

CHILD LABOUR: THE BANE OF CHILDREN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Child labour has become a worldwide phenomenon and also a nightmare. It is most prevalent in developing nations. Child workers are known to be objects of extreme exploitation in terms of hours and conditions of work which have left the children vulnerable to all sorts of diseases. Moreover, because the children have no say when they are forced to work coupled with that fact that they sometimes, out of the poor condition of their families, opt to do these works, they have become victims of circumstance. The major questions staring everyone on the face are these, "what is the future of children who are still enslaved and exposed to such labour, how would they become effective leaders of tomorrow when they have not been thoroughly prepared through adequate education and other- types of exposures, and finally how will this problem be solved in order to free the child who must be raised properly today to be better prepared for tomorrow's challenges?"

Introduction

Child labour is one of the many forms of child abuse which is a physical or emotional harm to children caused by their parents or guardians (Encyclopedia Americana, 1989:450). Child abuse can also be seen as intentional use of physical force or intentional omission of care by parent or care-taker that causes a child to be hurt, maimed or killed (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992:121). The concept of child labour as a form of child abuse is an age long one exactly as old as man himself, only that "it has appeared in forms people deliberately or otherwise have refused to accept as such. In Igbo land generally or in Nigeria and Africa in particular, it is part of the tradition for children to assist in all sorts of chores in the family because it is believed that it prepares them better for their own adult lives ahead. These works and other types done by children are classified as child labour at some point (Orkin, 2000:5).

Also in Nigeria, in particular, there is this practice of househelpship where children from less privileged homes are sent out to other homes to live-in as helps. The tendency to treat these house helps called houseboys and house girls (maids) differently is there either with malicious intents or otherwise. In Nigeria too, young girls' hands are given in marriages too early sometimes to men who are as old as their fathers, who may be late or still living. These young girls may therefore end up as slaves to the earlier co-wives; doing all the washing and cleaning in the home, hawking or petty-trading to assist in sustaining the family. These practices can also be all classified as child labour at some point.

Nigeria is not the only country in Africa where such ill-usage of children takes place. It also occurs in other African countries as well as in other third world countries from other continents, (see Table 1 for more details of the estimate number of children exposed to the ills of child labour in some parts of the world).

Table 1: Estimated Child Labour Cases in Selected Continents of the World

Continent	Country	Child Labour Estimate	Ages Involved
Africa	Nigeria	12 Million	-
Asia	India	44 Million	-
	Pakistan	10% of all workers	10-14
South America	Brazil	7 Million	-

Source: Reach (1996). World Campaign Against Child Labour, (Public Schools, Application of Law needed) from the Internet.

Saddiqi and Patrinos (2001), Human Resources and Operations Policy Department and Education and Social Policy Department Working Papers (From the Internet).

By ILO's own estimate, up to 73 million children of ages 10-14 are employed nearly full-time or part-time worldwide and the total number of working children are in their hundreds of millions. Africa and Asia alone account for over 90% of total child employment in any of its forms worldwide (Saddiqi and Patrinos, 2002:2).

Another source (UNICEF Report, 1992) has revealed that some 200 million children were mal-nourished, while more than 15 million below the age of 5 years died of malnutrition. Also 15 out of every 100 children born each minute would be dead before the age of one year, and fewer than 40% would finish elementary school.

Another Report by UNICEF (1993) has shown that some 12 million children under the age of five die every year, another 130 million in developing countries are not in primary schools and yet another 160 are mal-nourished. The same report further revealed that many unwanted children languish in orphanages and other institutions and are denied education and adequate health care while several others are physically abused. Moreover, an estimated 250 million are engaged in some form of labour and over 600 million live in abject poverty. All the above were happening after the United Nations had organized a convention on the "Rights of the Child" in November 1989 and followed it up with a summit in September 1990. Many world leaders attended both meetings as was confirmed by its adoption by more than 200 nations.

Table II reveals the percentage of total world child labour as exposed by ILO. The table further proves that child labour is mostly prevalent in Africa and Asia. This is in line with the claims of Saddiqi and Patrinos (2001:1) which shows that the "...capacity to enforce minimum age requirement for schooling and work is lacking"¹⁷. Though it is a pervasive problem world-wide, it is most prevalent in rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work are lacking completely.

Table H: Distribution of Economically Active Children is Years of Age Requirements for Schooling

Region	1980	1985	1990
Africa	17.0%	18.0%	21.3%
America	4.7	5.6	Na
Asia	77.8	75.9	72.3
Europe	0.3	0.2	0.1
Oceania	0.2	0.2	0.2

Source: ILO, 1993 in Saddiqi and Patrinos: 2001 Page 3 (Na... Not available) (Percentage are of the total world child labour.

It should be noted that the age limit for child workers differs from region to region depending on the peculiar needs of the area in question. Therefore, while ILO had pegged the minimum working age at 15 years (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992:121), many regions' requirement still vary. Irrespective of age, however, (here are other issues being considered like why recently world-wide, the concept of child labour is being serious discussed. This and other issues bordering on what child labour is, its causes, challenges and implications will form the bedrock of this write-up.

The Concept of Child Labour

As with other concepts, many definitions have been given to child labour as a concept. For instance:

- i. Colliers Encyclopedia (1990:222) sees it as work performed by children that either endangers their health or safety, interferes with or prevents their education or keeps them from play and other activities important to their development.
- ii. Child labour is a designation formally applied to the practice of employing young children in factories but now used to denote the employment of minors generally, especially in work that may interfere with their education or endanger their health (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992:122).
- iii. It is work done by children under 18 which is exploitative, hazardous or otherwise inappropriate for their age, detrimental to their schooling or social, physical, mental, spiritual

or moral development (Orkin, 2000:2). In this definition of child labour by Orkin, work is not limited to work for the care-giver. The above definitions show that child labour is a social evil because the child is deprived., exploited, exposed unduly to suffer different types of ills. This is exactly why much awareness is needed to make its eradication possible.

Causes of Child Labour

Before looking at the causes of child labour, a short preview of its history shows that child labour has been around and is as old as creation itself. All along, it has been ignored either because of the conveniences enjoyed from its practices or because of cultural background as is the case with Nigeria and some other African countries. It has also existed earlier and has persisted in most third world countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc.

History also shows that it had existed in developed nations like North America and Britain during the period of the Domestic System and eventually the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. During the said periods, children as young as five operated machines while half-naked children of six years of age worked in damp and dangerous mines carrying coals in packs on their backs to the surface through very long ladders (Collier Encyclopedia, 1999-:460).

Around the 18th century also, Great Britain employed children of between five and six years of age who worked between 13 and 16 hours daily for very little pay. Also in the United States up to the early years of the 19th century, children of between the ages of 7 and 12 made up the third of their work force recruited mostly from indigent families (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992:122-123). It would therefore, seem that one of the major causes of child labour is the stage of development of any particular nations. But the irony of the above is that in this present age of high technology, millions of children, who are tomorrow's leaders, are still neglected. Another problem that has arisen out of the stage of development issue is that there may be no way out for developing nations since they so much need the labour offered by children to get by. This is therefore, scary because "unless the world is going to be left in the hands of few privileged children from the developed world" something very urgent must be done.

Other major causes of children labour are poverty, prompting by parents, socio-political conditions of the society, traditional factors, child specialization, migration from rural to urban areas, unemployment and lack of payment of salaries.

- 1) **Poverty:** As a course of child labour can be a function of many other issues like premature death of the breadwinner, unemployment, lack of payment of salary etc. These other factors notwithstanding, in developing countries, poverty and child labour are two inseparable things like the chicken and the egg (Satyarthi, 1994:4). It can also result from the socio-political conditions of the society like is the case in most developing nations. Since poverty results from many other factors, it leads to child labour where the children have to work to supplement the meager earnings of their parents or widowed mother or father. An instance is given where minors contribute up to 25% of the total family income (see Table III).

Table HI: Contribution, of Children to Family Income (Percent)

Country	Overall Child Contribution	Contribution by Age Years		
		10-12	13-15	16-18
England, rural (1789- 1796)	13.0	9.0	17.4	22.8
Peru (1991)	14.0	7.5	11.7	16.5
Paraguay (1990)	23.7	19.5 (12-14)	22.3 (15-16)	25.8 (17-19)

Source: Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1993; 1995; Lindert, 1916 in Saddiq and Patrinos (2001 Child Labour: Issues, Causes and Intervention (in the Internet).

- 2) **Prompting by Parents:** A study shows that 62% of the source of induction into child employment came from parents while children only decided 38% of the time (Syedet al; 1991). Children do not have much say especially in developing nations and they contrib-3r more time to household cares than they deplete as compared to their counterparts in developed countries (Lindert, 1976). They are therefore, less of burden in develop: countries. Parents therefore, more or less, take advantage of them by dictating what they should or should not do.
- 3) **Socio-Political Condition of the Society:** Though this factor as a cause of child labour has been discussed also as a possible factor of poverty, it can be discussed on its own as a major cause. This arises from the unavailability of facilities that encourage the growth and development of children. An instance is seen in schools with schooling problems. For a

whole year (2002) in one of the eastern states (Anambra precisely) in Nigeria, secondary school children were not in session because of the prolonged strike by their teachers. The strike resulted from non-payment of salaries by the state government.

The above resulted to many children resorting to hawking, working as "conductor; with public bus drivers and others idling about committing one illicit act or the other. Some parents in order to prevent their children from staying idle sent them out as house-helpers to work as child labourers in homes other than theirs. Another aspect of schooling problem, what obtains in some third world countries where schools are available but due to overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and apathetic teachers' attitude (Sadiqqi and Patrinos 2000:5) parents are discouraged from sending their children to school. In some instances too, children drop out of school for one flimsy reason or the other to work and contribute to family income. Weiner (1991) has cited India as having about 82 million juvenile workforce, one of the largest in the world. As a result, only 41% of Indians over the age of 15 are literate. The same is the case in Bangladesh with 26% and Pakistan with 23% (Weiner, 1991).

- 4) **Traditional Factors:** Until recently in Nigeria, it had always been misconstrued that educated females turn out to be useless because they neither marry nor bear children. As a result only the male children were granted qualitative education. Only few females were trained in schools by some enlightened parents before they were given out to marriage. It is also the case in some countries where educated females were thought not to fit into traditional roles (Bequale and Hoyden, 1988:153). The above practice has also resulted to lack of education for the girl/child who end up serving as house helps. It has to be observed however, that the above is no more common in Nigeria. Rather the present problem is with the boys who have been recently known to be dropping out of secondary schools early resulting to low male-enrolment syndrome. Sometimes the males opt not to acquire university education at all in order to go into business early for the quest of amazing quick wealth.
- 5) **Child Specialization:** This case was presented by Chernichovsky (1985:19) who described the situation in some developing countries where different roles were assigned to children. These roles resulted to some children attending schools (the older ones) while the younger ones do not. The above practice, however, depends on the birth order of the children (Saddle: and Patrinos, 2000). In Nigeria, this case can apply where there are many children in a family. While some may be given the opportunity for qualitative education, others are not because of the large family size and the expenses involved in educating a child.
- 6) **Migration from Rural to Urban Area:** This also been cited as one of the causes of child labour in developing countries. Usually families migrate to look for greener pastures (which may not even be in existence) in urban area. Sadiqqi and Patrinos stated that this movement has increased in the last 40 years. 17% of the population of the developing world lived in urban areas in 1950. they increased to 32% in 1988 and to 40% by the year 2000. It is presently being envisaged that they will increase to 57% by the year 2025 (United Nations. 1989). Barker and Knaul (1991) believe that such surge with the prevailing economic trends, force children and their families to urban poverty, and "children are soon required to work" to assist in taking care of the financial problems in their home.

Other factors which have been discussed as causes of poverty which can lead to child labour are unemployment and lack of payment of parents' salaries

Challenges and Implications of Child Labour

So many challenges face the world of tomorrow that do encourage child labour in many of its forms today. The results of today's child labour practices pose a lot of problems to the future generation and these come in various forms.

1. **Increase in Poverty Level:** Children who are engaged in any form of child labour are tender to produce as much as the adults. A study carried out by Satuyarhi (1994:5) has revealed that adults put in much more efforts and can earn up to 5 -6 times more than children. The employers of child labourers save a lot by paying "black money" to the children. This results to exploitation because they receive less, and the low earnings continue to perpetuate poverty level. In South Asian region alone, about 80 million children are in servitude, with India

getting a mammoth share of 55 million (Saluyarthy, 1994). This also exposes the world population to a very bleak future especially in the developing countries involved, because their earnings will continually be low.

2. **A Sickly World Population:** Children below the age of 14 years are usually unduly exposed to dangerous gases, smokes, chemical and high temperatures. These children, as a result, suffer from lung, eye, kidney and liver diseases. In India, records show that in public hospitals, out of (he 70% who are among the tuberculosis patients, 80% are children who have been exposed to child labour at one time or the other in their lives (Satuyarthy, 1994:5). If child labour persists and a particular category of children must work to survive, then that category will remain diseased and sickly.
3. **Uncontrolled Increase in Population:** Many parents in developing countries bear children (o make money with them through child labour (Saddiqi and Patrinos, 2001) in its various forms. According to a source, the general conviction amidst these sections is "more children's working hands means more income¹¹ (Satuyarthy, 1994:6). The same source shows that around 1984 in India, there was a 23% increase in population but in child labour prone areas, the increase rose to 30%. This is not the case in developed nations where the up-keep of any child is very expensive to most parents.
4. **Lesser Education, Lesser Power:** An adage has it that knowledge is power. Most children born in developing nations do not acquire adequate and proper education because of the disadvantaged positions they find themselves in. Most children in developing nations who attend schools at all are half-baked. This is because, they are not regular in school- These schools may not have the proper materials needed for effective teaching and learning and therefore, the children still lack the knowledge and skills required to fit into the present very competitive environment. In other instances, children drop out of schools due to one reason or the other and do not complete the level needed for gainful employment. In India, for instance, the dropout rate of children from schools is 40% but increases to 85% in child labour predominant areas (Salyarlhi, 1994:6). As long as children in developing nations are not given the needed opportunity to gain qualitative education, they will remain second class world citizens for a long time to come.

Conclusion

This write-up has shown that the world is in a serious problem as long as child labour prevails. Many children exposed to all sorts of dangerous working conditions will grow up to be sick adults v-'ho may never be able to face the challenges of tomorrow's world. It has therefore become necessary to do something urgently.

From the causes discussed in the paper, it would seem as if the countries where child labour still persists cannot help themselves and may not do much towards its eradication. Outside help is therefore needed in addition to legislations passed internally. A lot of education is also needed to really make the parents who allow their children to engage in child labour know the problems that arise as result of that. World bodies like UNICEF, ILO etc should work together with the affected countries home governments to, through the enactment of laws and enlightenment programmes, plan the eradication of child labour. This will not be easy at all but through persistent campaign over a long period of time the problem may eventually be solved, though poverty in most third world countries may still pose very serious constraint to success.

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