

Perception of Child Labour in South Eastern Nigeria: A Study of Onitsha Metropolis

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Abstract

Child labour is essentially understood as encompassing monetary or non monetary activities, which are mentally or physically, morally or socially hazardous for children below 15 years. It is a widespread phenomenon in the world in general and in developing countries in particular. Africa and Asia together account for over 90% percent of total child labour in the world. This study investigated the perceptions of Nigerians on child labour. Questionnaires were distributed to 360 respondents in Onitsha metropolis in Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that majority (70.6%) of the respondents perceive such chores like baby-sitting, fetching water, splitting firewood, sweeping, farming and cooking as child labour. Also, sex of the respondents was found to be the most important predictor of perception of chores that constitute child labour. The study went ahead to make some recommendations, one of which is the need to use various means to create public awareness of the danger of child labour.

Keywords: perception, child labour, chores, constitute

Introduction

Child labour is essentially understood as encompassing monetary or non-monetary activities, which are mentally or physically, morally and socially hazardous for children below 15 years (UNICEF, 2007). It is a reality in almost all parts of the world. In recent years, the problem of child labour and its impact have received increasing attention, which is manifested at international level. This is seen in the United Nations (UN) convention on

the right of the child in 1989; the creation of the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of the International Labour Organization (ILO); and in the adoption of the worst form of child labour convention in 1999 (International Programme for the Elimination of Child labour, 2006). According to ILO estimates in 2000, there are over 245 million child labourers in the world, who are below the age of 18. Approximately 179 million of these girls and boys are involved in the worst forms of child labour. Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific together account for more than 83 per cent of total child employment for the 5 to 14 age range (ILO, 2002).

Child labour is a widespread phenomenon in the world in general and in developing countries in particular. According to Fekadu and Alem (2001) the practice of child labour plays important role in the Industrial Revolution from the beginning. The displaced working classes, from the seventeenth century on, took it for granted that a family would not be able to support itself if the children were not employed.

There have been various proposals by scholars as to what constitute a critical threshold for the child. For instance Syed, Mirza, Sultana and Ram (1991) and Krone (2005) consider 20 weekly hours of work as a critical threshold beyond which the child's education starts being significantly affected. Child labour according to International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1996) can be of widely varying kinds, some harmful and some not. According to them, indicators that should be taken into account to determine whether working has a negative impact on children's development include working conditions (for example, hours of work, exposure to physical hazards, etc) and other risks and abuse to which working children may be exposed (for example, psychological and social adjustment risks, prostitution, and child slavery).

The Problem

Many children work under exploitative conditions that, apart from totally precluding schooling, have harmful effect on their physical condition and mental health. Long working hours are often responsible for fatigue that can cause accidents, and impair intellectual development. In Nigeria for instance, the barrow pushers and the bus conductors likewise the street hawkers are prone to road accidents because of some reckless drivers and their lack of sharp reflexes unlike their adult counterparts and this endanger their lives (Togunde and Carter, 2008).

It has also been reported by Barker and Knaul (1999) that large numbers of children work under conditions, which expose them, to substances with long latency periods. Such substances include, asbestos, which increases the chances of contracting chronic occupational disease such as asbestosis or lung cancer in young adulthood. Some are also exposed to hazardous condition, which can lead to chemical and biological hazards. Weiner (1991) in a study in India attributes epidemic epilepsy to chronic exposure to pesticides, the Benzene Hexachloride, which is used as a food preservative in many parts of the country.

Krone (2005) is 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. Also children who engage in farm work are more likely to be affected by exposure to inclement weather, heavy work, toxic chemicals, and accident from sharpened tools and motorized equipment. Sexually exploited and abused children are also vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI's) including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy. Their vulnerability is high because according to UNICEF (2005) they do not have choice and the perpetrators are usually older people who have been previously exposed to sexually transmitted infections.

Children who engage in hawking and other labour not meant for children sometimes pick up bad habits from adults. They also learn things like pick pocketing in the garage while some turn out to be armed robbers. From these arise a number of others social problems like drug trafficking, stealing and kidnapping. African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect [ANPPCAN (1995)] reports that working children are more likely to suffer significant growth deficits compared with children in school. They grow up shorter and lighter and their body size continues to be smaller even in adulthood.

Girls generally undertake child domestic service and scholars regard it as one of the occupations that can cause serious psychological and social adjustment problems (Zapata, (2006); Pacis, (2003); Canagarajah and Coulombe 1997). Children in this occupation are especially vulnerable to particular types of abuse. For example, they are victims of verbal and sexual abuse, beatings or punishment by starvation. Child domestic servants comprise the majority of

all child workers labouring over 60 hours per week. ILO (1996) reports that psychological stress premature aging, depression and low self-esteem are common symptoms among young household helpers.

Gamlin and Hesketh (2007) and Emerson and Portela (2007) have also reported that child labour could put children at a disadvantage physically, mentally, economically, and socially. For instance, children who are engaged in child labour in some cases are total or partially deprived of primary and or secondary school education. Some of them are taken out of school permanently or partially because they do not go to school regularly. Even when they are regular, they have little or no time to study at home due to fatigue because of their other duties. This deprives the child of education and perpetuates poverty within the family and in the long term within the society. These working children have very little time to play and socialise and consequently, may not develop to be productive individuals later in their lives like others who had the opportunity to play and socialise during their formative years. In supporting the above view, ILO (2002) noted that many child labourers lack educational opportunities and contend with physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Sometimes, some of the children are physically handicapped or even die before reaching adulthood as a direct result of their labour. Others suffer emotional scare for life. Sanchez, Orazem, Gunnarsson (2005) report that child labour lowers performance on tests of language and mathematics proficiency, even when controlling for school and household attributes.

Literature Review

People perceive what constitutes child labour differently. Each society considers differently who should be a child because norms and traditions influence the perception of childhood. Thus the influence of cultural factors on the place of a child in society cannot be denied. Ebai (2007) is of the view that there is need to clearly distinguish between child work and apprenticeship, which is part of the African culture. Indeed, one of the most widespread types of child labour is domestic work. However according to Haspels and Suriyasarn (2003) domestic work is seen as easy and safe work for children, particularly girls and therefore does not constitute child labour in some places. However, domestic work can be very dangerous for children and has been recognized as a possible worst form of child labour (ILO, 2002).

Sometimes it is seen as traditional for children to work and help their parents. In certain rural areas, in particular, it is normal for children to work in the farm from an early age or to assist with household activities such as cooking, cleaning and looking after younger siblings (Bhargava, 2009). Alternatively, it may be customary for parents to send their children to work as domestic helpers in the houses of family members or friends. Many parents do not see this as child labour especially mothers who see this as a training ground for their daughters as future mothers. Traditionally, according to Hunte (2009) in certain parts of Asia it is usually the eldest son in a household who is called upon to work, and he often has to sacrifice his desires for the good of the household and his younger siblings. In families that have no sons, or those that have small boys too young to work, a daughter may assume the role of a breadwinner. There is often a perception that certain work builds skills and is character building, and an expectation that the child will in return get access to education or other amenities he/she may not have had at home.

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 socialise 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) found for instance, 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 the 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 a good head of the family whereas older respondents do not think so. Also Chandra

(2000) in a study 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 differs from those of parents whose children are not involved. Most of the parents revealed that participation of a child in labour would depend upon 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.

Theoretically, scholars have tried to provide a rationale for the existence of child labour. Barker and Knaul (1999) for example, generalized that child labour is rooted in underdevelopment, urbanization and poverty. Such a theoretical position could be a mixed bag. While one would agree with this view that child labour is a manifestation of underdevelopment, such a theoretical position is inadequate for it does not explain the manifestation of child labour in some capitalist countries that are developed. According to Fekadu and Alem (2001), as long as the family derives gains from the economic contribution of children in the form of unpaid agricultural labour, children will continue to be valued as an economic asset and consequently, large family size will continue to be favoured and desired.

Traditional factors are also important. The established female role in certain countries dictates that women will not fit into traditional roles if they become educated (Bequere and Boyden 1988). There is the pervasive notion in some countries that educated females will not get married nor have children. Therefore, many families raise daughters solely to take over the household duties in order to release the mothers for paid labour. Such cultural practices restrict the education of females and promote child employment (Weiner 1991).

However, some forms of child work are acceptable. Work that is done without violating the child right can help him to develop good work ethics. For example, a child can water the plants at home, sweep the house and help in the house chores. This could help to promote responsibility and commitment in the child. However, the underlining assumption of this study is that child labour violates children's rights and is bad for the child and the society.

Very few studies have reported about the way different individuals actually perceive what really constitute child labour. Many of the previous studies on Africa have focused predominately on the effects of children's activities in rural and agricultural areas (Olutayo, 1994 ; Robson, 2004). As such, this paper seeks to highlight what individuals understand by child labour because we know that if we are able to find out they way people perceive child labour then policy makers can make use of such findings in shaping policies that will help create better awareness in the future. To this end therefore, the study seek to answer the following questions; a) What forms of chores do Nigerians perceive as child labour? b) Is the educational level of an individual a contributory factor as to how he/she will perceive chores that constitute child labour? c) Does age affect ones perception of chores that constitute child labour? d) Are there gender differences in an individual's perception of chores that constitute child labour?

Methods

Area of study and population

Onitsha town is about 35km from Awka, which is the capital of Anambra State. It is divided into Onitsha North and South local government areas for easy administration. Onitsha is bounded by Asaba, Nkpor and Obosi. As at 2005 Onitsha had an estimated population of 561106 according to the GeoNames geographical database (Mongabay, n.d.).

Sample size and sampling techniques

The size of the sample used by the researcher is 360 adults above 18 years. Due to the fact that the metropolis is not well delineated the researcher employed the purposive sampling technique in data collection. This is to ensure that the data was collected from the respondents that are well suited for the study. A major market in the town –Onitsha Main market was chosen as the field for the study because we believe that since the majority of the people living in Onitsha engage in one form of trading activities or another, it will be easier to reach the respondents in their places of business. To get the respondents, Onitsha Main market was divided into twenty sections and one section was selected using simple random sampling (balloting). The New World Fashion line was selected and 360 questionnaires were administered using purposive sampling. The purposive sampling technique was used in

order to administer questionnaire to only respondents who are 18 years and above and who are also willing to provide the needed information.

The demographic distribution of the respondents showed that 53.3% are males while 46.7% are females. The ages of the respondents ranges from 18-60years ($M=35.63$ and $SD=9.88$). As many as 48.3% of the respondents are traders 29.2% are civil servants while 22.5% are students. About 40% are single while 50.8% are married, the rest are divorced, separated or widowed. Results also show that 20.8% of the respondents completed primary education, 37.5% completed secondary education while the rest (41.6%) posses ordinary national diploma and above. It was also found that majority (90%) of the respondents are Christians.

Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was the self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A included the demographic characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, occupation, religion, etc. while section B consisted of issues as perception of chores that constitute and does not constitute child labour and reasons for their answers.

Results

Perception of chores that constitute child labour

Respondents were required to indicate how they perceive certain chores which are common chores done by children in Nigeria on a four point scale. The scales are Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed. These chores were as follows: baby-sitting, fetching water, splitting firewood, sweeping, farming and cooking. Their responses is presented in Table 1

Table 1: *Respondents perception of chores that constitute child labour (N=360)*

Perception of Child Labour	Frequency	Percent (%)
Baby-sitting	18	5
Fetching water	24	6.7

Splitting firewood	9	2.5
Sweeping	3	.8
Farming	138	38.3
Cooking	63	17.5
None of these chores constitute child labour	105	29.2

Table 1 indicates that more one-third (38.3%) of the respondents regard farming as child labour, while only very few (.8%) respondents regard sweeping as child labour. Also about 29.2% of the respondents did not see any of the chores as constituting child labour in any way. Therefore, about one third of the respondents do not think that any of these chores constitute child labour.

Factors affecting perception of what constitute child labour

To further answer the remaining research questions, the study sought to find out factors that will determine whether a person will perceive certain chores as constituting child labour or not. These factors include, level of education, sex and age. In other to do this, level of education and age of respondents were categorised into two. These categories are low-level of education, which comprised those with no primary and secondary education and high level of education, which comprised those with national diploma and university education. Age of respondents were also categorised into two; younger respondents comprised those that are thirty years and below while those that are thirty-one years and above make up the older respondents. The researchers also categorised respondent's views as to what constitute child labour into two; those who agreed that those chores constitute child labour and those who disagreed.

Table 2 summarizes the observed relationship between agreement and disagreement of chores that constitute child labour and some of the relevant socio-demographic variables, including age, sex and education.

Table 2: Perception of chores that constitute child labour and some socio-demographic variables (N=360)

Variables	Perception of chores that constitute child labour		Sig. P<
	Chores constitute child labour	Chores do not constitute child labour	
Level of education			
Low	17.1	22.4	.168
High	82.9	77.6	
Sex			
Male	65.7	48.2	*.002
Female	34.3	51.8	
Age			
Younger respondents	51.4	38.8	*.019
Older respondents	48.6	61.2	
Occupational Status			
Ever worked	60	74.1	*.006
Never worked	40	25.9	
Marital Status			
Single	51.4	35.3	*.003
Ever married	48.6	64.7	

* Statistically Significant

The results show that sex (.002), age (.019), occupational status (.006) and marital (.003) of the respondents have a statistically significant relationship with the perception of chores that should constitute child labour in the study population. In other words these variables influence respondent's perception of chores that constitute child labour.

Not many studies have been done to show how males and females perceive child labour or what jobs constitutes it. Rather a lot of studies have been focused on jobs that are done by male and female that constitutes child labour (Hunte, 2009). Looking at Table 2, more of the female respondents (65.7%) agree that the chores listed in Table 1 constitute child labour than their male

counterpart (34.3%). A study by Preethi (2002) in India found that younger respondents appear to support child labour than older respondents. Findings from table 2 appear to disagree with the above view because more than half (61.2%) of older respondents did not see the chores in Table 1 as constituting child labour.

Predicting factors that influence perception of what should constitute child labour

The way an individual will perceive whether a chore will constitute child labour or not is a function of many factors. The factors affecting perception of chores that constitute child labour were examined. Perception of chores that constitute child labour were dichotomised into two: chores that constitute child labour, and chores that do not constitute child labour. This is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Logistic Regression Results Showing Predictors to Perception of Chores that Constitute Child Labour (N=360)*

Predictor Variables	B	SE	ρ^2	Odds Ratio
Sex	-.762	8.563	*.003	.467
Age	-.439	2.196	.138	.645
Level of education	.066	.043	.836	1.068
Occupational status	.329	1.025	.311	1.389
Marital Status	-.113	.114	.736	.893

Dependent Variable: Chores constitute child labour = 1,

Chores do not constitute child labour = 0

* Statistically significant

Table 3 displays the result of logistic regression analysis between some socio-demographic variables and a dichotomous dependent variable of whether or not some chores constitute child labour. The result reveals that sex

of the respondents appear to be the best predictor of whether respondents will regard some chores as constituting child labour or not. Women are more likely to know which chores constitute child labour more than men. Also one's educational level is less likely to influence one's perception of chores that should constitute child labour. This is surprising because one would have thought that educated people are likely to be knowledgeable about child labour issues. However, given that the study was conducted in an environment where buying and selling is predominant, this may in one way or the other have influenced the respondents not minding their level of education.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the people's perception of child labour in Onitsha metropolis in South eastern Nigeria. The findings shows that majority of respondents (70.8%) actually agree with findings of some scholars like Sharp (1996), Bass (2004), Anker, Chernyshev, Egger & Mehran (2003) and Yeakey & Buck (2004) as to chores that constitute child labour. This finding is actually reassuring in that it shows to some level that Nigerians are aware of child labour and chores that could be said to constitute it. From the findings also one can deduce that being educated does not play any role in helping to recognise what constitute child labour. This finding is surprising because in a study by Canagarajah and Couombe (1997) in Ghana, they found that family characteristics such as father's level of education play a big role in the child's decision to work or go to school. They found that the father's education has a significant negative effect on child labour and that the effect is stronger on girls than on boys. However, Kim and Zepeda (2004) reported in their study that the higher the parents' educational level, the higher the probability children will work but for a fewer hours. Therefore it does appear as if there is no conclusive result about the impact of education on the perception and practice of child labour. Therefore more research is needed in the area of investigating the relationship between education, perception and practice of child labour

The effect of sex difference on perception of chores that constitute child labour is also noted. Diganta and Saswati (2008) in their study in India, looked at the incidence of harmful and manual occupations among the children and their relationship with level of education of the mother. They found that mother's education appear as the most important factor in curbing the manual work incidences among children. Findings from the present study

shows that sex of the respondents has a lot of impact on the perception of chores that constitute child labour. More female respondents appear to perceive the chores that were being commonly done by children as child labour more than male respondents. Therefore, women's empowerment (one important indicator of which would be female educational level) may indeed be instrumental in increasing parental awareness about child labour.

Public awareness of child labour and its danger is very important, because when people are aware, they are likely to take action to prevent it. One best way to reduce child labour is to appeal to the conscience of the people and raise their awareness of the evil inherent in child labour. This can be done through workshops, seminars, conferences, state by state campaign tours, media advocacy, musical concerts and so on. It may also be good if government can sponsor a weekly television program which attempts to depict the negative effect of child labour and all the inherent risks and dangers associated with it. Also a communications strategy concerning child labour needs to be developed that informs and educate not only parents, employers, and children but also the general public about child rights and child protection issues.

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