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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CHILD LABOUR AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SELF CONCEPT, VOCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND CHOICE

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#### ABSTRACT

The study set out to investigate the influence of work in childhood on the self concept, vocational aspiration and choice of children who work and go to school in Abia State. The study adopted a descriptive survey method using questionnaire and structured interview to illicit information from respondents on children who combine child labour and schooling. The sample is made up of 300 children from three Local Government Areas that make up Aba metropolis. Two research questions and three hypotheses were used. The analysis was done using percentages for the research questions and t-test statistic for the hypotheses. The findings are that majority of the children engaged in childhood work are from 12 years of age and above, in the junior secondary school level and from intact but poor families. They have good self concept but low vocational aspirations and choice. This implies that if this trend of child labour is allowed to continue, the country will lose potential graduates and trained contributors to the economy thereby, negating the compulsory free primary to junior secondary education move of the Government. Recommendations were also made.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Childhood is perceived generally in the society as a period of growing up and learning the rudiments of life from the members of the family as they interact with the older ones in the home. Chauhan (1983) stratified childhood into early and late childhood. Early childhood spans from 2-6years at which time, the child's thinking and reasoning develop in relation to concrete materials. There is rapid increase in memory and the child can learn by rote memorization. Late childhood is from 6-12 years when the child develops the capacity for logical thinking, becomes courageous and develops loyalty to authority among other characteristics. For Havighurst (Cited in Chauhan 1983), a child at 5- 6 years of age, learns sex difference, achieves physiological stability and forms simple concepts of social and physical reality. The capacity for emotional relationship with siblings and other people is equally developed and he learns to distinguish between right and wrong. In Erikson's (1950) view, the child develops initiative or guilt at 3-5 years of age and industry or inferiority from 6 years depending on the relationship and encouragement from the home.

What these developmental characteristics imply is that children are capable of and can be engaged in minor house chores like washing plates, shining shoes among others from about three- five years of age to enhance their industry and avoid inferiority. Tedious work outside the home such as hawking along the streets, cultivating farmlands and working in industries among others is introduced after the child has been in full-time education until the age of 16 years. At this age, the child is equipped physically and psychologically by reason of maturation and self concept to choose a vocation and either enter or prepare for it by specialized training or further education. Engaging children in tedious work outside the home before the age of 16 years is termed child labour which is any work that is likely to interfere with the child's education or harmful to his/her physical, mental or social development according to United Nations (1989).

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Daily in different homes in various nations (especially the developing nations including Nigeria) children engage in economic activities such as hawking, weaving clothes and carpets, fishing and crop cultivation among others as a means of subsidizing the economy of the family. While some of these children go to school, some do not due to the exigencies of their work and the economic condition of their homes. With the advent of Universal Basic Education (UBE), industrial revolution which engendered changes in working conditions and the emergence of the concepts of workers' and children's rights, child labour is now considered exploitative by many international organizations and illegal in many countries. In Nigeria in particular, the wide dispersion of child workers in the informal sector and agriculture has made it impossible for the actual number of children involved in exploitative or hazardous work to be known. However, a recent assessment puts the figure at eight million (Hodges 2002). In a recent study on child labour in Zaria, Aliyu (2006) reported that of the 200 respondents engaged in child labour, majority of the children (57.5%) were in the age range of 11-13 years while 17% were between 14-15 years. Many of them (70%) came from polygamous homes and the type of work done range from hawking, mechanic, tailoring and carpentry. Some were however, working as house girls (6%). In terms of health hazards, sixty one percent were physically assaulted, 52.31% had cuts from instruments in the places of work, 23.4% had falls and 10.6 percent were engaged in drugs/substance abuse.

This situation may be a result of the poverty level of Nigerians (Okpara 1988) which necessitated parents ignorantly leasing their children to more affluent citizens (sometimes through relations) in the hope of earning the much needed income for family upkeep. These are the children that are sometimes sold to those who are not bothered about their welfare; use them in prostitution and other illicit activities in and outside Nigeria. The children are thus deprived not only of the opportunity to go to school full time, but also freedom to choose the type of work they would want to engage in. Child labour runs contrary to Ginzberg's (in Shertzer and Stone,1971) postulation that

vocational choice is a compromise between a person's interest, capacities, values, available opportunities and takes place over a period of years. It goes through fantasy period which is governed by the wish of adults. At the tentative stage, the choice of work the individual makes depend on certain factors like capability, interest, aptitude, family and peer group influence. In his vocational development theory, Super (1957), identified the development of self concept and awareness of the occupational roles available in the world of work as the central process in making vocational choice. Self concept is basically, the idea one has about oneself and it is an aspect of personality. The family has a great influence on the personality development of children. It not only provides a wealth of materials for role playing but transmits behavioural traits, attitudes and value systems which are basic to specific roles. The family equally enhances the development of motivational traits such as achievement orientation (which is the desire or aspiration to achieve high) and habits of industry which can have a significant influence on vocational choice.

In terms of aspiration, Ginzberg found that while boys from high income families tended to assume they would go to college even at quite an early age, boys from lower income families tended to think in terms of skilled jobs which would offer a higher rate of remuneration than their fathers received. Boys from this group, who possessed mechanical interests and abilities, he continued, were not able to think beyond becoming mechanics or electricians. He stated that one of the major constraints on the vocational development of boys from lower income families was their modest level of aspirations. Supporting the influence of the family, Carter in Hayes and Hopson (1981) stated that among families within the lower socio-economic group, three main types of homes and social background can be identified namely; the home-centered aspiring type, the working class and the deprived and underprivileged types. The home centered aspiring family is convinced of the importance of planning ahead. The parents support the school and its values and consequently, encourage their children to study instead of working early. The solid working class family accepts the standards upheld in the wider society, they are easy going and inclined to take life as it comes. They neither think in terms of striving to improve their social position nor appear to take a profound interest in education. So, there may be little interest in persuading their children to aspire to anything other than the type of job the parents or other relations and even the immediate neighbour hold. The underprivileged families care little for conventional codes of behavior. They live much for the present and regard life as a matter of luck. Parents in this home tend to reject the value system of the school and have little interest in their children's future career.

The last two lower class families are likely to introduce tedious and strenuous work outside the home to their children and sustain it in childhood thereby practicing child labour. The society is also affected as it will be deprived of skilled and educated workers who would have contributed to the economy of the society. Although Aliyu (2006) reported that certain labour activities like street trading equips the children with better math skills than children of their age in formal schooling, they are exposed to environmental hazards and consequent ill health, injury or disability. In a personal interaction with some children engaged in street trading and organized apprenticeship schemes such as carpentry and mechanic, they said that they gained self confidence and esteem because of the skill they acquired and interacting with various individuals in the course of their business. Another study in Nigeria on child abuse showed that work, even within the family farm had negative ramifications on the children (Dantiye and Haruna, 2004). Child labour hinders learning through exposure to environmental hazards and consequent ill health, injury, or disability. For example, children working in mines can develop chest infections or get caught in explosions. Those who hawk may experience ill health, poor self concept, physical hurts and even disability as they wander about in search of customers. Children who weave carpets may develop problems with eye strain or infection from breathing chemical fibers. The question then arises how do these

children see themselves in terms of being at work while children their age are in school full time; will they stick to these jobs or aspire higher later in life? These are the issues the study intends to address. The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the self concept and vocational aspiration of children who are engaged in child labour and still attend school in Aba metropolis of Abia State. Specifically, the study investigated the type of labour the children engage in, their self concept and vocational aspiration. This was done based on gender, parentage (those living with their parents and those that are not), age and class as the intervening variables. The study was limited to establishing the self concept and vocational aspiration of children who work and school. The study was done in Aba metropolis of Abia State.

### Research questions

The following research questions were put forward to guide the study:

- How do children who engage in child labour perceive themselves?
- What are the vocational aspirations and choice of students engaged in child labour?
- At what age are children engaged in child labour?

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study

- There is no significant difference in the self concept of male and female respondents engaged in child labour.
- There is no significant difference in vocational aspiration and choice of male and female students engaged in child labour.
- Parentage will not affect vocational aspiration of the children significantly

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted descriptive survey design and was carried out in Abia State - specifically in Aba metropolis (The economic nerve center of Abia state) made up of Osisioma, Aba North and Aba South Local Government Areas. This area is chosen because it has many children who go to school and work. The population consisted of children who are engaged in business such as hawking and pushing wheel barrow in Abia State. Aba metropolis consists of 3 local government areas with a population of 750,972 (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2008). The population of children is however, not known. From these three local Government areas which make up Aba metropolis, a sample of 300 children were purposively selected who are engaged in schooling and business. They are composed of 100 respondents from each Local Government Area and stratified into males and females. A structured interview guide and a questionnaire were used. The structured interview was for those young ones who could not understand the questionnaire while the questionnaire was for those who understood it. The questionnaire had 3 sections. Section A requested for biographic data, B- self concept, C- vocational interest and aspirations. The instrument was validated by experts in guidance and counseling, childhood education and measurement and evaluation. Their corrections were used in producing the final draft of the instrument which was trial tested; subjected to cronbach alpha test of internal consistency and it yielded a reliability coefficient value of .69. Data collected was analyzed using frequency scores and percentage for the research questions and t-test statistics for the null hypotheses.

## RESULTS

The results were presented in tables according to the research questions and hypothesis.

### Research question one. How do children who engage in work in early childhood perceive themselves?

**Table 1. Percentage responses on self concept**

Items	Frequency	Percentage
I am responsible	292	97.3
My life has great value for me	296	98.6
I am a sensitive person	268	89.3
I am concerned about what people think of me	257	85.6
I constantly feel insecure	206	68.6
I can face any difficulty in life	261	87.0
I am unreliable	132	44.0
I feel loved	167	55.7
Life is meaningless	140	46.7
I like to be myself always	257	85.6
I am always thirsty for knowledge		
I fear I will fail in things I do	155	51.7
I like to generate new ideas	268	89.3
I like to work hard	280	93.3
I am intelligent	272	90.7
My school performance is above average	225	75.0
I will pursue academic to its peak	245	81.7
I am confident I will pass my exams	264	88.0
I can study any subject and master it	257	85.6
I have social attraction for others	272	90.7
My business does not allow me to perform well in school	190	63.3

From the responses, the respondents have good concept of self. The positive statements have percentages ranging from 75-97% while the negatives ranged from 44-68%. For example, item one, had the highest percentage indicating that the children feel responsible, followed by item two- my life has great value for me. Item 7- I am unreliable has 44%, item 9- life is meaningless, has 46.7%

## Research question 2

### What are the vocational aspirations of children laborers?

**Table 2. Percentage responses on vocational aspiration**

Items	frequency	Percentage
Secretarial job	162	54.0
Engineering	162	54.0
Medicine	187	60.6
Trading	202	67.3
Law	187	60.6
Fine artist	187	60.6
Teaching	58	19.5
Accounting	74	24.6
Fashion designing	93	31.0
Carpentry	124	41.3
Mechanic	140	48.7
Nursing	78	26.0
Food vendor	140	48.7

From the table, the children ranked highest in Trading followed by Law, Medicine and fine arts.

### Ho1. Parentage will not affect the vocational aspiration of the children.

**Table 3. t- test analysis on parental influence on vocational aspirations**

Parentage	No	Mean	SD	t-cal	t- crit
Those living with parents	130	1.63	.48	-10.79	1.96
Those living with others	125	2.00	.00		

The t calculated is greater than the critical value of t indicating that there is significant difference in vocational aspiration of children based on parentage.

### Ho2. There is no significant difference on self concept based on gender

**Table 5. t-test analysis of gender differences on self concept**

Gender	No	Mean	SD	tcal	T crit
Male	124	1.75	.43	8.4	1.96
Female	175	1.40	.49		

The t calculated is higher than the critical value of t. The null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

### Ho3. There is no significant difference in vocational aspirations based on gender.

**Table 6. t-test analysis of gender difference in vocational aspirations.**

Gender	No	Mean	SD	tcal	T crit
Male	124	1.47	.49	-988	
Female	175	1.50	.50		1.96

The t calculated is less than the critical value of t. The hypothesis is hereby rejected

## DISCUSSION

The biographic data of the respondents show that majority of the respondents – 69.5% are from 12 years and above while 30.2% of them were below 12 years. Fifty eight point four percent (58.4%) were females while 41.6% were males. This finding is contrary to Aliyu's 2006 report that more males engaged in child labour in Zaria which may be as a result of cultural difference. Eighty six point eight percent (86.8%) of the respondents were living with their parents while 13.2% were not. This also negates the popular opinion that parents use mainly house helps for family business activities. While 27.9% do not go to school, 72.1% go to school with secondary school students in the majority (44.6%) and primaries 4-6 pupils –38.1%. Majority 30.1% of the children sell sachet water, 16.9% engage in farming and 16.9% sell biscuits and sweets among others.

### What is the family background of these children?

Fifty point one percent (50.1%) came from intact families (with both parents living together); while 37.4% are from single parents and 12.5% are from polygamous homes. This is also contrary to Aliyu's report that 70% of his respondents were from polygamous families. Besides, cultural differences were equally observed due to the fact that Zaria is in the Northern part of Nigeria dominated by Moslems who are basically polygamous for religious reasons. The finding tends to highlight the poor economic situations of families- polygamous or nuclear.

### Parental occupation

While 31.3% of their parents are farmers, 21.7% are engaged in various businesses and 14.5% are teachers. This is in line with Aliyu's finding that majority of the respondents in his study were from poor homes most of whose parents had no formal education and were not employed.

### What are their vocational aspirations?

From the result, the children ranked highest in Trading (67.6%) This lends credence to Ginzberg's report that while boys from high income families tended to assume they would go to college even at quite an early age, boys from lower income families tended to think in terms of skilled jobs which would offer a higher rate of remuneration than their fathers received. Boys from this group, who possessed mechanical interests and abilities, he continued, were not able to think beyond becoming mechanics or electricians. Although hawking items is not a skilled job, it provides income which may not be higher than their parents' but contributory to the family income. The respondents

in this study may be from the solid working class family who accepts the standards upheld in the wider society, easy going and neither thinks in terms of striving to improve their social position nor appear to take a profound interest in education. So, there may be little interest in persuading their children to aspire to anything other than the type of job the parents or other relations and even the immediate neighbour hold. They may also be from underprivileged families who care little for conventional codes of behavior, live much for the present, tend to reject the value system of the school and have little interest in their children's future career; hence the respondents' gravitation towards trading. While gender influenced respondents' vocational aspiration significantly, parentage did not. Considering self concept, the respondents have good concept of self. The positive statements have percentages ranging from 75-97 while the negatives range from 44-63%. This finding lends credence to the responses of some children labourers (children who are engaged in street trading and those who took part in organized apprenticeship schemes such as carpentry and mechanic among others) the researcher interacted with. They reported having gained self confidence and esteem because of the skills they acquired and their interaction with various individuals in the course of their business. Gender however, had a significant effect on their self concept.

### Conclusion

Child labour in Nigeria and Abia state in particular is real. Majority of the children labourers are girls. A good number of the respondents at the secondary school level of education and from intact homes with poor parents who are mainly traders. They have good self concept and low vocational aspiration. The implication of these findings is that Nigeria may lose a substantial number of potential graduates who would have contributed to the technological advancement of the country if the Government does not as a matter of urgency, enforce free and compulsory education for all children till age 13 or junior secondary 3 level as provided for in the UBE act.. In as much as there is currently an emphasis on entrepreneurship, these children need to be kept in school till the minimum age of 16 years when they are physically and emotionally matured to take on entrepreneurial activities of their choice. School Guidance Counselors have a herculean task to motivate children in their schools to aim higher not neglecting consultations with parents who will facilitate the motivational ventures of the school counselors.

### Recommendation

Considering the fact that there are no Guidance Counselors in primary schools, there is need for the Ministry of Education to post them there to capture these children academically at this tender and formative age. There is also need for the enforcement of free and compulsory primary education for all which entails forcing children hawkers off the road during school periods and prosecuting any parent who persists in using their children to augment family income.

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