



## **Child Labour as a Reflection of Poverty: Study in Dutse Metropolis, Jigawastate, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examined the manifestation of poverty through child labour in Dutse, Jigawa State. The population of the study was exclusively child labourers. Both primary and secondary data were collected. The secondary sources of data include text-books, journal articles, conference proceedings e.t.c., which have been utilised during conduct of the study. The sample size for the study was forty-eight (48) child labourers. In generating the primary data, forty-eight (48) interview sessions were conducted to provide an insight into the factors (not only limited to poverty) that motivate child labour in the study area and beyond. The sampling procedure was purposive sampling, and the sample size was forty-eight (48) subjects. The research was mixed research because in-depth interview was initially adopted to collect primary data and then subsequently transformed to quantitative form during data analysis, with some qualitative responses been complemented. Primary and secondary data sources were used. The responses received from these subjects led to the conclusion that, poverty and traditional beliefs are the principal predisposing factors for child labour in developing countries, such as Nigeria. The paper suggests that, gradual phase out of the phenomenon and fighting poverty are the best and effective strategies for checking child labour in developing nations like Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Child, Child Labour, Development, Poverty

**JEL Codes:** J24

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### **Introduction**

The concept of child labour is becoming one of many causes of concern in both industrialized and developing societies of the world. But as we are troubled with the menace of child labour in these parts of the world, one universal reality remains that social problems are social creation as they emanate in the social processes. It is therefore up to the academics, families, communities, policy makers and/or leaders to investigate the root causes of such problems. By so doing, the society

has embarked on the journey to addressing the issue in question as this is the best to develop a strategy for eradicating it. Before the paper delves into the topic of child labour, it is instructive to acknowledge the truth that the phenomenon has universal epidemiology. In other words, child labour recognizes no national or continental strata-developed, developing and underdeveloped countries have one form of child or another, though the rate and preponderance differ.

The idea of children working long days in factories bothers people who live in high-income nations because they think of childhood as a carefree time of learning and play (Macionis, 2009). In the same vein, Lloyd-Evans (2010:310) pointed out that:

*In the 1990s, heightened concern over the future welfare of millions of the world's poorer children largely developed from media coverage of child-related issues, such as the murder of Brazilian street children by police, and increased documentation on child work by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international institutions such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO).*

International Labour Organization (ILO), at a meeting in Mexico City in 1999, also pointed out that child labour affects over 250 million children, 30 percent of which are in Latin America. According to the UNICEF (cited in Shah 2001) poverty is the most common factor contributing to child labour. The paper will therefore dwell on child labour as a reflection of poverty in Dutse, Jigawa state. In addition, the paper is designed to adopt mixed methodology with the use of survey (interview and then in presented in a frequency distribution table) to be presented to provide first-hand bases and add empirical make-up to the paper.

#### **Literature Review**

There are many studies on the concept of child labour, some of which explained the phenomenon in the context of development (Lloyd-Evans, 2010), others on the effects (Nengha-Chakrisa, 2013) or consequences of the phenomenon on the future of the children (Shah, 2001; Watson, 2008; Lloyd-Evans, 2010) or on their educational achievement and performance (Bhalotra, 2013). This paper will narrow its focus by examining child

labour as originating from economic dilemma-poverty.

Child labour, like many social science concepts, is variously defined depending on the intensity and hazardous nature of an activity. Firstly, the concept of 'child' should be defined to objectively arrive at what constitutes child labour. Child can be historically conceptualized. According to historians, the emergence of childhood as a concept is traceable to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Before that period, not only in Africa, but in most of Europe, children were treated as miniature adults. That is why the topic of "apprenticeship" whereby child follows father or guardian to farm, work place to be trained as future potential future farmer, blacksmith, or butcher. Legal interpretation of 'child' today comes to delineate specific social roles appropriate to young people. In common, for instance, a child is one who had not attained the age of fourteen (14) years (Rios-Kohn, 2007). But definition of child is also not uniform. According to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, cited in Gupta et al, 2001) every human being under 18 years is a child unless majority is attained earlier under national law.

Many global and local facts are made available to represent the picture of what childhood is in relation to economic and social policy, however they do not present a uniform picture (Brown, 2005). Hence, child labour can also mean different things to different people. The widely accepted definition of child labour is the one offered by the ILO (2014) which excludes certain works done by children from the child labour classification such as activities that involve helping parents, working to earn pocket money after school hours or during holidays without hazard. From this observation, we will discern that, if a work does not affect children's health and personal development or does

not interfere with their schooling is not regarded as something negative. Taking this into cognizance, ILO (2014) therefore defined child labour as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development”. Work of this nature is what is referred to as hazardous labour.

Hazardous work is defined as work that jeopardizes the safety, health or morals of children, and its abolition has been the focus of international legislation since the implementation of Convention 182 on the elimination of the ‘worst forms of child labour’ by the ILO in 1999. In 2012, the ILO estimated that 215 million children across the world are trapped in child labour, with over 50% exposed to the ‘worst forms of child labour’ in mining or quarrying, slavery and forced labour, illicit activities such as prostitution, or armed conflict (Lloyd-Evans, 2010). It is obvious that socio-cultural variations account for differential role allocations child roles. Irrespective of socio-cultural differences, child labour applies to engagement of children in activities whether these be industrial or non-industrial but which are detrimental to their physical, mental, moral and social wellbeing and development (Guha-Roy, 2001). The U.S. Department of Labour (2007) revealed, some 200 million of the world’s children work, half of them full time, earning about 50 Cents an hour.

Because there is growing concern on the excessive work for under 12s, as it harms their social development and, sometimes, prevents them from attending school, the decision to exclude domestic chores from some child labour classifications has been widely criticized due to excessive working hours and conditions experienced by many children. In line with the above, Nieuwenhuys (1994) raised a critical question on the basis of comparison

between household labour and industrial labour, thus:

*With an estimated 60% of working children engaged in agriculture, commentators have asked why unpaid household labour is considered to be morally ‘neutral’, compared to waged work in industry, when both can be equally detrimental to the development of children (quoted in Lloyd, 2010:312).*

Poverty is a notable cause of child labour and it has many dimensions. It motivates child labour in especially the developing world. In addition, debt, bloated military budgets and structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have eroded the capacity of many governments to provide education and services for children, and have also pushed up prices for basic necessities (Shah, 2001). Poverty has always leads to immense social, political and economic constrains. Poverty, by definition, is a multidimensional state of deprivation involving lack of basic requirements, social and political exclusion and lack of education.

Poverty is a condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services. Extreme poverty can cause terrible suffering and death, and even modest levels of poverty can prevent people from realizing many of their desires. The Nigeria’s poorest people-many of whom live in the northern part of this country are; Jigawa, Kebbi, Kogi, Bauchi, Kwara, Yobe, Zamfara, Gombe, Sokoto, and Adamawa they struggle daily for food, shelter and other necessities. They often suffer from severe malnutrition, epidemic disease outbreaks, famine and uprisings etc. (Usman, 2010).

Paradoxically, Nigeria's huge agricultural resource base offers great potential for growth. Despite Nigeria's plentiful agricultural resources and oil wealth, poverty is still a challenge in the country. Poverty is especially severe in rural areas, where up to 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and social services and infrastructure are limited. The country's poor rural women and men depend on agriculture for food and income (IFAD,2013).

The selection of the study area is therefore not a coincidence, because poverty is reported by IFAD (2013) to be widespread in the northern Nigerian states, while Usman (2010) mentioned Jigawa state first state in the list of the poverty stricken states. Child labour is not only an economic compulsion of poor families; it is also the consequences of extreme social and economic exploitation. Poverty of the households may be due to several factors, such as inadequate income of the family;unemployed adults, where one or more of the adult member(s) of a household especially parent(s) is jobless; absence of scheme for family allowances, where there is no any family empowerment program (e.g. Family Support Program in Nigeria); and large family size, because the little income earned by a large household might be strained thereby making them living without proper savings, among others.

Admittedly, poverty is one of the determinants of growth or development. In order for society or nation to aspire for some reasonable level of development, the society should fight poverty, and by implication, combat other social problems like child labour.Industrialization, said World Bank (2008, cited in Macionis 2009) extends childhood and discourages children from work and other activities considered suitable only for adults. This is why child labour is uncommon in the

United States and other high-income countries. In less economically developed nations of the world, however, children are a vital economic asset, and they typically begin working as soon as they are able. While the Liberian and Sierra Leonian scenarios are still in our memories, many soldiers in Iraq are still teenagers.

Globalization process culminated in socio-spatial disparities on the concept of child labour, Lloyd-Evans (2010) admits that, socio-spatial dimensions to child labour exists which explains why some forms of 'child work' are deemed to be more undesirable than others. This accounts for why definitions of certain hazardous 'child labour' on special parameters. He further buttressed on the argument raised by Jones (Lloyd-Evans, 2010), who states, societal views on child labour and related issues will depend on the meanings people attach to public 'spaces' and what they regard as appropriate places for children. In Latin America, for instance, millions of street children are perceived as delinquents and threats to social order. At the global scale, cities streets and industrial factories are seen as 'unnatural spaces' for child workers, while the private household space is deemed to be safe (Mackie 2009, cited in Lloyd-evans, 2010). The only public space deemed acceptable for children is school, irrespective of the nature and quality of education. Such conceptual dilemmas regarding children's spatial identities impact upon the development and implementation of global policies which address child labour.

As stated earlier, child labour takes many dimensions. In addition, the phenomenon occurs in multiple contexts. One of the contexts within which child labour takes place is *bonded labour*, which some sociologists regarded as 'a gray area between contract labour and slavery' (Henslin,2010:232). In his magnum opus,

*Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach*, James Henslin (2010) had an encounter with an Indian girl-child bonded labourer in the course of investigation. Henslin (2010:232), gave the narration, thus:

*During my research in India, I interviewed an 8-year-old girl. Mashahury is a bonded labourer who was exchanged by her parents for a 2,000 rupee loan (about \$14). To repay the loan, Mashahury must do construction work for one year. She will receive one meal a day and one set of clothing for the year. Because this centuries-old practice is now illegal, the master bribes Indian officials, who inform him when they are going to inspect the construction site. He then hides his bonded labourers. I was able to interview and photograph Mashahury because her master was absent the day I visited the construction site.*

It is recorded by Scholastic (2014) that more than 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work today. Of those, more than 80 million kids labour in extremely hazardous conditions. They weave carpets in dimly lit factories-at times, shackled to their looms. They crawl through cramped tunnels deep below the earth's surface hunting for gems and coal. And they struggle not to buckle under the crushing weight of bricks balanced on their heads. This cycle of unending labour is robbing young people of their childhoods-even in America. Officials estimate that more than 150,000 children work illegally on U.S. farms (Scholastic, 2014).

An overview of the life course reveals how society organizes human experience according to age-childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age (Macionis, 2009). Our concern here is child's experience. Although it can differ across societies, child labour is most common in the nations of Africa and Asia. Macionis (2000)add that most athletic shoes used in

the developed nations are manufactured in countries such as Taiwan and Indonesia where wages are far lower than they are in the United States and France. What is not stated on the shoes is that many are made by children who spent their days working in factories instead of going to school.

#### **Methods**

The target population is the entire children population of the study area: Dutse, Jigawa State. Purposive sampling technique was adopted and, in some cases, accidental sampling procedure was adopted to make up the sample size, forty-eight subjects (48). The Yadi/Gida Dubu/Yantifa, Takur Site/Takur Adua, Garu/Fagoje/and Danmasara are the areas with preponderance of child labour within the Dutse metropolis and they were purposively targeted to select the sample respondents. This was as a result of the difficulty faced during the data collection as most of the respondents were skeptical of giving an audience, neither were they cooperative enough to provide us with the required responses.

The few sample size is determined by the fact that interview is time-consuming. Primary and secondary data sources were used. In generating the primary data, eight unstructured interview and forty IDI (in-depth interview) were employed to provide an insight into the factors that motivate child labour in Nigeria and beyond. Of the eight interviews, four females-child and four male children were interviewed. The interview and IDI responses (together) are transformed and interpreted in a frequency distribution table and transcribed to form a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative). Secondary data sources (books, journal articles, conference proceedings, e.t.c.) were also utilized in the paper.

**Results and Discussions**

Foremost is the gender of the respondents. Each gender category has 50% (24 males and 24 females). All of the respondents'

ages ranged from 10 to 15 years. Forty two percent (42%) of the respondents' fathers have business as their occupations.

Table 1.0: Occupations of the respondents' fathers (N=48)

Occupation	Frequency	%
Business/trading	20	41.7
Farming	12	25
No response	16	33.3
Total	48	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

From Table 1.0 it shows that, fathers on business or trading havetaken up the greatest figure of 20 (41.7%); fathers that relied on farming accounted for 16 (25%); while the children who could notrespond were 16 out of 48 (33.3%). From the table above, it is observed that none, but one, of the children in labour is lucky to have a father that works in any bureaucratic organization, be it public or private. If the parents know the how education pays someone who has it, they might not neglect their children or subject them to an activity that could hamper social and psychological development.

For the farmers, it is already observed by sociologists and economic anthropologists that, people in a simple agrarian community rejoice having many children because with too many hands, they can be able cultivate more land. Children in this socio-economic arrangement are trained

apprenticeship at early ages and subsequently expected to assist parents at homes, at market and in the farmlands. The unresponsive column signifies two things:1) that the children of lower classes have communication inhibition. For instance, Bernstein (1961,cited in Haralambos and Heald, 2006) describes how differences in speech pattern set children of low-income families from that of high-income background based on "restricted code" and "elaborated code"for children belonging to working class and middle- or upper-class respectively; 2) that they are not contented with the strangers who stopped them in the street and began to ask themquestions on their personal lives(despite the efforts made by the researchers to explain there is no harm). Some of the children were thinking thatwe were security officerstrying to trap and take them to borstal homes.

Table 1.1: Respondents whoseparents had any educational background (N=48)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	83.3
No	0	0
No response	8	16.7
Total	48	100.0

Source: fieldwork 2014.

The Table 1.1 is closely related to Table 1.0 because work in private or public sector is to a greater extent associated with formal education with at least primary leaving certificate to become a messenger

or a cleaner or at most a degree to become a senior staff or administrative officer. Attending formal school does not only offer an opportunity for getting awhite or blue-collar job, it also shapes how parents

will rationally choose and prepare a better future for their children. It also became obvious that some parents are sending their children to informal school to become *almajiris* and usually ended up with neither the authentic Islamic knowledge nor developing the requisite

quality of employability in adulthood. The Table 1.1 shows that virtually all of the respondents' parents attended schools, 40(83%), while 8(16.7%) of them do not know whether or not their parents went to school.

Table 1.2: Type of school attended by respondents' parents (N=48)

Type of school	Frequency	%
Islamic	40	83.3
Western	-	-
No response	8	16.7
Total	48	100

Source: fieldwork, 2014

Table 1.2 shows that, 83.3% of the parents of the respondents have Islamic literacy and non has ever attended Western oriented schools (see Table 1.3). Perhaps, that is why majority of the working children are into informal Islamic schools,

especially the male children. The few girl-children who go to the Islamic schools are however not sent to other towns to get educated, but are working as vendors of pure water and other local commodities.

Table 1.3: Educational status of respondents (N=48)

Educational level	Frequency	%
Primary	12	25
JSS	4	8.3
Islamic school	21	43.8
No school	6	12.5
Drop out	5	10.4
Total	48	100.0

Source: fieldwork, 2014

Table 1.3 above shows that, 48% are in Islamic school, 12.5% are not going to school, and 10.4% have at once gone to school but dropped out when the research was conducted. Among those not going to one is female and when she was asked whether she will like to go to school, she gave positive response, "Yes!" And as

she was asked again, why then she is not going, she said:

*I asked my father severally that, I want to go to the school, but he did not respond. I asked my mother too, but our mother does not want to risk the money I generated for her through selling these items (jallop rice, pure water, and locally made sweets)*

Table 1.4: Respondents perception of work by child as appropriate or not (N=48)

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	33	68.8
No	15	31.2
Total	48	100.0

Source: fieldwork, 2014

Table 1.4 represents the responses of the children on whether they perceive their work as something appropriate. Sixty eight point eight percent (68.8%) of them sees it as appropriate, only few (31.2%)

considered it inappropriate. The implication of these perceptions is that, it is difficult to fight child labour in these locations because both parents and their children are in support of the activity.

Table 1.5: Reason why the respondent is working (N=48)

Reason	Frequency	%
Assisting parents	12	25
Poverty/lack of money/to earn money	29	60.4
No response	7	14.6
Total	48	100.0

Source: fieldwork, 2014

Table 1.5 contains the most crucial responses because the study sought to examine whether or not child labour is a reflection of poverty. First raw revealed other fact than poverty which also perpetuates child labour in northern Nigeria and Africa at large. This fact is the willingness of the younger ones to render assistances to their parents as it accounts for 25% of the responses. The poverty as a cause of child labour took 60.4% and this can also be reflected in Guha-Roy's (2001) argument that, in developing countries a large number of children from poor families are victims of the exploitation of child labour. In the socio-economic context of a developing country child labour is often considered as necessary social evil resulting from economic necessity of a poor family.

The remaining (14%) declined to say a word in the discussions. However, research ethics are always at the heart of a good researcher, one thing observed during the data collection is that, depending on the circumstance, some truths are obtained when the investigator shows indifference or no serious concern in the interview, while in some cases the respondents give more cooperation if the researcher assures them confidence. In an interview with a cocoa seller in Dutse of Jigawa state, the child initially refused to talk, because he thinks the researcher is a

law enforcement agent trying to pick him to borstal home. But he later said,

*I used to go to school, but I do not go now... My father had divorced my mother and the second wife he married is maltreating, give me more hard labour than selling cocoa, such as fetching in a large bucket beyond my physical strength... I am flogged for no reason, and that if I do not come to market and sale this cocoa nut, I will suffer from hungry. During the mid of our interview session, two of his friends and school mates came and they testified that, it is true. While the two children are going to school, they come to visit their primary school drop-out friend for leisure, an opportunity which the friend (the cocoa seller) does not enjoy.*

#### Policy implications and Recommendations

Child labour is not an easy issue to resolve; while it seems noble to immediately withdraw investments and cooperation with firms and factories that employ child labour it may do more harms than good (Shah, 2001). To reduce worst child labour is to reduce poverty. However, there were many poverty alleviation programs in the country since 1980s, but poverty remains one of the major social problems in the country due deep-seated corruption, lack of good will by the policy makers and as a result, the



programs end up making the rich getting richer and poor getting poorer.

Agriculture was a viable sector of the informal economy of the country, but it is neglected and this culminated in the high rate of poverty in the country. The contribution of the agriculture was immense from pre-colonial era, through colonial times to the post-colonial, but the discovery of oil in the late 1950s resulted in relying on the oil. In order to reduce the rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria, agriculture must be taken so serious. This step will provide dual purposes: fighting the poverty or child labour and achieving food security in the country.

Special family empowerment schemes are needed to enlighten and make families economically buoyant. There were some programs which were directed towards family empowerment, such as BLPRW (Better Life Program for Rural Women) and later FSP (Family Support Program). These programs are well designed and their objectives are well articulated, lack of continuity syndrome of Nigerian leaders did not allow the programs to thrive. It is therefore important to bring one of them back to life in order to fight poverty-related child in Nigeria.

Gradual phase out is said to be a more preferable solution. Many of these children are from very poor families and work to pay for their family and/or their education. Depriving them of this income has led to some children seeking different, lower paid work, and even prostitution in some cases. Other ways with schemes to help children would likely be needed so that this labour can be phased out.

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, socialization and household maintenance. As a response to these, many NGOs and grassroots organizations have attempted to implement small-scale programs which recognize children as rational individuals who can be empowered to take control of their own lives. NGOs, such as Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) are established to render nonprofit and selfless assistance to young people, orphans through vocational training and counseling (Sani, 2010). 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.

## 6. Conclusion

The paper attempted to explain child labour as a dilemma posed by poverty in developing nations, where Dutse metropolis of Jigawa State, Nigeria was selected as a study area. However, the researchers did not directly asked the working children on whether poverty happens to be the reason for their plights during the interviews, majority of the children admitted that they engage in labour because of either forsome economic benefits or due to some socio-cultural factors. That is, they work to help augment their parents' incomes or their parents cannot sponsor their education or because their parents preferred sending them to traditional schools (*almijirci*) which exposes the children to further exploitation and abuses. In sum, the entire responses are manifestations of poverty and lack of awareness, because most of the Islamic education in the *almajiri* system is not in line with the authentic teaching of the Islam. Therefore child labour is conclusively said to be influenced by poverty and cultural beliefs

in the study area and, of course, other parts of the country.

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