



The Emotional and Social Challenges of Child Labourers in Nigeria

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Abstract. Child labour has several negative effects, some of which include harm to the children's social and emotional development. In the Benin metropolis of Egor and Oredo Local Government Areas in Edo State, Nigeria, eight working children between the ages of seven and fourteen will have their psychosocial effects from the child labour problem examined in this study. The research's theoretical model was informed by the ecological theory. Using a narrative method, this qualitative study aims to provide a deeper understanding of children's experiences based on the impact of workload on their development. Through the use of thematic data analysis, it was discovered that children's involvement in wage earning had a detrimental effect on their social and emotional development because of labour.

Keywords: Child labour, emotional, social, psychosocial, social work

1. Introduction

Child work has significant implications for children's physical, social, and moral development, making it a global issue that needs serious attention. Any work that is fundamentally exploitative, robs children of their youth, potential, dignity, and is harmful to their development is referred to as child labour (International Labour [ILO] & Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Nonetheless, child labour is still a major issue in today's society. A total of 160 million children—63 million girls and 97 million boys—are employed as child labourers worldwide, making up about one in ten of all children, according to the ILO and United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] (2021). Furthermore, Africa has the largest rate of children working as well. Additionally, the ILO and the Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (2024) state that, of children in the 5–14 age range in Nigeria, “a total of 46.5% (23,184,430) are working; approximately one in ten are exclusively working, while almost four in ten are combining work and

school” (p. 5). The way childhood is viewed affects how children are treated and, consequently, whether or not they should engage in labour activities (Omorogiua, 2017; 2020b).

The type of labour that children do and the environments in which they operate make it difficult to quantify the work that children do through their services (Admassie, 2002; Fetuga et al., 2007; Amuda, 2010; ILO, 2016; Omorogiua, 2018; 2020a). The research's narratives look at the many psychosocial effects of child labour. Because of the situations under which children are forced to work, child labour has gained attention both nationally and internationally (Aliyu, 2006). “Children in Nigeria are often found engaged in work activities as hawkers selling their goods, some as beggars, car washers, scavengers, and iron workers,” according to UNICEF (2006, p. 1). According to Owolabi (2012) and Omonona et al. (2010), children have engaged in a variety of employment activities over the years, including industrial, street, and home labour, with the resulting psychosocial impacts. In a similar vein, Mitik and Decaluwé (2009) suggest that children's labour load include all activities completed, such as domestic duties, education, and earning money. The researcher was inspired by these viewpoints to ask children about their experiences with work exposure.

The “Ideal workload of child labourers can only be determined when the hours of work and household chores are included,” according to Ensing (2010, p. 9). Child labourers often lack essential social connection, opportunities for personal growth, emotional support, and safety from various hazards as a result of their lengthy work hours (Okoronkwo & Oprah 2024). As a result, the study took into account the intricacy of the job that the children did as well as the ways in which their many tasks affected them all at once. Child labour has a variety of psychosocial repercussions on children since it affects the kind of work they undertake as well as its duration, intensity, and frequency (Liborio &

Ungar, 2010; Omorogiuwa, 2016; 2018). In essence, their workload has significantly increased in intensity.

Even though it is believed that children who work to support their families are doing so at the expense of their own relaxation, leisure, and social interactions, this is not the case. According to researchers from a variety of backgrounds, the psychological effects of child labour lead to low self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness, dejection, and isolation (Rabiu, 2010; Jones et al. 2012; Asamu, 2015; Omorogiuwa, 2018 Okoronkwo & Oprah 2024). In Nigeria, there has been little discussion of these aspects of child labour and how they affect children's social and emotional growth. The statement "child labour has some harmful effects on children's school attendance, social relations, and leisure time" is made by Grootaert (quoted in Togunde & Carters, 2008, p. 175). Consequently, child labour severely impairs children's rights and welfare by having an adverse effect on their early years and development.

1.1 Aim of the research

This study's primary goal is to investigate the emotional and social problems that working children in Benin City, Nigeria, face.

2. Theoretical Framework

Ecological theory is the theoretical framework that explains the comprehension of the psychological effects of child labour and the suitable solutions. Theorists of ecology would rather see children's activities as interactions between people and their surroundings (Germain & Gitterman, 1996; Ungar, 2002). An ecological perspective on child labour revolves with the relationships that exist within society. This method of social intervention promotes "challenging properties" at all social ecological levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1643). Psychosocial aspects, according to Sossou and Yogtiba (2009), are essential to understanding the phenomena of child labour and its effects.

The present investigation employs a multi-level ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) to facilitate comprehension of child labour and the many approaches taken to address it, namely the micro, meso, and macro levels. The relationship a youngster has with his immediate surroundings and how that interaction helps or hinders the actualization of his potential is known as the micro system level. Moreover, the recurrent interactions between systems that have a direct impact on children and their

surroundings make up the meso system level (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Using this approach to the understanding of child labour in this study, the social and emotional effects are considered meso factors.

3. Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative research methodology, drawing on the experiences, worries, and views of working children regarding the pressures they face at work (Gilgun & Sands, 2012).

3.1 Sample and sampling technique

Eight working children, both male and female, between the ages of seven and fourteen from two local government districts were chosen for this study using purposive sampling in order to participate in a semi-structured interview. The two local government regions' consents to participate in the research, together with the children's willingness to do so, were taken into consideration during the selection process. Two visits were given to each child participant and their parents/guardians to create rapport. This helped to foster trust and protected the researcher's capacity for reflection. The study aims to explore the effects of double work load on children's well-being from their personal perspectives, rather than generalizing findings, which is why the number of participants was

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Since the child participants needed the same information, a single interview guide was created for them. The type of work, the activities the children were involved in, how long the job took, and how many tasks they completed were the main topics of inquiry. Children's opinions were also sought regarding the long-term impacts of employment experiences on their social and emotional development.

The present investigation employed theme analysis methodologies as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to conduct a qualitative analysis of the data. The utilization of thematic data analysis associated with the ecological approach enabled a comprehensive comprehension of children's experiences. The six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for achieving convergence of empirical knowledge consists of the following: (1) familiarizing yourself with your data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) organizing themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. A great deal of thought was given to how children engaged, thought through their experiences, and

expressed opinions about their important jobs and growth. As a result, the information gathered was confirmed.

4. Results and Findings

The effects of children's labour activities on their wellbeing were investigated in this study. The data analysis produced the following conclusions. The child participants' answers in this study make it clear that children's exposure to the workplace causes them emotional anguish, which in turn impacts their personalities. The absence of leisure time or break periods and the financial exploitation by their clients are just two of the social and emotional effects that the children in this study had to deal with. When children are refused breaks at work, the emotional and social effects of employment on them are amplified, as will be covered in more detail below.

4.1 Lack of Breaks and Leisure

Lack of breaks or free time is one of the prevalent characteristics of children's job. The students in this study also mentioned how infrequently they take breaks during work hours or between school and work, even with how hard they work. Without set work hours and rest periods, children's work experience is a sign that their childhood is being taken from them since they don't have as much free time as they should, which is crucial for their development (Kuti, 2006), a Nigerian researcher. It may be deemed unfair, harsh, and exploitative to work for extended periods of time without taking breaks (Omorogiuwa, 2016).

According to the Child's Rights Act, Act 26 (2003, Sec. 28(1) B), children "shall not work in any capacity." The Nigerian Labour Act, 1990, Section 13(3), states that "where a worker is at work for six hours or more a day, his work shall be interrupted by allowing one or more suitably spaced breaks of not less than one hour," even for adults. The youngsters in this study, however, operate under much worse conditions because they are required to work nonstop without any breaks, which violates their rights. When asked how often they take breaks while working, two more children responded as follows:

"I don't take breaks... I only take breaks from work when I'm not as busy, and when I have no customers to sell my iron to, I use that time to talk with my friends who are also child labourers. Otherwise, I work through the day without taking a break".

"My mother did not advise me to take a break; instead, I constantly hawk my things. Occasionally, I will try to locate a spot to relax, but as soon as I remember the

market (my goods), I begin hawking right away in order to sell successfully and even finish them".

The children's stories show how their necessity to make a sufficient living prevents them from taking many breaks to rest in between jobs. Encouraging youngsters to work longer hours per day than what is legally required for adults can have a significant negative influence on their emotional development. Due to hectic work schedules, children who miss meals may get exhausted and hungry. However, some child labourers were seen sitting beneath a tree during the fieldwork for this study, presumably venting to themselves and taking a break to unwind. According to Omorogiuwa (2016), child labour is unregulated, therefore although they use their own judgment to pause to rest, they do not take time off from work.

Children who work nonstop lose out on leisure time and experience negative effects on their psychological growth. For example, two of the children who were interviewed stated that because they work nonstop, they hardly ever get time to relax. One person recounts: "Even when there are no customers around, I still work and occasionally clean the shop." The other child said that she doesn't have a break at work since there isn't enough room, unless her shop is less crowded. Children who work "without stop" are more likely to be mentally and socially exhausted in addition to physically exhausted. According to Admassie (2002), Omorogiuwa (2018) and Omorogiuwa (2024), children's psychosocial development is negatively impacted when they are engaged in activities for long hours because it deprives them of their social wellbeing.

According to several of the interviewees, youngsters work because they frequently need to earn money throughout the course of their working day, not because it gives them less space. One could argue that letting children labour long hours without much or any downtime is the same as enslaving them (Omorogiuwa, 2016). It also suggests that children's social functioning is probably going to suffer when they don't get enough sleep, especially at work. "The denial of rest breaks does not only have physical effects, but an irreversible psychological impact on the development and well-being of children," according to the UNCRC (Act 31(2013, No. 17)). Children's feeling of purpose for work could be enhanced by leisure time, which is denied to child labourers.

The aforementioned accounts provide important insights on the psychological effects of child labour on an individual and interpersonal level, as well as how children's wellbeing is hampered when they are unable

to take breaks from work. Feelings of helplessness, being taken advantage of, dissatisfaction, and loss of identity are made worse by this. Not only do children have to deal with the psychological effects of working long hours without a place to take breaks, but they also have to deal with not getting paid or getting paid too little by clients, which is covered in the next section.

4.2 Exploitation of Working Children by their Customers

A prevalent encounter that numerous children shared was the deception techniques used by their clients. Children who work for a living are susceptible to exploitation since their employers might not be kind and might underpay them or take a long time to pay them (Desai, 2008; Omorogiuwa, 2016). Children's interactions with customers revealed some of the effects of their job on their emotional health; some children talked about how difficult it was for them to deal when they were required to provide services and then had their money withheld because they were vulnerable to abuse. "Some of my customers do not pay me after buying from me," a young youngster explained simply. The goal of children's labour is undermined if they receive no payment after working. Additional examples of nonpayment are provided.

"I get calls from customers saying come and collect money from me later when you are going home, but when it comes time to pay, they never do; all they say is come tomorrow, come tomorrow, it hurts me and makes me cry," the customer said. "Sometimes, when I go out to hawk, customers do not pay me. Some people will pretend as if they want to buy and pay, but they will not."

Since some of my clients buy from me but refuse to pay, I dislike not getting paid. After selling, I occasionally don't get paid, and I frequently spend my time sobbing in my customers' homes because they wouldn't pay me".

The stories told by the children show how sometimes they go home empty-handed because some clients take things but won't pay for them. When the children come to pick up the promised money, some clients offer to pay the children, but the money is taken away. When asked what emotions they experienced in such situations, the children said they felt sad and furious. One young person says, "I was always angry." The children also said they weren't happy in those circumstances and occasionally started crying. Customers' behavior may be characterized as insulting and humiliating since it exposed children to more abuse and rejection. As a result, children's labour in these circumstances not only gets in the way of their

ability to earn money, but it also has an emotional impact on them since they feel sad.

As a result, one of the children remarks, "I will be happy when my customers buy from me and pay me." This demonstrates that children benefit from the money they earn by working, as well as the compensation they receive for their labour. Therefore, it is deemed exploitation when minors encounter non-payment. Desai (2008) and Ekpenyong and Sibiri (2011) both attest that when minors participate in child labour, they are occasionally the target of extortion since some clients refuse to pay for the services they receive. When clients don't pay for the work they do, youngsters feel less accomplished and get depressed.

Underpayment is a component of the adults' exploitation technique that the youngsters work for, aggravating the working conditions. They are occasionally underpaid against their will rather than being compensated for the services they performed. Two of the children who were interviewed talked about how they were underpaid by some customers since they would frequently receive a meal or a modest stipend instead of the agreed-upon sum after working. Children haggle with clients to reach a certain price, but after their services are provided, the clients refuse to pay the entire amount. The following children's narratives serve as examples of this:

"Most of the time, I don't go home with a lot of money because some of the clients I work with won't give me the money we agreed upon." Sometimes, when it is time for them to pay, I get given modest amounts of money after moving their load to where they want it. I frequently carry their trash since I deal with some stingy consumers. I usually take whatever money they want to pay because they either want to beat me up or refuse to give me any money at all".

"I frequently wash dishes for patrons at restaurants and expect to be paid accordingly, but occasionally they choose to give me little payment, which irritates me sometimes. Some will try to offer me food in place when I insist that my money must be paid. Usually, I refuse because it was not what we agreed upon, but occasionally I give in if they are persistent because I am powerless to stop them".

These reports highlight how youngsters who labour in the public eye are susceptible to exploitation. Even when preliminary agreements are negotiated before work begins, once the job is over, the customers unilaterally change the arrangement and pay however they see fit—or, as in one of the aforementioned situations, offer food in lieu of money. In the second instance, the child's ultimate payment was far less than

the sum that was first agreed upon. These situations show that children frequently have no choice but to submit to the dominance of their parents in order to prevent conflict or because they have little authority and no recourse to the legal system because it is against the law for children to work as young. Situations like this have a significant effect on the psychosocial well being of children.

Additionally, they have an emotional effect on the children, making them feel useless and helpless. Such circumstances are unfair and discriminatory as an employee is entitled to the pay that was agreed upon. They did, however, reply positively when asked if they would continue to work for clients who underpaid them, pointing out that not every day is the same and that there have been instances when they have received the agreed-upon payment. This demonstrates how, because of their desperate financial circumstances, children persisted in interacting with the same clients in spite of their dishonesty and deceit. According to Leka and Jain (2011) and Yasin et al. (2011), certain children did exhibit acts of resistance while staying inside the boundaries of the exploitative and oppressive behaviors that their clients had set.

The stories told by these children provide as more evidence that certain children who work as minors are frequently exploited and denied money by adults. These children are defenseless and helpless to stop the scenarios from happening, so they find comfort in mimicking or in the idea that God would punish the customers who refuse to comply. According to Omorogiuwa (2023), the fact that child labour is prohibited makes children more susceptible, and as a result, when children are exploited, neither the parents nor the children can seek justice. These clients most likely take advantage of this as well as being completely aware of it. Children who work should be considered victims with the right to fair compensation for their efforts, even though it may be counterproductive to encourage the legalization of child labour in any case. This story encapsulates the challenging working conditions that children face, which are made worse by consumer abuse. Consumers who treat children with disrespect and dishonesty lose their sense of self, which affects their ability to stand up for their rights out of concern that other customers won't buy from them.

According to studies conducted throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, children are susceptible to exploitation, hazards and other vulnerabilities (Rabiu, 2010; Jones et al. 2012; Okoronkwo & Oprah 2024; Omorogiuwa, 2023; 2024). This is sometimes defined as "under-payment or non-payments in intimidating

environments" (Admassie, 2002; Omorogiuwa, 2016). Therefore, children and their families who are living in impoverished conditions experience distress as a result of this extortion of revenue, which is a sign of helplessness. Children's ongoing involvement in work activities resulted in sentiments of anguish, helplessness, and mistreatment since their interactions with consumers at work do not always align with their psychosocial well-being.

In conclusion, children's firsthand accounts of child labour demonstrate how these events undermine their early development and have a mesolevel impact on their social and emotional development. We can conclude that these results hampered the well-being of youngsters. Under such conditions, employment obstructs children's rights to protection and optimal development.

5. Conclusion

The two themes that surfaced from the data and had an impact on children's development are highlighted in this study. The children's descriptions of their working environments make it abundantly evident how dangerous those settings are for their mental and social development. Through payment delays or nonpayment following service delivery, customers intimidated and manipulated youngsters, causing them to develop low self-esteem and unhappiness. The absence of recreational possibilities or work breaks was indicative of social hardship.

In light of the complexity, the steps taken to address the issue of child labour would offer some means of support to the children and their families. Therefore, interventions focused on how to best use social work techniques to address the challenges faced by children and their families will support the society's response to the problem of child labour.

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