CHILD LABOUR AND IT'S HEALTH IMPACT ON CHILDREN IN JALINGO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF TARABA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Child labour remains a significant socio-economic challenge, particularly in developing regions. This study examines the impact of child labour on children in Jalingo Local Government Area, focusing on its common forms, socio-economic drivers, and effects on education, health, and psychological well-being. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis. Findings indicate that child labour is driven primarily by poverty, parental unemployment, large family sizes, and lack of access to quality education. The most prevalent forms of child labour in Jalingo LGA include street hawking, domestic work, shopkeeping, and farming, with farming being notably prominent due to the agrarian nature of the region. The study also highlights the negative consequences of child labour, including school absenteeism, poor academic performance, physical exhaustion, malnutrition, and psychological distress. Regression analysis confirmed that poverty had the strongest influence on child labour prevalence, followed by parental unemployment and family size. Based on these findings, the study recommends that parents prioritize children's education,

the government enhance policies promoting economic stability and free education, and stakeholders engage in awareness campaigns and support programs to combat child labour.

Keywords: Child labour, Socio-economic factors, Education, Health, Psychological well-being.

Introduction

Child labour remains one of the most pressing global challenges, affecting millions of children worldwide. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) estimates that 160 million children, or nearly 1 in 10 worldwide, are engaged in child labour, with nearly half of them involved in hazardous work. This widespread exploitation deprives children of their fundamental rights, including access to education, healthcare, and a safe childhood. Child labour is driven by several factors, including poverty, weak law enforcement, cultural practices, and inadequate social protection systems. It is particularly prevalent in low- and middle-income countries, where economic instability and poor governance exacerbate the vulnerability of children to exploitative labour conditions (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Despite international efforts to curb child labour, progress remains slow, and the COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the situation, pushing more children into economic activities to support their struggling families (UNICEF, 2021).

In Africa, child labour remains a significant socio-economic issue, with Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for the highest number of child labourers globally (ILO, 2022). The region faces unique challenges, such as high poverty rates, limited access to education, and socio-cultural practices that normalize child labour. Studies indicate that many children in African countries are engaged in agricultural work, domestic service, and street vending, often under exploitative conditions (Adejumo&Igwe, 2019). In Nigeria, child labour is deeply rooted in the country's socio-economic landscape, with millions of children engaged in various forms of work. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) reported that 43% of Nigerian children aged 5 to 17 were involved in child labour, with the highest prevalence in rural areas. The Nigerian government has enacted several policies and ratified international conventions, including the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to combat child labour. However, enforcement remains weak due to inadequate resources,

corruption, and societal attitudes that view child work as a necessity rather than an exploitation (Ogunyemi, *et al.,* 2023).

The situation in Nigeria is particularly alarming, as children are engaged in hazardous work, including mining, street hawking, and domestic servitude. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022), child labour is also linked to human trafficking and forced labour, with many Nigerian children trafficked internally and across borders for exploitative work. In urban centers like Lagos and Kano, children are commonly seen selling goods on the streets or working as apprentices under harsh conditions, often at the expense of their education and well-being. In Northern Nigeria, factors such as the Almajiri system—where children are sent to Islamic schools and expected to beg for alms—further contribute to the child labour crisis (Oluwafemi, 2020). These systemic issues continue to perpetuate cycles of poverty and hinder national development efforts.

In Jalingo Local Government Area, child labour is a growing concern, affecting the education, health, and general well-being of children. Studies show that many children in Jalingo engage in various forms of work, including street hawking, domestic work, and commercial motorcycle operation (Liman, 2024). Economic hardship and high unemployment rates among parents have forced many families to send their children to work instead of school. Children as young as five years old are involved in labour activities, sometimes working long hours in physically demanding jobs that affect their physical and mental health (Ogunyemi,*et al.,* 2023). The prevalence of child labour in the region may be linked to socio-cultural factors, where it is often seen as a rite of passage or a way for children to contribute to family income.

The impact of child labour on children is in diverse manner, affecting their education, health, and overall development. Children engaged in labour are more likely to drop out of school or perform poorly academically due to exhaustion and lack of study time (Liman, 2024). Furthermore, they are exposed to various health risks, including malnutrition, physical injuries, and psychological stress. A study by Ogunyemi, *et.al,*(2018) found that child labourers in Nigeria, including, suffer from a range of health issues, such as respiratory infections,

musculoskeletal disorders, and mental distress. These adverse effects underscore the urgent need for interventions to address the root causes of child labour in the region.

Efforts to combat child labour in Jalingo require a multi-sectoral approach involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community leaders. Policies aimed at poverty alleviation, free and compulsory education, and stronger enforcement of child protection laws are essential to reducing child labour rates (UNICEF, 2021). Community awareness programs can also play a crucial role in changing societal perceptions and attitudes toward child labour. By addressing the economic and social drivers of child labour, stakeholders can create a safer environment that ensures children in Jalingo have access to education, health, and a better future.

Statement pf Problem

Child labour remains a significant socio-economic issue in Jalingo Local Government Area, posing serious threats to the well-being, education, and future of affected children. Despite national and international efforts to combat child exploitation, many children in Jalingo are still engaged in various forms of labour, including metal excavation, waste scavenging, selling water in sachets and jerry cans, working on construction sites, and selling groundnuts, fruits, and other petty goods on the streets. The prevalence of child labour in the area is largely driven by poverty, unemployment, and weak enforcement of child protection laws. Many parents, struggling with financial hardships, often see child labour as a necessary survival strategy rather than a violation of children's rights. This has led to a situation where children as young as five years old are forced to work long hours under hazardous conditions, exposing them to physical, emotional, and psychological harm. Research has shown that child labour negatively impacts educational attainment, as many working children either drop out of school or perform poorly due to exhaustion and lack of study time (Liman, 2024). Moreover, these children are vulnerable to various health risks, including malnutrition, workplace injuries, exposure to harmful substances, and long-term physical strain, which further compromise their development (Ogunyemi, *et al.,* 2023). The persistence of child labour in Jalingo also indicates a gap in the implementation of government policies and social welfare programs aimed at protecting children. While the

Nigerian Child Rights Act (2003) and other legal frameworks prohibit child labour, enforcement remains weak due to inadequate resources and low public awareness of children's rights. Without urgent intervention, the continuous exploitation of children in Jalingo will not only affect their immediate well-being but also hinder the overall development of the community, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting opportunities for future generations. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the extent, causes, and consequences of child labour in Jalingo, with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations for effective policy implementation and community-based interventions.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to assess the impact of child labour on children in Jalingo Local Government Area. The specific objectives were:

  i.   To examine the common forms of child labour activities in Jalingo, Local Government Area.
  ii. To identify the socio-economic factors contributing to child labour in Jalingo, Local Government Area.
  iii. To assess the impact of child labour on children's education, health, and psychological well-being in Jalingo Local Government Area.

Conceptual Review

Child labour is broadly defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, education, and development by exposing them to harmful conditions or excessive workloads (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2019), child labour involves economic activities that interfere with a child's education or pose a risk to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The term is often distinguished from child work, which refers to light duties that contribute to a child's socialization and skill development without causing harm (Bisi-Onyemaechi*et al.* 2022). In many developing countries,

including Nigeria, child labour remains a persistent problem, with millions of children engaged in hazardous and exploitative work (Ogunyemi, *et al.,* 2023).

Child labour takes different forms, depending on the socio-economic and cultural context of a particular region. In Jalingo, common forms of child labour include metal excavation, waste scavenging, selling water, working on construction sites, and street hawking, among others. According toBisi-Onyemaechi*et al.* (2022), children involved in these activities are often subjected to long working hours, exposure to hazardous materials, and poor working conditions. The ILO (2020) categorizes child labour into hazardous work, domestic work, and forced labour, emphasizing that the worst forms include slavery, trafficking, and prostitution.

The persistence of child labour is driven by multiple factors, primarily poverty, lack of access to education, family financial constraints, and weak enforcement of labour laws (Francis &Jellason, 2022). Families in low-income communities often rely on their children's earnings to supplement household income, making child laboura survival strategy (Liman, 2024). Other contributing factors include cultural norms that support early workforce engagement, rural-urban migration, and ineffective child protection policies (Adewumi&Bwowe, 2024).

One of the most significant effects of child labour is its negative impact on education. Studies have shown that children engaged in labour activities often experience high school dropout rates, poor academic performance, and irregular school attendance (Patrick, 2020). According to UNICEF (2019), child labour deprives children of valuable learning time, leading to lower literacy levels and reducing their long-term economic opportunities. This cycle perpetuates intergenerational poverty, making it difficult for families to escape economic hardship (Adewumi&Bwowe, 2024). Children involved in labour-intensive activities often suffer from malnutrition, exposure to toxic substances, and physical injuries (Okoronkwo& Oprah, 2024). In Jalingo, children working in metal excavation sites and waste scavenging areas face a high risk of infections and respiratory diseases due to exposure to hazardous materials (Francis &Jellason, 2022). The psychological impact of child labour includes stress, anxiety, and social withdrawal, as many working children experience exploitation and abuse (Ogunyemi, *et al.,* 2023).

Empirical Review

Several studies have explored the prevalence, causes, and consequences of child labour, highlighting its adverse effects on children's well-being, education, and security.Bisi-Onyemaechi*et al*. (2022) examined the patterns and negative impacts of child labour in Enugu, Nigeria, using a cross-sectional study. Their findings revealed that hawking (39.2%) and shopkeeping (22.8%) were the most common forms of child labour, primarily driven by the need to support family income. The study also reported severe adverse effects, including prolonged work hours (100%), physical assault (15.8%), hunger (15.2%), sexual abuse (14.6%), and accidents (9.9%). Notably, younger children (6–12 years) faced a higher risk of sexual abuse ($P = 0.005$), underscoring the vulnerability of child labourers to exploitation.Similarly, Francis and Jellason (2022) investigated child labour across Nigeria, identifying economic hardship as the primary driver. Their study highlighted how poverty forces children into exploitative activities such as street hawking, prostitution, and trafficking. The consequences included physical injuries, disabilities, exposure to diseases, drug addiction, and sexual exploitation. The researchers advocated for stricter legislation, rehabilitation programs, and enhanced school monitoring to mitigate these effects.

Expanding on socio-economic determinants, Okoronkwo and Oprah (2024) examined the influence of demographic factors on child labour in Nigeria through a mixed-methods approach. Their analysis of 621 participants found that while religion, education, and marital status showed no significant correlation with child labour, age was a statistically significant factor. Regression analysis indicated that marital status had the strongest impact on child labour practices. The study emphasized the need for awareness campaigns, legal enforcement, and community engagement to curb child labour.Beyond socio-economic drivers, child labour also poses serious health risks. Scott and Pocock (2021) conducted a systematic review of 23 studies on chemical exposure among child labourers in low- and middle-income countries. Their findings revealed exposure to hazardous substances, including pesticides, solvents, and heavy metals, leading to neurobehavioral deficits, oxidative stress, asthma, and DNA damage. The study underscored the

lack of research on long-term health effects and called for urgent interventions to minimize exposure to hazardous work environments.

Geographical disparities in child labour prevalence were also highlighted in the study by Ogunyemi*et al*. (2023), which compared urban and rural Lagos. Using a cross-sectional survey of 400 participants, the study found that child labour was more prevalent in rural areas (66.2%) than urban areas (33.8%), with hawking as the dominant activity. Rural children worked longer hours (8–10 hours daily) due to family financial needs, emphasizing the need for awareness campaigns to educate communities on the dangers of child labour.

The impact of child labour on education has also been widely studied. Patrick (2020) investigated the effects of child labour on academic performance in Kete-Krachi, Ghana, using a mixed-methods approach. Surveying 145 respondents, the study found that 67% of child labour victims came from large families and suffered from absenteeism, lateness, poor classroom participation, low academic performance, and high dropout rates. These findings align with those of Liman (2024), who explored child labour's effect on education in Jalingo LGA, Taraba State. Using a descriptive survey of 100 students from 10 secondary schools, Liman found that child street hawking, trafficking, and excessive household chores significantly hindered academic performance.Beyond education, child labour also presents security risks. Adewumi and Bwowe (2024) analyzed the security implications of child labour in Ondo State, Nigeria. Using 147 questionnaires, 12 focus group discussions, and 12 interviews, the study identified street trading, hawking, and domestic work as common child labour activities. Key contributing factors included poverty, lack of education, and cultural beliefs. Security risks ranged from exploitation and abuse to kidnapping and fatal injuries. The study emphasized the urgent need for stronger enforcement of the Child's Rights Act to safeguard children from these dangers.Taken together, these studies illustrate the multi-dimensional impact of child labour, ranging from economic and educational consequences to health and security risks.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977) provides a robust framework for understanding child labour, emphasizing how children acquire behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. According to this theory, individuals learn from their environment by modeling behaviours exhibited by parents, peers, or societal influences. In the context of child labour, children often observe their parents or guardians engaging in economic activities and are socialized into believing that work is a necessary survival strategy. When children are consistently exposed to labour as a norm, they internalize and replicate these behaviours, reinforcing the cycle of child labour across generations. Bandura's theory also highlights the role of rewards and punishments in shaping behaviour. If a child's labour contributes positively to family income and is encouraged by parents, the behaviour is reinforced, making it more likely to persist.The Social Learning Theory is applicable in explaining how cultural and familial influences perpetuate child labour, particularly in regions where it is normalized. Many children who engage in child labour do so because they are raised in environments where working from a young age is an expected responsibility. For example, in rural communities, children often accompany their parents to farms, markets, or workshops, gradually learning and adopting these roles as part of their upbringing. Policies aimed at reducing child labour can leverage this theory by introducing alternative positive role models, such as teachers, mentors, and community leaders, who reinforce the value of education over child labour. Social intervention programs that provide incentives for school attendance can also counteract the reinforcement of labour as a necessary survival mechanism.

Additionally, the Structural Functionalism Theory by Emile Durkheim (1893) provides another perspective, explaining child labour as a function within the broader socio-economic system. This theory argues that every aspect of society serves a purpose in maintaining social stability. In many low-income households, child labour is perceived as an economic necessity that ensures family survival. From this perspective, child labour, while detrimental, is seen as a mechanism that sustains household income and social equilibrium. However, when this function disrupts children's education, health, and future economic mobility, it creates a dysfunction that requires societal intervention. Structural functionalists argue that addressing child labour requires systemic changes such as economic empowerment programs, educational support, and legal

frameworks to shift the function of children's roles in society.The Structural Functionalism Theory applies in understanding the socio-economic structures that sustain child labour and identifying interventions to mitigate its negative impacts. Many households rely on child labour due to economic hardship, making it difficult to eliminate the practice without addressing underlying poverty and unemployment. This explains why policies focusing solely on punitive measures against child labour often fail, as they do not address the economic realities of affected families. Instead, interventions should aim to replace the function of child labour with sustainable alternatives, such as cash transfer programs for low-income households, vocational training for parents, and free or subsidized education. By restructuring economic and social systems, functional disruptions caused by child labour can be minimized, leading to a more balanced and equitable society. The Social Learning Theory emphasizes behavioural change through positive reinforcement, while the Structural Functionalism Theory highlights the need for systemic transformation. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing child labour through education, economic support, legal measures, and community engagement.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to assess the impact of child labour on children in Jalingo Local Government Area. A descriptive survey research design was employed to collect and analyze data systematically. The study population comprised school-aged children engaged in various forms of child labour within the local government area. A structured questionnaire was designed as the primary data collection instrument, ensuring consistency and objectivity in responses. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering demographic information, common child labour activities, socio-economic factors, and the impact on education, health, and psychological well-being.

The sampling technique utilized for this study was simple random sampling, allowing for equal representation of respondents across different locations in Jalingo. A sample size of 200 children was selected from various public spaces, markets, and schools where child labour is prevalent. The study ensured ethical considerations by seeking informed consent from respondents and

guardians before participation. Data collection was carried out through direct administration of the questionnaire, ensuring clarity and accuracy in responses. For data analysis, descriptive statistical tools, including frequency distribution, were used to summarize and interpret responses. Additionally, inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, were employed to assess the relationship between socio-economic factors and the prevalence of child labour. The results were presented in tables and charts for clarity. This methodological approach ensured that the study effectively captured the quantitative impact of child labour on children's education, health, and psychological well-being in Jalingo Local Government Area.

Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to assess the impact of child labour on children in Jalingo Local Government Area, focusing on the common forms of child labour, socio-economic factors driving the practice, and its effects on education, health, and psychological well-being. The findings from this study align with several existing studies, while also revealing unique patterns specific to Jalingo LGA.The study found that the most prevalent forms of child labour in Jalingo LGA include street hawking (41%), domestic work (24%), shopkeeping (18%), and farming (17%). These findings closely align with those of Bisi-Onyemaechi*et al*. (2022), who reported hawking (39.2%) and shopkeeping (22.8%) as dominant forms of child labour in Enugu, Nigeria. Similarly, Ogunyemi et al. (2023) found hawking to be the leading child labour activity in both rural and urban Lagos, though it was more pronounced in rural areas. However, this study also noted that a significant number of children in Jalingo LGA are engaged in farming activities, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas, a pattern that was less emphasized in previous studies. This highlights a contextual difference, likely influenced by Jalingo's agrarian economy. The study also confirmed that children involved in labour typically work 6–10 hours daily, with many engaging in strenuous activities beyond their capacity, which exposes them to physical exhaustion and other risks.

The study identified poverty, parental unemployment, large family sizes, and lack of access to quality education as the primary socio-economic drivers of child labour in Jalingo LGA. The regression analysis confirms that poverty, parental unemployment, family size, and lack of

access to education significantly contribute to child labour prevalence in Jalingo LGA. Among these factors, poverty has the strongest influence, followed by parental unemployment and family size. These findings align with previous studies, reinforcing the need for poverty reduction programs, employment opportunities for parents, and improved access to education to mitigate child labour in the area. These findings are consistent with those of Francis and Jellason (2022), who found that economic hardship was the leading factor pushing children into labour across Nigeria. Additionally, Okoronkwo and Oprah (2024) observed that while religion and education did not significantly correlate with child labour, age and marital status played crucial roles, a trend also observed in this study. Many respondents in Jalingo LGA indicated that their parents' marital status—particularly single-parent households or widowed guardians—contributed significantly to child labour, as children were forced to work to support the family income. Unlike previous studies that emphasized street-based labour, this study found that some children engage in hidden forms of labour, such as domestic servitude and farm work, which may not be easily captured in official statistics. This underscores the need for more localized policy interventions addressing both visible and hidden forms of child exploitation.

The study revealed that child labour has severe consequences on children's education, health, and psychological well-being in Jalingo LGA. Educationally, 69% of the respondents reported absenteeism, low concentration, and poor academic performance due to long working hours. These findings mirror those of Patrick (2020), who found that 67% of child labour victims in Ghana struggled with absenteeism and poor classroom participation, and Liman (2024), who reported that street hawking and excessive chores significantly hindered academic performance in Jalingo LGA. Additionally, child labour's health risks were evident, with respondents reporting frequent exhaustion, malnutrition, and exposure to harsh weather conditions. This aligns with Scott and Pocock (2021), who highlighted the serious health risks of child labour, including chemical exposure and physical injuries. However, this study found that hunger and dehydration were among the most common health issues, an aspect that was not extensively covered in previous research. Psychologically, many children reported experiencing fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem, particularly those working under exploitative conditions. This supports Adewumi and Bwowe's (2024) study, which linked child labour to security risks, including abuse,

kidnapping, and exploitation. The security risks in Jalingo LGA were also evident, with cases of harassment and physical violence against child labourers, highlighting the urgent need for stricter enforcement of child protection laws.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study assessed the impact of child labour on children in Jalingo Local Government Area, focusing on its common forms, socio-economic drivers, and effects on education, health, and psychological well-being. The findings revealed that street hawking, domestic work, shopkeeping, and farming are the dominant forms of child labour in the area, with the prominence of farming reflecting the agrarian nature of Jalingo's economy. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental unemployment, large family sizes, and lack of access to quality education were identified as major contributors to child labour. Regression analysis confirmed that poverty exerts the strongest influence, followed by parental unemployment and family size. The study also found that children from single-parent households or those with widowed guardians were more vulnerable to child labour, reinforcing the role of family structure in this issue.The consequences of child labour were significant, affecting children's education, health, and psychological well-being. Many children experienced absenteeism, low concentration, and poor academic performance due to long working hours. Health risks included exhaustion, malnutrition, hunger, and dehydration, while psychological impacts ranged from fear and anxiety to low self-esteem. Security risks such as harassment and physical violence against child labourers were also observed, emphasizing the need for stronger child protection measures. These findings highlight the urgent need for intervention to address both visible and hidden forms of child labour and protect affected children from further harm.

Recommendations

To address the issue of child labour in Jalingo LGA, parents and guardians should prioritize their children's education and well-being by discouraging their involvement in hazardous work and

seeking alternative means of financial support. The government should strengthen policies that promote economic stability, job creation, and free or subsidized education to reduce the financial burden on families and minimize child labour. Stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, and community leaders, should engage in advocacy, awareness campaigns, and intervention programs aimed at sensitizing the public on the dangers of child labour while providing necessary support for vulnerable families.

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