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Children Exploitation in the Labour Process: Empirical Exposition from Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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Introduction

Engaging children in economic activities is a contextual issue. In a typical African setting, for instance, children are normally socialized into work. In this context, it is commonly perceived that through such a process, work culture and tradition are sustained (Odetola and Ademola 1985:57–68; Torimiro and Lawal 1998). This African context of work is being globally contested in recent times, as the children are now engaged in many questionable labour activities, perhaps, as a consequence of the poverty situation engulfing many African families (Grootaert and Patrinos 1999; Kilbride et al. 2000:60). Children are engaged in economic activities for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to escape from its trap. For instance, studies have shown that children are often prompted to work by their parents because of the poor household economic situation (Torimiro and Lawal 2001:70–4, 2002). Schooling problems may also contribute to this phenomenon, owing to the inaccessibility to schools or lack of quality education, which may spur parents to engage their children in more ‘profitable’ pursuits. Traditional factors such as rigid cultural and social roles in certain communities may further limit educational attainment and increase child labour (Torimiro et al. 2003:185–92).

Further, working children have become objects of extreme exploitation in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay. Their work conditions are especially severe, often not providing the stimulation for proper physical and mental development. Many of these children endure a life of pure deprivation. The Ghanaian experience described by Verlet (2002:78–9) led him to the critical use of the dialectics of ‘good-will’ and ‘willingness’ in describing the working conditions of

the working child vis-à-vis the position of the master, which usually becomes an exploitative relationship. He noted thus:

The master's good-will gives him the power to do what he will. His desires, his needs and moods, govern the wages, set the working hours, assign the tasks and influence the quality of the relationship. Willingness means the availability, the obedience expected of a child. Vulnerable children seeking protection and support see themselves bound over to remain meek, ever-present, ever-willing. Their labour power is malleable, flexible.

Verlet's view is germane, most especially in any poverty-stricken environment where the owners of very limited resources are usually in control of the wills of the less privileged, not to talk of the most vulnerable, the children. It should be noted, however, that in a situation where the 'good-will' is being expressed by the child's parent(s) as the 'master', the level of vulnerability is expected to be lower and expression of the child's 'willingness' is invariably expected to be mild. However, the level of exploitative relationship and its perception in different situations are expected to vary, given the socio-cultural and economic peculiarities of different societies. For instance, children may have to be engaged in their parents' economic activities in some circumstances with little or no exploitation in order to generate money for sponsoring their education (Ajayi and Torimiro 2004). Osita (2004) also reported a common practice in Eastern Nigeria, where the male children are apprenticed to traders from an early age, in preference to going to school. According to him:

the child usually works for a 'master', learning the details of the business over a number of years. When the young man is ready for 'freedom', the 'master' is obliged to 'settle' him by providing capital for him to set up his own business.

Globalization and Exploitation of Children in the Labour Process in Africa

For better understanding of child exploitation within the African context vis-à-vis globalization, it is imperative to take a cursory look at the extent to which the tides of globalization have contributed to the plight of the children in Africa, especially with regard to child labour. Globalization in this context is perceived as an ideological process based on the perceived persistent disparity and inequality between the North and South, which has dichotomized the state of the global economy into industrialized or agrarian, developed or developing, and rich or poor. The understanding of globalization, according to Aina (2004:3–6), is taken from a perspective that sees the world from the so-called Eurocentric or Economic North position, portraying the world from the perspectives of the dominant political and economic interest prevalent in Europe, Japan and North America. While the notion to bridge the disparity between these worlds may be applauded, the possibilities of perpetuating the Northern agenda of continual exploitation of the perceived limitations inherent in its Southern counterpart should not be undermined as 'it has provided developed countries with powerful leverage upon which to pursue their interests to the detriment of the developing world' (Agbu 2004). The gap that is expected to be bridged through its

market pulls is being widened, almost on a daily basis. This situation is apparent with the consequences of the various reforms it has come to replace (Ghai 1992 Amin 1992, 1998). Aina (2004) noted that in Africa, globalisation has not only generated so much anxiety, insecurity and resistance; it has generated an almost unanimous perception of polarisation, pain and greater inequality along with a feeling of almost insurmountable threat to ordinary people's livelihoods and cultures.

One of such reforms is the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which was hastily sold to many African countries. Unfortunately, several studies (Mkandawire and Olukoshi 1995; Amin 1998; Jega 2003) have not only established the failure of the reform, but also the capitalists' agenda embedded in the globalized marketing strategy. The soaring poverty level in most African countries could not be dissociated from the advent of SAP!

The major contestation is, therefore, the negative features that the 'agenda' has brought to the African continent. These include cultural breakdown, conflicts and war, greed, corruption, hunger and so on. In fact, these situations, as rightly noted by UNRISD (2003), have immensely contributed to the 'disruption of livelihood systems and institutional arrangements that, historically, have provided some degree of social protection'. This is basically a matter of lack of adequate consultation or provision for the participation of the supposed beneficiaries and stakeholders, especially the marginalized and excluded sectors such as the rural poor, peasants, poor women, children, the youth and the elderly (Aina 2004). In these situations, children are the most vulnerable. These children turn out to become objects of exploitation for different kinds of purposes, under different situations, in most parts of the African continent. The interrelationship between globalization and child exploitation is schematically represented in Fig. 5.1. By way of digressing, however, it might be suggestive to raise two fundamental questions on whether the ideology is imposed on the African nations or whether it is optional, answers to which this chapter has no mandate to provide. It might, however, become an agenda for a very serious debate.

It has severally been reported (ILO 2002; Agbu 2004) that children under different circumstances have been used as objects of trafficking, sexual violence, street begging and forced labour, to mention a few. In literature, however, many authors (e.g. Onyango and Kayango Male 1982; Ebigbo 1990:74–6; Oloko 1997:48–51; UNICEF 1997:1–15; Nkuly 2000:36–9) have further characterized the various working conditions under which child exploitative labour could be perceived, as follows: lack of freedom of movement; emphasis on the child's inferior status; overwork at tedious, exhausting jobs; emphasis on complete obedience to the employer; control of the child, managed through beatings and insults; lack of emotional warmth; expectation that the child will behave totally like an adult; expression of developmental needs by the child seen as disobedience by employers; strong belief by employers that the child's situation is good when compared to home conditions; underpayment; and an abbreviated period of childhood, with a 'push' into adulthood; full-time work at too early an age; excessive hours spent working; work that exerts undue physical, social and psychological stress; work and life on the street in bad

In recent years, child exploitation in different forms has been facilitated by globalization and modern communication and information technologies, which have made it become increasingly transnational in scope. Hence, several international events have called for immediate action to end this crime, including the Stockholm Congress against commercial sexual exploitation of children in 1996, the Amsterdam and Oslo Conferences on child labour in 1997 and the International Labour Conference Convention against the worst forms of child labour in 1998.

The ILO Convention No. 182 defines the worst forms of child labour as slavery, debt bondage, prostitution, pornography, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, use of children in drug trafficking and other illicit activities, and all other work harmful or hazardous to the health, safety or morals of girls and boys under 18 years of age (ILO 1998).

This convention has been much popularized as the major United Nations response to end the various forms of child exploitation. Other efforts from different quarters (individuals, groups, international agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations, among others) include legislation to check perpetrators and beneficiaries, sensitization for enlightenment, rehabilitation of children that have become victims, further research into the phenomenon and documentation by reports based on local and regional experiences, policy formulation and implementation to end the crime, and programmes/projects development and implementation.

Research Problem and Questions

The post-colonial era in Nigeria from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s enjoyed a rural-based economy as the major national income was basically from cash crops. This was a period when farmers took pride in marrying many wives, having many children and regarding large family size as a measure of their economic wealth, which invariably translated into high agricultural production. Their children were fully socialized into farming activities, especially in cash crop plantations. Basically, they were producing for export in consonance with the grand design of the colonial masters primarily to feed foreign industries. Though this era apparently witnessed child labour, the phenomenon was not given prominent attention at the global level, perhaps owing to the economic benefits the 'grand designers' derived therefrom. Moreover, during this period, rural people were more comfortable and could perform their basic social and economic responsibilities. However, the mid-1970s witnessed a dramatic change in the nation's economic situation, with the discovery of petroleum, mismanagement of public funds, poor leadership and weak public institutions, which significantly resulted in the abandonment of the rural sector and a decline in agricultural development. This situation made the rural areas more susceptible to the scourge of national economic recession, which culminated in high poverty levels. The situation further led to the vulnerability of children. As a way of devising coping mechanisms for survival, rural people have had to harness their children's potential by engaging them in on-farm and off-farm economic activities. Many of these children were employed in the informal urban economy or engaged as domestic

servants, shopkeepers, street hawkers, building site labourers, bus conductors, industry and factory workers, to mention a few (Osemwegie 1998:52).

In recent times, there has been a dramatic increase in these activities, even in their worst forms. Also, a significant rise in child labour and child trafficking has been observed in many parts of the country. Although many invaluable efforts and interventions have been initiated through wives of political officeholders to address the issues faced by the exploited children in the various Nigerian states, however there is still the need for an empirically based expository study for proper understanding of the exploitation of children in the labour process. To be more specific, little or no research has been conducted for a proper understanding of this phenomenon in Ile-Ife in south-western Nigeria. Against this background, therefore, attempts were made to provide answers to the following research questions: What are the socio-economic conditions of these children who are engaged in economic activities? In what ways are these children engaged in labour activities that make them exploited? What are the ways of life of these children on their labour sites? What are the factors influencing their working hours and the types of work they do? How do these children perceive the jobs they are doing? And what future prospects do they perceive in what they are presently doing?

Methodology

The study was carried out in Ile-Ife, in south-western Nigeria. It lies in the tropical rain forest belt, and has an estimated population of about 282,000 people. Ile-Ife has many satellite villages that are linked by a poor road network. For the most part, the villages have poorly developed infrastructure, often without access to either electricity or pipe-borne water.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. A structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from seventy (70) children (between 10 and 17 years of age), purposively interviewed on their labour sites when schools were in session. Also, on-the-spot assessment and systematic observation, where the children's daily activities were periodically observed in their labour and orderly recorded (Reynolds 1991:76), were made to generate the qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), while the qualitative data were used to buttress the discussion. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, bar and pie charts were used to describe the data, while the Chi-square (X^2) and Pearson's correlation (r) were used to establish the tested hypotheses, and Contingency coefficient and Coefficient of determination were respectively used to determine the strength of associations and relationships.

Family Milieu and Socio-economic Condition of the Children Engaged in Labour

It is generally observed that many Nigerian parents in poverty have acceded to the reality of their situation by engaging their children in some economic activity in order to enable them to cope with many of their parental and household responsibilities.

For instance, in recent years, Nigeria was categorized among the eight countries in the world that are going through 'severe' poverty (where more than one-half of the population subsist on less than US\$1 per day); and also among the fourteen countries that are undergoing 'severe-to-moderate' poverty (more than three-quarters of the Nigerian population has been found to be impoverished, using the US\$2 a day poverty line) (ILO 2001). This condition generally has a very serious implication for household economic survival. In the context of Ile-Ife, where this study was conducted, it is interesting to note that a majority (82.86 per cent) of the children engaged in various economic activities with the consent of their parents. These children came from polygamous homes with household size of more than ten members. Their parents were mostly illiterates, engaged in various trades and informal businesses. Over 97 per cent of the children claimed they resorted to what they were doing because of the poverty situation their parents were going through and for lack of financial support to earn a living. This is in consonance with the findings of Osemweige (1998) on a study conducted on street children in Lagos.

Demographically, the children were categorized according to their gender, schooling status, age and religion in order to understand the extent to which these variables had influenced their engagement in economic activities. Male children (68.57 per cent) were found to be more engaged in the informal labour sector than their female counterparts (31.43 per cent), though most of the children (97.14 per cent) interviewed did not believe that the type of job they were doing had anything to do with their gender. About 20 per cent of the children were not enrolled in school; they were absolutely illiterates and fully engaged in various economic activities. Others had either dropped out of school at a particular level of their education or claimed to have combined their economic activities with schooling. It was, however, observed that most of the children had either abandoned their education totally or dropped out of school, because they had perpetually been at work for an average of over five years without attending school.

The age groups were categorized into two, that is, those below 15 years (45.71 per cent) and those between 15 and 17 years old (54.29 per cent). This categorization was purposefully devised (see later discussion). The two age groups are significant as they relate to the forms of work they are expected to be engaged in – these include light work, regular work, hazardous work and unconditional worst forms. In terms of religion, children (54.29 per cent) from a Muslim background were found to be more engaged in economic activities than those (45.71 per cent) of a Christian background. This further confirmed the reports of a high tendency for child labour in Islamic households compared with Christian households. In Lagos, for instance, Osemweige (1998) reported that 59.3 per cent of street children were Muslims. A total of 62.86 per cent of the children engaged in economic activities were Yoruba, born in Ile-Ife, while others (37.16 per cent) were non-Yoruba and born outside Ile-Ife. Although some of these children had their parents living in Ile-Ife, an element of trafficking was suspected, as few whose parents were living outside the study

area revealed that they were brought to their labour sites by their employers. A majority (71.43 per cent) of those children who were living with their parents, though, claimed to depend on them for their livelihood, that is, they depended on their parents for their day-to-day expenses in terms of food, clothing, accommodation and other socio-economic activities. This might not be wholly correct as further enquiry revealed that most of these parents absolutely depended on the proceeds from their children's labour for their daily survival.

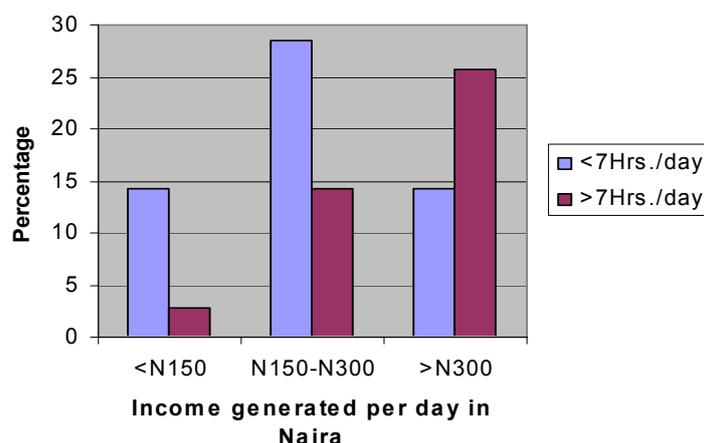
Some Empirical Evidence of Child Exploitation in the Labour Process

This is determined in line with the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) definition of what constitutes child labour in relation to the child's age vis-à-vis the hours spent on the labour per week and the types of labour engaged in. For the purpose of global estimates, ILO (2002) categorized the forms of work into four, under three different age groups, viz.: 5–7 years, 12–14 years and 15–17 years, in order to justify perpetration of child labour using working hours, working environment and the nature of work.

This study, however, adopted the ILO categorization with modification by categorizing the age group into less than 15 and 15–17 years for the purpose of empirical calculations. ILO described *non-hazardous work* for children as any work in non-hazardous industries/ occupations for less than 43 hours per week. Such work, if less than 14 hours per week, is tagged *light work* for the age group between 12 and 17 years. It is referred to as *regular work* for the age group 15–17 years, but considered as child labour for those less than 15 years of age. *Worst forms of child labour* are simply classified as either *hazardous work* (in specified hazardous industries/occupations plus more than 43 hours per week in other industries/ occupations) or *Unconditional worst forms* (trafficked children; children in forced and bonded labour, armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities). The general findings are shown in Fig. 5.2.

The study, therefore, revealed that the children were generally engaged in the worst forms of child labour of the hazardous category. About 57.14 per cent of the children usually work for less than 43 hours per week, while 42.86 per cent put more than 43 hours into their respective labour per week. The hours spent on the job vary according to the amount earned and the types of work engaged in. For those who worked for less than 7 hours per day, 14.29 per cent made a gross income of less than N150 [at a time when N140 = \$US1] 28.57 per cent made between N150 and N300, and 14.29 per cent more than N300. Among those who worked for more than 7 hours per day, 25.71 per cent made a gross income of more than N300 (see Figs 5.3 and 5.4). It could be inferred from the findings that these children were working basically for their parents in order to put the household above the poverty line. As Varlet (2000) rightly put it, 'children are placed in the position of household protectors, breadwinners'.

Figure 5.2: Distribution of Children by Working Hours and Income Generated per Day



The types of work in which they were engaged included: carrying of planks in sawmills (25.71 per cent), hawking and selling of different kinds of goods in the streets (54.29 per cent), and bus conducting in motor-garages (20.00 per cent). While 28.57 per cent of the children claimed that they did not have any problem with the jobs they were doing, these jobs were considered to be very hazardous by a majority (71.43 per cent) of the children. Hazardous work by children means any activity or occupation, which, by its nature or type has, or leads to, adverse effects on a child's safety, health (physical or mental), and moral development. Hazards could also derive from excessive workload, physical conditions of work, and/or work intensity in terms of the duration or hours of work even where the activity or occupation is known to be non-hazardous or 'safe' (ILO 2002).

Those who worked in the sawmills claimed that they occasionally sustained injuries while carrying the planks. It was, however, observed that the children might be exposed to respiratory diseases resulting from the draughts oozing from the sawdust dunghill and the dust from the milling machines, which they usually inhale while carrying the planks. Those who engaged in selling/hawking and bus conducting complained of occasional loss of money (for which their 'masters' would mercilessly beat them), failure of customers to pay, road accidents, mockery and insults from their customers, among others.

Figure 5.3: Distribution of Children by Types of Work and Income Generated per Day

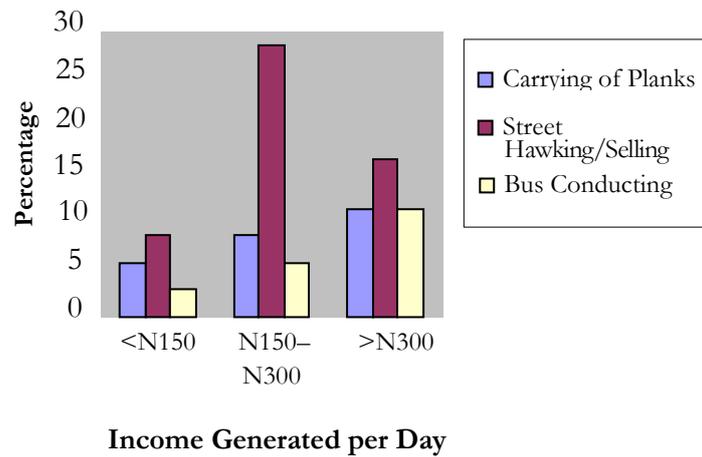
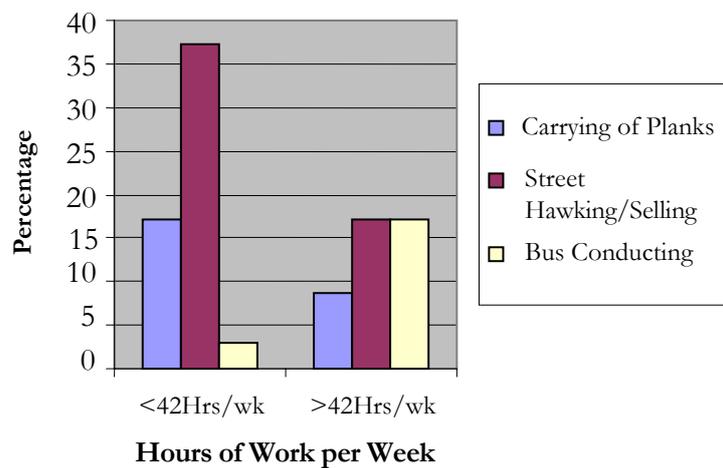


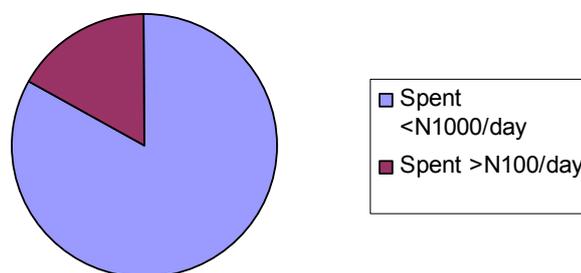
Figure 5.4: Distribution of Children by Types of Work and Hours of Work per Week



Empirically, gender, ownership of job and types of job were found to have significant association with the hours the children spent on their job per day. The two latter variables were found to exert a very strong strength of association of over 95 per cent (see Table 5.1). Also, the amount of money spent by child per day was found to significantly correlate ($r = 0.34$) with the hours they spent on their job per day at 0.01 level, though with a very weak strength (11.56 per cent) of relationship (see Fig. 5.5).

The child's gender is expected to be a very good factor in determining the hours he or she spends on a particular job (see Table 5.2). It was, however, observed that male children were more engaged in carrying planks at the sawmills and in bus conducting business. Culturally, some jobs have been observed to be exclusively reserved for a particular gender. For instance, tasks that are energetic are expected to be assigned to the male gender, while those that require patience and less energy exertion are ethically meant for the girls. This might be contextual, as it has to do with the prevailing culture and traditions of the studied area. However, a study conducted in Brazil found no gender differences in the number of hours worked (Araujo 1998).

Figure 5.5: Distribution of Children by the Amount Spent for Themselves per Day



This study further revealed that most of the parents were privy to the children's engagement in labour activities and favourably supported the time they spent on the job per day. Though it was expected that many of the children (45.86 per cent, and most especially among those that were engaged in street hawking and selling) who claimed that they were working for their mothers should fare better on the job than their peers who were not working for their parents, but ironically, the contrary was observed. However, while realizing the fact that the major catalyst for the period of work by the children could not be dissociated from the amount of income they have the potential of earning, which supposedly must have been fixed by the owner of the job for each day, it could still not be discountenanced that the level of biological relationship between the job owner and the employed child would, to a

large extent, influence the working hours considered for such a child per day, all things being equal. This is in line with the reasoning of Verlet (2000) when he noted that since the working children are partially responsible for household survival, their bonds with their mothers are deeper. In this circumstance, one expects the child to enjoy good welfare conditions in terms of feeding, and so on.

Table 5.1: Chi-square Analysis showing the Variables influencing the Working Hours per Day

Variables	X^2_c	X^2_t	D.F.	C
Gender	5.83*	3.84	1	0.57
Ownership of job	28.40*	25.00	15	0.96
Types of job	57.40*	54.57	39	0.99
Level of schooling	30.18	65.17	48	0.96

P values at 0.05 level of significance; C = Contingency co-efficient; * = significance

Note: X^2_c = Chi-square calculated; X^2_t = Chi-square tabulated; D.F. = Degree of freedom

Source: Calculated from the field survey, 2004.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 further revealed that schooling is not a significant factor that could contribute to the hours a child spent on the job and the types of job he or she could do. Incidentally, many of the children, though, indicated that they were in one level of schooling or the other, but further enquiry showed that many of them had already dropped out of school. It could, however, be deduced that waning interest in school could make the children more vulnerable to long hours of labour by the employers.

Table 5.2: Chi-square Analysis showing the Variables influencing the Types of Job

Variables	X^2_c	X^2_t	D.F.	C
Gender	27.22*	27.69	13	0.96
Age	16.80	27.69	13	0.90
Level of schooling	46.14	62.43	39	0.98

P values at 0.05 level of significance; C = Contingency co-efficient; * = significance

Note: X^2_c = Chi-square calculated; X^2_t = Chi-square tabulated; D.F. = Degree of freedom

Source: Calculated from the field survey, 2004.

Some authors (Oloko 1997; ILO 2001) have equally reported that some children combine economic activities with schooling. Oloko explained that a child who does some odd jobs (which do not disturb his schooling or other aspects of his welfare) for neighbours after school to earn needed pocket money is not engaged in child labour. However, it is expected that the interest of the children will be highly sustained in their studies even if proceeds from such economic ventures are to be expended on their education.

The correlation analysis shows that age was found to be positively and significantly correlated ($r = 0.24$) with the amount spent by child per day at the 0.01 level. It is expected that older children should spend more than the younger children, but this study statistically showed that age as a factor has a very weak influence on the amount to be expended on the child per day, with the co-efficient of determination analysis showing that age accounted for only a 5 per cent contribution to the amount of money spent on the job per child per day. In reality however, it was observed that what was expended on a child per day was being dictated by the amount he/she made per day vis-à-vis the family budget, although these could not be statistically explained as the study did not establish any significant relationship between the amount made and the amount spent by the child per day. It was also revealed in Table 5.2 that age has no influence on the types of job the children do.

Child Culture at the Labour Sites

Child culture in this context is the way of life of the children at their labour sites. This finding was based on the systematic observation of some of the children in their various labour sites, in terms of the way they relate to their peers alongside their behaviour on the job, their break time and so on. Much of the report was based on their activities when they were in clusters.

It was generally observed that most of these children were not well fed. They often live on a very small quantity of nutritionally poor snacks (such as puff-puff, biscuits, bread, roasted yam etc.) as lunch, which they usually purchased from their co-hawkers. Many of them would not have their breakfast until about ten o'clock in the morning when they might have made appreciable sales of their goods. On the average, it was revealed that the children spent for themselves about N88 out of the income they made in a day (see Fig. 5.5). This was often spent on their breakfast and lunch, usually at the labour sites. It was also observed that some of the children, instead of spending all their money on food, secretly engaged in daily money contribution. However, how the money raised through this contribution is spent could not be ascertained.

It is also interesting to note that many of the children were very happy with what they were doing despite the high level of impoverishment apparently observed from their physical appearance. This may perhaps be related to a high level of liberty they were enjoying on the labour sites. Essentially, the street hawker or bus conductor child was observed to have derived a lot of pleasure in the company of his/her co-hawkers in the course of their daily businesses. The girls among the hawkers and the bus conductors were observed to be very lax in morals and had a high tendency to engage in early sexual activities. This was discernible from their frivolous and unethical statements and *laissez-faire* attitude to life.

Furthermore, it was generally observed that every job has its peak period during which the children were expected to be actively engaged for the purpose of making high income during the day. In the case of those who were hawking and selling goods, many times, during periods of very low patronage, they would be found

clustering around shady places and engaged in talking with their mates. These were the places where they were usually socialized into street culture and made street friends. Many of them spent this period in relaxing, playing with their peers, feeding on snacks and quenching their thirst. In fact, this was a period when these children mostly expressed their high level of autonomy!

They often forgot that they were in employment and behaved mostly like adults. This period lasted for about three hours until later in the day when workers and students/pupils were returning from offices and schools, respectively, when patronage picked up again. When the sales are over, they would return to their recession points and take stock of their goods and account for their money before they proceeded to their employers.

For those children who were bus conductors, their peak period was usually during the early part of the day (between 7 and 11 a.m.), when they were actively engaged by their employers. Some of them were picked up from their houses by the bus drivers (their employers) while others joined their buses at an agreed location or bus stop before 7 a.m. They also had about three hours of 'recess' when the patronage would generally be low. During this period, a majority of them would join their employers to eat and thereafter spend some time in the motor parks to relax until later in the day when the business picked again. Saw-mill children workers, however, seemed to have a different way of life from those described above, because in their own case, they were treated by their 'masters' like others on apprenticeship. They were strictly under the instruction of their 'masters' and could not enjoy absolute liberty at the labour sites compared to their peers in the hawking and bus conducting businesses. In terms of morality, their situation seemed to be better off as they tended to emulate the standard demonstrated by adult site workers. They patronized the same food caterers who would come in the afternoon to supply their 'masters'. They were neater in their appearance and looked more promising, though they engaged in what was defined as a worst form of labour that is hazardous in nature.

Generally, it was revealed that the hawking/selling and bus conducting children were only unnecessarily kept on the streets or on the job for those long hours by their employers with the perception that they were always making money, whereas they oftentimes only engaged in extra-social activities that were inimical to good upbringing. Their ways of life were highly characterized by an improper way of eating and dressing, bereft of manners and full of careless talk, exhibition of immorality, delinquency and the like. This type of culture does not guarantee a proper adulthood!

Children's Perceptions about Job Preferences, Benefits Derived and Future Prospects

About 31.43 per cent of the children preferred the job they were doing to any other. Others felt that if they had the opportunity, they would prefer doing something else. Their preferences varied and included schooling (20.0 per cent) and business (11.42 per cent), while some (20 per cent) did not have anything in mind but still felt that

they desired jobs that were better than what they were currently doing. However, 11.42 per cent, among those who were not hawking, considered hawking as their best option. It is generally observed that a preference for hawking over other businesses might not be unconnected to the opportunity for liberty reposed in it. It is also worthy of note that 'buying and selling' of petty goods is usually the common business for most illiterates at the study area. Apart from the fact that these children live independently on the street during working hours, it was also seen as very profitable, but condones some undesirable economic activities (such as secret financial contributions and unmonitored spending), which were there for the child to perpetuate. Among the others, 2.86 per cent preferred to be motor mechanics, soldiers or singers. On the benefits of the job, 94.29 per cent perceived the job to be their main source of income, apart from the experience and exposure they felt they were gaining. Very few (5.71 per cent) felt they were not benefiting at all from the job. Further inquiry into what they were likely to lose if they should stop doing the job revealed that many (65.71 per cent) did not believe that they had anything to lose, while 30.81 per cent counted their loss in terms of the financial benefit, which they might not be able to derive again. Few others (2.86 per cent) felt that their parents would not be able to discharge their responsibilities if they should stop.

Many (40.00 per cent) of the children perceived that the work they were doing was not good for their age, but that there was nothing they could do about it. Emotional sentiments were raised by some (8.57 per cent) of the children as a way to justify their engaging in the labour activities as a form of support for their mothers, whom they claimed they were helping. Many (65.71 per cent) of them perceived that their parents did not see anything wrong about the job, while a few (25.71 per cent) perceived that their parents did not like the job, but could not do anything. In the same vein, 65.71 per cent did not perceive that their peers or siblings could look down on them because of the job they were doing. However, about 28 per cent felt differently.

On what prospects they had regarding the job they were currently doing, a majority (57.14 per cent), interestingly, felt that there was a brighter future for them. Notable in this category were those who worked in the sawmills and many of the sellers/hawkers. However, over 40 per cent felt that there was no future in what they were doing, mostly among the bus conductors and very few hawkers. This latter category was observed to constitute mostly those who attached prospects in life to education.

Conclusion

It is evident that many of the Nigerian children are still very much engaged in hazardous economic activities – in the category of worst forms of child labour – a situation that is not likely to stop if the current condition of extreme household poverty persists. The study reveals a high level of exploitation in the course of these children's engagement in economic activities. Most parents and even the children counted their benefits from what they were gaining from the situation without thinking about the future effects on the children. It is, however, anticipated that in

the near future, these children might be trapped in a worse form of poverty than the one experienced by their parents. A majority of them may grow to be very handicapped in human capacity-building, which should have been developed through education. These children would not only constitute an unskilled generation in the future, but the country may continue to nurture the cycle and the anti-social effects would continue to manifest.

Since the poverty situation in which many of the Nigerian parents found themselves has been recognized as the major reason for engaging their children in different exploitative economic activities, it was thought that any likely solution to be proffered must be focused on poverty alleviation. In reality, a more revolutionary outcome is to plead for the genuine interest of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in reassessing their roles in connection with addressing poverty in Nigeria and in Africa. This should not be taken lightly! Moreover, continual persuasion of the parents to see the future advantages embedded in encouraging their children to go to school as against the immediate gains from child labour may contribute in no small measure to stemming the occurrence of exploitative child labour. This could be realized through public enlightenment campaigns. Locally sponsored legislation against crime could also be engendered through Local Government Councils. Law enforcement agents at the local community level need to be empowered to prosecute any perpetrator of child labour. Children found hawking, engaged in street trading or illicit activities during school hours should be sent to child welfare institutions for rehabilitation.

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