



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Patterns and Practices of Child Labour among Mothers in Rural and Urban Areas in Lagos, Nigeria- A Comparative Study

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Keywords

Child labour;

Family;

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ABSTRACT

Background: Child labour is a social phenomenon of global concern with serious consequences for child development, education and well-being. This study compared the pattern, attitude and child labour practices in urban and rural areas of Lagos State.

Methods: This was a descriptive comparative cross-sectional study among mothers of children ages 5 to 17 years. A multistage sampling technique was used to recruit 400 participants. The data was collected using a pre-tested, standardized questionnaire on child labour for household surveys. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences IBM (SPSS) version 20 software and the level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Urban mothers were older (43.8 ± 11.8 years) compared to rural mothers (41.9 ± 12.7 years), and a higher percentage of urban mothers (52.5%) had secondary education in contrast to rural mothers (25.5%). Child labour was more prevalent among children aged 5 to 10 years in rural areas (55.5%) compared to urban areas (44.5%). Within the past year, 33.8% of urban children and 66.2% of rural children were involved in labour and hawking was the most prevalent work in 31.0% and 69.0% of urban and rural children. The majority of rural child labourers (68.4%) and 31.6% of urban child labourers worked 8 to 10 hours daily, with a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$), primarily due to family support.

Conclusion: There is a need for increased and continuous awareness campaigns aimed at educating communities, parents, and children about the detrimental effects of child labour on their overall well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a persistent social phenomenon of public health concern, found in most developing nations, and to a lesser extent in developed countries.¹ According to the

International Labour Organization (ILO), child labour is defined as “work that deprives children under the age of 18, of their childhood, their potential and dignity and that is harmful to their physical and mental development”.² It obstructs their access to education or interferes

with their ability to attend regular school, and the acquisition of skills.² This could potentially negatively impact the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 and 4 (good health, well-being and achieving quality education). However, certain chores such as sweeping and washing dishes done by children cannot be categorized as child labour because such tasks are typically considered age-appropriate and part of a child's learning and development process.²

It has been estimated that the number of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in hazardous work – defined as work that is likely to harm their health, safety or morals has risen by 6.5 million to 79 million since 2016.³ According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2018, about 50.8% of Nigerian children, ages 5 to 17 years, were involved in child labour.⁴ Child labour exists in urban and rural areas, but it is found to be more prevalent in urban areas due to rural-urban migration in search of economic opportunities.⁵ Child labour in urban areas frequently involves work in the informal sector. For example, children may be engaged in street hawking, garbage picking, or working in small workshops.⁶ Also, domestic labour is a significant concern in urban areas worldwide.⁷ In sub-Saharan Africa, hawking and street trading appear to be the most popular forms of child labour.⁸ In urban cities, a prevalent child labour practice involves children working as house-help under the care of affluent individuals. These children are often promised

access to education but frequently end up as domestic servants responsible for tasks such as laundry and kitchen duties.⁹ In Enugu metropolis, the prevalence of child labour among junior secondary school children in the 9-17 years age range was 71.7%, with the most common type of child labour being domestic housework.¹⁰

In rural communities, the mainstream work is agriculture and the vast majority of all child labourers are unpaid family workers.¹¹ Child labour in agriculture such as farming, fishing, aquaculture, forestry, and livestock is a global phenomenon found in all regions of the world including Nigeria and it accounts for 60% of all child labourers ages 5 to 17 years.¹² Other forms of child labour include children in armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking and so on.¹³ Poverty serves as both a cause and a consequence of exploitative child labour.^{3,14} This complex issue is further exacerbated by a strong correlation between illiteracy and child labour. Additionally, it is often observed that female children bear a heavier burden of child labour compared to their male counterparts, highlighting the intersection of gender disparities in this challenging context.¹⁴

Child labour not only deprives children of their right to education but also places them at significant risks.¹⁵ Many child labourers are unable to attend school regularly, resulting in lower literacy rates and diminished opportunities for future employment. Also, working in hazardous conditions exposes these children to various health risks, including

physical injuries and exposure to harmful toxins, which may lead to long-term health problems.¹⁶ Beyond the physical toll, child labour can exact severe psychological and social consequences. Children often suffer from stress, anxiety, and social isolation due to their working conditions.¹⁷

In Nigeria, although laws and policies have been enacted to combat child labour, parents in

both urban and rural areas continue to involve their children in labour.³ There are limited studies on child labour practices and its different patterns in urban and rural areas of Lagos State. With rapid urbanisation in Lagos State, it is important to understand the patterns and practices of child labour in rural and urban areas for tailored interventions targeted at addressing child labour in the different contexts.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Areas		Chi-square (X ²)	df	p-value
	Urban n=200	Rural n= 200			
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)			
Age of mothers (Years)					
20-39	65(32.5)	87(43.5)	10.0	3	0.019*
40-49	75(37.5)	64(32.0)			
50-59	36(18.0)	19(9.5)			
60 and above	24(12.0)	30(15.0)			
Mean Age	43.8±11.8	41.9±12.7			
Level of education					
No formal education	7(3.5)	62(31.0)	62.5	3	<0.001*
Primary	53(26.5)	51(25.5)			
Secondary	105(52.5)	51(25.5)			
Post-secondary	35(17.5)	36(18.0)			
Marital status					
Married	170(85.0)	136(68.0)	16.8	4	<0.001*
Widowed	13(6.5)	32(16.0)			
Single	7(3.5)	16(8.0)			
Separated/Divorced	10(5.0)	16(8.0)			
Age of index child					
8-10	129(64.5)	161(80.5)	18.1	2	<0.001*
11-13	67(33.5)	31(15.5)			
14-17	4(2.0)	8(4.0)			
Mean age	10.1±1.6	9.7±1.6			
Sex of child index					
Female	103(51.5)	82(41.0)	4.4	1	0.352
Male	97(48.5)	118(59.0)			

* statistically significant

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Lagos State, situated in the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It is one of the fastest-growing

economies in the world with an estimated population of 21 million.¹⁸ Lagos State has 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of which 16 are urban and 4, rural.¹⁹ The study locations

were Ikeja (urban) and Epe (rural) Local Government Areas respectively. Ikeja is the capital of Lagos State and it occupies a land area of 9.92km square with a population of 437,400 in the 2016 estimate. Ikeja is an industrial area with the largest international airport in Nigeria and many local and international companies, educational and health institutions.²⁰ Epe Local Government is located on the North side of Lekki Lagoon with an estimated population of 181,409 from the 2006 federal census. Epe is the traditional settlement of the Ibeju people and has secondary schools, hospitals, and health clinics. Fishing is their major occupation.²¹

This was a descriptive comparative cross-sectional study among mothers of children ages 5 to 17 years and the inclusion criteria were those who had been resident in Ikeja and Epe local government areas of Lagos State for at least one year. The minimum sample size was calculated using the formula for comparison of two proportions,²²

$$n = \frac{(u+v)^2(P_1(100-P_1)+P_2(100-P_2))}{(P_1-P_2)^2}$$

assuming 80% power and 95% level of significance

where n = minimum sample size,

u = one-sided percentage point of the normal distribution with a power of 90% (1.28),

v = percentage point of the normal distribution at a significance level of 5%, (1.96).

P₁ = proportion of child labour practices in the urban area (24.9%)²³ and

P₂, the proportion of child labour practices in a rural area (42.8%). The calculated sample size for each group was 105 and this was increased to 200 per group giving a total of 400 mothers in both groups.

A multistage sampling technique was used to recruit participants for this study. In stage one, the two LGAs were selected from the rural and urban LGAs by simple random sampling (balloting). These included Epe (rural) and Ikeja (urban). Stage two involved the selection of five wards from each of the selected LGAs. Ten and twenty streets were selected consecutively from each ward in the urban and rural LGAs as listed on the ward map. To achieve the desired sample size, we employed simple random sampling (balloting) to select one eligible respondent per household in stage three.

The data was collected using a pre-tested, ILO 2007 essential questionnaire on child labour for household surveys.²⁴ The questionnaire was interviewer-administered and the data was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences IBM (SPSS) version 20 software and analysed. Results were presented in the form of frequency tables after descriptive analysis and the associations between the children's characteristics, labour practices and location were analysed using the Chi square tests. The level of significance was set at p<0.05. Ethical approval was obtained from the Lagos University Teaching Hospital Health Research and Ethics Committee (LUTHHREC) assigned number ADM/DCST/HREC/APP/165 and written informed consent was duly obtained

from each respondent. The participants were assured of their privacy and confidentiality.

Table 2: Attitude of respondents towards child labour

Attitude towards Child Labour	Urban (n=200)			Rural (n=200)			P-value
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	
It is an alternative to education	24(12.0)	170(85.0)	6(3.0)	107(53.5)	87(45.3)	6(3.0)	<0.001
It makes the child to be responsible	27(13.5)	170(85.0)	3(1.5)	91(45.5)	103(51.5)	6(3.0)	<0.001
It is not wrong as it is service	36(18.0)	163(81.5)	1(0.5)	47(23.5)	145(72.5)	8(4.0)	0.019
Makes children prone to crime	49(24.5)	146(73.0)	5(2.5)	47(23.5)	117(85.5)	36(18.0)	<0.001
It helps children to mature	65(32.5)	128(54.0)	7(3.5)	44(22.0)	132(66.0)	24(12.0)	0.001
It has good opportunities	38(19.0)	136(68.0)	26(13.0)	54(27.0)	121(60.5)	25(12.5)	0.165
Children are prone exploitation	141(70.5)	52(26.0)	7(3.5)	161(80.5)	20(10.0)	19(9.5)	<0.001
It is a product of poverty	131(65.5)	60(30.0)	9(4.5)	175(87.5)	24(12.0)	1(0.5)	<0.001
It is a violation of human right	135(67.8)	61(30.2)	4(2.0)	192(96.0)	8(4.0)	0(0.0)	<0.001
It contributes to a child's escape from home	136(68.0)	53(26.5)	11(5.5)	37(18.5)	127(63.5)	36(18.0)	<0.001
Children labour should be abolished	130(65.0)	37(18.5)	33(16.5)	56(28.0)	13(6.5)	131(65.5)	<0.001

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents from urban and rural areas. The mean age (43.8 ± 11.8 years) of the mothers in the urban area was significantly higher than mothers in the rural area (41.9 ± 12.7 years). Urban mothers with secondary education were about twice (52.5%) their rural counterparts (25.5%). A higher percentage (80.5%) of children within the ages of 8-10 years in rural areas were involved in child labour as compared to the urban areas (64.5%).

There were no statistically significant differences in the sex of the child involved in child labour in both groups.

In **Table 2**, the majority (85.0%) of urban mothers disagreed with the with the notion that child labour is a superior option to education, which significantly surpasses the 45.3% of rural mothers who shared the same view ($p < 0.001$). A significant majority (85.0%) of urban mothers disagreed with the idea that child labour contributes to a sense of duty among children, which is higher than the 51.5% in the rural group ($p < 0.001$). More than a quarter

(26.5%) of urban respondents believed that children involved in child labour had a higher likelihood of leaving home, in contrast to 18.5% of rural mothers ($p < 0.001$). The majority (65.5%) of the urban respondents agreed that child labour should be abolished while the majority (65.0%) of their rural counterparts were neutral ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3 presents the child labour practices in both rural and urban areas. Majority (64.5%) of children in rural areas were involved in labour practices in the past year, which is significantly higher compared to the 33.0% observed among urban children ($p < 0.001$). More than half (53.0%) of child labourers in urban areas began working before the age of 10 years. This is slightly higher than the 50.4% in rural areas, although this difference was not statistically significant. A larger proportion of children in rural areas (69.7%) worked for more than 8 hours a day compared to their urban counterparts (39.4%) ($p < 0.001$). Regarding compensation, child labourers in urban areas (57.6%) were more likely to receive salaries compared to those in rural areas (48.1%). The perceived benefits reported by children engaged in child labour included supporting their families, with 68.2% of urban respondents and 72.9% of rural respondents noting this as a benefit. Additionally, 18.2% of urban and 20.1% of rural respondents mentioned that child labour helped provide food for the child.

The pattern of child labour practices is shown in **figure 1**. The most prevalent job among these

child labourers in both urban and rural areas was hawking. Among those hawking, the majority (69.0%) was in the rural group and 31.0% in the urban group. This was followed by the engagement of children as house helps with 61.8% and 38.2% in the rural and urban groups respectively. The rural group had a higher percentage of industrial workers (58.1%) than the urban group (41.9%).

DISCUSSION

This comparative study was carried out among mothers of children aged 5 to 17 years in Ikeja and Epe LGAs. The mean age was higher in the urban group and the urban women were better educated than their rural counterparts. The index child involved in child labour was older in the urban than in the rural group ($p < 0.001$). Facts and figures by the ILO indicate that child labour is mainly a rural issue and is often invisibly hidden in remote farms.²⁵

The results from this study indicated that more than half of the rural respondents agreed with the statement that child labour was an alternative to education higher than their urban counterparts. This finding is similar to a Ghanaian study in which some parents did not consider basic education to be the right of a child.²⁶ More rural respondents supported that child labour made a child responsible in line with the economic and cultural context of child labour as a means of socialization in society among the respondents in the Ghanaian study.²⁶

Table 3: Child labour practices among respondents from urban and rural communities

Variables	Urban (200) Freq/%	Rural (200) Freq/%	Chi-square (X ²)	df	p-value
Child has been engaged in work in the past 1 year					
Yes	66(33.0)	129(64.5)	39.7	1	<0.001
No	134(67.0)	71(35.5)			
Age child started work	n=66	n=129			
<8-10	35(53.0)	65(50.4)	1.3	2	0.522
11-13	27(40.9)	60(46.5)			
14-16	4(6.1)	4(3.1)			
Hours work per day	n=66	n=129			
2-4	13(19.7)	27(20.9)	17.2	3	<0.001
5-7	27(40.9)	25(19.4)			
8-10	25(37.9)	54(41.9)			
11 and above	1(1.5)	23(17.8)			
Payment received	n=66	n=129			
Wage	14(21.2)	38(29.4)	1.9	2	0.384
Salary	38(57.6)	62(48.1)			
Others (for their upkeep)	14(21.2)	29(22.5)			
Benefit received	n=66	n=129			
Support family	45(68.2)	94(72.9)	4.9	4	0.176
school expenses	5(7.6)	9(7.0)			
Feeding	12(18.2)	26(20.1)			
Shelter	4(6.0)	0(0.0)			

The majority of respondents in both the urban and rural groups expressed agreement with the statement that children were vulnerable to exploitation by employers. This points to a concerning aspect of child labour practices. Among the factors driving the demand for child labour is the perception that children are more compliant, less knowledgeable about their rights, and generally easier to exploit.²⁵ This perception encourages a cycle of exploitation, as employers may exploit children's vulnerability for their own benefit, leading to a continued prevalence of child labour in both urban and rural areas.

A higher proportion of rural mothers expressed the view that child labour was primarily a product of poverty, identifying it as the most notable force pushing children into the workplace.²⁷ This perspective aligns with

findings from other studies, which consistently show that child labour is more prevalent in economically disadvantaged communities.²⁷⁻²⁹

A substantial majority (65.0%) of respondents in the urban group believed that child labour should be abolished in contrast with rural respondents where only 28.0% shared this viewpoint, while a considerable 65.5% remained undecided on the matter. This high proportion of undecided rural respondents may be indicative of the cultural acceptance of child labour as a means of supplementing family income in these areas.²⁷ It highlights the complex interplay of socio-cultural factors that perpetuate child labour practices.

About two-thirds of children in the rural group had been involved in child labour within the past year compared to only one-third of children in the urban group. The proportion in

the both groups in this study are much lower than 72.5% child labour prevalence among working school children in a community in Ibarapa, Ibadan.²⁷ This difference may be due to the agrarian nature of Ibarapa community. In both urban and rural settings, more than half of the children involved in child labour were within the age range of 8 to 10 years. This finding is despite the International Labour Organization (ILO) established guidelines regarding the minimum age for employment. In developing countries, such as those included in this study, the ILO sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years. Additionally, Convention No. 138 of the ILO includes a provision for light work, allowing children between the ages of 12 and 14 to engage in light work for a maximum of 14 hours per week.²⁵

According to the Human Rights Watch, the practice of working at a young age and for extended hours can have detrimental effects on a child's well-being.³⁰ This study's rural-urban comparison reveals that approximately one-fifth of the children in the rural group were engaged in labour for more than 11 hours per day, whereas only 1.5% of their urban counterparts worked such long hours. This disparity is statistically significant and highlights the heightened vulnerability of rural children to prolonged working hours. The ILO recognizes the importance of promoting social protection measures to reduce the vulnerability of rural households.²⁵ In this context, social protection can encompass various interventions aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of children, including measures to prevent child

labour, ensure access to education, and provide support for families facing economic hardships. The significant difference in working hours between rural and urban children stresses the need for targeted interventions in rural areas to protect children from excessive and potentially harmful labour practices.

The urban child labourers who received a salary were more than half and higher than those in the rural setting. This finding is similar to that of children who worked in the urban cities and towns in Cross River State who were paid for their services, unlike their counterparts in rural areas.³¹ Other kinds of payments received by about one-fifth of children in both urban and rural settings are provision of accommodation and upkeep. Another study found that children in rural areas work for their families, and hence most are not paid in cash for the services.³²

Those against the ban on child labour argue that if children are not allowed to work, they and their families will end up worse off and these children often work to help impoverished families meet basic needs.³⁰

The commonest form of child labour among the rural respondents was hawking followed by working as a house help and a similar trend was seen in their urban counterparts. These findings were similar to the study in Lagos State.³³ In Cross River State, engaging as a house-help was the highest child labour practice followed by hawking in the urban region.³¹ Other studies in Nigeria also reported house-help as the most common child labour practice in urban areas.^{1,9} However, some studies found farming as the

most prominent child labour practice in the rural area.³¹ This difference may be a result of the cosmopolitan nature of Lagos State.

In conclusion, it was observed that children engaged in child labour tended to be younger in rural settings compared to their urban counterparts. Additionally, a higher proportion of females were involved in child labour in urban areas compared to rural regions, emphasizing the gender dimension of child labour practices in urban environments. Furthermore, the majority of mothers in the rural group believed that child labour could serve as an alternative to education,

highlighting the need for targeted interventions in rural communities to promote education as a priority. The reasons provided by respondents for engaging in child labour, such as providing family support, securing food and shelter, and covering school expenses, shed light on the complex socio-economic factors driving child labour practices in Lagos, Nigeria. There is a need for increased and continuous awareness campaigns aimed at educating communities, parents, and children about the detrimental effects of child labour on health, education, and overall well-being. Initiatives aimed at increasing access to quality education, particularly in rural areas, are recommended.

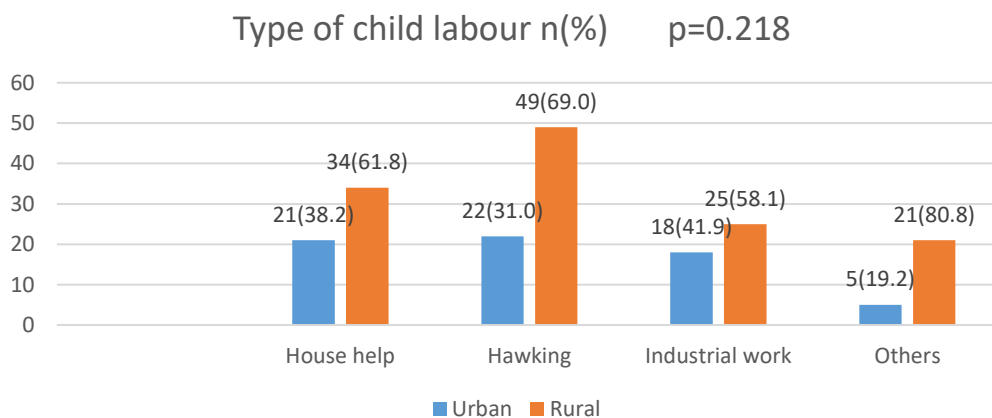


Figure 1: Pattern of child labour practices among urban and rural respondents

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