

CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

The free economic system has created the opportunity for the exploitation of children in modern Nigeria. Children are now the tools of income generation for the parents. This problem has become unprecedented compared to what is obtainable in the traditional social structure of Nigeria, when children were seen as "economic tools" for further production of wealth by parents on farm. This study is underpinned by the Merton's strain theory and social stratification theory by Max. Lagos, Nigeria served as the study location. In-depth interviews were conducted among eight hundred and eighty (880) respondents in four Local Government Areas in the State. This paper examines critically the socio-political and economic factors that encourage child exploitation in Nigeria. It equally looks at the socio-economic characteristics of children involved in child labour and also examines the economic motive behind the exploitation of children. The paper found out that economic doldrums encourages child exploitation. Again, breakdown in social institution of family is another factor that leads to the proliferation of child exploitation. This paper therefore, recommended the resuscitation of welfare home and juvenile court and social security services are also recommended in this paper.

Introduction

Literatures on child labour and trafficking have dominated the academic landscape since the beginning of this millennium. It is widely noted that, the focus of most researchers has been on children working as domestic servants, factory workers, commercial sex-workers, and street hawkers/vendors to earn a living (see Asiwaju 2007; Ebbe and Dilip 2007a; Folami 2007; Higuchi 2004; Minkang 2004; and Tavcer 2004). Little or no attention has been paid to children working for the survival of their families or guardians.

The British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) (2008) reported that before children turned to 10 years in Nigeria, they are often taken from their homes in south-eastern state of Abia State, Nigeria, on a weeklong journey across the Bright of Guinea to Gabon in canoes. There, they are put to work on the streets by their 'uncles' – usually, neighbours or friends of their parents in their home-villages. They are promised care, education, and/or training while away with these supposed benefactors, but, instead they are subjected to a daily-routine of exploitation- emotional and physical. These children are gravely exploited in various ways depending on the type of labour that catches the whims and caprices of their benevolent 'captors'.

The economic exploitation of children becomes worrisome as a result of increase in the incidence of child prostitution and trafficking. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) (2007) claimed that nearly two and half million children were trafficked between countries under the illusion that they were 'heading' for opportunities they were denied at home. Most of these 'captives' are girls unsuspectingly sold into the sex trade. They are victims of a 'debt bondage' where poor people are being taken out to a creditor to meet their basic needs.

Most studies on child labour often look at the phenomenon from the macroscopic socio- economic dimension. This study is designed to examine child labour from the basic unit of the society, that is, -the family. It is the belief of the researcher that the microscopic explanation would dig into the root of child labour and provide reliable data on the criminal exploitation of children. The number of children subjected to the drudgery of labour in Nigeria rises on a daily basis. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 12.3 million people all over the world are held in forced

labour, bonded labour, sexual servitude, and involuntary servitude at any given time.

This study is significant because most countries of the underdeveloped world, regardless of their economic status are directly or indirectly involved in the exploitation of children. However, the free-market economy creates freedom for every member of the society to exploit available resources at his or her disposal. In a competitive economy, the survival of a family depends on the economic contribution of every member, - including children. In view of this, largely children are to work productively on a very large scale and figure prominently in the development of capital-accumulation. Ebbe and Dilip (2007b) has argued that in a country where there is high level of poverty and unemployment, child labour may be considered essential for the survival of the family. Children are therefore, placed in work-situations at very tender ages. The income this generated by them are desperately needed by their families/ guardians while the only benefit they receive may only be food and / or a place to sleep.

This study therefore, examines this form of exploitation as it seeks to identify the reason(s) why parents engage their children in exploitative labour. Also, it attempts to highlight the method(s) parents/guardians employ in the exploitation of children as well as analyse the socio- economic consequences of child labour.

Child Exploitation in Perspective

Nigeria, a country at the crossroad of development, moved from the peripheral capitalist-economy to a core capitalist nation as a result of the privatization and commercialization policies of the Obasanjo-led civilian administration of 199-2008. According to Odetola and Ademola (1985), the traditional economic system depended on subsistence farming. Polygamy, especially polygyny was valued and cherished. The underlying reason was that many children would be needed to work on the farm for the family. Production thus depended on human labour and children became a 'tool' of capital generation. As a result of this, it was highly desired by parents to keep a polygamous home/family. At an early age, a boy followed the father to the farm, starting by helping with the weeding, fetching and carrying, looking after the fire, and bird scaring. Consequently, there was a steady development up to a complete proficiency in farming activities.

As for a girl, she was to fetch water, help in the running of the household, clearing, cooking, caring for infants, preparing and marketing the farm surplus. Despite the introduction of formal education, before or after school, girls are made to hawk about far- produce while boys their fathers on the farm during weekends and/or school the holidays. In these ways described, children contributed essentially to the economy of their households through the proceeds are often neither spent on their welfare nor on their education. As Kelso (2004) observed:

“These children are paid as children but treated as adults, work long hours, and engage in physical labour. They are denied education and growth opportunities, and, without education or vocational training, they are unable to compete in the workforce, and are thus confined to the vicious and endless life of poverty”

The capitalist economy places undue pressure on individuals within the society. ‘Survival of the fittest’ applies in every interaction, fewer become richer and many become poorer. The main survival-strategy designed by the poor is the engagement of children in capital production. In a very poor family with high number of children,-i.e., a family with a ‘feeble’ economic base, - may subject their children to street-begging, street hawking, prostitution, head-loading, and, even, petty theft. The exploitation of children does not end only with parents or guardians; even, religion clerics also practise this unwholesome attitude with impunity. In the Northern part of Nigeria, most Islamic clerics are fond of exploiting their pupils by engaging them in street-begging to generate income. These pupils-widely referred to as ‘almajeri’- street urchins. Luga (2004) noted that the need to survive is a compelling force, which drives adults to exploit children. Poverty breeds other ills such as the increasing migration of children from rural to urban areas for labour. Family dysfunction and breakdown of support systems, the shedding of traditional values that uphold a strong family- foundation, are also some of the reasons why the exploitation of children abounds.

The vestige of traditional practice continues in Nigeria unabated. Children are put to work at what seems a very early age. The physical and sexual abuse of children is a commonplace feature of family life, although the full extent of such abuse has only recently come to the front stage of public discourse. Child exploitation has clear connections with what, by public standards today, appears as the criminal maltreatment of children. British

Broadcasting Cooperation (2008) reported that movement of child labour is common in Nigeria. In January 2008, 105 children were rescued from the back of a 15seater minibus as they were being driven to an Islamic school, 400km away from their homes in the northern state of Kano. The country's anti-trafficking authority- NAPTIP- claimed it is a clear case of abuse, the way the children were packed on top of one another into a tiny bus showed they were being trafficked. But the children's parents said they were sending the children out to a traditional Koranic school, known as 'Tsangaya'-the Hausa word for 'village' or 'traditional'.

A popular non-governmental organization (NGO)-WOTCLEF (Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation), which was initiated and founded by Her Excellency, Chief (Mrs.) Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, wife of the former Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999. This organization was established to champion the cause of Children in Nigeria. The mission of WOTCLEF is to organize and promote enlightenment campaigns against women trafficking and child labour; to create awareness to Nigerians and the international community on the effects of women trafficking and child labour migration; to work towards the eradication of women trafficking and child labour migration; to provide an enlightenment forum where policy makers can discover, harness and exchange ideas on the issues of women trafficking and child labour (see www.wotclef.net).

In spite of the activities of WOTCLEF, exploitation of children continues unabated. Another government agent National Agency for the Protection of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters NAPTIP is fully committed to the prevention of all forms of human degradation and exploitation. Through the coordinated use of the nation's crime prevention and law enforcement resources, NAPTIP determines to stamp out human trafficking and to liberate and uplift the vulnerable; especially women and children, from dehumanizing and exploitative employment and usage, as well as to ensure their rehabilitation and effective reintegration into society (see www.naptip.gov.ng).

Theoretical Perspective

Merton's 'strain theory' and Marx's inequality theory provide theoretical explanations for the exploitation of children. According to Merton, a capitalist society is an unusual society, not simply because the culture places an extra ordinary emphasis on economic success but also because this goal is universal, held up for all to desire and to achieve. Poor people are not taught to be satisfied with their situation but rather, are expected to pursue the 'capitalist dream' through hard work and honesty. Even, it is claimed, the lowest or poorest can rise from rags to riches. This widespread aspiration for success, however, has an ironic and unanticipated twist to it. The 'cardinal capitalist virtue of 'exploitation', Merton (1968) cautioned, ultimately 'promotes a cardinal societal vice - 'child labour'. But why should the desire for economic survival lead to criminality? The problem is that the social structure limits access to the goal of success through legitimate means. The disjunctions between what the culture extols,- striving for success, - and what the social structure makes possible,- 'limited legitimate opportunities'- tend to place large segments of the Nigerian family in the stain engendering position of exploiting their children.

Merton developed five typologies that is, conformity, innovation, retreatism, rebellion and ritualism that are relevant to the discussion on criminal exploitation of children. 'Innovation' adaptation typology encompasses those who continue to embrace as a worthy end pecuniary success but who turn to illegitimate means when they find their legitimate prospects for economic gain blocked.

The offshoot of 'strain theory' has been traced to the work of Durkheim, - i.e., 'normlessness'. Normlessness describes the weakness of social norms to checkmate crime and criminality. The entering of Nigeria to full-fledged capitalist economy destroyed the mechanical relationship among people. Restitutive law characterizes organic solidarity. Instead of being severely punished for even seemingly minor offenses against the collective morality, individuals in our modern society are likely simply to be asked to comply with the law or to repay,- make restitution to,- those who have been harmed by their actions (Ritzer 1996).

The extant law against child labour is not repressive but it is more of restitution. The legal awareness of this law is low. There is little or no powerful and coercive common morality; the vast majority of people do not

react emotionally to a breach of law. The monitoring of child-rights' bill is largely in the hands of the media in a society with organic solidarity. But, the maintenance of restitutive law is primarily the responsibility of specialized agencies -for example, the Police and the Courts.

The ideas of Karl Marx on social inequality provides intuitive understanding for the explanation of the criminal exploitation of children and the reasons why many parents engage their children in labour at very early ages. Marx argued that the structure of classes produces relations of power, prestige and rewards in human society. The nature of domination of children by their parents or guardians explains the social structure of stratification and inequality.

The reviewed literatures and theoretical analysis therefore, provide rooms for the following hypotheses to be generated:

That there is a significant relationship between the socio-economic background of parents and the involvement of children in labour; and, that most child labourers are orphans and labour for survival.

Method

Data for this study was collected in Lagos State, Nigeria. The choice of Lagos State as the study area was informed by the cosmopolitan nature of the State. The State is heterogeneous in terms of its cultural, and ethnic/'national' composition. Besides, the State has been identified as the destination of internally trafficked people in Nigeria (see Asiwaju 2004).

Lagos State has twenty (20) Local Government Areas (LGAs). By randomization, using a five-scale interval, the researcher selected four LGAs : Ajeromi/Ifelodun, Epe, Ikeja and Lagos Island for the study.

Qualitative method of data collection was also employed in this study. The qualitative method of data-collection provides an appropriate mechanism to generate adequate data for this type of study. The choice of this method was occasioned by the itinerant nature of most of the respondents while the high degree of illiteracy among the child labourers made it difficult for the researcher to administer questionnaires. However, eight hundred and eighty (880) respondents participated in the in-depth interviews conducted in four randomly selected sample-locations. The following distributions were obtained: Ajeromi /Ifelodun 180(20.45 percent); Epe 140(15.91percent) respondents; Ikeja 300(34.09percent); and Lagos Island 260(29.55percent)

respondents. The variation in the number of respondents from the four sample-locations is a result of the differences in the population density and commercial nature of these sample-locations.

Structured questions were asked from the respondents to avoid the overlapping of responses and mixed-up of ideas. Two research assistants were employed to administer the structured-interview schedule on the respondents in Ajeromi/Ifelodun and Epe. The research assistants are PhD students,-colleagues of the researcher- that carried out the fieldwork in the first two samples. The research assistants did not collect any honourarium but the researcher provided boarding and lodging for them. The researcher himself handled the conduct of in-depth interviews in the other two sample-locations, that - Lagos Island and Ikeja. It took the researcher approximately six months to collect data from all the sample-locations.

Participants in the study were children between the ages of six and seventeen years old. The reason for this age limit is that, the Nigerian Constitution fixes eighteen years as the age of legal responsibility minor. (See 1999 Nigerian Constitution). The conduct of the in-depth interviews took place twice daily between 8am-12Noon and 4pm-6pm. The targets of the researcher, however, were the children who engage in street-hawking, conducting buses, head-loading, food vending, canteen-assistance and begging during school-hours and after school. The data collected were transcribed and subjected to rigorous qualitative and quantitative interpretation and analyses. However, the in-depth interviews provided data that could be codified for hypothesis-testing and the quantitative analysis of some variables. Simple percentages, cross-tabulation, and chi-square were the statistical tools used to analyze the following variables: 'size of family', 'age', 'sex', 'level of education', 'income generated by the family', 'reasons for child-labour' and 'who benefit from the child-labour'.

Results

Socio- Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Child Labourers.

←Inserttable 1

The table 1 explains the relationship that exists between parents' socio-economic backgrounds and involvement of children in labour by using simple percentages and cross-tabulation of data. The following results were obtained: 'Rich' 26(2.9 percent); 'Average' 62(7.1 percent); and 'Poor'

792(90 percent). The results indicate that there is a clear connection between the involvement of children in labour and their parents' socio-economic backgrounds.

The in-depth interviews also revealed that 792(90 percent) of the respondents came from poor backgrounds, where survival has become problematic. Some families have been living on dietary formulae: '0-0-1'- No food in the morning, no food in the afternoon and little or insufficient food in the evening; '1-0-0'- little or insufficient food in the morning, no food in the afternoon and no food in the evening; and '0-1-0'- no food in the morning, little or insufficient food in the afternoon and no food in the evening.

Also, 500(56.8 percent) of the respondents came from polygynous homes where the responsibility of caring for the children rests squarely on women where siblings of the same mother eat from the same pot and where the father has no financial responsibility to play. The in-depth interviews conducted with child-labourers revealed the socio-demographic statuses of the respondents:

- *"It is highly unfortunate, my father could not provide for the family. He doesn't care about us. We are twenty-two siblings: 6 boys and 16 girls. None of us went to school. I engage in street hawking to assist my mother because 'mummy' feeds us, clothes us and even provides shelter"* (Sherifat 8, female, Groundnut hawker, Ikeja 14/08/07).

Her view was collaborated by Kola, another child labourer:

- *"Whenever I think of my household I remember 'fuji house of commotion'- a popular Yoruba TV soap opera. My father is a pensioner. His meager income is not enough to take care of 18 of us, his children. We have to assist our mothers to make provision for the family. Whenever we asked for financial support from daddy his response is always unsupportive-'go and meet your mum' (Kola 11 male, head-loader, Epe, 10/07/07).*

H₀: that most child labourers were orphan.

H₁: that most child labourers were not orphans.

$X^2 = 14.8$

$a = .025$

$d.f = 6$

Critical value = 14.5

The rejection region for this test can be located using chi-square with a $\alpha = .025$ and $d.f = 6$. The critical value is 14.5. Since the observed value of χ^2 exceeds the critical chi-square value, it is imperative to reject the null hypothesis of independence of the classification and conclude that most child labourers are not orphans. The probability of making a wrong decision using the chi-square test is $\alpha = .025$. Consequently, I feel fairly confident that some child-labourers are orphans. The simple percentage analysis gives the figure of orphans among the child-labourers interviewed at 336(38.2percent) while those with parent(s) were 544(61.8 percent). It was also gathered from the in-depth interviews that out of 336(38.2percent) respondents who were orphans, about 260(77.4percent) were trafficked to Lagos from Niger Delta after both parents have been killed in protracted fratricidal wars between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, the Ijaw and Ilaje and the destruction of Odi ordered by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. Furthermore, 65(29.6percent) of the respondents have single-parents who are financially handicapped. This finding demonstrated the severity of divorce rate in Nigeria, most especially in the urban centers. Though divorce is not the only factor responsible for single-parent syndrome, other factors such as spouse death, baby born out of wedlock' and voluntary single-parenting are also contributory. The following responses of child labourers are insightful:

- *"...Yes, I beg to survive. My parents were killed during Ijaw and Itsekiri crises. My parents did not introduce us to any of their relations. I followed rescued mission operation team to Lagos. On getting to Lagos, I absconded. Since then, I live on begging and alms from good Samaritans"(Omatsola, female, 10,, street beggar, Ikeja, 21/07/07).*
- *"I don't think I have a father. My mother refused to show me my father. I sell for my mother because she is unemployed. I hawk twice daily, I sell beans cake in the morning and provisions in the evening"(Taye, male, 13, Ikeja, 21/07/07).*
- *"I have a woman who is both my 'mother' and 'father'. I was told she adopted me. I hawk for her inside moving buses. If I refused to hawk, no food for me. In fact, I have to hawk in the morning before I could be given food" (Funmi, female 14, Ajeromi/Ifelodun, 10/11/07).*
- *"I am an Islamic pupil. My malam/teacher asked me to go for begging for him. Yes, I have parents but they forced me to go Koranic School. My malam takes advantage of this and always put me on the street for begging" (Lukman, male, Epe, 24/11/07).*

Forms of Child Labour

Different forms of child labour are identified in this study. The forms of child labour identified in this study the forms identified by Ebbe and Dilip (2007). It also compliments the forms of inequality existing within the family system. Though these are somehow hidden, a careful examination of the root-cause of exploitation of children brings it to the open. Various ways by which parents deployed their children to generate income were revealed by the study. These are:

1. **Street hawking:** sachet water, fruit/vegetable vending, provisions, food-vending, etc 310(35.2 percent).
2. **Aggressive hawking:** car spare-parts, bottled-water, sachet-water, wares, jewelries, drugs, etc 95(10.8 percent).
3. **Street-begging:** direct begging, assisting disable person, group begging, etc 101(11.5 percent).
4. **Bus conductor, passengers/driver intermediary** (Agbero) 65(7.4 percent).
5. **Head loader/wheelbarrow pusher** ('Alabaru'), (163(17.4percent)).
6. **Fetcher of water/ water vendor** ('Agbonmita'), (99(11.2percent)).
7. **Sex work:** in-house, brothel, street-hanging, night-clubbing, etc 57(6.5percent).

The in-depth interviews conducted among child labourers were more revealing:

- *"I am into hawking, most adults cannot match my dexterity when it comes to money making. I hawk different articles three times daily. It is provisions in the morning, 'pure water' in the afternoon, and fried yam in the evening". (Chinwe, female, 10, Lagos Island, 12/08/07).*
- *"In my own case, I engage in begging for the survival of my family. My father is crippled; my mother is jobless, if I don't beg who will care for the family. Let me reveal certain things to you, a times, I pick pocket if I failed to get something from begging (Ibrahim, male, 9, Lagos Island, 12/08/07).*

It is worrisome to note that some girls engage in commercial sex work to fend for their parents/guardians. In-depth interviews conducted in Ikeja revealed that young girls between 9-14 years engage in prostitution. These children gave poverty, lack of parental care, push factors from school and home, peer group influence, abduction etc as factors that led to their engagement in prostitution/ commercial sex-working.

- *"I am into prostitution, is there anything bad in what I am doing? I use what I have to get what I want. I have been sleeping with men, I mean adult of my dad's age since age 8, and I am now 13 years old. Yes, I save my money and send ¾ of it to my parents. I enjoy this 'work'- prostitution! Because I get*

money from it to finance other siblings and see to the welfare of my parents” (Chineye, female, 13, Lagos Island, 24/11/07).

- *“I have been engaging in prostitution since age 12years old. The madam who brought me from the village always arranges me for men. She negotiates price with them and they pay her directly. What I gained from this unwholesome arrangement are accommodation and a small sum of money to live on. I have no opportunity to further my education. I left school three years ago, precisely whenever I asked her about schooling she shout me down (Patience, female 15, Ikeja, 21/07/07).*

Forms of Exploitation

Exploitation is characterized by social and economic relations in a capitalist society. Gender, race, age, power/ authority, income, ethnicity have been identified as the root causes of stratification in society. This study revealed that age difference between children and parents/guardians confer natural/unlimited authority and recognition on parents/guardians to control and direct the activities of children without hindrance.

The promulgation of child rights bill in Nigeria in 2006 has not helped matter; sixteen out of twenty-six States in the country have adopted this bill. Where the bill has been adopted there is little or no public sensitization about its existence. The children have no knowledge of the extant law in the States that have already adopted the bill.

Exploitation explains vividly the kind of inequality that exists between parents and children. According to Worsely, (1982) the capitalists pay workers less than the value of the products of workers' labour while keeping the surplus for themselves. The workers are not often aware of this exploitation, while the capitalists but no eye-lids at their gain. The capitalists even behave as if this surplus value derives from their skillful business- acumen. And, Marx is of the view that 'so long as trade is good, the capitalist is too much absorbed in money grubbing to take notice of this gratuitous gift of labour.

This study, however, highlights how parents/guardians benefit from the exploitative labour of their children. The money generated by children from dangerous, grueling, and indecent jobs, such as prostitution and street hawking, ends up in the pockets of parents/guardians. What the children get in return is often only food and a place to sleep. The orientation of giving birth to different sexes

is different across cultures but a unique under-current is exploitation. For instance, the Hausa/ Fulani, in the northern Nigeria, prefer a female child to a male child. It is the shared belief among this major ethnic group that a female is a source of wealth to the family. This actually accounts for the predominant practice of early marriage among the Hausa/Fulani. The sex preference among the Yorubas is male. Male child is needed for the creation and further reproduction of wealth as well as the perpetuation of the family name.

The in-depth interviews conducted among the child labourers in the five sampled-locations revealed a wide range of exploitation experiences by children:

- *“My parents are still alive but have no source of income. My family depends on the income generated from this ware. If I don’t sell in a day, my family would be in a crisis. Yes, I deliver all the sales to my mother. I don’t make ‘extra’, I don’t keep anything for myself and my parents do not save anything for my education and future” (Sherifat, female, 8, Ikeja 14/08/07).*
- *“We are eight in my family but I am the last born. All of us engage in selling of articles. My father is the ‘managing director’. My mother is the ‘accountant’. The children are the workers; they don’t care about us. All proceeds go to them. No education, no clothing, no medication except food and shelter. I regret ever coming to this world! (Chuks, male, 15, Ikeja, 14/08/07)*

The exploitation of children did not stop with the parents/guardians a few other adults in care of these children’s welfare also engage in this criminal act. The guardians take over the care and training of children whose parents are alive but reside far away in the rural areas or are dead or act as parents for the orphans or motherless babies. The excerpts from the data collected provide insights into this form of exploitation:

- *“The woman I am serving is my guardian. She took over the responsibility of caring for me after my parents died. I lost both parents to Niger-Delta crisis. She forced me into labour because I am not her biological child. I work for the money that her family spends. She sends her biological children to school but no education for me. If I don’t hawk in the morning, I won’t eat. I don’t gain anything from my labour except feeding, even, the feeding is not regular” (Seun, female, 14, Epe 10/07/07,)*
- *“My guardian happens to be my uncle. He said I have to work for other children in the household to survive because I am the youngest. He stopped me from schooling and forced me into labour. He feeds me but the food is not regular. I*

- supplement my income by 'pick-pocketing'. There was a day I was caught. I escaped being lynched by a whisker" (Chima, male, 13, Ikeja, 15/08/07).*
- *"I hate life! I regret my sojourn on this earth. We that lived like princes and princesses in our father's house have now become refugees in another man's house. Our uncle took the three of us after the death of our father. This 'wicked' uncle stopped paying our school fees and makes us income-generating tools for his family. His children are in schools and never engage in any form of labour" (Layo, female, 16, Epe, 11/07/07).*
 - *"If in a day I made #2,500(\$21) I told my uncle that was enough to send me to school but he said he had no time for school and he beat me. He used a horse whip to beat me and a times he used a rope to tie me and lifted me up. I usually sleep in the market place and eat scraps of food from the rubbish. I later worked in the canteen, washing plates. If I made a mistake, I was seriously beaten" (Osunbor, male, 9, Ajeromi/Ifelodun, 11/11/07).*
 - *"I kept asking my aunt when she was going to put me into school and then she said if I asked again she would beat me. Instead I was forced to sell bottled drinks on the highways. I had to give my aunt #3,000(\$25) everyday. If I did not earn that amount, I was beaten. On one occasion, I was supposed to give money to a creditor my aunt had owed six months ago, but I did not make enough, the woman took electric iron, plugged it in, allowed it to turn red, and used it on my body. When something is getting difficult like that, there is no way you can even cry because if you are even longing for tears, you will not get" (Rachel, female, Lagos Island, 13/08/07).*

Conclusion and Recommendation

In this study, attention has been to the exploitation of children, especially in contemporary Nigeria. The promulgation of child rights bill in 2006 made the exploitation of children in whatever guise a criminal act. As at February, 2008 about sixteen out of thirty-six States of the Nigerian Federation have adopted the child rights bill. The non-adoption by some States to this law has made the eradication of child-labour a difficult task indeed.

It is believed that articulating the demographic factors that are associated with exploitation of children is a prerequisite to explicating a number of factors such as poverty, ineffective law, ignorance, lack of education and economic doldrums, and frequent policy- changes.

In the area of legal education, Nigerian government has a lot to do. Legal awareness of child-labour among people is low, even; adult citizens are ignorant of the law not to talk of the underage. The sensitization of citizens of their rights on radio and television has far reaching effect. Regular radio

and TV Programmes on children's legal rights and awareness can reduce the level of ignorance. This study has shown that law against child labour is restitutive rather than repressive. Offenders must be severely punished for any action that is considered to be injurious and offensive to the children. Exploitation of children in whatever form must be met with swift, severe punishment.

The different ways by which children have been exploited were also discussed in this study. These include: street-begging, street-hawking, bus-conducting, 'head-loading' and some other forms of labour that could be described as hazardous. The literature also shows that the identified forms exploitative of child-labour are common features of underdevelopment economy or developing economies.

A very important revelation was the nature and who are the actors in the exploitation of children. It was identified that parents, guardians and religious teachers are the agents of exploitation. The compelling need to adapt to strenuous economic conditions made most of the parents to engage their wards in dangerous labour. The socio – economic consequences of the exploitation of children is enormous. It is revealed that most child labourers did not attend school while some have already dropped out of school. Most of the child labourers 'graduated' to become criminals. They learn the technique as a result of association with common criminal on the street. It is also observed that in the near future, the required sound labour power to drive the nation's economy would be in short supply.

To 'secure' the future, the life of children must be protected. The enabling child rights law must be proactive. There should be a specially trained squad of the Nigerian Police to arrest and prosecute any child below 18 years, involving in labour. In this way, juvenile courts, reformatory homes, and social security services must be created in the country to forestall the incidence of child labour.

In conclusion, any research is a work in progress and, ultimately partial and incomplete. There are far too extraneous variables operating to contribute to the better understanding of this phenomenon at this point in time. An analysis relying principally, - as this study does – on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents provides useful but limited insight into the sociological construction of criminal exploitation of children, and structural and cultural factors attributed to it..

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Table1: Cross-tabulation of the parents' socio-economic backgrounds and involvement of children in labour.

	Study		Location			
	AJ	EP	LI	IKJ	TOTAL	
Background	No / %					
Rich	05 (2.8)	06 (4.3)	08 (3.1)	07 (2.3)	26 (2.9)	
Average	11 (6.1)	13 (9.3)	21 (8.1)	17 (5.7)	62 (7.1)	
Poor	164 (91.1)	121 (86.4)	231 (88.8)	276 (92.0)	792 (90.0)	
Total	180 (100)	140 (100)	200 (100)	300 (100)	880 (100)	

Source: Author's field survey, 2007

Legend:

AJ/I: Ajeromi/Ifelodun

EP: Epe

LI: Lagos Island

IKJ: Ikeja