
48-57	10	5.2	
58 & ABOVE	10	5.2	
MARITAL STATUS			
Single	89	46.4	
Married	88	45.8	
Separated	6	3.1	
Divorced	2	1.0	
Widowed	7	3.6	

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION			
FSLC	14	7.3	
SSCE	72	37.5	
OND/NCE	17	8.9	
B.Sc./HND	53	27.6	
M.Sc./PhD	36	18.8	
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION			
Christianity	188	97.9	
Islam	1	.5	
African traditional religion	2	1.0	
Other, Judaism	1	.5	
OCCUPATION			
Unemployed	61	31.8	
Farmer	11	5.7	
Trader	34	17.7	
Apprentice	17	8.9	
Civil servant	68	35.4	
Other, student	1	.5	

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Data of the Respondents Field Survey, 2018

Table 1 shows the analysis and interpretation of the socio-demographic data of the respondents. A careful look at the table reveals that majority 99(51.6%) of the respondents were males, while 93(48.4%) were females. The average mean age of the respondents is 33-years; implying that they are adults and matured. Again, 89(46.4%) of the respondents were single, followed by 88(45.8%) that were married while 6(3.1%) and 2(1.0%) were separated and divorced respectively; 7(3.6%) were widowed. The implication is that separation and divorce are not socially acceptable in the study area, this explains the reason for a small percentage of respondents in this category. However, majority 188(97.9%) of the respondents were Christians while 2(1.0%) were worshippers of African Traditional Religion; 1(0.5%) were of Islam and Judaism respectively. It is not surprising having close to 100% of the respondents as Christians, since the study was carried out in AwkaSouth, which is dominated by Christians. Lastly, many of the respondents 68(35.4%) are civil servants and while 61(31.8%) are unemployed. This could be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted in Awka South which is the capital city of Anambra where bulk of civil servants in the state reside and work.

5. Analysis of Research Questions

• Research Question One: What is the level of awareness of child labour practices in urban communities in Awka South, L.G.A., Anambra State, and South-East, Nigeria?

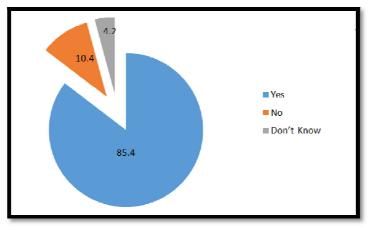


Figure 1: Respondents' Views on Level of Awareness of Child Labour Practices

When asked if they were aware of the existence of child labour practices in Awka South, majority 164(85.4%) of the respondents said that they were aware while 20(10.4%) said that they were not aware, just 8(4.2%) of the respondents said that they did not know of child labour practices. From the findings, one can rightly observe that it is a common practice hence the reason for high level of awareness in the study area. Data from the IDI supported the questionnaire data on the above issue. An IDI respondent said:

Child labour practice is in existence in Awka because I always see children selling pure water, drinks, gala etc. in the road carrying it on their head. However, some work as bar attendants in their madam's shop till night in most

cases and these are works under aged children are not supposed to do, so child labour exists in Awka. (Female, 58yearsold, Civil Servant, Nkwelle Village)

Supporting this view, an IDI participant said this;

Yes, child labour exists here in Awka and since I was transferred here, just one case has been reported which happened last week. A little girl ran away from her aunty's house due to maltreatment on the ground that she beat her auntie's daughter. A good Samaritan saw her roaming about in the night and brought her to us the next day. You can see that this is a clear case of lack of understanding on the part of the said aunty. (Female, 50years, Social Welfare Officer, Awka South L.G.A.).

• Research Question Two: What are the perceptions of child labour practices in urban communities in Awka South L.G.A., Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria?

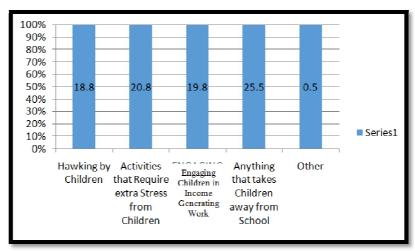


Figure 2: Respondents' Views on Perceptions of Child Labour Practices

Figure 2 indicates that 49(25.5%) said that child labour means anything that takes children away from school, while 40(20.8%) attributed it to activities that require extra stress from children. Again, 38(19.8%) described it as the act of engaging children in income generation. This is as 36(18.8%) and 1(0.5%) perceived it as hawking by children and other acts respectively. An IDI respondent said:

Some people do not allow their house helps to come to school and when you ask them why is the child not coming to school some will be like I did not bring her to Awka to be going to school, she is here to help me in the house and shop. Most time these children come to school late and they always sleep in class and when asked they will say that their madam closed shop by 1am and they wake up very early to prepare for shop the next day and that is why she comes late to school (Male, 35years old, Civil Servant, AguluAwka.)

Another IDI respondent said:

From the ones I do see around, hawking; child slavery - taking them as house helps thereby maltreating them; sending of a child away from the home are various forms of child labour in Awka South. To me, it is mainly using of children as housemaids and exposure to health hazards (Female, 45years old, Social Welfare Officer, Awka South LGA).

6. Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study show that majority of the respondents were aware of the existence of child labour practices in Awka South L.G.A. Results of the study also indicate that hawking, street begging by children, using children for domestic work or house helps, farming and doing hard work in factories or industries and sending of a child away from home were different forms of child labour in Awka South LGA. This finding does not corroborate with Oruwari (1996) who had earlier argued that domestic work is seen as easy and safe work for children. Therefore, it should not be considered as child labour.

Results also show that child labour is a prevailing menace in Awka South L.G.A. Here, people perceive child labour to mean anything that takes children away from school, activities that require extra stress from children, the act of engaging children in income generation, as hawking by children and other acts respectively. The findings corroborate that of Sadashivan (2001) who believes that parents contribute to childlabour. In his study in India, he found that the number of illiterate parents who do not see (or are unaware of) the benefits school can bring to their children and their families was quite high. It has also been postulated that age can affect one's perception of childlabour. Also, Preethi (2002) found that younger respondents believe that work help them to prepare for the future so that they can become good heads of their families whereas older respondents do not think so.

7. Conclusion

Child labour practices are prevalent in Awka South LGA in spite of the fact that it has a lot of implications. This problem is caused by myriads of factors like poverty, poor educational level, inability to take girl-child education seriously and many others. The most prevailing form of child labour in Awka South are hawking, street begging, as well as using children for hard work to support their care-givers etc. Consequently, this has led to denying many children the

opportunity of going to school, exposure to health hazards, child rape, sexual abuse or molestation, especially on the girl-child; and most importantly, exposure to kidnappers and ritual killers.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be proper implementation of Child Right Laws in Nigeria. This will enable stakeholders such as law enforcement agents, NGOs and government agencies to intervene, control, arrest and prosecute people engaging children to work as child labour and subsequently control the scourge in the study area.
- Government should introduce an effective and efficient welfare service scheme that will address the issue of poverty and lack of basic amenities, especially among the less privileged or poor members of the society. This should be based on paying certain stipend to such persons or establishing small scale businesses that would help them to carter for their children.
- Education should be made free and compulsory from primary to secondary school level by the government. This will go a long way to encourage parents to allow their children to go to school instead of engaging in such practices to augment their parents' income.
- Childhawking and exploitation in factory works should be outlawed and any firm found to hire the services of such children should be heavily fined or possibly withdraw its license of operation for a minimum of six months.
- Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should partner and carry out massive public enlightenment campaign to educate parents and care-givers on the dangers of child labour and its implications.

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