

Toward Eradication of Child Labour: Assessment of the Present Situation in a Nigerian City

Adaobi Ijeoma Bisi-Onyemaechi¹, Ugo Nnenna Chikani¹, Pascal Uwadiogwu Chime¹, Ngozi Rita Mbanefo¹, Obinna Chukwuebuka Nduagubam², Ndubuisi Anyele Uwaezuoke¹

¹Department of Paediatrics, College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, Ituku-Ozalla, ²Department of Paediatrics, College of Health Sciences, Enugu State University Teaching Hospital Parklane, Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract

Background: Child labour deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity and is harmful to their physical and mental development. **Aim:** The aim of this study was to determine the pattern and adverse effects associated with child labour in Enugu, Nigeria. **Patients, Materials and Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study using an in-depth interviewer-administered questionnaire guide on child labour and adverse effects among children aged 6 to <18 years. **Results:** The most common labour was hawking (39.2%) and shopkeeping (22.8%). Majority of the children work to support their families. Adverse conditions experienced by the participants include prolonged work hours (100%), assault (15.8%), hunger (15.2%), sexual abuse (14.6%), and accidents (9.9%). Children aged 6–12 years were at a higher risk of sexual abuse ($P = 0.005$, odds ratio = 2.463, 95% confidence interval = 1.311–4.630). **Conclusion:** Children in Enugu are still involved in the various forms of child labour which have detrimental effects on their well-being.

Keywords: Adverse effects, child labour, Nigeria, sexual abuse

BACKGROUND

The future of any nation is dependent on the state of her children. Child labour does not allow for the proper development of children. According to the International Labour Organization,^[1] child labour is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. The negative effects (both long and short term) of a task on a child defines child labour. An estimated 16 million children are involved in child labour worldwide.^[2,3] Child labour worldwide has been associated with poverty, social inequalities, gender discrimination, and adverse conditions on health. Poverty predisposes to child labour and child labour, in turn, entrenches poverty in any society as it prevents children from achieving their maximum potential, thereby creating an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Child labour is a global problem. There are 78 million child labourers in the Asia and Pacific region (almost one in ten children), 13 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, 9.2 million in the Middle East and North Africa, and 59 million in sub-Saharan Africa (one in five children).^[2] These regions are plagued with conflicts and poverty with

high numbers of out-of-school children. Nigeria is one of the ten leading countries with the highest prevalence of child labour.^[4] About 15 million Nigerian children work, with one in four children under 14 years involved in child labour.^[5] Child labour is illegal in many countries, but there are no laws to protect children from harmful work and its associated adverse effects in many countries in the world. The Child Rights Act was signed into law in Nigeria in 2003 to protect children from exploitation; however, there has been minimal enforcement of this Act with some states, including Enugu, yet to domesticate it. Studies that identify the types of tasks children are engaged in and their effects are needed. This will enable the eradication of all forms of child labour among children. This study aims

Address for correspondence: Dr. Adaobi Ijeoma Bisi-Onyemaechi, Department of Paediatrics, College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu, Nigeria.
E-mail: adaobi.bisi-onyemaechi@unn.edu.ng

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to identify the tasks that children in Enugu are engaged in and the effects of these tasks on them. It would serve as evidence to engage the policy formulators on the need to outlaw these tasks for children and to domesticate the Child Rights Act in Enugu, Nigeria.

PATIENTS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was done in Enugu, South-East Nigeria. The systematic sampling method was used to select the study sites. Enugu metropolis has three local government councils. The study was done in three local governments, i.e. Enugu north, South, and East. Three geographical settlements were selected randomly from each of these local councils, namely Abakpa, Nkwo Nike, and Emene from Enugu east; Gariki, Uwani, and Agbani road from Enugu south; and Asata, Ogbete, and Coal Camp from Enugu north. Within these areas, the researchers moved in the streets, markets, and shops meeting children at their different locations. The researchers introduced themselves to the children and created rapport with them. Subsequently, they made their intentions known and assent was obtained. Contacts (phone numbers/addresses) of their caregivers were obtained from those who could give it. Caregivers were contacted and consent to participate was obtained after explaining the purposes of the research. Wards/children whose caregivers consented to the study were subsequently enrolled. Recruitment was consecutively done using the convenient sampling method. Most of the caregivers were within a short range to the child, and consent and interview took place immediately. Interview appointment were fixed on a later day for very few of the children. In-depth interview using a questionnaire guide was administered to the children mostly around their workplaces and a few in their homes which ever was more convenient for the participants. The adult caregivers were excused during the interview and confidentiality was reaffirmed. Information obtained using the questionnaire guide include age, sex, parents' education and parents' occupation, school attendance, nature of work they are involved in, and possible hazards associated with it. Children < six years or up to 18 years who refused to complete the interview were excluded from the study. Child labour was defined as any type of economic task, paid, unpaid, or exploitative, engaged in by a child years less than of age, which places the interests of the beneficiary well above those of the child and is detrimental to the physical mental, social, educational and moral development of the child. (as defined by ILO).^[6] The social class of the children was determined using the Oyediji classification method.^[7]

Responses were documented and subsequently analyzed using SPSS version 21, Chicago, Illinois, USA. The categorical variables were summarized using the frequency and percent, whereas means and standard deviations were obtained for the continuous variables. The associations between the categorical variables were done using logistic regression and Fisher's exact significance $P < 0.05$ was regarded as statistically significant. The results were presented in tables.

RESULTS

A total of 171 children were interviewed with a male: female ratio of 1.4:1. Their ages ranged from 6 to <18 years with a mean age of 12.6 years (standard deviation [SD] ± 2.15). All of the children were of Ibo ethnic group. Majority (55.6%) of the children were living with both parents, and the mean birth order was three (SD ± 1.53). The mean number of siblings among the study participants was 5.5 (± 1.54). One hundred and thirty-six (79.5%) of the children attend school; however, only 77% of these attend every day. Only one caregiver was a civil servant and most were petty traders (103, 60.5%). Seventy-one percent (121) and 68% (116) of the mothers and fathers, respectively, had secondary education. Two rooms with shared facilities were the most common (43%) type of apartment occupied by the families of these children [Table 1]. Majority were from social classes 4 and 5. Seventy (41%) of these children get an average daily sleep of eight hours.

All of the study participants were admitted to child labour. The most common labour involved by the children was

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of the study participants

	Frequency (%)
Age group	
6-12	70 (40.9)
13-<18	101 (59.1)
Sex	
Male	100 (58.5)
Female	71 (41.5)
Living with	
Mother alone	18 (10.5)
Father alone	4 (2.3)
Both parents	95 (55.6)
Relative	18 (10.5)
Nonrelative	36 (21.1)
Type of accommodation	
Single room	42 (24.6)
Double room	74 (43.3)
Flat	31 (18.1)
Duplex	24 (14.0)
Handicapped	17 (9.9)
In school	136 (79.5)
School type	
Public	121 (89.0)
Private	15 (11.0)
School attendance	
Everyday	105 (77.2)
Most days (≥ 4 days)	11 (8.1)
Sometimes (≤ 3 days)	20 (14.7)
Current level	
Primary	61 (44.9)
Junior secondary	54 (39.7)
Senior secondary	19 (14.0)
Night learning	2 (1.5)

hawking (77, 45%) and shopkeeping (43, 25%) [Table 2]. Only one child (0.6%) was involved in farm work. The children who live with both parents were more likely to be involved in hawking ($P = 0.02$). Children <12 years of age were seven times more associated with housemaid labour ($P = 0.001$, odds ratio [OR] = 6.614, 95% confidence interval [CI] = 2.091–20.918) while those >12 years of age were more associated with factory works and loading (Fisher's exact significance = 0.003) [Table 3]. Table 4 shows that males were less likely to be house helps than the females ($P < 0.001$, OR = 0.065, 95% CI = 0.014–0.291) and were more involved with loading labour (Fisher's exact significance <0.001).

Majority (106, 62%) admitted working to support their families, 12% (21) did not have any reason for their labour, 16.4% (28) worked to be in school, another 7.6% (13) were forced to work, while 3 work for food [Table 5].

Table 2: Type of labour involved by the study participants

Type of labor	Frequency (%)
Hawking	77 (45.0)
Shopkeeping	43 (25.1)
Housemaid	19 (11.1)
Loading	17 (9.9)
Factory worker	11 (6.4)
Babysitting	3 (1.8)
Farming	1 (0.6)

Eighteen (10.2%) got complaints about their work from their employers.

Adverse conditions experienced by the children while working include prolonged work hours (continued to work even when they were tired; 58.5%), sexual abuse (48%), assault (15.8%), hunger (15.2%), and injuries (36.6%).

Children subjected to hawking were less likely to be beaten than those not hawking ($P = 0.049$, OR = 0.379, 95% CI = 0.144–0.997), while housemaids were 119 times more likely to be beaten ($P < 0.001$, OR = 119.00, 95% CI = 24.039–589.095). Similarly, housemaids are at a significant risk of hunger compared to other forms of child labour in this study ($P < 0.001$, OR = 7.147, CI = 2.546–20.063). Children involved in loading/off-loading goods were five times at risk of injuries and accidents than others ($P = 0.009$, OR = 4.931, CI = 1.448–16.340). Shopkeeping children were most at risk of prolonged work hours ($P = 0.025$, OR = 2.492, CI = 5.523) whereas housemaids also were four times more prone to sexual abuse than other forms of labour in this study ($P = 0.006$, OR = 4.343, CI = 1.514–12.460).

The children who attend school admitted that the work affects their schooling in various ways: poor school performance (35.7%) and absenteeism (11.1%).

Health risks associated with the labour include allergies (6.8%), physical injuries (33.9%), animal bites (1%), and burns (1.7%).

Different forms of sexual abuse were reported by 82 (48%) of the children during the course of their labor. Thirty-seven did not

Table 3: Association between age and child labour

	Age group		P/Fisher's exact significance	OR	95% CI for OR
	6-12	13-18			
Farming					
Yes	0	1 (1.0)	1.000	NA	NA
No	70 (100.0)	100 (99.0)			
Hawking					
Yes	34 (47.2)	43 (43.4)	0.146	1.588	0.851-2.963
No	38 (52.8)	56 (56.6)			
Shopkeeping					
Yes	18 (25.7)	25 (24.8)	0.451	1.319	0.642-2.709
No	52 (74.3)	76 (75.2)			
Babysitting					
Yes	2 (2.9)	1 (1.0)	0.382	2.941	0.261-33.081
No	68 (97.1)	100 (99.0)			
Housemaid					
Yes	15 (21.4)	4 (4.0)	0.001	6.614	2.091-20.918
No	55 (78.6)	97 (96.0)			
Factory worker					
Yes	0	11 (10.9)	0.003	NA	NA
No	70 (100.0)	90 (89.1)			
Loading					
Yes	0	17 (16.8)	<0.001	NA	NA
No	70 (100.0)	84 (83.2)			

NA: Not available, OR: Odds ratio, CI: Confidence interval

Table 4: Association between gender and type of labour

	Sex		P/Fisher's exact significance	OR	95% CI for OR
	Male	Female			
Farming					
Yes	1 (1.0)	0	1.000	NA	NA
No	99 (99.0)	71 (100.0)			
Hawking					
Yes	44 (44.0)	33 (46.5)	0.954	0.982	0.527-1.830
No	56 (56.0)	38 (53.5)			
Shopkeeping					
Yes	22 (22.0)	21 (29.6)	0.301	0.684	0.334-1.403
No	78 (78.0)	50 (70.4)			
Babysitting					
Yes	0	3 (4.2)	0.070	NA	NA
No	100 (100.0)	68 (95.8)			
Housemaid					
Yes	2 (2.0)	17 (23.9)	<0.001	0.065	0.014-0.291
No	98 (98.0)	54 (76.1)			
Factory worker					
Yes	9 (9.0)	2 (2.8)	0.124	3.412	0.714-16.299
No	91 (91.0)	69 (97.2)			
Loading					
Yes	17 (17.0)	0	<0.001	NA	NA
No	83 (83.0)	71 (100.0)			

NA: Not available, OR: Odds ratio, CI: Confidence interval

Table 5: Reasons for engaging in child labour

	Frequency (%)
Why do you work?	
To support your family	106 (62.0)
To eat	3 (1.8)
To be in school	28 (16.4)
Forced to work	13 (7.6)
I don't know	21 (12.3)
What problems do you encounter while working?	
Beating	27
Hunger	26
Accidents	17
Sexual abuse	25
Long working hours	100

resist the abuse. The abusers were mainly strangers (54, 65.9%) and others include relatives (8, 9.8%), employers (12, 14.6%), and friends (15, 18.3%). Among those who have been abused, the acts range from indecent touching (45, 54.9%), kissing (34, 41.5%), vaginal and anal penetration (15, 18%), and verbal/sex talks (14%). Majority (65.5%) of these abuses occurred in the houses of the perpetrators while 14.6% of cases occurred in the workplaces. Fifty-one (62%) of the sexually abused children were given money after the incident. In addition, others were patronized (29, 35%). Nine (11%) children had promises yet to be redeemed while 17 (21%) got nothing. These abuses resulted in low self-esteem among

65 (79.3%) participants, unplanned pregnancy in 6 (7.3%) while 11 (13.4%) children actually look forward to another experience. Children aged 6–12 years were two times more likely to be sexually abused than those aged 13–18 years [Table 6] ($P = 0.005$, OR = 2.463, 95% CI = 1.311–4.630).

DISCUSSION

It is not surprising that most of the respondents were males as the study did not visit homes where the females are more likely to be working. Different reports^[8-10] showed that males are marginally more involved in child labour though other studies^[11,12] documented a higher prevalence of female child labourers. Girls have been noted to be engaged in less visible and underreported forms of child labour; hence, the low incidence of female child labourers in reports.^[8,10] The children were mainly from lower socio-economic class as is the situation in other parts of Nigeria and beyond.^[13-15] This agrees with other reports that the higher the parental schooling, the less likely the child would work.^[11,16-18] Lower educational attainment has been associated with lower incomes, and therefore, the children are engaged to supplement the family income. This was the case in his report where most of the parents had secondary education and more than half of the children had to work to supplement the family income. The Nigerian child is a direct victim of the socioeconomic circumstances of his family as there are no functional welfare systems to cushion the child from any harsh domestic environment. Different reports have documented that the most common reason children are engaged

Table 6: Association between age, gender, and sexual abuse

	Sexually abused		P	OR	95% CI for OR
	Yes	No			
Age group					
6-12	42 (61.8)	26 (38.2)	0.005	2.463	1.311-4.630
13-18	40 (39.6)	61 (60.4)			
Sex					
Male	46 (46.0)	54 (54.0)	0.430	0.781	0.422-1.444
Female	36 (52.2)	33 (47.8)			

NA: Not available, OR: Odds ratio, CI: Confidence interval

in labour is to support their families.^[11,12,19,20] The same reason was given by majority of the children for engaging in child labour in this report. Child labour unfortunately entrenches the cycle of poverty as the children's educational achievement is likely to be compromised, leading to lower adult earnings and subsequent child labour, as has been reported in other studies.^[21-23] The lack of social support for the very poor and large family sizes may have contributed to why children are sent to the labour market as their income is not just needed in the family but is also critical to their own survival. The nine years of basic education is free in most parts of Nigeria; however, the cost of school uniforms, footwear, and other school needs has to be borne by very poor caregivers who may not cope when the children are many. This was seen among the study participants where the average number of siblings was 5.5. This is probably why some of the children had to work to be in school.

Developed countries have also reported that schoolchildren's engagement in child labour is found to increase the student's probability of repeating a grade.^[24] This study did not have the privilege of investigating the children's academic performance as they were recruited and interviewed in their different workplaces and were not followed up to their homes or schools; however, there was a self-reported poor school performance from 36% of the participants.

In Brazil, Emerson and Souza^[25] reported that child labour was more prevalent among earlier than later-born children. In this study, 73% were between one and three birth orders. This may be because the older the child, the more likely the productivity and the higher the bargain. Child labour has been shown to ultimately affect adult earnings negatively. Reports from Ghana and Vietnam^[18,26] show that child labour is associated with reduced school enrollments and grade attainments. This was observed to be worse for girls.

It was also observed that most of the children lived with their parents suggesting a sincere need to augment the family income and not a case of taking advantage of another person's child, as also observed by Fetuga *et al.*^[22] This is different from a study in Zimbabwe^[27] where the degree of biological closeness to the household head is positively associated with human capital investments and negatively with child labour.

Hawking and shopkeeping was the most common labour involved by the children, similar to other Nigerian reports.^[11,19,20]

This is not surprising as it has little skill/investment requirement with probably relatively higher returns on investment. There are no laws regulating when school-age children can be found roaming or hawking in the streets as obtained in some developed countries. This type of labour puts the child at various risks as they move around seeking patronage of their goods. From this observation, housemaid work more than others placed the children at a higher risk of beating, hunger, and sexual abuse. This might be because these children live and work in the same place (usually not their homes) and therefore in contact with their bosses throughout the day and even at night. Farm work was uncommon probably because the study was done in the metropolis unlike reports from Bangladesh, India, and most countries where agriculture was a major employer of children.^[18,28,29]

The females who babysit reported frequent school absences to stay at home and mind the baby. Any accidental damage of goods while loading resulted in beatings for the males.

The health hazards reported by the children were no different from what was noted in cross-country data across 83 countries in six geographic regions of the world and other reports.^[11,12,30] Malnutrition, lack of access to safe water and hygiene, high-risk sex, bad company, and unsafe workplaces/accidents were the main findings from these countries. This is similar to the more common hazards encountered by the study participants, i.e. physical injuries, sexual abuse, hunger, beatings, and prolonged work hours.

There is a high prevalence of sexual abuse among the study participants compared to a previous report of 2%.^[12] Another report in Northern Nigeria documented a quite high incidence of sexual abuse (77%) among child labourers.^[31] This may be because the study was done in a Boko Haram-ravaged state that has produced many orphans and vulnerable children. Sexual abuse of children has also been reported in Ethiopia among child labourers.^[32] This emphasizes the need for quick domestication of the Child Rights Act in the whole country and strict enforcement to protect children (the future of the country) from adverse effects of child labour and the emotional torment of sexual abuse. The most common forms of abuse encountered by these children put them at a very high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Poverty is the major underlying factor responsible for child labour. Most of the children admitted either receiving money or patronage of their goods(child hawkers) after the incidence(s).

CONCLUSION

Child labour is still prevalent in Enugu. It makes children assume adult roles prematurely, and puts their growth development and life achievement at great risk. Efforts should be intensified to curb this social ill to the barest minimum.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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