

Assessment of Child Labour and Trafficking in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses child labour and trafficking within the Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Employing a survey research design, 400 questionnaires were distributed to adult residents across selected locations within the Keffi Local Government Area (LGA). A high response rate of 96% (383 completed questionnaires) was achieved, and the collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of respondents reported having children involved in household economic activities, as well as the presence of child labourers from distant origins. Furthermore, most respondents reported household incomes within the lower to middle range, coupled with larger household sizes. These descriptive results suggest a potential correlation between household economic conditions and children's labour engagement within the Keffi community. The study highlights the need for further in-depth analysis and targeted interventions to address child labour and its underlying socio-economic factors in the region.

INTRODUCTION

The innocence of childhood should be a period of growth, learning, and protection (Ibrahim & Sule, 2023). However, for millions of children worldwide, this fundamental right is tragically curtailed by the pervasive scourges of child labour and trafficking (Musa, Magaji, & Tsauni, 2022). These interconnected issues represent profound violations of human rights, stripping children of their dignity, potential, and safety (Obehi, Sule, & Ahmad, 2024). Nigeria, as a developing nation grappling with complex socio-economic challenges, is not immune to these global issues (Musa, Magaji, & Tsauni, 2023). Understanding the specific manifestations and prevalence of child labour and trafficking within its diverse regions is a crucial step towards effective intervention and the safeguarding of its most vulnerable population (Magaji & Musa, 2015). This study focuses its lens on the Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria, aiming to illuminate the local context of these complex problems and pave the way for targeted and impactful solutions.

Child labour, in its myriad forms, constitutes a grave impediment to a child's holistic development (Magaji, 2007). Defined by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) as any work that jeopardises a child's physical, mental, social, or moral well-being and obstructs their access to education and developmental opportunities, it encompasses a broad spectrum of exploitative practices. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) further emphasizes that child labour robs children of their formative years, their inherent potential, and their fundamental dignity, subjecting them to risks that can have lasting detrimental effects on their physical and psychological health. Whether toiling in hazardous industries, engaged in arduous agricultural work, or exploited in domestic service, these children are denied their right to education, play, and a secure upbringing (Jafaru, Magaji, & Ahmad, 2024). The long-term consequences for both the individual child and society are significant, perpetuating cycles of poverty and hindering socioeconomic progress (Magaji, Musa, & Salisu, 2022).

Adding another layer of complexity and severity to the exploitation of children is the abhorrent crime of child trafficking (Yunusa, Magaji, Ahmad, & Obehi, 2024). This insidious practice, clearly defined in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a child through means of threat, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over the child, for exploitation. This exploitation can manifest in various brutal forms, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and even the horrific practice of organ removal (Musa, Magaji, & Yakubu, 2024). Child trafficking often preys on the vulnerabilities created by poverty, lack of educational opportunities, family breakdown, and social instability (UNODC). Traffickers exploit the desperation of families and the naivety of children, luring them with false promises of a better life, only to subject them to unimaginable cruelty and exploitation.

The intersection between child labour and trafficking is often blurred, with trafficking frequently leading to exploitative labour situations. Children trafficked from rural areas to urban centres or across state lines may end up engaged in hazardous work, facing conditions far worse than those experienced in more localised forms of child labour. Understanding the dynamics that drive both child labour and trafficking within a specific local context, such as Keffi, is paramount. Factors such as prevailing socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, educational infrastructure, and the presence of protective mechanisms all play a significant role in shaping the landscape of child exploitation.

Nigeria, despite having ratified international conventions aimed at protecting children, continues to grapple with the challenges of child labour and trafficking. Regional disparities and varying levels of socio-economic development across the country contribute to the complexity of these issues (Magaji, 2005). Studying a specific local government area like Keffi allows for a more granular understanding of the local drivers, patterns, and consequences of child exploitation. This localized approach is essential for developing interventions that are culturally sensitive, contextually relevant, and ultimately more effective in safeguarding children.

This research endeavours to investigate the prevalence of child labour and trafficking within the Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. By addressing the research question – What is the prevalence of child labour and child trafficking in the Keffi Local Government Area? – and aiming to investigate the extent of these issues, this study seeks to provide crucial empirical data. The null hypothesis guiding this research posits that there is no prevalence of child labour and child trafficking in the Keffi Local Government Area. The study aims to contribute to a more accurate understanding of the reality on the ground.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform evidence-based interventions and policies at the local and potentially state levels. The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and other stakeholders working to protect children's rights in Keffi. By quantifying the prevalence and potentially identifying key characteristics associated with child labour and trafficking in this area, the research can contribute to the development of targeted prevention strategies, improved identification and support mechanisms for victims, and ultimately a more robust child protection framework within the community. Furthermore, this localised study can contribute to the broader national discourse on child protection challenges and potentially serve as a model for similar investigations in other local government areas across Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child labour, household income, and their relationship are three essential ideas to comprehend. The following sections will analyse these notions and elucidate their relationship.

Concept of Child Labour: Child Labour, defined by UNICEF (2022), refers to any form of work that poses physical, mental, social, or moral risks to children and hinders their access to educational and developmental possibilities. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is defined as an individual under the age of eighteen. The Convention highlights the imperative of safeguarding children

from violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse, as well as from labour exploitation and perilous occupations.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022) defines "child labour" as work that denies children their youth, potential, and dignity while also posing risks to their bodily and mental development. Child labour encompasses tasks detrimental to children's mental and physical well-being. It also includes activities that hinder their education by preventing them from attending school, forcing them to drop out prematurely, or burdening them with balancing school with excessively demanding and time-consuming work. The classification of "child labour" for specific types of employment is contingent upon factors such as the child's age, the nature and duration of the work, the working conditions, and the goals set by different nations. The response differs among nations and even within states within those nations (ILO, 2022).

Child labour, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022), refers to any employment or activity performed by a child under the age of 18 in exchange for compensation.

In the form of money, goods, or any other form that hinders their physical well-being, access to school, and overall growth. The labour performed by children is classified as child labour due to their age falling below the legally mandated minimum working age of 18 years, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Minimum Age Convention of 1973, specifically Number 138 (1). Suda (2001) and Edmond and Watson (2008) define child labour as the employment of children for economic purposes, which involves both dangerous conditions and a high likelihood of exploitation. Child labour is widely seen as the perilous engagement of children in work that poses harm to their well-being. Child labour is any form of work that hinders a child's physical and mental growth, as stated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2022.

Child labour is often viewed as a beneficial practice in Africa and Asia due to the potential for youngsters to acquire valuable skills. In their study, Kielland and Tovo (2006) view child labour as a means of incorporating children into various societal tasks, which helps them discover their future roles as they grow older. According to Udry (2006), child labour is viewed as a trade-off where families forfeit potential future earnings to gain immediate, more significant cash during crucial periods. This financial factor typically hampers the child's academic potential at an early stage (Magaji & Yahaya, 2012); some opt to juggle education with excessively lengthy periods of laborious work (Ruchi, 2012).

Concept of Household Income: According to the definition provided by OECD countries in 2022, household disposable income refers to the total amount of money available to households after deducting their spending on goods and services and savings, while excluding any changes in the net value of households' investments in pension funds. It is also equivalent to the total of earnings and salaries, combined income, net property income, net current transfers, and social benefits excluding non-monetary transfers, minus income and wealth taxes, as well as social security contributions made by employees, self-employed individuals, and the jobless (Shaba, Yelwa, Obansa. & Magaji, 2018). The household sector indicator encompasses the disposable income of Non-profit Institutions Serving Households (NPISH). The price deflator utilized to derive absolute values is congruent with the one employed to adjust the final consumption expenditure of families and NPISH.

Household income typically refers to the total gross income of all individuals in a household who have reached a specified age threshold (Aluko & Magaji, 2020). It includes all individuals residing in a family unit, such as spouses and dependents, who share the same residence (Musa & Magaji, 2023). All incomes, regardless of their allocation towards household expenses, are considered. Household income is a significant risk. A metric employed by lenders to assess loans and serves as a valuable economic indicator of the standard of living in a particular area.

Concept of Child Trafficking: Child trafficking is a grave violation of human rights, representing the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for exploitation. This exploitation can take many forms, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and organ removal. The power imbalance inherent in the child-adult relationship, coupled with vulnerabilities arising from poverty, lack of education, and unstable family environments, makes children particularly susceptible to traffickers' deceptive tactics.

International legal frameworks, such as the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), define child trafficking and mandate state parties to criminalise it, protect child victims, and prevent future occurrences. Organizations like UNICEF and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conduct extensive research and advocacy on child trafficking, highlighting its devastating impact on children's physical and psychological well-being, as well as their development and future opportunities. Their reports often detail the root causes of child trafficking, the routes and methods employed by traffickers, and the challenges in identifying and protecting victims. Academic research further explores the socio-economic factors that contribute to child trafficking, the psychological trauma experienced by survivors, and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. Understanding child trafficking requires a multi-faceted approach, considering legal definitions, the lived experiences of victims, and the broader societal contexts that enable this heinous crime.

Theoretical Framework

General Systems Theory (GST) offers a foundational approach for analyzing how inputs influence individuals and how outputs—behavioural or systemic responses—are generated within a continuous feedback loop aimed at maintaining regulation and balance. Initially developed in biology and later extended to the social sciences by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), General Systems Theory (GST) encourages a holistic understanding of individuals as part of broader, interacting systems. In social work, this theory shifted the focus from isolated interventions to a more integrated view of human behaviours within environmental contexts (Payne, 2014).

A key critique of GST in social applications is its emphasis on internal equilibrium, which often overlooks the dynamic and unstable nature of many human environments. Additionally, it treats all aspects of a person's life as part of a unified system, which may not reflect the fragmented realities individuals face.

Ecological Systems Theory (EST), developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), builds upon and diverges from GST by emphasizing the multilayered interactions between individuals and both living and nonliving elements of their environments. Unlike GST, EST explicitly incorporates environmental and policy-level influences, including nonhuman factors, which are often only implied in GST.

Bronfenbrenner identified five interrelated environmental systems that influence human development. The microsystem encompasses the immediate settings in which an individual interacts directly, such as family, peers, and school. The mesosystem refers to the connections and relationships between these microsystems—for example, how family dynamics influence school performance. The ecosystem includes external environments that indirectly affect the individual, such as a parent's workplace or local government decisions. The macrosystem involves the broader cultural, social, and institutional values, norms, and laws that shape the other systems. Finally, the chronosystem captures the dimension of time, accounting for life transitions, historical events, and shifts in policies that influence development over a person's lifespan.

The chronosystem introduces a dynamic, temporal element to the model, illustrating how institutional and policy changes can influence personal trajectories by altering access to resources or redefining social norms (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). At this level, individuals are influenced by high-level processes, such as governance, law, and institutional reform, which can directly impact their quality of life and capacity for adaptation.

In areas such as human rights and anti-human trafficking efforts, both GST and EST are frequently applied—either explicitly or implicitly—to design interventions that address the complex systems shaping individual vulnerability and resilience.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Obehi, et al. (2024). This research delves into the relationship between household income and the incidence of child labor and trafficking in Suleja, Niger State. Utilizing the conceptual frameworks proposed by Basu and Van (1988), a model was constructed to examine this correlation. Employing a multistage sampling approach, data was collected from three specific rural districts within the Suleja Local Government Area of Niger State.

Questionnaires were distributed to 367 families residing in these selected rural areas. The findings of the study reveal a notable prevalence of child labor and trafficking in Suleja, Niger State, Nigeria. It is recommended that both individuals and government entities take heed and actively engage in endeavours aimed at eradicating child labour and trafficking. Such concerted efforts are crucial in curtailing the involvement of children in these detrimental practices.

Oli and Nweke (2021) examine the phenomenon of child labour in the Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The study included a mixed-methods research design and a multistage sampling approach, comprising a sample of 200 persons aged 18 and above. The primary tools employed for data gathering were the questionnaire schedule, a quantitative method, and the in-depth interview guide, a qualitative method. The findings indicate that child labour is influenced by factors such as poor household income, poverty, parental education, family size, cultural beliefs, and living in slums. Common manifestations of child labour include activities such as peddling, street soliciting, household chores, agricultural labour, and employment in industrial facilities.

Yunusa, et al. (2024). examines the underlying factors influencing child labor and trafficking in Suleja, Niger State. Employing the theoretical frameworks proposed by Basu and Van (1988), a model was developed to analyse these influences. The study utilized a multistage sampling approach to collect data from three specifically selected rural districts within the Suleja Local Government Area of Niger State. Data collection involved distributing questionnaires to 367 families residing in these rural areas. The study's findings reveal that households experiencing an increase in size relative to income are more likely to experience higher rates of child labour and trafficking. Conversely, employment opportunities and skill development are associated with reduced incidences of child labour and trafficking. Children from households with incomes below the subsistence level are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. It is recommended that both individuals and governmental authorities priorities efforts to combat child labour and trafficking by actively participating in prevention initiatives. Such actions are crucial to mitigate children's involvement in these detrimental practices.

According to Musa and Magaji (2023), in their study, they examine the nexus between household income and child labour in Northeastern Nigeria using logit regression methodology. Results from their findings reveal that amongst virtually all the socioeconomic determinants of child labour and trafficking, household income was found to be the primary determinant and recommends that governments at all levels should provide not only employment opportunities but also enhanced income.

Additionally, according to Mackintosh and Wori (2021), an examination of parental socio-economic status on Child Labour in the Port Harcourt Metropolis is conducted. The study used 14 14-item questionnaires titled "Parental Socio-economic Status on Child Labour" (PSSCL) as the primary data collection instrument. A total of 126 respondents, comprising 45 parents and 81 children, participated in the study. The study employed a descriptive survey research design to gather reliable data. Data generated from primary and secondary sources were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study showed that parents' socioeconomic status was significantly related to the prevalence of child labour.

The study was conducted in the Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. However, Musa, Magaji, and Tsauni (2022) examine the socioeconomic determinants of child labour in Northeastern Nigeria. Their study employs multistage sampling techniques to obtain the required data from selected local government areas in three states of North-Eastern Nigeria: Adamawa, Bauchi, and Yobe States. Their study used structured questionnaires. The data obtained were analysed using the Tobit Model. Their findings show that socioeconomic determinants of child labour comprise children's age, children's gender, children's relationship with the household head, household head's education, household's occupation, and poverty, which is measured by household head's income, family size, access to clean piped water, and distance from school. However, some were found to be statistically significant at varying levels. Musa and Magaji (2023) examine the nexus between household income and child labour in Northeastern Nigeria using logit regression methodology in their study. Results from their findings reveal that amongst virtually all the socioeconomic determinants of child labour and trafficking, household income was found to be the primary determinant and recommends that governments at all levels should provide not only employment opportunities but also enhanced income.

However, Ezeh and Oli (2021) examine socio-economic determinants of children's vulnerability to trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, South East Nigeria. The study employs a mixed-methods research design and a multistage sampling procedure to select respondents. A sample size of 384 was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size calculation. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Their finding reveals that greed and poverty are major factors responsible for children's vulnerability to trafficking.

Olukunmi (2017) examines the socioeconomic factors that influence child labour in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Data for the study were gathered using questionnaires. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed in the five Local Government Areas of Ilorin City. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, specifically the Chi-square test. The data indicate that child labour is significantly influenced by low household income across various households. The size of a family and the educational status of parents have a respective impact on child labour.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design, a method that involves collecting data from a selected group through questionnaires, as it is well-suited for describing and investigating human behaviour in social and psychological research. This approach allowed for a broad reach within the Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria, the study's geographical focus. Nasarawa State, located in North Central Nigeria, was established in 1996 and comprises thirteen local government areas. Keffi town, with its historical significance dating back to the early 19th century and a diverse economy encompassing agriculture, trade, and mineral resources, served as the specific area of investigation.

The target population for this study consisted of residents of the Keffi Local Government Area, estimated to be approximately 107,528 individuals in 2011. To obtain a representative sample, the Taro Yamani formula was employed to calculate a sample size of 400 respondents. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: one focusing on the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (e.g., age, gender), and the other designed to gather their perspectives on the influence of household income on child labour in the Keffi LGA. Both primary data, collected through field surveys and questionnaires, and secondary data, sourced from books, journals, seminar papers, and relevant reports, were utilized. The primary data collection methods included administering questionnaires with both closed-ended and open-ended questions, complemented by personal interviews to clarify questions and ensure accurate responses. The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods, specifically frequency counts and simple percentage calculations, to address the research objectives.

Data Presentation

Four hundred questionnaires titled "Questionnaire on the impact of household income on child labour in Keffi local government area, Nasarawa State" were distributed to adult members of multiple homes in Keffi local government area, Nasarawa State. Most of these questionnaires were collected and filled out. The success of this project can be attributed to the data collectors' utilization of comprehensive methods, which involved distributing questionnaires to respondents, conducting individual interviews to clarify and address each question in the questionnaire, and providing guidance on how to record the answers accurately. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed as part of the sample, 383 were collected and analysed. The results are presented below.

Table 4.1: Distribution of administered questionnaire responses rare

Location	Number distributed	Number returned	Percentage returned	Selected questionnaire
Angwan Rimi	120	114	95	114
Mangare Tudu	101	97	96	97

Sabon Gari	90	87	97	87
Keffi East	89	85	95	85
Total	400	383	96	383

Table 1 shows that a total of 400 questionnaires were sent for completion and return. Of these, 383 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 96% across the four locations included in the study. All 383 questionnaires received were selected for analysis based on the determined sample size. Brooks (2008) states that a response rate of 60% or more is deemed satisfactory for academic research. Based on this criterion, a 95% response rate can be judged sufficient for this current academic study.

Table 2: Distribution of responses based on age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-30	39	10.18
31-40	199	51.96
41-50	110	28.72
50 & Above	35	9.14
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents by age group. There are 39 respondents (10.18%) aged between 18 and 30, 199 respondents (51.96%) aged between 31 and 40, 110 respondents (28.72%) aged between 41 and 50, and 35 respondents (9.14%) aged Over 50. This indicates that a significant proportion of the participants fall within the middle age range.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	217	56.65
Male	166	43.34
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

According to the data in the table above, 217 respondents, or 56.65%, identified as female, whereas 166 respondents, or 43.34%, identified as male. This suggests that most participants are female.

Table 4: Distribution of responses based on family Income

Income	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5,000	134	34.97
5,000 - 50,000	198	51.70
50,000 - 100,000	40	10.44
100,000 & Above	11	2.87
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents by their family income. Out of the total respondents, 134 individuals (34.97%) reported a family income of less than 5,000. Additionally, 198 respondents (51.70%) had a family income between 5,000 and 50,000.

Furthermore, 40 respondents (10.44%) reported a family income between 50,000 and 100,000.

Lastly, 11 respondents (2.87%) reported a family income of 100,000 and above. This indicates that most of the respondents' household income falls between 5,000 to 50,000.

Table 5: Distribution of responses based on Child Help

Child Help	Frequency	Percentage
No	106	27.68
Yes	277	72.32
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

According to Table 5 data, 277 participants have children who assist in their enterprises or farms, accounting for 72.32% of the total. On the other hand, 106 participants, or 27.68%, do not have children to help them. This suggests that a substantial proportion of participants receive assistance from a child in their household.

Table 6: Distribution of responses based on household Size of Respondents

Household Size	Frequency	Percentage
2 – 3	23	6
4 – 8	82	21.41
9 – 14	186	48.56
15 & Above	92	24.02
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 6 shows that 23 respondents, accounting for 6%, have a household size of 2-3. Additionally, 82 respondents, representing 21.41%, have a household

Size between 4 and 8. Furthermore, 186 respondents, accounting for 48.56%, have a household size of 9 to 14. Lastly, 92 respondents, comprising 24.02%, have a household size of 15 or more. These findings indicate that most of the participants had a household size that falls within the range of 9-14.

Table 7: Distribution of respondents based on Trafficked Child Labourers in the business

Trafficked Child Child Labour	Frequency	Percentage
No	105	27.42
Yes	278	72.59
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Based on the data in the table, 278 respondents, or 72.59%, reported having child labourers from distant origins, whereas 105 respondents, or 27.42%, reported not having.

RESULTS

The study successfully collected and analysed data from 383 adult respondents in the Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, achieving a high response rate of 96%. The demographic data reveals that most respondents were between 31 and 40 years old (51.96%) and were female (56.65%). Regarding household income, the most significant proportion of respondents (51.70%) reported an income range of ₦5,000 to ₦50,000. An important finding indicates that 72.32% of participants reported having children who assist in their businesses or farms. Furthermore, a considerable percentage (48.56%) of respondents reported a household size ranging from 9 to 14 individuals. Notably, 72.59% of the respondents indicated having child labourers from distant origins involved in their businesses.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study in Keffi Local Government Area suggest a notable prevalence of child involvement in household economic activities. A substantial majority of respondents reported that both children contributed to their enterprises and that child labourers from distant origins were present. This appears to correlate with the reported household income levels, where over half of the respondents fall within the lower to middle-income bracket (₦5,000 - ₦50,000), and a large proportion also reported larger household sizes. These descriptive statistics highlight potential links between household income constraints, the need for family labour, and the engagement of both own children and those from outside the immediate family in economic activities within the Keffi community. Further inferential analysis would be required to establish statistically significant relationships between these variables.

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