Analysis of Usage of Child Labour Among Rural Farming Households in Kwara State, Nigeria

Kayode, A.O and Abdullateef, A. O.

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The study analyzes the usage of child labour among crop farmers in Kwara North rural communities of Kwara State. It identified the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents; farming activities done by children in the study area; the level of child labour usage in the study area; the factors influencing child labour usage in the study area; and the possible hazards encountered by children in the study area. A four-stage sampling technique was adopted in selecting ninety (90) rural households. A well-structured questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Findings reveal that socioeconomic characteristics (Income, year of formal education, and contact with extension agents) have direct or inverse relationship with level of usage of child labour. The study therefore recommends that Governmental, non-governmental organization, literate individuals and corporate bodies should help alleviate the sufferings of low-income rural communities by providing them with social security schemes, economic opportunities and activities that would engage the children in self-development, empowerment and discovery.

Keywords: Child labour, Income, Soil fertility, Extension agents

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has a significant role in the economy of Nigeria. It is the primary source of food security for people and a means of livelihood for the most vulnerable citizens (Adepoju, 2014; Pawlak, and Kołodziejczak, 2020). Majority of agricultural activities is carried out in the country's rural areas, where rural farming households depend on all available agricultural input they can readily access, of which labour is a prominent part. In these areas, family labour is the most conventional type of labour, in which child labour is of significant constituent.

A child means sundry things to various people in different places (Olaitan et al., 2014). Age, for instance, in the west, is used to determine who a child is, but in many societies, cultural and social factors come to the fore. A child is somebody who is under age 18, and who lacks the mental or physical ability to provide for him/herself or guard him/herself against neglect, abuse, discrimination, or maltreatment. The term "child labor" is often used to cover a multitude of situations: from bonded labor to part-time work on the family farm (Edmonds, 2007). Although considered bad, it is a common practice to subject children to harmful working conditions, such as exposing them to the use of dangerous machinery, making them spray pesticides and chemicals, or engaging the children in mining activities.

According to Guarcello, Lyon and Valdivia (2006), child labour keeps children out of school, hinders effective learning and denies children the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills they need to escape poverty, which will also drive inclusive growth and human development in the society. Besides its tendency of exposing children to injuries, child labour has other negative consequences such as rendering children vulnerable, depriving them of freedom, constraining their chances of learning, and violating the fundamental rights.

The world's population of children in child labour has been estimated around 246 million children. More than 70% (172 million) of these children work in hazardous conditions, including working in mines, chemicals and pesticides in the agricultural sector or dangerous machinery (UNICEF, 2016). They are also employed as domestic servants in homes, hired farm labour, debt bondage, bus conductors and begging. While sub-Saharan Africa's population of child workers is estimated around 48 million, it is worthy of note that the agriculture sector accounts for more than 70% of the overall population of child workers. (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF, 2016).

It was estimated according to International Labour Organization (2015) that in Africa, Asia and the Pacific regions, nine out of every ten children in child labour were in absolute numbers: 72 million in Africa, 62 million in Asia and the Pacific, 11 million in the Americas, 6 million in Europe and Central Asia and 1 million in the Arab States. Although statistics indicate that between 2012 and 2016, the number of children in child labour has reduced, a significant number of adolescents are still in child labour: these adolescents are regarded as 36.5 million of 15–17-year-old children, and 42.5 million of 12-15-year children.

In Nigeria, child labour may be defined as the act of employing individuals below age 18, thereby restricting or preventing them from primary education and development. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2013) estimates that about 25% of Nigeria's 80 million children under the age of fourteen are involved in child labour, hence, child labour among crop farmers in the study area are rampant.

Agricultural child labourers work on all types of undertakings including; family farms (small, medium and large-sized), corporate-run farms, plantations, and agro-industrial complexes (ILO, 2006). While agriculture has a very high incidence of child labour, it should be noted that the use of child workers in agriculture is a common practice across the world, including in Nigeria. An estimated 246 million children (ILO, 2015) around the world carryout work that harms their well-being, hinders their educational progression, development and future livelihoods. Child labour has, over many years, remained a matter of global concern, and it is commonly characterized by poverty, gender inequality, and educational inequality. Child labour is a complex issue, and various factors behind labouring predominate in different contexts.

Agriculture employs 70% of the children exposed to child labour, with many of the child workers found in agricultural enterprises owned by family members. While there also exist children who serve as migrant farm workers, a significant population of children have been found working in large-scale commercial plantations. Agriculture is very common in rural areas, and nine out of every 10 rural child workers are estimated to be in agriculture. On the basis of that, child labour is considered one of the outcomes of poverty and failure of social and economic institutions. Agriculture is the largest global employer of child workers.

According to ILO (2006) and ILO (2015), more than 129 million girls and boys aged 5 to 17 years old work in crop and livestock production, fisheries, aquaculture, and forestry, helping supply some of the food and drink we consume and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products.

Agriculture is more predominant in rural areas, but it is also done in urban areas, with urban agriculture a common practice in both developed and developing countries. Urban agriculture has been estimated to account for 200 million part-time farmers. Thus, agricultural child labourers may also be found in urban areas (ILO, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

In ordinary parlance, child labour may be defined as the act of exposing children to activities which either negatively affect their social, mental, moral or physical well-being, or which deprive them of childhood or educational rights. International Labour Office reports (2013) also opined that child labour excludes work-related activities which neither endangers children's mental and physical well-being, nor prevent the children from schooling. Such activities, which do not count as child labour, may include looking after siblings at home, working to earn pocket money on holidays or after school hours, and assisting parents at home. Therefore, child work is considered a part of children's training to be responsible adults, child labour is exploitative (ILO reports, 2013).

According to recent estimates by the International Labour Organization, child labour affected more than 150 million children aged 5–17 around the world in 2016, mostly in developing countries and primarily in agricultural activities (ILO, 2017). Most of these child workers are employed by their parents on the family farm or within the family enterprise (Edmonds, 2007)

Measurements of child labour in the empirical literature are often heterogeneous. It is hard to present a single and generally applicable statistical measure for child labour, as the legal definitions provided by the national authorities of different countries are at most discretionary. This remains the statistical situation of child labour despite the official definition in ILO and UN conventions (ILO Convention No 138 on the legal minimum age, the ILO Convention No 182 on the worst forms of child labour, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Child labour poses risk to children's academic, social, and cognitive well-being. Poverty is one of the situations that condition children (persons below age 18) to enter the labour market. It is also worth noting that it is detrimental for such "under age" persons to be thrown into the labour market, as it may leave a negative impact on their formative stages of development, thereby hampering their social development.

Many research studies contend that child labour, especially as spelt out in the preceding context, is common in rural areas, where both male and female children are subjected to labour. While the female children are subjected to domestic work, the male children are subjected to laborious tasks associated with the household economy. It should be noted that the fundamental point in this case is that the children –both male and female –are unskilled and vulnerable persons who are tasked by their parents or relatives to engage in risky work such as spraying agrochemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, etc.

Research has also suggested that particularly in rural areas, child labour persists due to the failure to clearly distinguish reproductive labour from productive labour. This further births a situation that blends work and education in such a manner that children are inevitably exposed to agricultural production and housework even when it's certain that they are relatively too young for such roles.

Poverty is the major cause of child labor in agriculture, together with limited access to education, inadequate agricultural technology and traditional attitudes toward children's participation in agriculture

and poor access to adult labor (ILO, 2015). However, some farming operations do not seem hazardous, so it can be argued that certain forms of agricultural labour do not expose children to hazards. Such activities have positive consequences since it enhances inter-generational transfer of technical and social skill and children's food security (ILO, 2015).

Children's future should not be handled with levity. Much attention has been given to the need to study the level and nature of children's involvement in agricultural work to determine the types of activity that place them at risk (Adeoti et al., 2013). There is a sort of relationship between schooling status and child labour, and in recent times, a good deal of attention has been devoted to this. Previous child labor studies in agriculture (Adeoti et al., 2013) depict long hours of work, dangerous conditions in which children work, meagre wages, and poor school attendance.

According to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA, 2002), farmers rarely employ children from outside their families. These farmers instead subject their own children to farm operations which ultimately cause the children (mostly in the age bracket of 7-15 years old) to labour at farms during hours they are supposed to spend at school.

Child labour has been found to serve as a way out of poverty, especially for many poor families as children contribute as much as one-third of household income in poor families (Ogwumike and Ozughalu, 2018). Other researchers like Oluyemi (2018), have established that most cases child labour is determined by the poverty status of the family and level of parental education. In Nigeria, child labour is prevalent in urban centers because a large number of people move from the rural areas to urban areas (Oluyemi, 2018).

About six million children are equally split between boys and girls who work in Nigeria, while one million children are forced to drop out due to poverty (UNICEF, 2006). In some locations in the country, families send children from rural to urban areas where they are often forced to beg on the streets while some other locations are said to be a major human trafficking hub where children in Nigeria are trafficked internally and are subjected to forced labour (Khanam, 2014).

Unfortunately, forcing children to work at an early age in life and subjecting them to long hours of work daily may deny them access to education, which is imperative to breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy (Oluyemi, 2018). Awosusi and Adebo (2012) have argued that many children who engage in child activities in Nigeria are abused physically, mentally, sexually and psychologically. They are also expected to work hard and are sometimes subjected to sexual exploitation in the household while they receive harsh treatment with life-threatening injuries (UNICEF, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kwara State. The target population for this study was all children involved in labour farming activities in Kwara state. The sampling technique involves a multi-stage sampling technique. The first stage was the purposive selection of two ADP zones which are; Zone A and Zone B because child labour is well pronounced in the Areas. The second stage was the purposive selection of one local government area from each ADP zones (Zone A; Kaima Local Government Area, and Zone B; Edu Local Government Area). The third stage was the random selection of the rural communities, each from each local government area selected. The last stage was the random selection of fifteen households respondents from each rural community selected. A total of ninety rural children was be used in the study. The data collection for this study was done with the aid of a well-structured questionnaire interview schedule. The instrument was sectioned from A-F based on the research objectives. The level of child labour among the rural households known to engage in farming within the study area. It will be measured on a four-point likert type scale of; Used very often (4), Used often (3), Often (2), Not used at all (1).

RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS

Socio-economic characteristics of the children

Results in Table 1 shows that the mean of age of the respondents is 15.3 years. This is an implication that child labour is evident in the study area even children at age 10 is seen on the farm. This agrees with the findings of Bassey et. al., (2012). About 57.7% of respondents were males with 42.3% female. This implies that male children are perceived as being more strengthful as compared to female children. Most of the children are drop out from secondary school. Household size is an important factor in agriculture, given the relevance of labour in the agricultural activities. This result is in relation to the findings of Adeoti et al. (2013). Fifty percent of the household had children between 2-3. According to Norberg (2017), increased household population swallows up increased output. This makes the farming households conscript his or her children into farming operations to save money for hired labor.

The majority of the respondents (53.1%) spend 9-11 hours per day on the farm. The implication of this result is children have less time to spend in school, in contrast to the number of hours they spend on farm engaging in farming activities. This result is in accordance with ILO Reports (2010) and Adeoti et al., (2013). The majority of the households (83.8%)

had no access to extension agents, 16.2% of the households had access to Extension contact. The implication of this finding is that children in the households does not have access to crude information from the government and other sources through the extension agents.

Farming Activities engaged in by Children-

As shown on Table 2, results on farming activities engaged in by Children includes; Land clearing (92.3%), Weeding (89.2%), Mulching (73.1%), Staking (47.7%), Harvesting (79.2%), Winnowing (19.2%), and Ridging (30.7%) respectively. This result indicates that children participate effectively in almost all activities. This is in line with the findings of Lana (2014), who found that poor households are unable to meet their basic needs and the household heads are unable to meet up with their obligation.

Levels of Child labour usage - The mean score of the levels of child labour usage was found to be on the high side (2.37), 48.5% of the respondents were on the High levels of Child labour usage, while 36.2% of the respondents were on Low levels and 15.3% were on Very high levels of Child labour usage. Child labour usage was found to be predominant across the study area, and its level was also found to be on appallingly high levels. These findings agree with that of Lawal et al. (2007) who reported that about 80% of children in Oyo State are exposed to hazards resulting from their involvement in farm activities and even hawking leading to their lateness or absence from school.

Hazards Encountered by Children Involved in Farm Labour - The hazards encountered by children involved in Child labour according to the results of the study include; Exposure to Chemicals (2.36), Working in air-tight spaces (2.10), Operating machinery and farm equipment (2.15), Exposure to noise (from Machines and other farm equipment) (2.20), Working under bad weather conditions (1.87), Animal attacks (1.75), Fall from heights (1.94), Cuts and bruises from farm operation (1.89). This implies that children involved in child labour are exposed to various hazards while working on the farm.

Factors Influencing Child Labour Usage in Kwara State - The factors include; Low income of parents (2.29), Inflation (2.19), Literacy rate of parents (2.11), Agricultural economy (2.10), Fertility rate (2.05), Children attendance in school (2.02), and gender of the child (1.46) were found to be salient factors responsible for influencing Child labour usage in the study area.

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Determinants of the Use of Child Labour - Income was found to be negatively significant in relation to the dependent variable ($\beta = -0.122$, $p = 0.05$). This depicts that a unit increase in household income will lead to a 0.122 decrease in the use of child for labour in farming activities. This corroborates with the claims of Adewuyi and Ogundairo, (2015).

In addition, contact with extension agents was also found to be significant ($\beta = -0.053$, $p = 0.05$) but, negative. That is, the absence of extension agents contributed negatively to alleviating child labour levels, depicting that a unit increase in the availability of extension agents leads to a 0.053 decrease in the usage of children in carrying out farming activities among households. However, a high frequency of extension agents among farming households would positively increase the children's knowledge of agriculture and the use of technological devices in their practices. This is supported by the findings of Ogunremi, et al. (2013) who opined that access to extension efforts improves agriculture, providing the required understanding of existing farming systems along with how resources and technology (local and foreign) can help overcome farmers' production problems

Correlation Analysis between Use of Child Labour and Level of Hazards encountered by Children - The results of the analysis depicted that use of child labour is perfectly correlated with the level of hazards encountered by children involved. The implication of this result is that an increase the level of child labour will lead to an increase in level of hazards encountered by children involved. Which spells considerable amount of risk for the children involved both in short and long term respectively. This agrees with the submission of ILO, (2015).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that child labour usage is predominant across the study area, and its level was also found to be appallingly high levels due to low income and inflation; and contact with extension agent was found to be negatively significant as a determinant of child labour usage. It was therefore recommended that The Government should ensure adequate provision of social security schemes; as well as economic opportunities and activities; Literate individuals could educate the rural communities on the menace of and sanctions against child labour; Corporate bodies are also implored to facilitate supervision of the availability of extension agents who will serve as aids for the rural households; and Non-Governmental bodies should carry out sensitization on the need to avoid engaging children in child labour to avoid several risk factors that affect their mental development, wellbeing and causes physical impairments.

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