

## Child Labour in Zaria, Nigeria

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### Abstract

**Background:** In recent years, child labour has become a topical issue not only at Global level, but nationally because of the unhealthy circumstances the children are subjected to work. The Nigerian child is the direct victim of the low purchasing power of his/her parents. This study was conducted to determine the health, educational and socio-economic consequences of child labour in a Northern Nigerian city.

**Methods:** The study involved the administration of questionnaires to all children aged 5-15 years engaged in child labour in Zaria city in order to obtain data on socio-demographic characteristics, socio-economic factors influencing child labour, impact on health status and school attendance and performance.

**Results:** Two hundred children were interviewed, their ages ranged from 5 to 15 years. The majority of the children were in the age group 11-13 years (57.5%), mean age 11.4 years +/- 2.4. Sex distribution shows a male preponderance (82%); Hausas constituted 92%, and all belonged to Islamic faith (100%). Most of the children encountered the following health hazards, physical assault (beaten by their seniors) (61%), cuts from instruments (52.3%), falls (23.4%) and poor school performance (33.8%).

**Conclusion:** As the problems of child labour are assuming a wider dimension, there is need for public awareness campaign on its consequences. All the 3 tiers of governments must live up to their responsibilities through legislation and enforcement. Hopefully the government's free and compulsory Universal Basic Education [UBE] will go along way in abating this unhealthy practice.

**Key words:** Child labour, socio-economic factors, health consequences

### Résumé

**Introduction :** Tout récemment, travail des enfants est devenu des questions d'actualité non seulement au niveau international, mais national parce que des enfants sont en butte à des circonstances malsaines du travail. L'enfant nigérian est la victime directe de pouvoir d'achat bas de ses parents. L'objet de cette étude est de décider la santé, des conséquences éducationnelles et socio-économique du travail des enfants dans une grande ville au nord du Nigéria.

**Méthodes :** Cette étude concerne l'administration des questionnaires aux enfants âgés de 5 – 15 ans engagés au travail des enfants dans la grande ville de Zaria afin d'obtenir des données sur des caractéristiques socio-démographiques, facteurs socio-économiques qui provoquent du travail des enfants, son effet sur le statut de la santé et présence à l'école et de mauvais résultats à des examens.

**Résultats :** Deux cents enfants ont été interrogés, leur tranche d'âge était de 5 à 15 ans. La majorité des enfants étaient dans la tranche d'âge de 11 – 13 ans (57,5%). L'âge moyen de 11,4 ans +/- 2,4 distribution du sexe a indiqué une prépondérance du sexe masculin (82%) ; Haussas a constitué 92%, et tous sont du monde musulman (100%). La majorité des enfants étaient victimes de risque pour la santé suivant : attaque physique (tabasse par leur aînés) (61%), coup à travers des instruments tranchants (52,3%), tomber (23,4%) et mauvais résultats à des examens (33,8%).

**Conclusion :** Comme les problèmes liés au travail des enfants deviennent de grandes dimension, c'est nécessaire de mener une campagne sur la prise de conscience de tout le monde sur ses conséquences. Tous les 3 tiers des gouvernements devraient tenir leur promesses à travers une législation et exécution. Avec optimisme, le programme d'éducation de base gratuite, obligatoire et universelle du gouvernement (EBU) va beaucoup lutter contre cette pratique malsaine.

**Mot clés :** Travail des enfants, facteurs socio-économiques, conséquence de santé

## Introduction

Children are regarded as a source of joy to families and are invaluable assets to the parents. Hence, they should grow up and be nurtured in family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, care, and understanding. Also, because of their peculiar needs in physical and mental development, children require particular care with regard to health, physical, mental and social development and require legal protection in conditions of freedom, dignity and security. They should not be maltreated, exploited, over worked or deprived of their rights to education, association and health. Child labour is any work that is likely to interfere with the child's education or harmful to his/her health, physical, mental or social development<sup>1</sup>. However the situation of most African children remains critical due to unique factors of socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances (natural disasters, armed conflicts, poverty). It is estimated that, children constituted 5% of Nigerian total population.<sup>2</sup>

The actual numbers of children involved in exploitative or hazardous work in Nigeria are not known, owing to the wide dispersion of child workers in the informal sector and Agriculture. However a recent assessment puts the figure at eight million<sup>3</sup>. The Nigerian child is the direct victim of the poverty level of his/her parents. The Human development index (HDI) which measures human achievements in the most basic human capabilities, ranked Nigeria 151<sup>st</sup> out of 174 countries in 1998.<sup>4</sup>

According to an international labour organization (ILO) report (2002) it was estimated that about 246 million children were engaged in one form of work or another worldwide.<sup>5</sup> Africa and Asia are the most affected continents, for example they accounted for 70% of countries and 94% of the working children in a survey of more than 100 countries in 1992.<sup>6</sup>

A recent UNICEF survey of households in 25 sub-Saharan African Countries indicated that 31% of children aged 5-14 years are engaged in the various forms of child labour<sup>2</sup> (slavery, trafficking and forced recruitment for purposes of armed conflicts, prostitution etc) and that a large percentage are engaged in hazardous work, that is working 43 hours per week in labour that threatened their health and well being<sup>2</sup>. Studies done in Nigeria showed that work even within the family farm had negative ramifications on the children<sup>2</sup>. To the best of our knowledge the hazards of child labour in this part of the country has not been documented. The aim of this study therefore was to determine the consequences of child labour on the health status, school attendance and performance of children engaged in child labour in Zaria city, Northern Nigeria.

## Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Zaria, a city of ancient historical importance in Northern Nigeria. Zaria city lies between longitudes 90° and 100° East and

latitudes 70° and 80° north and located on the north central plateau at an altitude of 2178 feet above sea level in the northern Guinea Savannah zone.

The estimated population of the area is 440, 386 with an annual growth rate of 3.8%. It is a predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani community with settlers from other ethnic nationalities. The study which was cross-sectional and descriptive in design was undertaken over a four months period in May 2004 through to September 2004. Children aged 5-15 years constituted the study population from which the sample was taken. The population was divided into 4 clusters of homogenous units of wards using the 1991 National population census report for Kaduna state. From each of the four wards a total of fifty children who engaged in child labour were selected for the study. This gives a total of 200 children that were thus recruited for the study. In each of these wards, structured, closed ended interviewer-administered questionnaires were used to collect information on socio-demographic characteristics, socioeconomic/cultural factors influencing child labour, the profile of child labour, health and educational consequences. The data was analyzed using Microsoft excel software package. Statistical methods used included frequency counts and tables.

## Results

Of the 200 children who were engaged in child labour majority (57.5%) were in the age range of 11-13 years, mean age 11.4 years and SD 2.4, while 17.0% were in the 14-15 years. Sex distribution also shows that majority were males (82%), (Table 1). Ninety two percent of the children were Hausa, while other ethnic nationalities constituted the remaining 8%.

Seventy percent of children engaged in child labour were from polygamous and extended family background, (i.e. couples living together with blood relatives). A breakdown of types of work done showed that 48.5%, 20.4% 9.8% and 9.5% were engaged in hawking, mechanic, tailoring and carpentry respectively (Table 1). Six percent were working as house girls. Majority of the children (52.0%) worked for between 4-6 hours per day, while 6% worked more than 9 hours per day.

Sixty one percent of the children were physically assaulted (beaten by their seniors), 52.31% had cuts from instruments in the places of work [workshops], 23.4% had falls, and 10.6% were engaged in drugs/substance abuse. Eighty three percent of children worked for income generation, of which the beneficiaries of the proceeds were parents 64.6%, self 17.0% and employer 6.8% respectively. Other reasons cited for child labour included, contribution to family feeding and for school expenses. Thirty three percent of children who engaged in child labour had repeated at a class. Most of the children who engaged in child labour were from poor parental backgrounds, whose parents had no formal education and were unemployed (Table 2). One hundred sixty nine (84.5%) children were in primary or quranic schools.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of children engaged in child labour

Characteristic	No. (%)
Age (years)	
5 - 7	20 (10.0)
8 - 10	31 (15.5)
11 - 13	115 (57.5)
14 - 15	34 (17.0)
Total	200 (100)
Mean age: 11.4 ± 2.4 years	
Sex	
Male	164 (82.0)
Female	36 (18.0)
Religion	
Islam	200 (100)
Christianity	-
Tribe	
Hausa	184 (92.0)
Yoruba	2 (1.0)
Fulani	8 (4.0)
Others	6 (3.0)
Total	200 (100)
Others: Ebira, Nupe	
Type of work	
Hawking	97 (48.5)
Mechanic	42 (21.0)
Tailoring	18 (9.0)
Carpentry	31 (15.5)
House girl	12 (6.0)
Total	200 (100)
Educational level	
Qur'anic school	47 (23.5)
Primary school	122 (61.0)
Secondary school	31 (15.5)
Total	200 (100)

Table 2: Occupation of parents (fathers/guardians) of children involved in child labour

Occupation	No. (%)
Teaching	8 (4.0)
Tailoring	21 (10.5)
Mechanic	24 (12.0)
Unemployed	87 (43.5)
Farming	60 (30.0)
Total	200 (100)

## Discussion

The findings from this study revealed that male children between the ages of 11-13 years, constituted the largest group of children in child labour in this part of the county. This is in contrast with the findings of Ebigo and Izuora<sup>6</sup> who reported no gender

difference in their study and Oloko<sup>7</sup> who reported female predominance. This might be because these are mostly male dominated work. A similar finding was reported in India where children were engaged in carpet weaving<sup>6</sup>. By far the most frequently identified factor in all forms of child labour is economic need, which was reported by 83.0% of children in this study. Other factors such as natural disasters, poverty and in recent times HIV/AIDS pandemic have been cited by other workers as factors contributing to or exacerbating the existence of child labour and reducing opportunities or access to alternatives<sup>4, 8</sup>. This is most often to supplement family feeding expenses and/or take care of school expenses (school fees, uniform and books).

Majority of the children (61.0%) were in primary school. This was similar with Maduewesi's findings.<sup>9</sup> Students in quranic and secondary schools accounted for 23.5% and 15.4% respectively. In Zaria city, like in many typical Nigerian urban areas, there are schools that run both morning and afternoon shifts, so children work after attending one shift. The pervading poverty in the country with its consequent effect on family income and expenditure has left many children vulnerable to every opportunity to supplement family earnings. This might be one such opportunity.

The works which children performed in this study were usually repetitious and dangerous to their health and safety. In addition to the adverse effects that such work might pose to the child's physical development, the work and associated absence of educational opportunities can be detrimental to their mental development. Most of the children encountered various forms of health hazards in the course of their work which included; physical assault (60.7%), cuts (52.3%) and falls (23.4%) respectively. Other conditions (parasitic infections) were reported to occur at similar levels in working and non-working children.<sup>10</sup> Exposure to toxic substances, accidents at work or on the road, and psychological disturbance has been reported by WHO as other health hazards of child labour.<sup>11</sup> These findings were not seen in this study except for workplace accidents/injuries.

It is interesting to note that (33.8%) who engaged in child labour had at least repeated a class in the course of their study. Other studies had also reported poor school performance, and that children are usually too tired after hawking.<sup>12-14</sup> The children are fatigued and lack concentration for any meaningful intellectual discourse, thus accounting for poor school performance. This is a worrisome development that needs to be urgently addressed in order not to destroy the future of these children.

The health hazards [physical assault, cuts etc] and other consequences of child labour documented in this study call for a concerted effort on the part of the government to institute measures to curb this societal menace. This may entail appropriate legislation to protect the rights of the child as well as measures to eliminate poverty in the society as part of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Mosques, and other public places where

opportunities for addressing the public and enlightening them occurs, stakeholders, community leaders and advocates should work in tandem with religious leaders in addressing the problems of child labour. Government needs to design a sustainable re-orientation and rehabilitation programme. Finally there is urgent need for international collaboration through international programme for the elimination of child labour (IPEC).

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