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Abstract

The paper examines child labour activities in Minna metropolis and tries to compare its effect on environmental quality perception of child labourers in the low and medium income neighbourhoods. It utilizes the use of primary and secondary data obtained through structured questionnaire with analysis displayed in tables. The research indicates that children of the poor in the society dominate all categories of child labour in Minna and there is little or no disparity in the environmental quality perception of child labourer in both neighbourhoods. It also points out that difference in the class of neighbourhood is not a measure of environmental perception of child labourer; it's very much close to their level of education. The paper therefore stresses that the underlying cause of child labour is poverty of parents and recommended for government intervention in job creation through purposeful financing and monitoring of poverty eradication programmes, heavy investment in education; free basic education for all and public enlightenment on the menace of child labour.

Keywords: Poverty, Child Labour, Environmental Quality Perception, Low and Medium Income Neighbourhoods

Introduction

The basic needs of life are indispensable for the political, social and economic growth and development of man. These needs are shelter, clothing and food. Every normal living being will not be comfortable without these needs and the only way one can get this needs is to work and earn money. Unfortunately employment in Nigeria and many other parts of the world is not easy to come by. This worsens poverty incidence. Poverty is a global problem, which is higher in African countries, of which Nigeria is one. Over 70% of Nigerians are poor, and can't provide their families with the basic necessities of life. (FAO, 2008). Aluko (1975) refers to poverty as a lack of command over basic consumption needs, which means that there is an inadequate level of consumption giving rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter. The lack of certain capacities such as being unable to participate with dignity in society is regarded as poverty. Poverty has also been defined as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living (World Bank, 1990).

The Nigerian government has made attempt to reduce or eradicate poverty in the country by initiating many programmes targeted at improving the standard of living of rural and urban man. But, as promising as they appear on paper, poverty level in Nigeria did not reduce; instead it keeps increasing for reasons of insincerity of purpose. In 1966 it was estimated that 66% of Nigerians live below poverty level and in 1999 Nigeria was rated the 25th poorest nation in the world (W.H.O 1999).

The incidence of poverty as a result of lack of employment has pushed families into using their children to engage in one form of child labour or the other to augment their income so as to meet the needs of life. This act is simply called "child labour". It is both a cause and consequence of poverty and squanders a nation human capital (UNICEF, 2006). Child labour is a social phenomenon all over the world and it is a process where children generally have a different status from adults. They are regarded as trainees, apprentices, casual or temporary labourers, helpers or minds of adults workers subject to the authority of adult workers as well as the owners or managers of the enterprises and sometimes they work to maintain themselves (Goddard and

White, 1982). International Labour Organization, ILO (2006) defined child labour as "the employment of children under age determined by law or custom". As indicated in the declaration of the right of the child by child right convention of 1999, the child by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth. This is not the case in Nigeria as children under 15 years of age are made to do work that is physically and mentally harmful which interrupts their education and social development.

Phenomenal increase in child labour is noticeable in many parts of the world in varying magnitude which is also seriously affecting children's mental growth and development. ILO, (2006) pointed out that in Europe there are an estimated 171 million children working in hazardous conditions of whom 111 million are under 15 years and many of them are out of school. In Asian and African countries, roughly 8.4 million youths are involved in the worst forms of child labour of which 1.2 million have fallen victims of child trafficking, many of which cannot communicate in English language and drop out of school at primary school level (UNICEF, 2006).

In virtually all the states of Nigeria, particularly in Benin City, for many hours, children of poor parents are engaged in economic ventures such as street hawking, cart/wheel barrow pushing, bus conducting, plaiting of hair as well as apprenticed to artisan (Edith, 2007). Country Report (2000) observed that in the Northern Nigeria, children known as *almajirai* survive on the street by begging. They claim to be out to pursue Islamic education which are not mostly realised and never care to have any form of modern or western education, as such, they are completely cut off from enjoying the benefits of what comes with sound and purposeful modern education. Some of these children are trafficked and further abused as domestic servants, sex workers and petty traders.

Niger state is also not free from child labour as areas in the state capital; Minna (Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu) which is the focus of this study also experience different forms of child labour. The quality of the environment of Kpakungu differs from that of Tudun Wada North for obvious reason of Kpakungu being a low income (high density) neighbourhood and Tudun Wada North being a medium income (medium density) neighbourhood. Individuals differ in physical structure and level of thinking and so their perception of the environment differs. It is against this background that this paper attempts to study the impact of child labour on the environmental perception of the child labourers in the medium income neighbourhood (Tudun Wada North) and low income neighbourhood (Kpakungu) in Minna. Indicators of environmental quality are numerous. However, environmental quality perception of child labourers in the study areas was examined using the following indicators: level of accessibility and organization of dwelling unit, drainage availability and condition, solid waste collection and disposal.

Concept of Environmental Quality and Perception

Irene *et. al* (2003) are of the opinion that environmental quality is a container concept, the concept is multidimensional as different theories relate to different aspects of environmental quality. Porteous (1971), see environmental quality as a complex issue involving subjective perceptions, attitudes, and value which vary among groups and individuals.

Urban planners usually have very outspoken visions in environmental qualities that contribute to liveability (Dantzy and Saaty, 1973). Usually these visions are strongly conceptual, vary strongly in time and can seldom be evaluated in practice due to the necessary compromises urban planners are confronted with (Leidelmijer, *et. al* 2002). Urban planning visions were extensively reviewed by Smith *et. al.* (1997) resulting in a summary of quality and need principles that an urban environment should fulfil. Important elements are liveability, character, connection, mobility, personal freedom and diversity.

There are multitudes of ways in which individuals perceive environmental conditions and environmental changes, with such diversity of perceptions likely related to the complexity

inherent in the environmental issues themselves. Individual expressions of environmental concern may relate to countless physical qualities associated with the air, water, and land upon which humans and all other species depend (Michael and Lori, 2005). Knox (1999) describes the concept of environmental perception as the result of a process in which personal experiences and values are used to filter the barrage of environmental stimuli to which the brain is subjected, thereby producing a partial simplified version of reality. Lynch (1960) is of the view that environmental perception is the articulation of the mental image of people who have acquired experiential knowledge about their environment and he hypothesised that an individual simplifies the physical form by organising it in terms of paths, edges, districts nodes and landmarks, and central to this approach are images, inner representations, mental maps and schemata derived from peoples perceptions of the environment.

Research Method

This study employs the use of both primary and secondary data gathering instruments. The primary data was collected with structured questionnaire and the target group was children within the age bracket of 1 - 18 years. For Tudun Wada North being a medium income neighbourhood where the services of house helps are often sought, 240 questionnaires were administered. Out of the 240 questionnaires, 120 were systematically administered at every 2nd house to capture information on house helps. Only 64 sampled households enjoyed the services of house helps, thus 64 house helps responded. The remaining 176 questionnaires were administered to the children involved in child labour seen on the street using personal interview method. A simple random sampling technique through personal interview was also used for Kpakungu area to administer 240 questionnaires to children engaged in various form of child labour. The target group was mainly child labourers who are residents of the two neighbourhoods under study. A total of 480 questionnaires were returned and analysed. The results of the analysis were presented in tables from where inferences were drawn.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Tudun Wada North			Kpakungu			
	Freq.	%	Cum. %	Freq.	%	Cum. %	
Age	4-8yrs	57	24	24	77	32	32
	8-12yrs	63	26	50	69	29	61
	12-18yrs	120	50	100	94	39	100
Total	240	100		240	100		
Gender	Male	109	45	45	127	53	53
	Female	131	55	100	113	47	100
	Total	240	100		240	100	
Occupation of Parent	Civil Servant	22	9	5	32	13	13
	Trader	62	26	31	79	33	46
	Artisan	58	24	47	104	43	89
	Farmer	98	41	100	25	11	100
Total	240	100		240	100		
Enrolment in School	Yes	109	45	45	187	78	78
	No	131	55	100	53	22	100
	Total	240	100		240	100	
Type of School	Nursery	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Primary	36	33	33	99	53	53

	Secondary	17	16	49	58	31	64
	Quaranic	56	51	100	30	16	100
Total		109	100		187	100	
Type of Child Labour	Hawking	50	21	21	108	45	45
	House Help	64	27	48	21	9	54
	Begging	102	43	91	31	15	67
	Industrial Worker	24	9	100	80	33	100
	Total	240	100		240	100	
Reason for Engagement	Orphan	48	20	20	34	14	14
	Pressure from Parent	166	69	89	134	56	70
	Self Reliance	26	11	100	72	30	100
Total	240	100		240	100		
Daily Income Generated	<N500	59	25	26	85	35	35
	N500-N600	100	42	74	57	24	59
	N600-N900	39	16	90	52	22	81
	N900-N1200	24	9	97	29	12	93
	>N1200	18	8	100	17	7	100
Total	240	100		240	100		

Source: Authors Field Work, 2009

Child labour is predominantly engaged in by children between the age bracket of 12-18 yrs in both the low and medium income neighbourhoods under study. Field survey result (table 1) shows that majority (50% and 39%) of children engaged in child labour in Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu are 12-18 yrs old respectively. 55% of this respondents are female in Tudun Wada North while 53% are Male in Kpakungu. The difference in gender participation in child labour in the two neighbourhood can be attributed to the social engagement of households of Tudun Wada North in paid employment since majority are civil servants who have their children in schools and mostly employ the services of house helps (mostly female trafficked from villages) to assist in domestic work who are in most cases never allowed to attend school and are paid monthly. Another reason for high participation of female in child labour in Tudun Wada North is also associated with the belief in the northern part of the country that house domestic work are meant for female. The dominance of male child in child labour in Kpakungu is connected to religious beliefs and parent's reluctance to expose female children to hazards such as kidnap and rape. Survey analysis of data on background of occupation of parents indicates their concentration in low paying jobs. This is presented in table 1 which indicates that 9% and 26%, 24% and 41%, and 13%, 33%, 43% and 11% in both Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu are civil servants, traders, artisans and farmers respectively. This attests to the poverty bias of the parenthood of these children.

Result of survey (table 1) reveals the enrolment rate of children's in schools: Kpakungu area recorded higher rate (78%) of enrolment of children engaged in child labour in schools, having majority (53%) of them in public primary schools. Enrolment of children engaged in child labour in schools in Tudun Wada North is lower (45%) than that of Kpakungu and have majority (51%) of them in Quaranic schools. The reason for this disparity is not farfetched as majority of those engaged in child labour in Tudun Wada North are females (Table 1) who hawk for many hours of the day, does domestic work for household and are not given the right to attend school. Although field survey result gathered that 10% of this house help are not willing to be enrolled in

school even if they are given the opportunity. The ugly result of low enrolment of young females engaged in child labour in schools portend a danger to psychology and perception of child labourers and their future wards because educated parents have greater appreciation for the value of education, whereas uneducated parents may simply want to believe that human capital decision made by their own parents were correct.

Collection of pertinent data on the category of child labour respondents in both neighbourhood engaged in as displayed in table 1 revealed that Begging (34%) dominates child labour activity in Tudun Wada North, followed by Hawking (33%), then House help (27%) while few (7%) of the children work in mostly light service industries. 50% of this respondents complained of been subjected to stress and hunger while few of the respondents particularly those involved in house help feel very comfortable with the job for the pecuniary gains attached to it. Data obtained for Kpakungu neighbourhood present different result in terms of the type of child labour respondents engaged in as majority (45%) of respondents are involved in hawking of variety of goods. This is followed by Beggars (33%), Industrial workers (13%) and House help (9%). Child labourers (Beggars) are mostly children trafficked from northern states to acquire Islamic education (*Almajeria system*) and for the fact that they don't enjoy what they were brainwashed they will benefit (regular and good feeding), they resolve into roaming on the streets begging for food and money.

Field survey also revealed that majority 69% and 70% (Table 1) of child labourers in Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu are compelled into child labour by their parent as a way of augmenting family income. This is a vivid case of high poverty incidence in the northern part of Nigeria; a situation that demands urgent attention by all the northern leaders if the realization of the vision 2020 of Niger state and Northern Nigeria is to be realized.

Child labour from whatever dimension is looked at, exposes the younger generation to an unquantifiable menace that is capable of damaging their career. Contrary to Oruwari (1997) and Abudu (1987) findings in Port-Harcourt and Benin city about child perception of business work, it is interesting to note that majority (85% and 100%) of the sampled population in Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu perceived the work they do as an indicator of poverty and are very willing to stop child labour if their parents will concede to that to enable them pursue their educational career to its climax. The reason advanced in Tudun Wada North by the few (15%) respondents that seems unwilling to stop child labour is just a perceived notion that getting used to domestic work better train a female child to be a good house wife and also considered house help as a means of making sufficient money to prepare for marriage. This perception is similar to that of Collins, (1983) who pointed out that work help a child in terms of socialization in building self-esteem and for training.

As stressful as the child labour exercise is and as vulnerable as the child labourers are to many menace, the exercise appears to generate income beneficial to the respondents and their parents even though daily income generated by majority (42%) of the child labourers in Tudun wada North neighbourhoods is some amount of money as small as ₦300-₦600 daily. It is also evident in table 1 that about 35% of child labourers in Kpakungu make less than ₦ 300 daily.

Table 2: Environmental Quality Perception of Respondents

Variables	Tudun Wada North			Kpakungu			
	Freq.	%	Cum. %	Freq.	%	Cum. %	
Accessibility to dwelling Units	Accessible	221	92	92	78	33	33
	Inaccessible	19	8	100	162	67	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Nature of Roads to Dwelling Units	Tarred	53	22	22	14	6	6
	Untarred	187	78	100	226	94	100

Total		240	100		240	100	
Arrangement of Dwelling Units in the Neighbourhood	Very Organized	146	61	61	11	5	5
	Fairly Organized	89	37	98	168	70	75
	Not Organized	5	2	100	61	25	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Opinion on the Level of Accessibility	Very Satisfactory	97	40	40	28	12	12
	Fairly Satisfactory	124	52	92	154	64	76
	Not Satisfactory	19	8	100	56	24	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Drainage Type in the Neighbourhood	Open	58	24	24	11	5	5
	Covered	23	10	34	0	0	5
	None	159	66	100	229	95	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Condition of Drainage	Fine and Neat	37	46	46	1	9	9
	Blocked and Dirty	44	54	100	10	91	100
Total		81	100		11	100	
Opinion on Drainage Type and Condition	Very Satisfactory	104	43	43	97	40	40
	Fairly Satisfactory	121	50	93	98	41	81
	Not Satisfactory	15	7	100	50	19	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Solid Waste Collection Methods	In Drums at Home	94	39	39	11	5	5
	Open Space Near Home	146	61	100	229	95	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Solid Waste Disposal Methods	Openly in Surrounding	105	44	43	186	76	76
	Dump Site	103	43	87	49	20	96
	Waste manager	32	13	100	5	4	100
Total		240	100		240	100	
Opinion on Solid Waste Collection and Disposal	Very Satisfactory	83	35	35	96	40	40
	Fairly Satisfactory	132	55	90	141	59	59
	Not Satisfactory	25	10	100	5	1	100
Total		240	100		240	100	

Source: Authors Field Work, 2009

As shown in table 2, out of the 240 respondents sampled in Tudun Wada north, 92% houses are accessible and the roads are mostly untarred. For Kpakungu, 67% of respondents houses are not accessible and over 90% of the roads are untarred. With respect to the arrangement of dwelling units, majority (61%) of child labourers in Tudun Wada North are of the opinion that the dwelling units in the neighbourhood is very organized while majority of the respondents in Kpakungu find dwelling unit arrangement in their neighbourhood fairly organized. For 61% of child labourers in Tudun wada North to commend favourably of the organization of their neighbourhood is a confirmation that they have low level of perception of their environment which could be attributed to the fact that a huge percentage of those involve in househelp, hawking and begging are mostly trafficked from villages and do not have any formal education.

Therefore, they are likely to perceive that kind of environment as very satisfactory. Respondent's opinion on the level of accessibility in the two neighbourhoods as displayed in table 2 indicates that majority of the child labourers are fairly satisfied with the circulation pattern of their areas. Given the unplanned nature of Kpakungu that is characterized by very low accessibility, it is ironical for anybody to perceive the area to have fairly organized dwelling unit and fairly satisfactory level of accessibility. This perception of child labourers in Kpakungu can be connected to their low level of education and high concentration of them in mostly public primary schools which is known for very poor educational delivery in recent times. As such it is very possible that most of the child labourer who attend schools in Kpakungu are not well tutored in their schools for them to appreciate the beauty and quality expected of a planned ideal environment.

On the drainage type in the neighbourhoods, only 34% of the child labourers in Tudun Wada North said they have drainage in their area and 24% of them said the drainages available are also open to the air. In Kpakungu area, very few respondents (5%) said there exist drainages which are also open to the air. Field survey result displayed in table 2 shows that 54% of drainages in Tudun Wada north are blocked and dirty and 91% of drainages in Kpakungu are also block and dirty. However, the perception of child labourers in the two neighbourhoods on drainage type and condition appear the same as (50% and 43%) and (41% and 40%) in Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu are satisfied with their present situation. This clearly connote that the low level as well as low quality of education of child labourer has a lot of influence on their level of thinking and appreciation of environmental condition that surrounds them.

It is evident in table 2 that majority of the child labourers in Tudun Wada north and Kpakungu collect domestic solid waste from their homes and gather them in open space near their homes. While about 44% of respondents in Tudun Wada North said that solid waste collected near their homes remain there for many months where they decompose and produce unpleasant smells, 43% said some vehicles usually move round their neighbourhoods to collect solid waste to dump in disposal sites and only 13% said they enjoin the service of private waste managers. The situation in Kpakungu is synonymous to what obtains in Tudun Wada North except that as high as 76% of respondents in Kpakungu said that their solid waste collection points serve as the final disposal site as the waste is left not evacuated and decomposed. On the opinion of the respondents on the collection and disposal methods in their neighbourhoods, 90% and 99% of them seems satisfied with the methods in Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu respectively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has examined child labourers in Tudun Wada North and Kpakungu neighbourhoods in Minna to ascertain the likely disparity that exist in their level of perception of environmental quality. The impact of child labour to the development of youth in the Nigerian society today is worrisome because of its future consequences. But, it is difficult for its eradication right away because of its financial benefits to the household and its potential future occupational training for the child. However, it is pertinent to stress that the future of a nation will be bleak if a large proportion of her youth are out of school constituting nuisance on the streets instead of being in school to acquire sound education fundamental to economic growth and development of any nation particularly of developing nation like Nigeria. Therefore, Government at all levels and NGO's should shoulder the challenge of drastically reducing the incidence of child labour in Nigeria and Minna metropolis in particular. The following recommendations can bring about the actualization of a society free of child labour.

- (1) Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger: Poverty is the underlying cause of child labour. Underpinning all attempt to reduce child labour in Nigeria (Minna) must be economic policies that not only create jobs and reduce poverty, but are also aim at increasing the wealth of all segment of the population rather than just a few. Nigerian government must formulate economic policies that generate equitable, balanced growth

aimed at eliminating poverty and its exploitation. This implies that government at the local, state and federal level must prudently utilize her resources and create an atmosphere that will encourage job creations for the well being of all Nigerians.

- (II) **Increased Expenditure on Education:** The 26% budget allocation to education should be implemented in Nigeria at all levels of government and access to education should be improved upon by making basic education free for all in Nigeria. Emphasizes must be given to compulsory education at the primary level by all the tiers of government by way of provision of adequate educational facilities in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. Agencies like UBE, Primary and Secondary Education Boards, Education Tax Fund must be properly financed and made accountable to the people. Japan provided a classic example in this regard as it has provided educational access to all segments of the middle class population.
- (III) **Strict Enforcement of Laws:** Government must use legal measure to check child labour. It must be pronounced an illegal act and a sound monitoring mechanism is needed to regulate child labour in homes, on the streets through the engagement of social workers, NGO's and multilateral agencies.
- (IV) **Adequate Public Enlightenment:** Child labour will be extremely difficult to eradicate completely in Nigeria because of the peculiar deepened poverty situation in the country. But concerted effort by all and sundry can help reduce the phenomenon drastically through consistent adequate public enlightenment on the dangers associated with it. It is therefore incumbent on the federal, state and local government in all part of the country to use all their media houses to educate people in the language of the people for a thorough understanding of this menace.
- (V) **Restructuring of the Almajeri System:** The current Almajeri system of education in northern exposes young children to all forms of child labour activities. Therefore, the northern governors must engage muslim clerics into discussions that will help reduce the rate at which young almajeri's roam the streets all day.

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