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Child Labour and Burnt Bricks Production in Selected Communities in Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Child labour is a global social problem with social and economic consequences for children and societal development in general. It is a complex social phenomenon that enjoys prevalence in both developed and developing countries. The paper examined the phenomenon of child labour in burnt bricks production in Benue state. The specific objective were to examine the nature and extent of child labour in the burnt brick production process, identify reasons for the involvement of children in the production of burnt bricks and examine the impact of the involvement of children in the production of burnt bricks. A total of 150 respondents were sampled for the study using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected through structured interviews, in-depth interviews and observation methods and subjected to descriptive and content analysis. The findings of this study reveal that the engagement of children in burnt brick production is a common phenomenon is this area. Children engage in tasks such as site preparation, brick molding, brick arrangement and burning as well as loading and off loading burnt bricks. These activities beyond being burdensome have implications for their social, educational and mental development. The study recommended reorientation of both children and adults engaged in burnt bricks production, the provision of better educational facilities for the children and the enforcement of legislation against all forms child labour.
Keywords: child labour, burnt bricks, child rights, child development, communities

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a global social problem with social and economic consequences for children and societal development in general. It is a complex social phenomenon that enjoys prevalence in both developed and developing countries with Sub-Saharan Africa topping the list. According to International labour organization (2017) 246 Worldwide 218 million children between 5 and 17 years are in employment. Among them, 152 million are victims of child labour; almost half of them, 73 million, work in hazardous child labour. ILO (2017) further states that almost half of child labour (72.1 million) is to be found in Africa, 62.1 million in the Asia and the Pacific, 10.7 million in the Americas, 1.2 million in the Arab States and 5.5 million in Europe and Central Asia.

In terms of prevalence, 1 in 5 children in Africa (19.6%) are in child labour, whilst prevalence in other regions is between 3% and 7%: 2.9% in the Arab States (1 in 35 children); 4.1% in Europe and Central Asia (1 in 25); 5.3%in the Americas (1 in 19) and 7.4% in Asia and the Pacific region (1 in 14) (ILO2017). The report further says that almost half of all 152 million children victims of child labour are aged 5-11 years.42 million (28%) are 12-14 years old; and 37 million (24%) are 15-17 years old. This picture presents a depressing outlook of the child across the world and specifically in Africa. Many of these children either born into slavery and are involved in hazardous work such as forced labour, prostitution, armed conflict, pornography and other illicit

activities suicide bombing. This trend has persisted across the world in spite of the United Nations' (UN) declaration on the right of the child article 9 and article 15 of the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child recommendations that the child should be protected from every form of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interferes with the child's physical mental, spiritual moral and social development.

Child Labour has persisted and it is prevalent in both rural and urban communities world over. It is important to note that not all work done by children is called child labour. Activities that contribute to a child's positive development and provide skills and experience for them to become productive members of society are not child labour(ILO 2006). Furthermore work for children is important as they are expected to help around the house as long as the work does not result in physical or mental harm. Child labour is generally defined based on the type and minimum age expected for a particular kind of work (Edmonds 2007). According to the ILO(2007, 2016, 2018) child labour refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. It is not child labour if it contributes to their physical, mental and future development but if it burdensome, involves long hours and hinders them from having enough time for study, interaction with their pears or they have to do it alongside their education, then it can be regarded as child labour.

The subject of child labour has been widely researched on by scholars. Ekpenyong and Sibiri (2011) lists activities such street hawking, farm work and domestic chores such as taking care of babies, fetching water and firewood, all forms of apprenticeship at the expense of schooling child prostitution and all sorts of hazardous work. . According to Bennett, Jodne and Sherer (2004) Poverty is the primary cause of child labour. Poor parents send their children to work, not out of choice, but for reasons of economic expediency. Poor children and their families may rely upon child labour in order to improve their chance of attaining basic necessities. About one- fifth of the Worlds six billion (6,000, 000,000) people live in absolute poverty. The intensified poverty in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America causes many children there to become child labourers. Rana and Das (2014) attributed it to Poverty, lack of employment or partial employment and illiteracy among parents/guardians have given birth to majority of child labour problems. Furthermore, Drusilla and Alan (2002), stated that child labour has been an acceptable way throughout history that the fact of young children. Working and the difficult conditions under which children work occasionally become more evident. In the mid 19th and 20th centuries child labour became more visible because children were drawn into an industrial setting. Drusilla and Alan (2002), explained that children are engaged in child labour because of new technology, household dynamics, culture, market, and political failure which determine the labour force participation rate and educational attainment of young children. This situation adds to low school attendance of pupils and leading to poor academic performance in school.

There are no particular statistics for child labour in Nigeria but observation as well as the works of scholars shows that child labour is endemic in both urban and rual areas in Nigeria(Amuda, 2010;Togunde and Carter 2006, 2008;, Aderinto and Okunola 2008; Okafor, 2010) . Aderinto and Okunola 2008link child labour to the globalization of the economy and the need for the utilization of cheap labour and maximization especially in urban Nigeria. Dimeji et al (2006) link the issues of child labour to the African culture of the preparation of the child for adulthood as well as industrial development in Nigeria which encouraged the use of child labour as cheap labour in order to maximize profits. They further list factors that have contributed to the prevalence of child labour in Africa as cash crop production, industrial work, poverty, war, domestic slavery, debt burden, and national developments such as decline in oil prices, debt burden and recession. Though child labour in Nigeria is concentrated in agriculture,(ILO 2017 Togunde 2006, Aderinto and Okunola 2008) other areas of the economy such as local industrial

production where child labour exists equally has consequences for the physical social and mental development of the child

Benue state is one state in Nigeria where child labour exists as can be observed in the number of children involved in street trading, hawking, load carriers and wheel barrow pushers domestic servants as well as vulcanizing .A particular work type that is presently enjoying the involvement of children as labourers is the local production of burnt bricks. Bricks are locally produced for building in many areas of Benue state. It is popularly believed that burnt bricks have the capacity to accommodate the waterlogged nature of soil in the state. It is produced using mud and then burnt overnight using felled trees. The involvement of children in this kind of work has implication for the physical, social mental and educational development of the children involved. This research examined the nature and impact of the involvement of children in burnt brick production on the children in selected communities in Benue State. The study specifically addressed the following questions

1. What is the nature and extent of children's involvement in burnt bricks production?
2. What are reasons for the involvement of child in burnt brick production?
3. What is the impact of the involvement on the children in burnt bricks production?

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in some selected communities where burnt bricks are produced most in commercial quantities. These areas include Tyo mu, Kwatan sule, Daudu, Tsekucha,. The study adopted cluster sampling technique which purposive sampling technique was used to select 150 respondents for the study. The study used structured interviews, in-depth interviews and observation methods for data collection. Structured interviews were held with 80 burnt brick producers, 20 parents and 30 children. In-depth interviews were held with the heads of the association of burnt bricks producers in the selected communities, 6 parents as well as 10 children. Data was collected using a structured interview guide and an in-depth interview schedule. The data generated was subjected to content and descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic Attributes of Respondents

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Attributes of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Sex		
Female	46	30.7
Male	104	69.3
Age Distribution		
10-12	53	35.3
13-14	74	49.3
15-16	23	15.3
Marital Status of parents		
Widowed	19	12.6
Married	104	69.3
Separated	12	8
Divorced	15	10
Major Occupation of Parents		
Artisan	13	8.7
Business	10	6.7
Civil servant	27	18.0
Farmers	48	32.0
Drivers	37	24.6
Fishing	15	10.0
Nature of Residence		
Biological parents	93	62.0
Not biological parents	36	24.0
Grandparents	21	14.0

The information on Table 1 explains the distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The data indicates that female respondents were 30.7% (46) while 69.3% (104) respondents were male. The findings also shows that respondents within the ages of 10-12 years were 35.3% (74), respondents from the ages of 13-14 were 49.3% (74), those from the ages of 15-16 were 15.3% (23) respondents. On the marital status of the parents, 12.6% (19) respondents reported that, their parents were widows or widowers, 69.3% (104) respondents reported that, their parents were married, 8.0% (12) respondents reported that their parents were separated, while 10.0% (15) respondents reported that, their parents were divorced. again, the data collected on occupation of respondents parents shows that 8.7%(13) of respondents were artisans while 6.7%(10) were business people, 18.7%(27) of respondents were civil servants, while 32.0%(48) were farmers 24.6%(37) of respondents were civil servants and, 24%(37) were drivers while 10.0%(15) respondents were fishermen. The table also show that 62.05 (93) respondent were staying with their biological parents, 24.0% (36) respondents were not staying with their biological parents while 14.0% (21)

Nature of extent of child labour in burnt bricks production process

Findings from the study revealed that children ranging from ages 12 to 17 were involved in the burnt brick production process. This finding is confirmed by the responses below.

> Children actually help us during the production of the burnt bricks. But it is usually the older children. Children of about 12 years old and above are allowed to help us. The work is quite tedious so we use the more mature children especially boys to help us during production
> (IDI 50 yr old burnt brick producer/ Asukunya)

> It is a normal thing for children to assist us in production. Our mature children as well as our wards participate in the production. That is the only way they can learn the trade. Also need the income from burnt bricks to supplement in these times when there is no money. So children work with us so as to learn the trade and also earn something for themselves. (IDI 35 yr old burnt brick producer/ kwatansule)

The responses above show that children of ages ranging from 12 to 17are involved in the production of burnt bricks. The data also shows that children's involvement in the burnt brick production process is an accepted practice. It is seen as a form of socialization for the future and not child labour. Findings from the study further revealed that children performed tasks ranging from the site preparation to loading and offloading of burnt bricks as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Nature of Activities that are done by children in burnt bricks production process

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Site preparation	13	8.7
Bricks moulding	18	12.0
Supply of clay for moulding	47	31.3
Bricks burning	10	6.7
Bricks assemblage	23	15.3
Loading and off loading	39	26.0
Total	**150**	**100%**

Source: field survey, 2018

The table above shows that, 8.7% (13) respondents said that children are involved in site preparation for burnt bricks production, 12.0% (18) respondents said that children are involve in bricks moulding, 31.3% (47) respondents said that children are involve in supply of clay for bricks moulding, 6.7% (10) respondents said that children are involve in bricks burning, 15.3% (23) respondents that children are involved in bricks assemblage while only 26.0% (39) respondents who said that children are involve in loading and off loading of bricks. Based on the above findings, it can be deduced that, children are involve in virtually all aspects of burnt bricks production. Data from the in-depth interviews and observation further describe the nature of these tasks.

> We help our master to prepare the ground so that blocks can be made. We use hoes to dig out the mud from the ground. Our masters buy tanker water to wet the ground to make it soft. While we are digging other children like us use wheel barrows to pack the mud to where the burnt bricks will be made. We help to mould the blocks and then arrange them for burning in the night. (IDI 15 yr old / child /Asukunya)

> The children help us to arrange the bricks after production for burning which is usually done at night. We supervise the arrangement because it is done in such a way that there will be space to place the logs of wood that we use to burn the bricks. After arranging the bricks, the children use wheel barrows to carry mud and cover the arrange blocks. (IDI 40 yr old burnt brick producer/ Makurdi Riverside)

> We also help in packing firewood from the vehicle and arranging them inside the burnt bricks. Usually our master arranges with the firewood sellers to bring firewood in bulk. We move these fire woods into the burnt bricks under the supervision of our masters. When they start burning which is usually in the night, we move round the bricks to ensure that the fire is burning properly. Once we are sure that the fire is burning we look for somewhere to sleep till morning before going home to prepare for school. (IDI 16yr/secondary school student/ Makurdi Riverside)

The responses above show the nature and extent of involvement of children in the production of burnt bricks. It further shows the tedious nature of their involvement and suggests that their involvement has a capacity to affect them physically and academically. Data was also generated with regards to the reasons for child labour among burnt bricks producers. A variety of reasons were given by both the adults and the children. The reasons are shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: factors responsible for involvement of children in the burnt brick production process

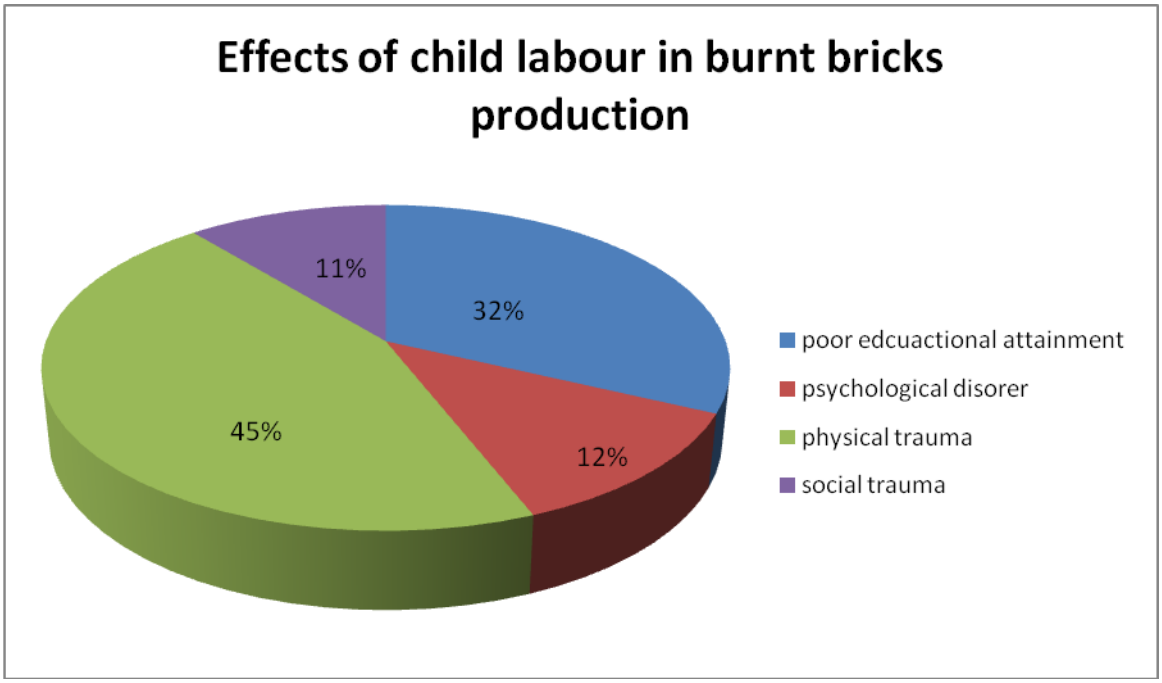
Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Death of parents	5	3.3
Poverty	52	34.7
Family size	24	16.0
Means of survival	25	16.7
Culture	44	29.3
Total	**150**	**100**

(Source field survey, 2018)

The table three above indicates that 3.3%(5) of respondents were involved in their labour because of the death of their parents, 34.7%(52) respondents said, they partake in their labour because of their poverty condition, 16%(24) responded that they were involve in child labour activities because of the huge number of sibling which their parents could not take care of all of them. In the same view 16.0% (25) respondents they, they were involve in child labour because, it is the only may of survival; 29.3% (44) reported that it is a way of training children. These implies that child labour in burnt bricks production in the study area is as a result of poverty, and as part of bringing up children, family size, means of survival and so on. From the interview conducted, some parents also review the above factor as reasons why some of their children are involved in child labour activities.

Effects of child labour in Burnt bricks production

Findings from the study revealed that the participation of children in the production of burnt bricks has effects on the children. The pie chart below attests to this



Source: Field Survey, 2018

The figure above shows the effects of child labour in burnt bricks production, which reveals that, 45% of the total respondents agreed that, it causes physical trauma among children. This means, children who are involved in excessive labour usually have difficulties with their physical well being, some do not grow well, while others are deformed. Also, due to the nature of the activities of burnt bricks production, some children have experienced changes in their natural completion. 32% of the total respondents said that it results to poor educational performance in the sense that, such children usually absent themselves from school in order to have time for production processes, similarly, 12% respondent affirmed that it results to psychological trauma and 11% respondents reported that it affects the social well being of children. Children who spent much time working do not relate well within their social environment. The following interview responses further corroborate this.

> Many times I go to school late because I spend the night at the burning site. I also leave school early to go and help my uncle prepare the bricks for burning at night. Sometimes I am beaten at school for late coming and not doing my assignment (IDI 12/ primary school student/ Makurdi Riverside)
>
> I cannot participate in after school lesson because I have to leave school early so that I can help my uncle on the site. But the small change [money] I get from working at the site is worth it. Whenever we load or offload burnt bricks from the vehichle, the owner of the bricks pays us money. At least I use the money to buy soap and other personal effects that I need. (IDI 17 yr Old secondary school student/ Makurdi Riverside)
>
> Some of the children are exposed to cold, mosquitoes and we have had cases of scorpion sting and snake bite before. You know since the burning is done by the river side the children are usually exposed to these hazards. Some of them take shots [alcohol] so that they can stay awake. The alcohol is actually for us the elders. But it is cheap so the children can afford to buy to drink so that they can stay wake and participate in the burning. (IDI 46 yr old burnt brick producer/ Makurdi Riverside)

The responses below show that the participation of children in the production process of burnt bricks has health, educational and physical implication for the children. Firstly the children are exposed to health hazards because of the nature of the work. They spend long hours digging, moulding and arranging the blocks. In addition to this tedious work they have to stay awake by the river side all night throughout the burning of the bricks. Besides the fumes from the burning which can cause respiratory problems, they are exposed to mosquitoes which can cause malaria, they can also be bitten by other insects and snakes and also be stung by scorpions. They are made to sleep under very harsh conditions by the river side, this trend is hazardous and has grave consequences for the health of the children. Secondly the nature of the work does not allow the children full participation at school. From the responses above, the children sometimes go late, are unable to spend time to do assignment and even read their books after school. Spending the night under harsh circumstances by the river side all night can hamper concentration at school. The overall effect of this is poor participation and performance at school. After school interaction with students and teachers is critical to educational development is practically nonexistent as the children practically shuttle between working at the production site and school.

The nature of and extent of children's involvement in burnt bricks production, suggests that they spend most of their time at the river side with little or no time to interact with their peers. Some of these tasks are adult tasks but children are used as cheep or free labour so that their employers can maximize costs. Though the work may be valuable in terms of the fact that they may be learning for the future but the work appears tedious for the children. Besides there have been technological developments over time. Diggers can be rented to do the digging but the issue of cost mazimization comes to play. Why pay for a digger when children can be used as cheap labour? Also the negative impact of child labour on the health and educational achievement of the affected children cannot be overlooked. Due to the high demands at work and the fact that their studies are inter-spaced with spells of employment these children appear to be faring worse than their counterparts academically. Poor academic performance inevitably leads to poor progress and ultimately to loss of motivation to continue with their education. Such children will thus be confined to low paying jobs as adults which ensures that the cycle of poverty and exploitation continues this finding is in line with the views of Ekpeyoung and Sibiri (2011);Akanle (2007), Bass (2004). On the whole child labour here is a reflection of poor societal conditions and structures that are inimical to the progress and development of the child.

Childhood is a critical stage in the life of an individual. It is regarded as the formative stage where the foundation of adulthood is laid. When a proper foundation of life is not laid it leads to a faulty adulthood. Children being exposed to work at this stage is valuable as it can enable them become responsible adults in the future. Findings from the study reveal the existence of child labour in burnt brick production. Variety of reasons for the participation of children was given. Some of these include poverty, death of parents, and cultural acceptance of the practice, economic value and training for the future. This finding is in line with (Togunde and Carter 2006; 2008) and Aderinto and Okunola (1998) poverty has remained endemic in many African societies in spite of various investments from successive governments. Child labour as such becomes a means of survival as children a made to go to work so as to augment family income (ILO2008). Circumstances of life such as death of parents where children are handed over to relatives leaves the children susceptible to child labour. In the study area the practice of using children for labour in the process of the production of burnt bricks is an accepted cultural practice. While research tags it labour the society sees it as preparation of the child for a responsible future. Here addressing the issues of child labour would also mean sensitizing them to adjust their beliefs and practices with regards to children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to create awareness on child labour conditions. Government should define specific child labour conditions and generate awareness. Most employers who engage under aged children

sometimes do not know that they are involved in child labour. In most cases, these employers are of the wrong notion that it is training for the future.

There is also need to improve on the Nigeria economy. Poverty has been identified as the major reason for engaging child labourers. Purposeful leadership which is able to manage our resources, attract foreign investment improve employment and earning and also ensure fair distribution of goods and service at affordable prices needed is important.

Government should improve the access and quality of education. Education is the most powerful tool to prevent children working fulltime as labors, so if government can improve the quality of education and make it accessible for all citizens it will reduce the high level of child labour activities among children of secondary school age in general..

Children are regarded as future of the nation. The nature of their involvement in the production of burnt bricks has implications for their physical mental and social development. Investment should be made in the education of children. Government should go a step further to enforcing child labour laws. Parents or guardians whose children do not participate fully at school should be investigated and sanctioned if found guilty of engaging their children and wards in activities that hamper their physical, mental and social development.

Traditional rulers and other gate keepers of the society should be involved in the campaign against child labour. They should be sensitized so that they can communicate same to members of their society. Child rights organizations should also conduct further research on the phenomenon of the involvement of children in burnt bricks production.

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