

**Vulnerability of Women and Children in Domestic Work in
Nigeria: Causes, Trends and Remedies**

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Abstract

This study focused attention on children involvement in domestic work and other forms of worst labour. The aim of this study is to

establish from conceptual analysis and review of extant literatures the major causes of increasing women and child labour in domestic work in Nigeria. The study is a conceptual analysis of issues surrounding children involvement in domestic work in Nigeria and remedies to the challenges confronting domestic work in the Country. Therefore, the study relied heavily on extant literature that covered domestic work, child labour, unemployment, employment regulations in Nigeria, decent work agenda. The study also makes references to secondary data and social statistics collected from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Larger percentage of children in Nigeria involved in domestic work because of combination of economic and social problems such as internal conflicts, high rate of unemployment, poverty, rural-urban migration and political instability. Despite government regulatory attempts to stop the menace of child labour in domestic work the problem still persist because of weak institutions in the country. This study, therefore recommends the use of social dialogue model, implementation of decent work agenda to strengthen the labour institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Nigerian informal sector, Child labour in Nigeria, Nigerian women in domestic work*

Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 defines domestic workers as any person engaged in domestic workings an employment relationship. However, domestic workers vary in terms of task performed and responsibilities. In a more simple term, domestic work itself can be regarded as a task performed in or for a household or households (ILO). Women and children mostly engaged in domestic work in Africa and also the most vulnerable group of domestic workers. According to Ndem, Baghebo, & Owa (2012) noted that the specter of small children toiling long hours under dehumanizing conditions have precipitated an intense debate among scholars, policy makers and human right activists over the past two decades. In the middle of the 19th century, industrial revolution, policy makers and the public have attempted to come to grip with the causes and consequences of child labour. However, Tambo (2014)

stressed that children have always been exploited through child labor since the last two decades. According to her child domestic work carried out in Nigeria as well as in other countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, has been given increasing attention by international policy makers and scientists. Therefore, this study will focused attention on children and women involvement in domestic work.

Domestic work is one of the oldest occupations in the world because it involves tasks that have been traditionally assigned and performed by women and children in most societies without compensation. For instance, task such as cooking, cleaning, caregiver for children, disables and elderly, are regarded as domestic responsibility of women especially in most African societies cooking, cleaning and caregiver were believe to be the traditional responsibilities of women without any form of compensation, and failure to carry out that tasks may be sanction through divorce for married women and other forms of punishment for unmarried women such as smacking.

In most African societies, for instance among the Yoruba and Igbo, young unmarried girls are usually tutored in the act of cleaning and cooking as a fundamental qualities to attract and secure potential spouse. However, domestic works were also common among men in most African societies, for instance task such as Gardening, Chauffeuring, and security services with little or no compensation. However, in most African societies non-payment of compensation to female and child domestic workers was premised on the fact that it is a training process for them as a mean to secure potential spouse. The child domestic workers are usually recruited from the extended family such as cousin, nephew, friends and other relatives who may likely be an orphan or their parents appears to lack the financial means for their welfare and education. This practice is socially accepted among some communities in Nigeria under the disguise of child fostering. However, according to Olateru-Olagbegi & Ikpeme (2018) the age-old form of internal trafficking is usually confused with the traditional practice of child fostering within the extended family. Such children are no longer cared for but rather exploited through placement in different forms of labour such as hawking and sometimes begging . They stated further that parents and guardians (mostly in the rural communities) now give

away children to non-relatives for labour in exchange for money. Historically, domestic work is perceived as part of moral upbringings and tutoring for children especially female child while payment of wage to those that perform such domestic work is considered unnecessary. Also within some cultural context in some African societies domestic works are perceived as part of good parentage, and any person that display excellent performance of such act of domestic work such as house cleaning, cooking, child caring appears to have a good parentage.

However, domestic work became prominent in Nigeria during the colonial era when Africa natives were employed by the colonial officers as domestic staff, tour guide and local interpreter (George: 2011; Elegbede, 2016). The colonialist introduced wage payment to domestic staff but with the perception that African workers has backward slopping supply curve , therefore, wages paid to domestic workers are kept low to ensure continuous supply of hours of work by the domestic staff (Otobo, 1997; Elegbede, 2016).

The culture of payment of low wages to domestic workers in Nigeria and in most part of Africa societies persisted from the colonial era till date because most of children in domestic works are either forced or by trafficking children from rural eras to urban cities in Nigeria, and also from neighbouring Africa countries such as Republic of Benin and Togo.

According to the study conducted by Aransiola (2013)), it was found that children from rural communities in Cross-Rivers, Akwa-Ibom Benue, Ebonyi, Kwara, Bayelsa, Imo and Anambra States; Shaki in Oyo State, border villages in Ogun State were trafficked for domestic service to the urban or city centres such as Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, Ibadan and Kaduna. Similarly, ILO estimates (2007) African ranks highest both in the percentage of children in child labour and absolute number of children in child labour and majority are employed in hazardous work and domestic work without any form of regulations or lack of effective implementation of regulations.

The ILO (2007) regional grouping with comparable estimates for 2012, shows that Africa is falling further behind the rest of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa witnessed a rise in child labour during the 2012 to 2016 period in contrast to the other major regions where child

labour continued to decline .Therefore, this study tends to provide conceptual explanation to the problems associated with domestic works in Nigeria with the view to suggest remedies through decent work agenda of the ILO. This study tends to focus on children as the components of domestic staff because they are most vulnerable in domestic work.

Reasons for Increased Number of participants in Domestic Work in Nigeria

Despite the vices and ill-treatment of domestic workers in Nigeria majority of people involved especially adult female and children engaged in domestic works because of high poverty rate, unemployment, war and conflicts especially in the north east region of Nigeria. In most society in the Sub-Saharan African Countries many factors push children out of their homes in the view of Oloko (1999) the factors which push children out of their homes vary from physical maltreatment and emotional problems. While Le Roux (1993) concluded in his study that to be sent out of the home because of misdemeanors or family breakup and financial problems. Similarly , Keen (1990) noted that increase migration to urban areas with associated problems like overcrowding, high unemployment, poverty, family dispersal and the impacts of HIV/AIDS have also contributed to increase in the number of street children in the recent times

The ILO reports on poverty rate in Africa (2013) revealed Child Labour is one of the multiple faces of poverty in Africa. The ILO report estimated that 16 million African children are active in labour market, and most of the children are driven into labour market by poverty. Supporting the ILO data on poverty rate in Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report on poverty rate in Nigeria revealed that poverty rate in the rural areas is 69 per cent. The high rate of poverty in the rural areas accounts for the involvement of children in domestic work in the urban cities like Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, and Port-Harcourt. Some of the children are sent into domestic work by their parents while others and young women perceived domestic work as an escape from poverty and therefore ran away from home.

Inequality in terms of income and opportunities has been growing rapidly, and has adversely effect on poverty reduction (World Bank,

2017). According to World Bank report (2017) Nigeria suffers from severe subnational disparities especially in the North Eastern part of the country compare with other part of the county especially Southern part of the country.

The inaccessibility to quality education, healthcare, and other basic infrastructure in North Eastern part of Nigeria caused exodus of youths to abandoned farming and opted for domestic work mostly as security men and gardeners. However, there is substantial poverty reduction by 6 million in Southern part of Nigeria (except for South East) while poverty increase substantially by 7 million in the North (World Bank, 2017). The report further stated that the number of poor residing in the North East and North West is 29 million in 2004 , and increased to 37 million in 2013 resulting from the conflict in that areas.

This account for large number of Nigeria's population living in poverty without adequate access to basic services, and could benefit from inclusive development policies. Therefore, most parents engaged their children in domestic work as a way to ameliorate their living conditions. In most rural areas in Nigeria, absence of employment opportunities contributed massively to the rate of poverty, inequality, social and political unrest (World Bank, 2017)

Source: World Bank. 2016. Poverty Reduction in Nigeria in the Last Decade.

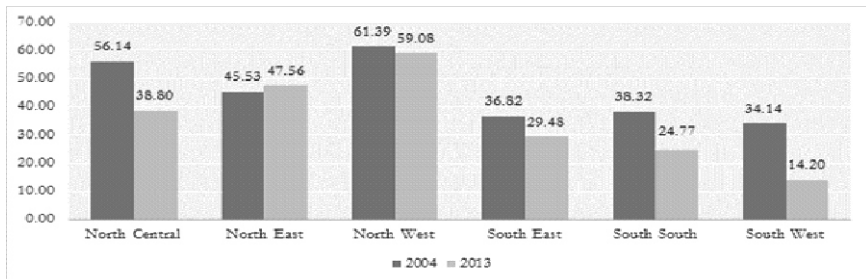
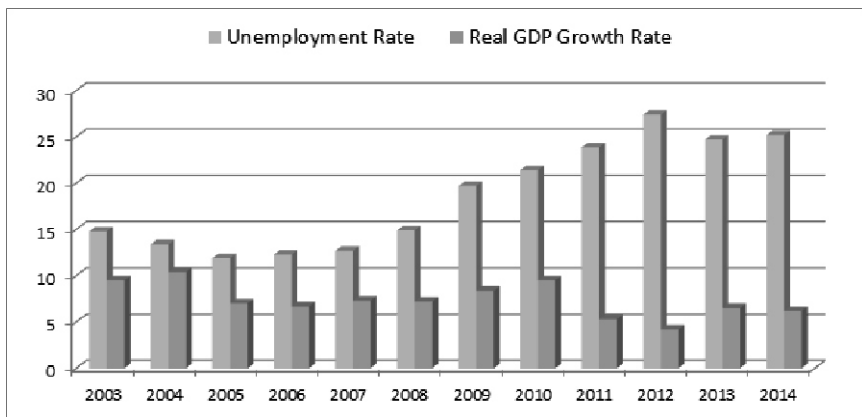


Figure 1. Poverty Incidence by Region in Nigeria

Unemployment rate in Nigeria is on the alarming rate causing massive rural-urban migration (Shadare & Elegbede, 2012). The unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 16.20 in the second quarter of 2017 to a disturbing rate of 18.80 in the third quarter of the same year (NBS). This sharp increase alone caused more people moving to the cities in search of employment opportunities which are

not readily available (Fajana, 2002). However, absence of employment opportunity in the rural areas of some neighbouring states caused migration to neighbouring cities. For instances there is high rural-urban migration to Lagos from Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Edo, and Kwara. This rural –urban migration precipitate people to take up domestic work because most of the rural migrants lacks necessary qualifications and skills to gain employment in the formal sector , and also employment opportunity in the cities is not adequate to accommodate cities dwellers and the rural migrants (Fajana, 2000). Women and children are more vulnerable in this situation because some parents willingly offered their children to work in domestic capacity while some young adult preferred domestic work to prostitution.



Source: Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2016)

Figure 2- Unemployment and Real GDP Growth Rate

Conflict and insecurity pose a great threat to regular economic activities because it usually forced larger per cent of children and women to fled rural areas and seek abode in the urban centres. In the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria there has been crisis between government and some aggrieved militant (Ihayere, Ogeleka, &Ataine, 2014).

The conflicts between Militants and government forces has been causing migration of people from the affected areas to Neighboring cities such as Portharcout . Similarly, tribal and ethnic conflicts between Ijaw and Issekiri in Delta and Ondo States prompted

migration of people to the urban centres. Many people fled these areas to neighbouring town and cities while those mostly affected are women and children. These vulnerable women and children are forced by the conditions and realities of the urban centres to take up domestic work especially in homes of middle and upper classes as cook, laundry men, and cleaners.

Similarly, the North East of Nigeria has been affected by the Boko Haram conflict and the resulting military operations, affecting the lives of over 15million people (WorldBank, 2017). The conflict situation in the North East seems to have make women to become the target of violence during the conflict. The vulnerability of women during conflicts makes them to become victims of sexual and gender-based violence and abduction causing women in the North East to have been disproportionately affected by forced displacement. The Boko Haram conflict in the North East has further caused separation of families because most of the casualties are predominantly young men, women and children. All these interrelated problems in the North East of Nigeria forced children, women, and young men to migrate to cities such as Kano, Kaduna, and Lagos to take up domestic work for survival.

Worst Forms of Child Labour in Nigeria

Children in Nigeria are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, particularly in domestic service and dangerous agricultural activities. In rural areas, most children work in agriculture, producing crops, such as cassava and cocoa. Although evidence is limited, there are reports that children also produce tobacco. Children working in agriculture may step on sharp objects, wound their hands and legs, and suffer from insect stings. In particular, children engaged in work on cocoa plantations are exposed to pesticides, apply chemical fertilizers without protective gear, and sometimes work under conditions of forced labour. Children, primarily boys, work in cattle herding. Children engaged in herding livestock may suffer injuries, such as being bitten, head butted, gored, or trampled by animals.

In urban areas, many children work as domestic servants. Children employed as domestic servants are isolated in private homes and are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse (Agbo; 2017), and an extreme form of forced labour (David; 2009). Children employed as

domestic worker may also be required to work long hours and perform strenuous tasks without sufficient food or shelter. Both boys and girls engage in street-hawking, sometimes dropping out of school to work. Increasing numbers of children also engage in begging. Commercial sexual exploitation of children, especially girls, also occurs in some Nigerian port cities and refugee camps.

In northern Nigeria, many families send children, known as almajiri, from rural to urban areas to live with and receive a Koranic education from Islamic teachers. Some of these children receive lessons, but teachers often force them to beg on the streets and surrender the money that they collect; these children may go without adequate food or shelter. Although evidence remains limited, information indicates that some almajiri in Nigeria may undergo deliberate scarring or injuries to arouse sympathy and thus encourage donations. In December 2010, the Ministerial Committee on Madrasah Education estimated that Nigeria has about 9.5 million almajiri. Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking. Children in Nigeria are trafficked internally to work in domestic service, agriculture, street peddling, and begging. Children are also trafficked from Nigeria to work in the worst forms of child labour in Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Saudi Arabia. There are reports of Nigerian girls being trafficked to Italy for commercial sexual exploitation.

Children from Benin, Ghana, and Togo are trafficked to Nigeria, where many are forced to work in granite mines. Some children from the Central African Republic (CAR) are trafficked back and forth between CAR and Nigeria for forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Boys from Niger are subjected to forced begging and forced labour in Nigeria.

Government Regulations

On 20 November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Shortly afterwards, in July 1990, the African Union Assembly of Heads of States and Governments adopted the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC). Nigeria signed both international instruments and ratified them in 1991 and 2000, respectively. Both instruments contain a universal set of standards

and principles for survival, development, protection and participation of children and recognize children as human beings and subjects of rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the child stipulates that “Member States shall undertake to disseminate the Convention's principles and take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention.”

A draft Child Rights Bill, principally aimed at enacting the principles enshrined in the CRC and the CRWC into law in Nigeria, was prepared in the early 1990s. It was only after some ten years, several heads of government and much debate among parliamentarians that the National Assembly passed the Bill into law in July 2003. It received the assent of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in September 2003 and was promulgated as the Child Rights Act 2003.

The Child Rights Act 2003 (CRA) incorporates all the rights and responsibilities of children; consolidates all laws relating to children into a single law; and specifies the duties and obligations of government, parents and other authorities, organizations and bodies.

The Act defines a child as a person below the age of 18 years.

Forced or exploitative labor—including employment of children as domestic help outside their own home or family environment—is also regarded as an offence.

Buying, selling, hiring or otherwise dealing in children for purpose of begging, hawking, prostitution or for unlawful immoral purposes are punishable under the Act and may carry a prison term.

The provisions of the Act supersede all other legislation that has a bearing on the rights of the child. Having been enacted at the national level, the states are expected to formally adopt and adapt the Act for domestication as state laws: Issues of child rights protection are on the residual list of the Nigerian Constitution, giving states exclusive responsibility and jurisdiction to make laws relevant to their specific situations. State laws inimical to the rights of the child are also to be amended or annulled as may be required, to conform to the Act and to the CRC.

The Child Rights Act 2003 has been promulgated into law (passed by

the state assembly and assented to by the state governor) in 24 states: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Benue, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Jigawa, Kwara, Lagos, Nassarawa, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Plateau, Rivers, Niger, Bayelsa, Kogi and Taraba.

The Government of Nigeria has the authority to establish labour standards, though legislative power to protect children is reserved for its states, (46-49) The Labour Act sets the minimum age of employment at 13 and is in force in all 36 states of Nigeria. This minimum age is below that called for in international standards. Furthermore, the Labour Act permits children of any age to do light work alongside a family member in agriculture, horticulture, or domestic service, which likewise fails to meet international standards calling for a minimum age for light work of 12 in most cases.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent times and also in the past Nigeria society especially in the rural areas are characterised with the worst forms of child labour leading to several assaults and abuse. The major causes of these children involvement in domestic work and worst forms of child labour can be explain by combinations of economic and social problems such as high rate of poverty, unemployment , internal crisis and conflicts especially in the Niger Delta areas and in the North East. The combinations of these economic and social problems tends to influence children involvement in domestic work and worst forms of child labour , child trafficking , prostitution among teenage girls and children, sexual assault and harassment, rape of young boys and girls. However, Nigeria governments especially at the federal and state levels have put in place several laws and regulations to protect children against hardship and violence. These regulations by the Nigerian government are not effective because of weak institutions in the country. Most offenders of child labour were not prosecuted while most cases of assault were not reported due to fear and family reasons.

Children involvement in domestic work is a great social and economic threat in Nigeria which denied children access to quality education and it is associated with menace such as rape, sexual assault, accidents and death of greater percentage of children involve in domestic work. This study recommends the following to eliminate

the social problems created by children involvement in domestic work:

- Institutionalization of social dialogue model to eliminate the combination of economic and social problems that account for child labour.
- Government at all level should promote decent work agenda and social protection especially for children and women.
- Strengthening of social institutions through legal regulations to arrest and prosecute offenders and to provide protection for children against abuse and violence.

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