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CONTENTS

Editorial

vi

1. Parents' Perception of Community and School Violence as Predictors of Inactive Commuting Behaviour of Children to School in Nigeria
Okueso S.A., Okundare A. A. and Olawunmi S.A.
Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye Ogun State, Nigeria. 1
2. Social Factors as Predictor of Health Behaviour among Undergraduates of Osun State University, Nigeria
Bello M.A. and Ogundele B.O.
Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria 12
3. Domestic Violence and Health of the Childbearing Family
Ekpu F.S.
Department of Physical and Health Education, University of Uyo, Nigeria 21
4. Predictors of Dating Violence among Undergraduates of University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Iyanda A. B. and Adigun O.O.***
**Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*
***Department of Physical and Health Education, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Nigeria* 30
5. Family Socioeconomic Status as Correlate of Aggressive Behaviour among Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in Lagos State, Nigeria
Oyundoyin J.O. and Jacob U.S.
Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Ibadan, Nigeria 41
6. Prevalence and Factors Associated with Under-Reporting of Date Rape in a Nigerian University: A Qualitative Approach
Ogunwale A.O. and Oshiname F.O.***

- *Department of General Studies, Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology, Igboora, Nigeria.*
- **Department of Health Promotion and Education, Faculty of Public Health, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria* 52
7. Violence-Related Behaviours of Secondary School Adolescents in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State
*Enebechi J.C. * and Ani N.R. ***
**Department of Physical and Health Education, Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu.*
***Department of Health and Physical Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu* 69
8. Nutrition: A Major Factor in Violence and Aggressive Behaviour among Youths
Hauwa Umar Usman and Badamasi Lawal
Department of Physical and Health Education,
Bayero University, Kano 78
9. Intervention Strategies for the Prevention of Domestic Violence against Women in Nigeria
Jonathan B.N. and Ekenedo G.
Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,
University of Port-Harcourt, Nigeria 90
10. School Violence in Nigeria: Aetiological Factors and Prevention
Moronkola, O.A and Ogunmola, P. O
Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria 104
11. Violence in School Sports
Lawal Yazid Ibrahim
Department of Physical and Health Education,
Bayero University, Kano 113
12. Child Labour: Forms, Causes and Implications on Education
*Jime H.K. * and Adio-Moses R. ***
**Department of Physical and Health Education, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.*
***Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,*

13. Youth Restiveness and Socioeconomic Development in the Niger Delta: From Health Perspective
Ezeokoli Rita Nkiruka and Kayode Olubunmi***
**Department of Public Health, Babcock University, Ilisan, Ogun State, Nigeria*
***Department of Community Development, Justice Development and Peace Commission, Ibadan, Nigeria.* 136
14. Prevalence of Non-Medical Drug Use among Adolescents and Young Adults in Warri Metropolis
Erumi B.S.U
Department of Physical and Health Education, Delta State University, Warri Campus, Nigeria 132
15. Communal Violence and Development Communication: Implications for Nigeria's Fight against Insurgency
*Onagwa G.I., *Arogunmasa O.Y. ** and Jegede E.****
**NAERLS, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria*
***Theatre Arts Department, Federal College of Education (Sp), Oyo*
****Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria* 160
16. Domestic Violence as Correlate of Academic Performance, Psychological and Health Wellbeing of Senior Secondary School Students in Ibadan, Oyo State
Ojedokun I. M. and Bello Oloyede Moruff***
**Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*
***Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria* 171
17. Female Undergraduates Knowledge and Experiences of Sexual Assault in a Tertiary Institution in Lagos, Nigeria
Idowu B.B.
Department of Physical and Health Education, Lagos State University 188

CHILD LABOUR: FORMS, CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS ON EDUCATION

Jime H.K.* and Adio-Moses R.**

*Department of Physical and Health Education, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

**Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper focused on child labour, considering forms, causes, and educational implications. Child labour remains a major source of concern in Nigeria despite legislative measures. Forms of child labour include domestic child labour, agricultural child labour, industrial child labour, street hawking/scavenging, bonded child labour, and commercial sex work. Causes of child labour include poverty, poor schooling opportunity, rapid urbanisation, societal class discrimination and cultural factors among others. Implications of child labour on education include inability to attend classes, high dropout rate due to poor grades, and negative attitude towards school. This paper recommended that education should be made affordable; and that government should improve the quality of education, especially in the area of social security.

Keywords: Child labour, labour laws, child education

Introduction

Children are the future leaders of every society, thus their right to quality education cannot be over emphasized. However, their destinies are threatened when they are engaged as labourers at a tender age just to support the incomes of their families. Child labour remains a major source of concern in Nigeria despite legislative measures. It is so wide spread that it has been accepted by many as part of normal life. A report by UNICEF (2007) revealed that about 15 million children under the age of 14 are working across Nigeria. Many of these children are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments, carrying too much responsibility for their age. Working in these hazardous conditions with little food, small pay, no education and no medical care infringe on child's right. Child labour in Nigeria is still high and is evident in the presence of the little one loitering around at the motor parks or on the roads hawking. Many of them through this are

exposed to molestations and different forms of crimes. International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2012) defined child labour as the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood interferes with their ability to attend school regularly, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful. The United Nations (2008) viewed child labour as work that children should not be doing because they are too young to work or, if they are old enough to work, because it is dangerous or otherwise unsuitable for them.

However, participation of children or adolescents in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their education is generally regarded as being something positive. Whether or not particular forms of 'work' can be called 'child labour' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed and the conditions under which it is performed. Adaobi (2012) was of the opinion that child labour employers do so often because children can be paid less, they seldom question authority and therefore less likely to organize resistance against oppression and may not strike back when abused. Child labour in Nigeria is more prevalent in the informal sectors. Children work on family and commercial farms and as domestic servants. They also work in fishing, mining, quarrying, transport industry, construction, and garment manufacturing. Children also work in carpentry, masonry, hairdressing, weaving, dyeing, tailoring, carving, and tanning. In the urban areas, children work as street peddlers, shoe-shiners, load carriers, car washers, scavenger, and beggars. They are also engaged in commercial sexual exploitation (US Department of Labour, 2006).

Forms of Child Labour

Child labour comes in different forms emanating from the type of labour children do, and so they are categorised in nature and effect. These include: domestic child labour, Agricultural child labour, Industrial child labour, street hawking/scavenging, bonded child labour, and commercial sex workers among others.

a. Domestic child labour

This form of child labour is not easily noticeable since it operates in individual households whose activities are not open to public. A lot of children are denied the right to go to school or they attend school poorly due to the demands of house work. Such children are subjected to psychological, physical and social abuse. These children work long hours within the house with little or no food alongside

childhood deprivation. They are treated with no dignity and regarded not as human beings, and are vulnerable to sexual abuses (Fedelis, Oyaziwo and Philip, 2011).

b. Agricultural child labour

This form of labour involve making the child to work on the farm for long hours under scorching heat, carrying farm produce that is beyond the child's strength, as well as being exposed to agricultural toxic pesticides which predispose children to injury and diseases. In the revering areas, children are made to go fishing for long hours with a view to support family feeding or income. These children are most often denied the right to attend school. Children in agricultural child labour are more in number than children who are engaged in factory works such as garment manufacturing (I.L.O, 2002).

c. Industrial child labour

Many children are employed as labourers in construction and manufacturing operations because of the little money they would be ready to accept. Most of the time, they are exposed to diseases such as asthma or bronchitis from cement and saw dust. Some others have been mutilated while using industrial machineries (Nigeria National Policy on Child Labour, 2006).

d. Street hawking/scavenging

According to Adaobi (2012), children are employed to do street hawking and scavenging for scraps at the detriment of their education. Most of these children do not know their rights to education, and even if they know, cannot do anything about it. They are exposed to accidents on the road, sexual harassment and abuse. Street hawking and scavenging is very common among the non literates and low income class people that are mostly from extended families.

e. Bonded child labour

This is also a factor to child labour. It occurs among the poor families. Some of these poor parents pledge the services of their young children to farmers or factory owners in exchange for loans. Most of these families are unable to pay back the borrowed money, thus leaving their children as modern slaves in the hands of the family creditors (Adaobi 2012).

f. Child begging

One of the most vulnerable categories of working children is those who work on highways. Although begging is not ordinarily considered work, the amount of exertion, energy and scheming that goes into it, warrants it's being considered as

work in view of the fact that children work for organized groups, who use them to obtain sympathy money from passersby. Child begging could be considered as worst forms of child labour because of its grave negative psychological and social consequences. It could create such a dependency syndrome in children that may impair their ability to carry out any normal work in future and child beggars may easily drift into deviant activities because of their lowered self-esteem (Nigerian Government, 2001).

g. Commercial sex work

Most recently, many parents have been known to arrange for their children to be taken away to prostitution for money at tender ages. These children are subjected to innumerable physical and emotional abuses, not to mention HIV infection, which makes it one of the most hazardous forms of child labour (Ojo, 2004).

The forms of child labour discussed above are operational in Nigeria despite the child labour laws, and it has affected the future of many Nigerian children. These children have good future and are hoping to become leaders of tomorrow but when they are subjected to any form of labour which threatens their physical, social, mental and educational wellbeing, the bright future they hope to attain may not be actualised and they turn out to be nuisance and miscreants in the societies. These children become predisposed to antisocial behaviours, so that they easily join bad groups such as cults, and armed gangs, such as Boko Haram.

Causes of Child Labour

Major causes of child labour are wide spread poverty, poor schooling opportunity, rapid urbanisation, societal class discrimination, and cultural factors among others (UNICEF, 2007).

a. Poverty

Poverty is undoubtedly a dominant factor in the use of child labour. Families on or below the poverty line force their children into work to supplement their household's meagre income. According to UNICEF (2007), poverty emerged as the most compelling reason why children work. Poor households spend the bulk of their income on food and income provided by working children is often critical to their survival.

b. Poor schooling opportunity

Children may feel obliged to work because they don't have opportunity to go to school. This is very common in most rural areas. Many parents cannot condone

spending on a child who is not academically promising. They become favourably disposed to the options of sending children to go and learn vocation, work as house help or work in the farm (Ojo, 2004). Lack of meaningful alternatives, such as affordable schools and quality education, according to UN/ILO (2008), is another major factor driving children to harmful labour. Children work because they have nothing better to do. Many communities, particularly rural areas where between 60–70% of child labour is prevalent, do not possess adequate school facilities. Even when schools are sometimes available, they are too far away, difficult to reach, unaffordable or the quality of education is so poor that parents wonder if going to school is really worth it (Erik and Pavenik, 2005).

c. Rapid urbanisation

The migration of rural families to towns due to rapid urbanisation may force children into work. The adults may be faced with a new and unknown environmental and labour situation, as a result of the instability and insecurity that this causes, the children are often set to work so that the family may survive (Ojo, 2004).

d. Societal class discrimination

The Nigerian society does not provide equal opportunities for all classes of her citizens. In fact little efforts are being made to close the gap between the rich and the poor in a society where choice jobs are provided on the basis of who you are and whom you know. This situation enables only the elites of the society to grab the highly lucrative and paying jobs whereas the less paying jobs are left for the disadvantaged and the poor (Adaobi, 2012).

e. Cultural factor

Certain cultural beliefs have rationalised child labour and thereby encouraged it. Some view that work is good for the character-building and skill development of children. In many cultures, particular where informal economy and small household businesses thrive, the cultural tradition is that children follow in their parents' footsteps; child labour then is a means to learn and practice that trade from a very early age. Similarly, in many cultures the education of girls is less valued or girls are simply not expected to need formal schooling, and these girls pushed into child labour such as providing domestic services (Michele, 2004)

Child labour is still prevalent in Nigeria because a larger proportion of the populace are living in poverty. Many families in both the urban and rural areas are

living below the expected standard of living. These families are left with no option other than engaging children as labourers at a tender age just to support the incomes of their families. This situation has led to the increase in child labour despite the child labour law in the country. There is no doubt that poverty; cultural factors, rapid urbanization, poor schooling and societal class discrimination are among the causes of child labour in Nigeria.

Implications of Child Labour on Education

Child labour has great implication towards the educational achievement of children. A lot of children are denied the right to education because of the work they are expected to do at home, farm or hawking. These children cannot achieve the goals of becoming the leaders of tomorrow because education is the pillar upon which destinies are actualized. Child labourers that were fortunate to attend school perform poorly in academic work, and many of them end up as drop out because they cannot cope with school. Child labour therefore increases the level of illiteracy and crime in Nigeria.

Studies conducted by Lorenzo, Furio, Scott and Critina (2005) revealed that child labour prevented children's ability to attend classes while the non-working students attended class regularly. Another study conducted by Bunnak (2007) revealed that children working in industries skip classes, drop out from school due to poor grade, have negative attitude towards schooling as well as wanting to be friends who work, and are eager to have money for their personal needs. In another studies carried out by Lorenzo et al (2005), it was gathered from teachers feedback on students' learning achievements that the most academically disadvantaged were the working children compared to non-working children. The teachers indicated that non-working students had the potentials to improve academic performance over the working children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Childhood is a critical time for safe and healthy human development. Because children are still growing they have special characteristics and needs, in terms of physical, cognitive (thought/learning) and behavioural development and growth, that must be taken into consideration. Child labourers are at a high risk of illness, injury and even death due to a wide variety of machinery, biological, physical, chemical, ergonomic, welfare/hygiene and psychosocial hazards, as well as from long hours of work and poor living conditions. The work hazards and risks that affect adult workers can affect child labourers even more strongly. For example,

physical strain, especially when combined with repetitive movements, on growing bones and joints can cause stunting, spinal injury and other lifelong deformation and disabilities. Children often also suffer psychological damage from working and living in an environment where they are denigrated, harassed or experience violence and abuse. In addition, child labour has a profound effect on a child's future. Denied the right to a quality education, as adults they have little chance of obtaining a decent job and escaping the cycle of poverty and exploitation (UN, 2008). It is therefore important to save these children by intensifying efforts to control all forms of child labour in the country. If the youths of a country are truly the future of that country, then Nigeria's future needs a major rescue operation. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Education should be made affordable to parents/guardians of children in the country and an enforcement of the universal basic rights to education by all children should be vigorously pursued.
2. Government should improve the quality of education to ensure that even children from poor homes have access to quality education.
3. Specific interventions in the areas of social security will still be required to minimize child labour.
4. Proper implementation of child labour laws, and punishment of those who break the law.
5. Parents should stop exposing children to work that affect child's health and education.
6. Children should be encouraged to pursue their educational goals rather than working for small amount of money.

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