

AN INSIGHT INTO THEIR WORLD: THE PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY GATE KEEPERS ON CHILD LABOUR IN IBADAN NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

Child labour (CL) a major concern worldwide is seen in a different perspective and may relate to socialization and child training in African communities. This study aimed at exploring the socio-cultural perception that could influence its perpetration. The methodology consisted of 10 in-depth interviews spread over communities in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Nigeria among community leaders, landlords and religious leaders. CL was reported to be common and age group most affected was the 6 to 14year age group. Interviewee perceived it as a training period to prepare the child for the future and the girl child is the most affected. Poverty was identified as a key factor for CL. Reported benefits included additional income for the family and children becoming more useful. Consequences of CL included rape, prostitution and other anti-social vices. The eradication of CL therefore demands a shift towards strong advocacy and community mobilization against its practice.

Introduction

Child labour is a major problem in the world today, occurring in both developing and developed countries, Nigeria inclusive (Scanlon, Prior, Lamarao, Lynch and Scanlon, 2002; Zierold, Garman and Anderson, 2004 Basu and Hoang, 1998). The figures indicate that over the years the number of child labourers has been on the increase. These children are withdrawn from schools, and they then participate in extensive child labour such as street trading and the like (Child Welfare League of Nigeria, 1996).

The use of child labour in developing countries is a fundamental social problem with grave consequences for economic development. Child labour has been defined as the participation of children under the age of 15 years in the labour force, in order to earn a living or support household income (Andvig, Canagarajah and Kielland, 2001). Many researchers have viewed child labour as an index of poverty, neediness, subsistence living and general deprivation, and have suggested an outright abolition of this practice (Patrinis and Psacharopoulos, 1997).

This study therefore sought to explore the perception of community gate keepers on child labour in communities in which a representation of the different socioeconomic classes of people can be found.

Materials and Methods

The study was a descriptive qualitative study that utilized in-depth interviews. It aimed at exploring the perception of community gate keepers on child labour in Ibadan North Local Government Area (LGA), Oyo State, Nigeria. Ibadan North LGA was selected by simple random sampling from the five urban LGAs in Ibadan metropolis. The study targets are community leaders, landlords and religious leaders. Data was collected using pretested qualitative in-depth interview guide in Yoruba language. Issues in the guide included types of child labour, gender most affected, reasons for child labour and attitude of the community

to child labour, challenges, merits and benefits of child labour and how child labour can be reduced. The interviews took place at the interviewee's homes at times convenient for them after advance booking. A brief explanation of the aim of the study and confidentiality related issues kicked off the interview. At the end of the interview, debriefing was carried out and some quotations were read back to the interviewee especially on some important points. Each interview lasted about 50 minutes. During the interview, data was recorded by taking hand written notes and tape recorder.

Data analysis

After the interviews, the written and recorded materials were transcribed to English. The key ideas and emerging themes were identified concepts that were used to organize the presentation of the findings presented.

Results

Demographic characteristics

Ten community gate keepers comprising 5 males and 5 females participated in the in-depth interviews. The median age was 50 years, ranging from 45 to 65 years. Interviewees were made up of religious leaders, heads of households, and leaders of community based organisations.

Perception of Child Labour

All the interviewees opined that a child is a person between the ages of 1 day to 18 years, with child labour occurring mainly between 6 and 14 years of age. Most of the interviewees agreed that there is child labour going on in their communities.

When asked about their opinion of what constitutes child labour, a male interviewee said that it meant using a child for work that is beyond his/her age in order to bring income to the family. Most of the females interviewed were of the opinion that child labour is caused by the inability of parents to train or take care of their children, hence they send these children to work for money. One female interviewee held the view that *“Child labour is seen as the way of teaching children to work in case of the future so that they can stand on their own and not be dependant but live independently. If there is no child labour, children will find things difficult in the future especially the females that are going to marry so that they don't wait for their husbands to do everything for them, which should not be”*. Also, child labour was seen by a male participant as *‘aiding in the boosting of the experiences of a child to face future challenges and not just engaging children in home chores but asking them to do things’*.

Child labour was categorized into two by one male interviewee: a) *Local – under-age children hawking or used as house helps*; b) *International – child trafficking- children who are used as prostitutes*. Various views were given by other interviewees, these included: putting children under a master to be trained up, carrying heavy loads, pulling wheel barrows along the road, bus conducting, welding, sweeping of floors, fetching water, running errands and food canteen assistants.

Seven of the interviewees held the view that the female child is the most affected by child labour. This is because parents believe that girls should be the ones helping out in both the house and at the market place. This is highlighted in these words *‘female children are expected to be good at taking care of domestic chores and there is the general belief that she can handle it properly’*. It was also said that *‘child labour is used to train female children before they get married so that they may not be a liability to their husbands’* and that *“some parents are not willing to cater and train the female children because they cannot carry on the family name and all money spent on their education will be wasted since they will eventually get married”*. However two of the interviewees held a contrary opinion that *‘it was both male and female because of the poverty level in the country that these children will help to transform their communities economically by bringing income to their families, male children will wash cars and open gates while the female children will take care of children, wash clothes, clean rooms etc*. A male interviewee felt that *“males were most affected. Because of the situation in the country parents could not provide three square*

meals for their families so they send the boys out and also many of the boys go out themselves to look for work”.

All the interviewees felt that the major reason for child labour is poverty as the parents do not have enough money to provide for the needs of their families. Hence parents are responsible for child labour occurring. Some interviewee felt that *“parents don’t cut their coats according to their cloth. They have more children than they can cater for and the older children will have to go into street hawking or find some menial jobs.”* *‘Others take their children to relatives homes where they work as house helps’.* Another interviewee felt that orphans have nobody to care for them and are exposed to child labour especially the females who are involved in prostitution. An interviewee said that *“when parents discover that a particular person is prospering in a particular vocation they encourage their children to do such a job”*. Another interviewee said that environmental and societal influences encourage child labour practice while another felt that government was responsible as well as the situation in the country.

Most communities do not see anything wrong with child labour as they (the communities) cannot assist the parents or guardians in the provision of food and basic needs of their children. According to one respondent it is *‘our culture, when the children are helping out in the farm or business we believe they are showing signs of being responsible. The community will not help you train your children so you fend for them any way you know how to’.* Also in most communities, many residents are not too concerned about what their children are doing. They also feel that child labour ensures that their children are engaged in one kind work or the other and this better prepares the child for the future. A male interviewee said that *‘they are nonchalant about it. People mind their business and do not care whether the child is used for labour or not.* Two interviewees said that their landlords’ association and the Muslim elders in their communities were trying to intimate the parents/guardians in their communities about the ills of child labour.

Some of the consequences mentioned by the interviewees that result from child labour include: female children getting raped, pregnant and going into prostitution especially during street trading popularly known as “hawking”; accidents which occur as street children are hit by cars. Some children get missing and some end up being used for evil rituals. Some also become thugs and armed robbers especially the boys. The major benefit of child labour is the money it brings into the family and makes the children more useful to themselves, their parents and the nation at large by bringing economic growth.

Discussion and Conclusion

Even though the interviewees were aware of child labour and could list the types and instances in which it could occur, the practice of child labour was still common in the study area. Poverty was identified as the main cause of child labour and this is consistent with the findings of Osiruemu (2007) in Benin City, Nigeria, which documented that urban poverty compels parents to send children of school age to work to boost family income.

Virtually all interviewees’ agreed that child labour is being practiced in their communities and it occurs among children between the ages of 6 and 14years. The finding that it affects the girl child more corroborates the studies done in Zimbabwe and Kenya that female children spend more hours on labour than male children (Andvig et al, 2001).

The perception that children were born to assist their parents documented by this study was in line with findings from studies in developing countries which document that there is the future expectation that children will provide money for their parents and that children who survive their youth will be able to support their parents in old age. Thus parents look at their children as a form of insurance and having more children is an asset (Friedlander, Okun and Segal, 1999; Bastug, Hortacsu and Muhammetberdiev, 2001).

The findings in this study provide a justification for intensifying programmes for parents and guardians in the fight against child labour. Parents need to be further enlightened on the rights of children, the ills of child

labour and its effects on the child's health, physical development, intellectual capacity, social skills, psychological state, future opportunities and general well being. In addition, the need for the economic empowerment of parents cannot to be over emphasized. Parents should be encouraged to plan for their families and only have children they can adequately cater for.

Based on these findings there is need for strong advocacy, enlightenment and community mobilization aimed at reducing the prevalence of child labour. These leaders should be involved in developing a locally appropriate child labour eradication programme.

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