



## CHILD LABOUR IN NIGERIA: CONSEQUENCES AND SOLUTIONS

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### Abstract

The objective of this article is to examine the consequences and solutions of child labour in Nigeria. The study adopted literature review, thus secondary data has been used in the article. The findings of the study indicated that child labour is a long existing phenomenon. It is part and parcel of the socio-cultural heritage of the Nigerian society. Many Nigerian children are executing works in both rural and urban areas under hazardous condition, such as child domestic labour, child sexual exploitation, and agricultural labour. Children are also working in mining industries, where they quarry gravel and granite. These types of labour are harmful to the social life and the psycho-physiological development of the children. Given the gravity of the consequences of child labour, international institutions and the Nigerian Government have come up with measures for combating child labour in the country. United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF), International Labour Organization (ILO), and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have introduced various means for tackling the problem. Nigeria has also enacted Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law (Enforcement) And Administration Act in 2003, which culminated in the creation of the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP). Despite these efforts, the menace of child labour persisted; hence the article concluded that fighting child labour is very difficult because of its hidden nature and complexity. Yet, some recommendations have been provided, such as formalization of almajiri system in Nigeria; strong legal framework and poverty alleviation programmes, targeting the family structure.

**Keywords:** Child Labour, Physio-psychological Consequences of Child Labour, Social Consequences of Child Labour in Nigeria.

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### Introduction

Child labour is an old phenomenon. Pre-civilised societies consider child as a minor adult, capable of learning and handling some labour responsibilities in farms, at homes and in work places, such as iron smith, hides and skins, and dyeing, etc. This old tradition was regarded as a process of socialization. As societies become more industrialized, and education more formalised, children began to assume some rights which require them to remain in the school for significant period of their childhood and adolescence hood. The kinds of work expected of children in the traditional societies are therefore no longer condoned in the modern societies. That is why the western countries are up till now advocating for child's rights, especially to fight hazardous forms of child labour, because the high

level of tedious jobs executed by the children is alarming (Vanguard, February 13, 2018).

Children in Nigeria are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, particularly in domestic service and dangerous agricultural activities. In rural areas, most children work in agriculture, producing crops, such as cassava and cocoa. The consequences of child labour are usually devastating. As observed by UNICEF (2001:1):

There are hundreds of millions of children and young people around the world who are imprisoned, not in physical jails, but in a state of bondage more permanent than locks or bars alone could create...These are children who labour at tasks that harm their bodies and minds, their spirits and future.



Although evidence is limited, there are reports that children also produce tobacco. Children working in agriculture may step on sharp objects, wound their hands and legs, and suffer from insect stings. In particular, children engaged in work on cocoa plantations are exposed to pesticides, apply chemical fertilisers without protective gear, and sometimes work under conditions of forced labour (Orset, 2008). Children, primarily boys, work in cattle herding. Children engaged in herding livestock may suffer injuries, such as being bitten head butted, gored, or trampled by animals. In fact, hazardous child labour of this kind is harmful because it will negatively affect the social and psychological development of the child.

In view of these devastating consequences of child labour, study of this nature is pertinent in order to come up with some possible solutions to the menace of child labour in Nigeria. The article is structurally divided into seven sections, with this introductory remark being the first. The second section conceptualises child labour; section three discusses the trend of child labour in Nigeria; the fourth section examines the physio-psychological and social consequences of child labour in Nigeria; the fifth section reviews the countermeasures taken to combat child labour in Nigeria; section six provides some policy recommendations for solving child labour in Nigeria; and the final section (seventh) concludes the article.

### **Conceptualization**

Child labour is very elusive term, because scholars are trying to differentiate hazardous child labour and worst forms of child labour from normal jobs the children engage in domestic chores. Although there are some forms of activities, such as light domestic chores that are not harmful to children's social and psychological developments, as practiced today in many countries of Africa and Asia. Child labour, According to Business Insider (02/14/2018), child labour entails work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and deprives them of opportunities for education and development.

Thus, the war against worst forms of child labour is a welcome development. This is not only because these worst forms of child labour are directly denying the children their rights to education and play, but also because they involve gross human rights violation. In addition, hazardous forms of child labour portend serious national and international insecurity. In Nigeria, for instance, child labour is taking many dimensions, from human trafficking, kidnapping, child sexual labour, street hawking, street begging, and children as agents of fraudsters, drug dealers, armed robbers, and terrorists.

Child labour also emanates from human trafficking. Human trafficking is the third biggest lucrative business for international criminal organisations, just after drug racket and trafficking in firearms. Children represent a large part of this traffic. Roughly 1 to 1.2 million children are trafficked each year (Beyrer, 2004, as cited in Orset, 2008). Like in the case of child kidnapping, the predators of child workers do take the children in the street, a parked vehicle, a park or wooded area, their own home, at school or in a day-care, store, restaurant, or a mall.

### **Child Labour in Nigeria**

Child labour is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. This is because the problem is tied with the socio-cultural heritage of the diverse ethnics in the country. Despite the fact that Nigeria was one of the 198 countries in the world who ratified the UN CRC in 1989, child labour, child abuse and child neglect remain major sources of serious concern. A survey, The 2014 Nigeria Violence against Children Study, carried out by the National Population Commission (NPoPC) in collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control and the UNICEF, revealed a high prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional violence against children in the country (Akor, 2015). Many lower class children and orphans are engaging in worst forms of labour in a broad day light in the Nigeria. Children are subjected to such labour as quarrying granite and gravel, and even armed conflict (Bureau of International Labour Affairs, 2019).



The National Bureau of Statistics' (NBS) 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reported that 50% of Nigerian children, aged between five and 17, are involved in child labour. In urban areas, many children work as domestic servants. Children employed as domestic servants are isolated in private homes and are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse, and forced labour. Children employed as domestics may also be required to work long hours and perform strenuous tasks without sufficient food or shelter. Both boys and girls engage in street-hawking, sometimes dropping out of school to work. Increasing numbers of children also engage in begging. Commercial sexual exploitation of children, especially girls, also occurs in some Nigerian port cities and refugee camps (ILO, 2013).

In northern Nigeria, many families send children, known as *almajiri*, from rural to urban areas to live with, and receive a Quranic education from Islamic teachers. Some of these children receive lessons, but teachers often force them to beg on the streets and surrender the money that they collect; these children may go without adequate food or shelter. Although evidence remains limited, information indicates that some *almajiri* in Nigeria may undergo deliberate scarring or injuries to arouse sympathy and thus encourage donations. In December 2010, the Ministerial Committee on *Madrasah* Education estimated that Nigeria has about 9.5 million *almajiri*.

### Consequences of Child Labour

Child labour is a social problem and it presumably has a lot of social consequences. The consequences of child labour can be upon the children, family and the society at large. The consequences if child labour can therefore be physical, psychological, educational, economic, and above all social. Many children in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) unlike in other economically advanced regions of the world are subjected to economic activities, by their will, by force and by seduction. Some of these activities are more hazardous than others and scholars have advanced multiple views on the consequences of the child labour (Orset, 2008; Beegel, Dahejia,

Gatti, & Krutiova, 2008; Shelley, 2010). Whatever the case may be, child labour shall be deemed harmful if it will hamper the social and psychological development of child, deteriorate the child's health condition, or impedes educational achievement and other future prospects of the child worker. In broad terms, the article will divide the consequences into physio-psychological and social.

### Physio-psychological Consequences

Child labour has physical and psychological consequences. There are physical consequences of child labour including, poor nutrition, stunted growth, and various diseases, due to from heavy labour, exposure to harmful substances or toxic agents, and lengthy hours of working in hazardous conditions. The children are also experiencing sexual abuse by adult labour partners (Togunde & Carter, 2008). According to Beegel *et al.* (2008), economic activities for children consist mainly of farming, including tending crops in the field, processing crops, and tending livestock.

Research has indicated the inherent hazards and risks that children often experience when working in exploitative industries (Togunde & Carter, 2008). But children working to quarry gravel and granite are at physical risks, such as injury or death from exposure to dust, falling rocks, and carrying heavy loads. Children also work breaking granite into gravel at various sites near Abuja. Children reportedly work in artisanal gold mining, particularly in Zamfara State. As reported by the ILO (2013), children working in artisanal gold mining are exposed to extremely toxic chemicals, including lead and mercury. Some of the children working in mines and quarries do so under conditions of forced labour.

Togunde & Cater added that chores consist of fetching water and firewood, preparing meals, and cleaning the house can be mild or hard for the children to undertake, depending on the degree of labour and expenditure of energy to accomplishment them. Children in a survey work on average 16.8 hours a week, 10 of which are spent on chores. Girls spend on average 2.5 hours



more than boys on household chores.

### ***Social Consequences***

Socially, child labour deprived children of the opportunity of obtaining an education at a crucial age and they suffer psychological scars that may never heal and may prevent them from functioning in society as they mature. Working as labourers could render children face years without family life and may suffer pain from work-related injuries. It should also be noted that child labour is often gender-specific and the consequences as well depend on whether the victim of hazardous labour is either a boy or a girl. For girls-child workers, sexual molestation and rape are the notable consequences of child labour they encounter. For instance, Ikechebelu, Udigwe, Ezechukwu, Ndinechi, & Ikechebelu (2008) studied how street hawking exposes juvenile female hawkers to exploitation through sexual abuse by some adults and found that, 69% of these girls were sexually abused.

For the boys, they have higher tendency to join criminal gangs (Togunde & Carter, 2008), because child labour is leading street children to juvenile delinquency. There are some consequences that are common to both boys and girls. For example, motor accidents and kidnapping are happening to child street hawkers. Both boys and girls are also becoming gullible and vulnerable for negative ideological indoctrinations. Consequently, they have the tendency for being recruited by religious extremists and terrorists groups, such as those young boys and girls that are assigned to detonate explosive devices by *Boko Haram* leaders.

### **Counter-Measures on Child Labour in Nigeria**

Because of the devastating impacts of child labour, the various counter-measures have been evolving from global to local levels. Nigeria was one of the 198 countries in the world who ratified the UN CRC in 1989, child labour, child abuse and child neglect remain major sources of serious concern. In 2012, the labour ministers of the 15 ECOWAS countries, including Nigeria, adopted a regional action plan on child labour, especially in its worst forms. The plan seeks to eliminate the

worst forms of child labour in West Africa by 2015 and continue progress towards the total elimination of child labour. The Government of Nigeria ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), which entered into force on December 6, 2012. The Convention prohibits armed groups from recruiting children, or otherwise permitting them to participate in conflict, and engaging in sexual slavery and trafficking, especially of women and children (ILO, 2013).

Many international organisations, such as United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF), International Labour Organisation (ILO), and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and grassroots organisations have attempted to implement small-scale programs which recognise children as rational individuals who can be empowered to take control of their own lives. NGOs, such as Muslim Sisters Organisation (MSO) are established to render nonprofit and selfless assistance to young people, orphans through vocational training and counseling. Grassroots initiatives, such as street drop-in centers endeavor to give children the opportunity to work in safe environments while also providing time for schooling and recreation.

Nigerian Government has enacted a statute in 2003 when the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law (Enforcement) And Administration Act was passed. This Act had become the reason for establishing the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) in 26th August, 2003 (Isyaku, Ishaq, Mukhtar & Suleiman, 2017). The Act also criminalises activities connected to human trafficking, such as child trafficking and forced child labour. In addition, it provides means through which the protection for trafficked persons would be ensured. *The NAPTIP Act* is a major instrument in Nigeria tackling trafficking of women for prostitution and children, because it is operational throughout the country (Nnadi, 2013). In 2017, Nigerian Government-at various levels- took





novel efforts to eliminate worst forms of child labour.

As reported by the Bureau of International Labour Affairs (2019), Edo State established a task force that check human trafficking and Borno State Government has signed, as a witness, to an action plan between the United Nations and the non-governmental Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) with the aim of bringing an end to the recruitment and use of children in the CJTF. However, the menace of child labour continues to ravage our contemporary Nigerian society because labour inspectors conducted 4,694 child labour inspections and found 606 violations. *NAPTIP convicted 10 perpetrators for crimes related to the worst forms of child labour* (Bureau of International Labour Affairs (2019).

### **Solutions to Child Labour in Nigeria**

A commonly held assumption is that the most successful way of protecting children from harmful work is to exclude them from all employment, but critics argue that, children should have a right to benefit from work that is appropriate to their age as it can be important for self-esteem, socialisation and household maintenance (Lloyd-Evans, 2010). At the national level, Nigerian government should formalise the *Almajiri* system to be like other formal schools of western education. The teachers in those schools should also be receiving a workshop by highly informed Muslim *ulemas* (scholars) on how to handle their pupils.

Strong legal framework is also needed to fight child labour. The existing agencies shouldered with fighting child labour-related crimes, such as NAPTIP, are expected to be strengthened with the collaboration of other law enforcement agencies. More strategies are needed for intelligence sharing about the activities of organised criminal groups and individuals exploiting children and/or ill-treating them for further legal action. It is also pertinent to note that failure to make violators of children rights to proper moral upbringing and children's rights to education (even if they are their parents or guardians) face the wrath of the law is similitude to encouraging others to

perpetrate the same acts.

To be able to fight child labour, the Nigerian Government must also fight poverty by targeting the family structure. There were some programs aimed at supporting the institution of the family, in Nigeria, such as Better Life Program for Rural Women (BLPRW) which was initiated by the wife of former Nigerian Head of State, Late Mrs. Maryam Babangida in the 1987 (Mukhtar, Isyaku & Sani, 2016). BLPRW whose nomenclature was later modified to Family Support Program (FSP) in 1997 by the First Lady of the succeeding regime, Mrs. Maryam Sani Abacha was well designed and articulated as it offered a holistic improvement to the life of Nigerian woman her immediate family as well as the entire community.

Among others, the objectives of the BLPRW and the FSP include; to stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards, and sensitise the rest of Nigerians to their problems; to encourage women to seek and achieve leadership roles in all spheres of society to encourage recreation and enrich family life and inculcate the spirit of self-development, particularly in the fields of education, business, arts, crafts and agriculture into rural women; to educate rural women on simple hygiene, family planning, the importance of child care, and increased literacy rates; to raise their consciousness about their rights, the availability of opportunities and facilities, their social, political and economic responsibilities (Sule, Alinno & Ikwegbe, 2013).

Such programs are very important in tackling some social and economic problems because some social problems are easily prevented right from family since they might be rooted from the homes and ought to be revived in order to reduce child labour. On this note, the incumbent First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mrs. Aisha Muhammad Buhari, shall demonstrate the spirit of continuity by reviving these programs rather than changing them with new ones. This will be cost effective; it will save time and other resources.



## Conclusion

The article investigated the consequences of child labour and provided some of its solution in Nigeria. In conclusion, child labour is an old phenomenon in Nigeria because it is part of the socio-cultural heritage of the various ethnics of Nigeria. Fighting the problem is very difficult of its hidden nature and complexity. For example, some families can willingly give out their children to relatives or teachers living in a far away village or city in the name of guardianship and training. However, these children are ending up working hazardously for those guardians. This also represents one of the reasons for limitations of existing data that can accurately measure and monitor the different facets of the child labour, with the people involved- victims, offenders or facilitating agents. Given the physio-psychological and social consequences of hazardous child labour in Nigeria, all levels of government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities and families should work together in fighting the menace.

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