

11-2022

### Qualitative Analysis of Factors Supporting Child Labour Trafficking in Nigeria: Public Perceptions and Cultural Relativism

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#### Recommended Citation

Omotoso, Femi Prof.; Oladeji, Olayide PhD; and Alokun, Babatunde (2022) "Qualitative Analysis of Factors Supporting Child Labour Trafficking in Nigeria: Public Perceptions and Cultural Relativism," *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 7: Iss. 3, Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2022.07.03.06>

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## Abstract

This study aimed to establish how socio-cultural and economic factors support the endemicity of child labour trafficking in Nigeria. The research was conducted among rural and urban households and stakeholders in southern Nigeria. A field survey was conducted in Ekiti, Edo, Kwara, Lagos, and Osun States. The study utilised cultural relativism and the margin of appreciation theories. The qualitative research approach used in-depth interviews, focus groups, and personal observation methods to collect data. Researchers interviewed 70 participants, including parents/guardians, stakeholders (government officials and private agency representatives), traffickers, trafficked children, and their employers. Societal context, especially the perception of child rights, plays an essential role in creating conditions in which child labour trafficking flourishes and constrains global efforts to eliminate the problem. Specifically, findings revealed that poverty, banditry/terrorism, religious practices, socialisation, fostering, cheap labour/urbanization, and materialism are key socio-economic factors contributing to the incidences of child labour trafficking in Nigeria. The paper concludes that international child labour trafficking continues because conditions within states maintain enabling environments for child rights violations. Consequently, understanding socio-cultural and economic contexts within states is essential to develop policies and practices that help curb or minimise the harm of international child labour trafficking.

## Keywords

Nigeria, child labour, child trafficking, child rights, cultural relativism, poverty

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## Acknowledgements

Dignity thanks the following people for their time and expertise in reviewing this article: Norah Hashim Msuya, Legal Lecturer, Mzumbe University, Tanzania; and Jody Raphael, Senior Research Fellow Emerita, Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center, DePaul University College of Law, USA.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF FACTORS SUPPORTING CHILD LABOUR TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to establish how socio-cultural and economic factors support the endemicity of child labour trafficking in Nigeria. The research was conducted among rural and urban households and stakeholders in southern Nigeria. A field survey was conducted in Ekiti, Edo, Kwara, Lagos, and Osun States. The study utilised cultural relativism and the margin of appreciation theories. The qualitative research approach used in-depth interviews, focus groups, and personal observation methods to collect data. Researchers interviewed 70 participants, including parents/guardians, stakeholders (government officials and private agency representatives), traffickers, trafficked children, and their employers. Societal context, especially the perception of child rights, plays an essential role in creating conditions in which child labour trafficking flourishes and constrains global efforts to eliminate the problem. Specifically, findings revealed that poverty, banditry/terrorism, religious practices, socialisation, fostering, cheap labour/urbanization, and materialism are key socio-economic factors contributing to the incidences of child labour trafficking in Nigeria. The paper concludes that international child labour trafficking continues because conditions within states maintain enabling environments for child rights violations. Consequently, understanding socio-cultural and economic contexts within states is essential to develop policies and practices that help curb or minimise the harm of international child labour trafficking.

### KEYWORDS

Nigeria, child labour, child trafficking, child rights, cultural relativism, poverty

**H**UMAN TRAFFICKING OR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS is a complex global and dynamic criminal and human rights problem involving the illegal commoditization of human beings for exploitation and pecuniary gains. As a grave violation of human rights, trafficking in persons affects every country in the world (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour [IPEC]-International Labour Organization [ILO], 2008; Bureau of International Labour Affairs [ILAB], 2018, 2020; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018, 2021). Traffickers usually target vulnerable people who are either marginalised or under challenging circumstances. Given their

vulnerability, children are usually easy targets for traffickers. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020* notes that “[C]hildren account for about one-third of the detected victims of trafficking” (UNODC, 2021, p. 9). Victims of child trafficking are usually from poorer countries and impoverished households, dysfunctional families, or orphaned or abandoned with no parental care (Quattri & Watkins, 2016; ILO, OECD, IOM & UNICEF, 2019; UNODC, 2018, 2021). Children are trafficked for cheap and exploitative labour (IPEC-ILO, 2008; UNODC, 2021). Indeed, globally, an estimated 152 million children are believed to be victims of child trafficking and are in forced labour situations on farms, fields, factories, homes, streets, and even battlefields (ILAB, 2018). Consequently, child trafficking for forced labour has reached a global pandemic level.

While international law defines the trafficking of adults as the coercion, abuse of power, force, or threats that initiate the movement into exploitation, child trafficking is defined by exploitation (IPEC-ILO, 2008, p. 3). Child trafficking is defined as “any person under eighteen” (Article 3(d), The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (The Palermo Protocol), 2000) who is relocated from her/his parents, guardians, or protective zones and then exploited (IPEC-ILO, 2008, p. 3). Consequently, because of their vulnerable status, the consent of trafficked children is irrelevant. For instance, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (The Palermo Protocol), provides that the vulnerable status of children makes it impossible for them to consent regardless of whether any improper means were used or not (*Migration Data Portal*, 2020). Specifically, the Protocol states that:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means outlined in subparagraph (a<sup>1</sup>) of this article (Article 3, paragraph (c)).

Child trafficking is closely linked to the global demand for cheap and exploitative labour. Consequently, child trafficking cannot be delinked from the broader phenomenon of child labour (UNODC, 2021). The International Labour Organization (ILO) *Child Labour Convention 138* (1973) defines “child labour” as “working children aged between 5 and 11, all children between 12 and 14 who are performing work not considered light and for more than 14 hours per week, and those between 15 and 17 performing hazardous work” (ILAB, 2018, p. 2). The convention defines “light work” as harmless work permissible for children aged 13 and above (age 12 and above for low-income countries), amounting to less than 14 hours per week, which is considered not injurious to the children’s health or compromise their school attendance or training programmes. On the other hand, hazardous employment includes work in such sectors as construction and mining and other occupations like metallic and electrical engineering, wood-cutting, textile, leather product machinery, and street vending/begging, considered injurious to the children’s health or schooling (Quattri & Watkins, 2016; ILAB, 2018). These are considered the “Worst Forms of Child Labour” (WFCL) by the ILO Convention 182 (ILO, 1999). Specifically, the convention defines

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<sup>1</sup> Article 3, paragraph (a), “trafficking in persons’... mean(s) the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, utilizing the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the 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 another person, for exploitation...” (Emphasis added).

the worst forms of child labour to include all forms of slavery or practices comparable to slavery, sale, and trafficking of children, and work which, by its nature or the conditions in which it is carried out, has the likelihood to harm the health, safety, schooling, or morals of children.

Consequently, child trafficking for labour can be defined as the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of children for forced labour or services through the use or not of force, fraud, or coercion for subjection to involuntary servitude, debt bondage, slavery, or exploitation (Development Services Group, Inc., 2016, p. 1). Indeed, many practices associated with child trafficking and labour are prohibited under international human rights law (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner [UNHRHC], 2014). However, international child labour trafficking continues to flourish despite global efforts at curtailing it. International child labour trafficking flourishes because the sociocultural and economic contexts, especially the perceptions of children's rights, in countries support the practice. Global efforts to eradicate the problem may not succeed if the factors that support the practice in individual countries are not correctly identified, defined, and addressed. This may be why some scholars, practitioners, and commentators observed that international child labour trafficking continues to flourish because of attitudes toward children within states (Zelizer, 2005). They contend that international child labour trafficking will persist as long as some cultural values and practices within countries support it. For example, it is argued that while the rights of all children should be respected, understanding what this entails will vary from society to society because of differences in the cultural environment (Adonteng-Kissi, 2020).

Consequently, the main focus of this paper is the question of how economic, cultural, or societal contexts in Nigeria promote and/or constrain the efforts at curtailing international child labour trafficking. Despite increasing awareness and regulations seeking to combat the problem, Nigeria remains a prominent country of origin, transit, and destination for both internal and international child labour trafficking. Indeed, since the turn of the millennium, there has been an upsurge in the incidences of child labour trafficking in Nigeria. For instance, a recent study by the Budget and Planning arm of the Ministry of Finance, Budget, and National Planning in collaboration with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reveals that "about 14 million children aged 5-14 years are engaged in child labour" to sustain the livelihood of their families (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN] & UNICEF, 2022). This indicates that child labour trafficking is prevalent, and Nigeria is one of the countries contributing to its global endemicity. Consequently, the paper interrogates the causal and multifaceted roles that societal context, especially how child rights are conceived in Nigeria, plays in creating conditions in which international child labour trafficking can flourish and, by so doing, constrains global response to the menace. To do this, this study seeks to answer this research question: "What are the socio-cultural and economic issues promoting child labour trafficking in Nigeria?"

The study is significant because understanding the socio-cultural and economic conception of child labour trafficking within individual states is vital to global efforts at combating the problem since perceptions directly influence behaviour. Thus, ascertaining the socio-cultural and economic contexts within which child labour trafficking occurs in Nigeria is crucial to addressing the problem within and outside the country. It is essential to clearly understand and acknowledge public opinions about child labour trafficking to effectively engage state and non-state actors within the international community in addressing the problem. Therefore, stakeholders, politicians/ad-

ministrators, communities, parents, faith-based organizations, and the children, socio-cultural and economic values should be included in both local and global efforts at combating the menace of international child labour trafficking.

### THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT OF CHILD LABOUR TRAFFICKING

As a country of origin and transit, victims are usually trafficked from Nigeria to Western Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and West, Central, and North Africa. Similarly, as the country of destination, victims come into Nigeria from neighbouring countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, and Togo (NAPTIP, 2019; United States Department of State [USDOS], 2019, 2021).

However, as argued earlier, the international dimensions of child labour trafficking are usually fuelled by the enabling environments within countries. We have international child labour trafficking because it occurs within states. Consequently, as a country of origin, internal child labour trafficking from rural communities to urban centres has been rife in Nigeria. It affects all the states of the Nigerian Federation, either as the origin or destination states. Recently, there has been an increased number of children trafficked from rural communities in such states as Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Imo, Kwara, Niger, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, and the Plateau States to major cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Kano, Kaduna, and Port Harcourt. (Adesina, 2014). Consequently, in Nigeria, many young people are trafficked and engaged in economic activities, particularly in the worst forms of child labour, such as street beggars/vendors, sex-trafficked children, production of pornography, child soldiers, armed robbers, drug traffickers, quarrying and mining workers, domestic servants/servitudes, to work on farmlands, and among others (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN] & UNICEF, 2022; Bureau of International Labour Affairs ILAB, 2018; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, 2018; NAPTIP, 2019; UNODC, 2021). For example, the Nigerian Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2016/2017 Report indicated that the North Central, with 49.6% of children working under hazardous conditions, was the worst-hit region by worst form of child labour in Nigeria, while the South West (25.4%) had the least cases (NBS & UNICEF, 2018, p. 223). Furthermore, the report showed that there were more male children (42.8%) than females (35.1%) working under hazardous conditions, with the majority of them (46.0%) working in rural communities. The ages of the full childhood (5-11, 12-14, and 15-17 years) were found to be in worst forms of child labour in the country.

However, the dynamic of trafficking differs across regions/states in Nigeria, depending on the prevailing socio-cultural and economic situation. For instance, child trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation, as well as forceful recruitment and use in armed conflict, particularly by terror groups like Boko Haram, are prevalent in the Northern part of the country (Oduah, 2015; ILAB, 2018, 2020; NAPTIP, 2019). In addition, it is common for families in the North to send their children to the cities to live with *mallams* (Islamic teachers) for a Koranic education. These children, *Almajiri*, while receiving Koranic lessons, are often forced to beg for alms on the streets and surrender the money they collect to their *mallams* (ILAB, 2018, 2020). Furthermore, the children are easy prey to recruitment and use as child soldiers by Boko Haram and other insurgents/bandit groups operating in the region (*News 24*, 2018; ILAB, 2018, 2020; UNICEF, 2017; Kajjo & Kaina, 2020; UN Security Council, 2020; USDOS, 2020). For instance, between January 2017 and December 2019, a report showed that a total of 3,601 boys and girls were recruited, mainly through abduction, by Boko Haram, with about 1,385 used in direct combat, suicide bombing, and other support roles, including as sexual slaves (Kajjo & Kaina, 2020). Recent photographs released by the

Boko Haram terrorist group showed relatively young children dressed in combat-style clothing and balaclava participating in martial arts training, weapon handling training, and religious education class (*Sahara Reporters*, February 28, 2021). Indeed, Governor Babagana Zulum of Borno State had in September 2020 lamented that “right now the insurgents are recruiting many of our children into the sect...” (*Sahara Reporters*, February 28, 2021). However, it must be stated that state and non-state actors, such as Nigerian Security Forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), fighting the terrorist groups, are equally culpable of the offences being levelled against the terrorists (Hayden, 2017; ILAB, 2018; UN Security Council, 2017, 2020; UNIDOS, 2017, 2019, 2020).

Moreover, internal trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation of young boys and girls is rampant in the Southern part of Nigeria (NAPTIP, 2019). For instance, the recruitment and use of young girls to work in “baby factories” has been on the increase recently in the region (Hamilton, 2020; Obaji Jr., 2020). Baby factories are illegal businesses disguised as private clinics, orphanages, or social welfare homes where young girls are kept and impregnated to take their children for sale on the black market. Similarly, young boys are trafficked to work in commercial farming, quarrying, and ferrying drugs. Consequently, in the Southern part of Nigeria, child trafficking for street begging/vending, commercial sexual exploitation in brothels, commercial farming, quarrying and mining, drug trade, and domestic work are now very common (ILO-IPEC, 2011; ILAB NAPTIP, 2019). For instance, Benin City, the capital of Edo State in the South-South region of Nigeria, has become a major international human trafficking hub, particularly for recruiting girls to engage in commercial sex in local brothels or to be trafficked abroad for commercial sex (ILAB, 2018). Indeed, madams actively recruit and board young girls to engage in commercial sex in brothels. The madams receive up to 70% of the proceeds earned by these girls (NAPTIP, 2019). Victims’ recruitment is mostly through deception, coercion, and use of force or threats. However, at times, family members or guardians willingly, out of ignorance or inordinate expectation of material gains, facilitate or carry out the trafficking of their children or wards for exploitative labour (Olateru-Olagbegi & Ikpeme, 2006).

## REGULATIONS AGAINST CHILD LABOUR TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

There are several international regulations/conventions to protect children against trafficking and the worst forms of labour and enhance their rights. Nigeria has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labour trafficking (ILAB, 2020; NAPTIP, 2019.) See Table 1. In addition, the Nigerian government has enacted laws and regulations criminalising child labour trafficking. These legal frameworks include the 1990 Labour Act, the 2015 Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015, and ultimately the Child’s Rights Act 2003<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, the government has developed policy frameworks to protect the rights of children and enhance their welfare. Prominent among these policies are the Hazardous Child Labour List 2013 and National Policy on Protection of Children in Formal Care (NAPTIP, 2019). The protection of children against trafficking and exploi-

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<sup>2</sup> Since the enactment of the National Child’s Rights Law of Nigeria in 2003, 26 out of the 36 states have so far adopted the law in their respective states. Most of the states yet to adopt the law are in the Northern part of the country where the socio-cultural and religious contexts are usually conducive to street begging and child marriage (ILAB, 2020; NAPTIP, 2019).

tative labour also involves the establishment and/or enhancement of existing ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) Federal and State Ministries for Women Affairs, as well as National and State Steering Committee on Child Labour.

**Table 1: Nigerian Ratification of International on Child Labour Trafficking Conventions**

Convention	Ratification
International Labour Organization Convention 138, Minimum Age	Yes
International Labour Organization Convention. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labour	Yes
United Nations Convention Rights of the Child	Yes
United Nations Convention Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	Yes
African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child	Yes

*Source:* Updated from ILAB, 2020.

However, despite these legal frameworks and policies, there exist gaps in Nigeria's efforts to adequately protect children against labour trafficking. For instance, the Child's Rights Act (CRA) is the national law against the abuse of the rights of children in Nigeria, and each state of the Federation must adopt and implement it. However, presently it is only the law in 26 out of the 36 states (NAPTIP, 2019; ILAB, 2020). The remaining ten states in northern Nigeria have yet to adopt and implement the law. They do not have legal statutes that meet international standards for prohibiting child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation (ILAB, 2020, p. 3). In these states, child trafficking for forced labour and commercial sex exploitation, as well as the use of children in illicit activities, particularly recruitment as child soldiers, have not been criminally prohibited (NAPTIP, 2019).

Furthermore, there are inconsistencies in Nigerian laws regarding the minimum age for employment. For example, while the CRA states that children under 18 can only be involved in light work for family members, it still upholds Section 59 of the Labour Act, which sets the minimum age for employment at 12. Also, the Labour Act (1990) allows children of any age to do light work alongside a family member in agriculture and domestic work.

Moreover, while the Labour Act prohibits employment of youth under age 18 in work that is inimical to their health, safety, or morals, it does not list the prohibited types of hazardous labour for children. Indeed, the Nigerian government is yet to codify into law or regulation the list of hazardous works prohibited for children identified by the National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Labour in a report in 2013. The minimum age protections in the Labour Act do not cover self-employed children or those working in the informal economy. Because the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age of 15, children may have the incentive to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. More importantly, children are excluded from the Terrorism Prevention Acts penalty of life imprisonment for assisting in acts of terrorism (ILAB, 2020).

Consequently, child trafficking and labour have been inadequately regulated in Nigeria. As a result of the lacunae in the regulations, due mainly to the need to accommodate some socio-cultural and religious practices coupled with the economic situation in the country, the Nigerian environment is conducive to child labour trafficking. Consequently, there has been an increase in the incidences of child labour trafficking in the country.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL/ECONOMIC CONTEXTS OF CHILD RIGHTS**

Because of children's vulnerability, as noted earlier, there have been increasing international legal and institutional measures against the exploitation of children. Prominent among these conventions is the adoption and ratification of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) with provisions to guarantee children's rights (UN CRC, 1989). The ratification of the UN CRC brought about a universal law against children's human rights violations. The UN CRC considers child trafficking and labour to be human rights violations (Articles 32 & 35). Specifically, Article 32(1) of the convention states that:

States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (UN CRC, 1989, p. 9).

Similarly, Article 35 states that:

State Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral, and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of, or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form (UN CRC, 1989, p. 9-10)

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adoption in 1948, there has been an unending debate between universalists and cultural relativists on the universalization of human rights. For the former, given the severe migration flows and the coexistence of representatives of different cultures in our globalized world, a universal human rights regime is possible. The latter group contends that any generalised human rights regime may encounter cultural differences. For a more nuanced analysis of the debate, see Fluehr-Lobban (1998), D'Avolio (2004), and Lakatos (2018). However, some have argued that Western ideals informed the UN CRC of childhood that did not consider cultural variations or perceptions of childhood (Westwood, 2013). Some, for instance, argue that child labour trafficking is best examined within socio-cultural and economic contexts rather than viewed simply as a violation of the child's right (Adonteng-Kissi, 2020). Indeed, an international convention that proposes the same rights to all children worldwide is not unproblematic because the perception of childhood varies across cultures (White, 1999). Consequently, the West's dominated discourse on children's rights is perceived by developing countries (in Asia, Africa, and South America) as a thinly veiled form of "cultural imperialism" (D'Avolio, 2004).

The need for localised children's rights regimes is a familiar discourse that challenges the tendency towards the universalization of human rights. Much of the discourse on the localization of child rights centres on the theory of cultural relativism and/or the concept of the margin of appreciation. Cultural relativism contends that since culture has its inherent integrity with unique values and practices, value judgments should be withheld or suspended until the cultural context is considered

(Fluehr-Lobban, 1998, p. 10). The theory's core is not just the recognition of cultural differences in thought or value but also implies how evaluations or judgements are made (Lakatos, 2018, p. 13). Since profound diversity is a persistent characteristic of the international community (Donoho, 2001), cultural relativists contend that no moral judgment is universally valid. They contend that right only exists if a particular culture/society perceives it as such. Consequently, cultural relativists question the validity and applicability of a universal right of children in a particular culture, especially when such a right is not indigenous to or rooted in that culture. This suggests that children's rights have different implications among different peoples, depending upon their unique political, economic, religious, social, and cultural orientations.

Furthermore, the margin of appreciation is a doctrine—first developed and applied in the case law of the European Court and Commission of Human Rights – that states may have different views on what is an appropriate measure to restrict a right (Mcgoldrick, 2016). The margin of appreciation, as used in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), is described as a “form of legal discretion” which allows state authorities a margin of error or latitude in imposing measures that impinge upon protected human rights (Born, Morris & Forrest, 2020, p. 79). Therefore, the margin of appreciation is the recognition of cultural, economic, social, and political differences among states. It suggests that it will be misleading to mirror human rights as the same for peoples/countries with diverse cultures and that they suspend cultural practices and impose uniform culture, which would be at odds with the international rights foundation's purpose of seeking progressive improvement in the human condition through change (Rubasha, 2006). In other words, legislation on children's rights has to be rooted in and consistent with a country's social, political, and economic environments (Semali, 2012). In this context, the margin of appreciation could be explained as allowing for variation in international children's rights applications. For example, while it may amount to a complete violation of rights to marry a girl aged 12 under the UN CRC and some national laws, it may not be in a country practicing the Islamic Sharia law, especially when the girl has seen her first mensural period. Thus, like cultural relativism, the margin of appreciation doctrine challenges the universalization of children's rights.

Consequently, they argue, considerations on whether child labour trafficking violates children's human rights in a country should be based on socio-cultural and economic contexts on what constitutes childhood, child labour, and/or dignity. In line with this thinking, Sharley, Ananias, Rees and Leonard (2019) argue that there is a disconnect between Western and non-Western cultural perceptions of childhood. For instance, in Nigeria (and particularly in Africa), it is common to understand children's involvement in work, hazardous or not, as an important socialization mechanism through which children are trained and integrated into their communities, facilitating their transitions to adulthood as well as the acquisition of skills and knowledge that ensure basic survival. In fact, in Africa, parents are perceived as irresponsible when they do not prepare their children for adulthood by providing them with the necessary work skills (Myers, 2001).

Cultural relativism and the margin of appreciation seem attractive at least for two reasons: First, it is the argument that everyone is equally entitled to respect, and second is that this respect entails respect for that person's culture as culture is part of the person's identity (Lakatos, 2018, p. 14). Thus, to paraphrase Kent (1995, p. 80), if a local culture has no objection to children's exploitation or abuse (child trafficking for labour), should outsiders still respect the culture? While it may not be totally out of place to engage children in work (light and non-hazardous labour), the exploitation

and abuse of children's capacity for work constitutes a serious social problem and should be condemned as an infringement on children's rights to dignity across all cultures. For instance, under Sharia Law, underage marriage is permissible for a menstruating girl. This amounts to abuse to engage such a girl in prostitution or sex slavery. In this sense—the *abuse* of children in work, rather than their involvement in work—the “child trafficking for labour” problem should be framed (White, 1999). Consequently, the child-centred attempts, such as the ILO Convention 182 on WFCL and UN CRC, which regards “child labour trafficking” as all kinds of “children's work that are abusive, harmful, ‘intolerable’ or simply ‘worse’ than others,” confront issues of cultural relativism and/or margin of appreciation.

However, despite the criticisms against cultural relativism and the margin of appreciation, they can help us understand that certain cultural beliefs, orientations, and economic contexts shape how people of diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds define or perceive child trafficking and labour. In the specific Nigerian context, which is the focus of this paper, the theories would help gain insight into how socio-cultural and economic issues encourage child trafficking for labour and how this has influenced legal and policy responses to the social problem in the country.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study was conducted mainly among rural and urban households and stakeholders in southern Nigeria, focusing mainly on socio-cultural and economic issues support child labour trafficking. The research question is how child rights are perceived and how these attitudes support child labour trafficking in Nigeria. A field survey was conducted in Ekiti, Edo, Kwara, Lagos, and Osun states. However, some phone interviews were conducted with certain stakeholders in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja and parents/guardians in Benue and Akwa Ibom states. Data for the study was collected between April 1 and May 15, 2021. The study sites were selected because of the history and prevalence of child labour trafficking in communities that are known to be places of origin, transit, and destination for trafficking. Also, the sites were chosen to have a balanced view of rural and urban communities.

The study was designed utilising a qualitative research approach by employing in-depth interviews, focus groups, and personal observation methods to collect the necessary data. These techniques are justified because they assisted the researchers, utilising semi-structured interviews, to provide adequate information and clarifications on the complex issues raised in the study. Qualitative research was utilised because it enabled the researchers to produce valuable ideas about socio-cultural and economic issues involved in child labour trafficking at a series of levels in Nigeria, specifically from the individual or community perceptions through national or global systems perceptions (Green & Thorogood, 2018).

To determine the sample for the study, the researchers utilised purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify interview respondents to answer the research questions. Purposive sampling, also called judgmental sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique that allows a researcher to decide who should be included as respondents in a study, especially when information is required from a well-informed public on the issue under investigation (Lim, Shon, & Yang, 2018). The snowball sampling method is used when research participants recruit other participants for a study, particularly when potential participants are hard to find (Stephanie, 2014). Consequently, the researchers put in place methods to identify key informants

capable and willing to provide the required information for the study. In all, 70 participants were interviewed, including parents/guardians whose children/wards have been or have not been trafficked or involved in child labour; stakeholders (government officials and representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs)) in child welfare with expert knowledge; trafficked children involved in child labour (domestic services, street vending and commercial farming), traffickers (agents) involved in trafficking the children from rural communities to urban centres, and employers of these children.

Eleven stakeholders' interviews were conducted with academics with expertise in child trafficking and labour, government officials from the Federal and States Ministries of Women Affairs, government agencies (the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and National Human Rights Commission [NHRC]), as well as representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) – Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), Balm in Gilead Foundation for Sustainable Development (BIGIF), and Peacebuilding and Human Development Centre (PHDC).

In addition, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with eight parents/guardians (three were telephone interviews), three traffickers (they were distributing traffickers in police custody), and eight employers of children. Furthermore, 40 children (23 boys and 17 girls) between the ages of nine and 17 participated in five focus group discussions (FGDs) in Ijero-Ekiti (Ekiti State), Alaba Market and Ikorodu (Lagos), Ejigbo (Osun State), and Shao (Kwara State). Interviews were conducted in English, Pidgin English, and Yoruba Languages, depending on the language a participant was more comfortable with. All interviews and focus group discussions lasted between 45 to 80 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated to English, as the case may be.

Researchers employed survey instruments that differed depending on the group. The stakeholders' interview schedule had 25 questions; the parental/guardian interview schedule contained 13 questions; the children/focus groups' interview schedule comprised 10 questions; the traffickers' interview schedule was made up of 11 questions. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to provide detailed information and accounts in their own words. Consequently, the interview survey was made simple for easy comprehension by participants. The interviews took place in varied settings—office of stakeholders, homes/shops/farms of parents/guardians and traffickers, and on the streets or marketplaces. Interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience. Finally, researchers made personal observations to investigate children's natural working environments, and their physical appearances/conditions, and to contextualise the empirical findings to illuminate perceptions of children's human rights and trafficking for labour.

A major difficulty in the research was the sensitivity and the secrecy of the study issue. Thus, securing the confidence of potential participants to talk was a major difficulty faced by the researchers. As a result, researchers conducted a series of informal interviews first, to secure the confidence of participants. Even when they secured the confidence, participants only agreed to grant an interview on the condition of anonymity. This did not affect the outcome of the study since it is an ethical consideration in any research of this nature for respondents to choose whether to disclose their identities or not. Another major difficulty faced by the researchers had to do with how self-reporting of the participants' views may have echoed the perceptions of the target

population (Nigerians). This challenge was overcome by the researchers by standardising the interview surveys, the methods, findings, and conclusion format designed to decrease excessive rhetoric. Also, the researchers considered related literature to ensure that perceptions of child trafficking and labour provided by the participants were correctly conveyed and reflected the perceptions of the target population as much as possible.

In conducting the study, the researcher followed the United States Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2006, p. 36) recommended four guiding principles for interviewing victims of child trafficking: 1) do not harm; 2) provide informed consent; 3) responsibility in providing information; and 4) avoid raising unrealistic expectations. Thus, to address ethical issues in the study, the researchers assured participants that the study would not be injurious to them for participating. Also, participants' informed consent was secured. Participants were equally informed clearly of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The researchers got the necessary approval where government agencies required an official request and approval by appropriate authorities before an official would be assigned to grant an interview with the researchers. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all non-stakeholder participants in the study. Furthermore, the respondents' anonymity requests were respected and as such identities were withheld. Lastly, the researcher communicated the rationale for the research in clear terms to the respondents and what would be done with the information provided – academic purpose.

Data gathered was analysed using different sources and relevant literature to ensure that participants' perceptions were accurately captured and conveyed. The data collected were analysed utilising a thematic analysis approach. This involved the creation of structured thematic matrices that were systematically analysed to endure certain degrees of abstraction and consistency.

## FINDINGS

### INCIDENCE OF CHILD TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

Our research data indicate that internal child trafficking for exploitative labour is very endemic in Nigeria. While agreeing that child trafficking for labour is a global problem, participants in the study stated that internal child trafficking for labour has been on the ascendancy and that all states in Nigeria are affected. An expert in Child's Rights and Welfare at the Edo State University Uzairue explained:

The problem of child trafficking for labour cuts across all continents of the world. Even in those countries where we feel that they have a high level of moral standards and ways in which they reject these practices, there are cases of child trafficking and labour. But it is more prevalent in Africa, especially in Nigeria due to endemic poverty and illiteracy. In Nigeria, while some regions, particularly south-east and south-south, have had unfavourable publicity about child trafficking, it is endemic across all regions and cultures where children are seen as properties of their parents who could be put to any use, however unethical this may be (Stakeholder Interview with a Sociologist at the Edo State University Uzairue, April 12, 2021).

A similar view was expressed by an official of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Ado-Ekiti:

Child trafficking is a global phenomenon, and it is not limited to Nigeria alone. It is a pandemic that many countries are contending with. It is adversely affecting the lives of many children because they fall into the category of the vulnerable demography of our society. In Nigeria, while its occurrence varies from state to state, child trafficking is, however, a rising pandemic in the country (Stakeholder Interview with an NHRC Official, Ekiti State Office, Ado-Ekiti, May 13, 2021).

Some participants said child trafficking for labour was a “time bomb” waiting to explode in Nigeria. Participants explained that child labour trafficking is a time bomb because of its increasing endemicity in the country, especially the rural-urban child trafficking, which they said required an urgent response to curtail its devastating effects on the country. Indeed, data gathered indicate that an increased number of children are being trafficked within Nigeria from poorer/rural communities in the conflict-ravaged northern states (Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Niger, Yobe, Zamfara, Katsina, and so on), southwest states (Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, and Ogun), southeast states (Imo and Ebonyi), and south-south states (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, and Cross River) to urban centres, particularly capital cities. It is not in all cases that children are being trafficked to the cities. At times, particularly in Oyo, Osun and Ekiti States, there are rural-rural communities’ child trafficking, when children are trafficked from one rural community to another for exploitative labour in farms, mines or forced into marriage. Based on our data, children are being trafficked for exploitative labour as domestic servants, street beggars, farming, artisanal mining, prostitution, and to work as surrogate mothers in baby factories. A National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) official in Lagos said:

Today, an emerging and very disturbing trend in child trafficking in Nigeria is trafficking for organ harvesting. This is a situation where many children are being trafficked or abducted and sold to foreigners, looking for human organs like kidneys, livers, lungs, and so on (Stakeholder Interview with a NAPTIP Official, Lagos Command, April 1, 2021).

Furthermore, our findings indicate that there are two types of internal child traffickers in Nigeria—recruiting traffickers and distributing traffickers. At times, the same person may combine the two functions. Recruiting traffickers are usually community-based or local actors, who are, in most cases, the immediate and extended family members or people well known to the parents/guardians or in the community of the victims or former victims of trafficking. The recruiters facilitate trafficking by acting as the “go-betweens” for traffickers and potential victims. They are responsible for sourcing, recruiting, and transporting victims from their communities to various destinations. At various destinations, victims are handed over to the distributing traffickers, who are responsible for sending the victims to “the end users” or other traffickers, who may move victims to other destinations within Nigeria or abroad. In most cases, a recruiting trafficker is a resident within the victim’s community and may be well known to the victim and his/her parents or guardians, while a distributing trafficker is a non-resident and may not be known to the victim or his/her parents or guardians.

In some cases, the recruiting agents are former victims who now facilitate the movement of other children, usually friends, to the cities. One participant at a focus group discussion in Alaaba Market, Lagos, stated:

I came to Lagos with a friend, who had just gotten his freedom from his master, in 2019 when I was 15 years old because I lost my father, and it has not been easy for my mother to take care of eight of us. Last year, my friend was able to open his shop. What I do now is to direct buyers to his shop or other shops for items not available in his shop and get a commission from whatever they buy (Focus Group Discussion at Alaba Market, Lagos, April 1, 2021).

The research data show that various socio-cultural and economic factors contribute to the high incidence of child trafficking for labour in Nigeria. These factors are poverty, banditry/terrorism, religious practices, socialisation, fostering, cheap labour/urbanization, and materialism. While poverty cuts across all regions of the country, our data show that banditry/insurgency is a major contributing factor to the vulnerability of children to trafficking in the country's northern region. Also, while fostering, cheap labour/urbanization and materialism are more pronounced as contributing factors in the southern region of Nigeria, poverty and socialization are the significant factors responsible for child trafficking and labour in the rural areas under study.

## POVERTY

Participants in the study considered poverty a significant economic factor contributing to the endemicity of child trafficking and labour in Nigeria. They pointed to the harsh economic situation in the country, which made it difficult for most families to make ends meet and adequately care for their children. Consequently, many poor parents encourage their children to engage in economic activities to contribute to their family's income. Sometimes, children are even encouraged to travel to the cities to look for greener pastures. A strong theme in our study is that there is a strong link between poverty, deprivation of child's rights, and child trafficking for labour in Nigeria. A parent in Ejigbo stated:

You can only respect or protect your children's rights when you are comfortable. I encouraged my two sons to travel to Lagos and fend for themselves because I have been the only one taking care of 5 children since I lost my husband a few years ago (Parental Interview with a parent at Ejigbo Central Market, April 10, 2021).

A boy in one of the focus group discussions in Ikorodu said:

I voluntarily came with the man who brought me to Lagos from our village because of the poverty in our family. If my parents are rich and able to provide for my needs, I would not be here working as a slave. But, do I have a choice? (Focus Group Discussion at Garage-Roundabout, Ikorodu, Lagos, April 2, 2021).

Indeed, the researcher confirmed that the majority of the boys and girls vending items on the streets in the study areas are victims of trafficking from impoverished and dysfunctional households. They are usually housed and introduced to traders selling whatever they hawk on the street by their *ogas* (bosses). A certain percentage of whatever they make daily from hawking goes to the *ogas* for their accommodation and incentives for the bosses.

Furthermore, some participants argued that child labour trafficking was rampant because poverty made it impossible for many farmers to engage in mechanised farming. A boy in Ijero-Ekiti said:

I am supposed to be in school today, but I have to assist my daddy in clearing his farmlands to prepare for the next farming season. If he could afford a tractor or other farm equipment, I would not be on his farm now, but in the classroom. This has been the fate of many children in this community (Focus Group Discussion at a Farmstead in Ijero-Ekiti, May 12, 2021).

Corroborating the above perception, a Director of the Social Welfare Department in the Ekiti State Ministry for Women Affairs explained:

With the current economic situation and several job losses in the country, I can tell you, without fear of contradictions, that poverty is a major factor fueling child trafficking and labour in Nigeria. Despite the awareness and policy interventions by the government and CSOs, the practice will persist and keep increasing because of rising poverty, joblessness, and limited opportunities for most Nigerians (Stakeholder Interview with the Director of Social Welfare, Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs, Social Development and Gender Empowerment, May 13, 2021).

One parent equally stated:

Have you seen any child from a rich home hawking on the streets before? I would not have allowed my daughter to assist me in the shop when her mates are in school if I can provide for her needs as a single mother. Even when the government says education is free, would she go to school with an empty stomach? So, she skips school occasionally to help me (Parental Interview with a parent at Ayanguren Market, Ikoridu, Lagos, April 2, 2021).

Consequently, in both urban and rural communities, our data revealed that poverty is a major contributing factor to the deprivation of children's rights and child trafficking for labour in Nigeria. Participants argued that the country's high poverty level makes many children vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Indeed, the researchers observed that the victims of trafficking come from very poor and dysfunctional households, with some orphaned or from broken homes. Also, the researchers observed that the living conditions of the parents/guardians and victims of child trafficking are not good, with most of them living in slums on subsistence incomes, having many mouths to feed, and having little or no formal education.

Recently, poverty has become a major problem in Nigeria with the country being declared the "poverty headquarters of the world" (*Vanguard*, September 2, 2018). A major consequence of this is low school enrolment for children despite the policy of Universal Basic Education, which makes the first nine years of education free and compulsory in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2018). This is because the prevalent poverty in the country makes many poor households prioritise children's engagement in economic activities above education. Consequently, with the country's excruciating poverty and worsening deprivation, many parents feel that engaging their children in economic activities may be the only way to survive the economic situation.

The study's finding is consistent with the study of Adesina (2014), which finds that poverty is the primary driver of child trafficking from rural communities to urban

centres in Nigeria. Similarly, Adonteng-Kissi's (2018) study confirms that both the prevalence of poverty in rural and urban Ghana is responsible for children's engagement in child labour. Indeed, existing literature considers elements of economic need like poverty, unemployment/underemployment, and lower-income levels as relevant in explaining the social dynamics of human trafficking (Karen, 2005). Consequently, studies have identified poverty as one of the most relevant risk factors affecting victims' susceptibility to human trafficking (David, Bryant & Larsen, 2019; UNODC, 2021; USDOS, 2021). Worsening poverty related to the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impacts may increase the risks of teachers, businesses, and local community members exploiting children for labour (USDOS, 2021).

## **BANDITRY/TERRORISM**

Many stakeholders consider banditry and terrorism ravaging most parts of northern Nigeria as contributing factors to the vulnerability of children to trafficking and forced labour in the country. Most participants stated that because of the raging conflicts in the north, many children and their parents are being deceived into believing that greener pastures are in the relatively peaceful southern parts of the country. Once in the south, the children are forced into exploitative labour like *Okada* (commercial motorbike) riding, street begging, cart pushing, commercial farming, domestic services/servitudes, and commercial sex. The Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Ekiti State Command, explained:

There has been a sudden upsurge in the influx of children and young people from the north into the southwest recently. A major cause of the influx is the problem of banditry and terrorism in many states/communities in the north. Many of these children are victims of trafficking. Go to most communities in the southwest today, and you will realise that majority of the *Okada* riders are now young boys from the north. They ride the bikes for their traffickers or their agents in an exploitative manner (Stakeholder Interview with the Public Relations Officer, NSCDC, Ekiti State Command, May 13, 2021).

Corroborating the above opinion, a social worker with a civil society organization in Lagos said:

Because of the crisis in the north, many children have become vulnerable to and/or victims of trafficking. Our organization in conjunction with NAPTIP recently rescue some young girls brought to Lagos from a state in the north to be used as commercial sex workers in brothels (Stakeholder Interview with an official of WOTCLEF, Ikeja-Lagos, April 3, 2021).

A National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) official in Lagos stated:

Many trafficking syndicates, pretending to be civil society organizations (CSOs) (at times, faith-based), are exploiting the raging conflicts in the north to perpetuate child trafficking. With schools being closed because of frequent attacks on them and kidnappings of school children by bandits, many parents are desperate to send their children to the south. The syndicates are now exploiting the situation for trafficking. We are currently investigating many such cases (Stakeholder Interview with a NAPTIP Official, Lagos State Command, April 1, 2021).

Some focus group participants confirmed that they fled the north due to the problem of banditry and terrorism. Some said they were orphans after losing their parents to conflicts and had no one to take care of them. Thus, they came with some people to the southwest to start a new life. When asked whether they were disturbed working in exploitative situations, many said they were not bothered. They said they are better off exploited and living in peace than staying where they may be forced into fighting for terrorists and get killed in the process.

Overall, many stakeholders and focus group participants believed that banditry and terrorism in most parts of northern Nigeria contribute to the rising vulnerability of children to trafficking. Many unsuspecting parents, particularly illiterates who cannot adequately care for their children, are being deceived that their children will be given scholarships to continue their schooling in the south by traffickers. Indeed, studies have suggested that terrorism and violent extremism often create an enabling environment for child trafficking for exploitative labour (NAPTIP, 2019; UNODC, 2017,2021; USDOS, 2021). Also, banditry and terrorism have contributed to the closure of schools and the deprivation of children's education in many rural communities in the northern part of Nigeria (*Punch*, March 2, 2021; *Vanguard*, February 15, 2022).

### CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The research findings also revealed that children are being trafficked under the guise of some cultural and religious practices. Such cultural and religious practices mentioned by participants were child fostering and street begging for religious purposes. Child fostering is a traditional and modern practice when parents willingly allow their child to stay under the care of other parents (relatives) to encourage extended family ties or because of their (biological parents) inability to take care of such a child. However, while some participants believed that the fading practice of traditional child fostering was responsible for the vulnerability of children to trafficking, some argued that fostering itself amounts to child trafficking. Also, in most Nigerian cultures, particularly the Yoruba culture, a bridesmaid is a young girl who accomplishes her newly married sister/aunty to her husband's house as the bride's first child. She lives with the young couple and assists with house chores and babysitting by the time she has a baby. A Permanent Secretary in the Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs explained:

When I was young and my mother's relation got married, my mother gave me to her as 'omo iyawo' (bridesmaid). Despite that, I was going to school and I was treated just like the couple's own daughter. In those days, such fostering culture was designed to assist relatives, especially those not well-off, to give their children a good upbringing (education). However, these days, this culture is being eroded by the civilization (western culture) of the nuclear family. As such, poor extended family members and their children, who may have been assisted, are left at the mercy of people who may be pretending to want to assist them by taking their children to the cities (Stakeholder Interview with the PS, Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs, Social Development and Gender Empowerment, May 13, 2021).

On the contrary, a social worker in Benin argued:

Some people, exploiting the financial vulnerabilities of their extended family members, have hidden under the culture of child fostering to move children into the cities or outside the country and force them into exploitative labour. A girl was once taken to Italy by her mother's niece, who later turned her into

a sex slave. So, I think that culture has outlived its relevance, particularly because of many evil people distorting its original practice for other purposes—exploitation (Stakeholder Interview with a Social Worker, Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development, April 12, 2021).

Indeed, many studies have implicated distorted traditional fostering practice as a factor contributing to child trafficking and labour in Nigeria (Aderanti, 2002; Tade, 2010; Adesina, 2014; Foua & Diriwari, 2019; Ifeakandu, 2019). For instance, the *NAPTIP Nigeria Country Report on Human Trafficking* notes:

Culture plays a role in trafficking in persons when applied wrongly. In Nigeria, as in much of Africa, our tradition of ‘fostering’ is the responsibility of the extended family. This practice provides social balance and is meant to cushion the effects of poverty among extended family members... In recent years, this form of cultural or traditional fostering has been exploited by traffickers to recruit children (NAPTIP, 2019, p. 68).

Furthermore, some participants believed that children were being forced into street begging through certain religious practices. A social worker in Ilorin said:

It is now very common in Ilorin to find children or youths, during school hours, begging on the street close to a mosque for money for the development of the mosque. I am a Muslim, but I cannot say that such a practice has any Islamic or Quranic injunction (Stakeholder Interview with a Social Worker, Kwara State Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development, May 1, 2021).

A National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons official in Osogbo stated:

The issue of alms begging by children for Mosques is rising and very disturbing in Osogbo. But, because of the emotions we attach to religious issues in this country, it has been very difficult for our agency to curb the practice (Stakeholder Interview with a NAPTIP Official, Osun State Command, April 9, 2021).

Similarly, a social worker in Lagos explained:

Apart from some mothers who beg with twins, it is now very common in Lagos to see some traditional worshippers wearing white clothes moving around with children begging on the street. They say their deities make it compulsory for such children to engage in street begging (Stakeholder Interview with a Social Worker, Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs & Poverty Alleviation, April 4, 2021).

The researchers observed children in the street begging for mosques around Gambari, Sobi Road, in Ilorin on their way to Shao. Young boys between the ages of 14 and 17 lined the street very close to a mosque, carrying a wooden box they were pointing to motorists. Someone told me they were begging for alms to complete their mosque. Similarly, at almost all motor parks visited by the researchers in Osogbo, researchers saw people in white with young children between ages 10 to 16 begging for alms. These beggars usually claim that they have received the divine commission to beg from the deities due to the special circumstances of their life. Consequently, it has

been a situation some believe they or their children were fated to beg for alms, mainly to prevent calamity (Adekanbi, 2014). However, such practices deprive children of schooling and may expose them to other dangers.

### SOCIALISATION PROCESS

Many parents, children and some stakeholders who participated in the study did not believe that child labour and, at times, child trafficking were wrong. Instead, they believed that it is a training process a child must undertake to become useful in the future. In some communities visited, it is part of the culture to train or socialise children to take over parents' occupations, particularly farming. In some cultures, children are encouraged to travel away from their localities to be well exposed and learn how to fend for themselves. For instance, a parent said:

When I was very young, my dad sent me to his friend doing business in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. I lived with the man and understudied his business model for about 10 years before I returned to Nigeria to start my own business. Today, I have a thriving motorbike spare parts business here in Osogbo. So, I cannot see anything wrong with children leaving their parents to go and learn outside (Parental Interview with *Babalaja, Oja Oba*, Osogbo, April 10, 2021).

Another parent explained:

With the current lack of job opportunities for school leavers in the country, it is good to train your children to take over your business in the future. Today, the government is even encouraging entrepreneurship training in schools (Parental Interview with a Parent at *Oja Bisi*, Ado-Ekiti, May 12, 2021).

Another parent stated:

My children, particularly boys, assist me on the farm. I see it as part of their training so they can take up farming in the future if they are unable to get white-collar jobs after graduating from school (Parental Interview with a Parent at Shao, Kwara State, May 1, 2021).

Many children who participated in the focus group discussions equally believed that assisting their parents in economic activities enhances their entrepreneurial skills, social competencies, and career exposure. They argued that the more time they spent working for their parents, the better the knowledge, experiences and skills they acquired. Indeed, many participants were labelled as deviants and lazy children who refused to work to assist their parents. A participant in a focus group discussion in Shao explained:

I started helping my daddy in his farming right from when I was 7 years. I will be 16 years by July, but I can tell you, that I now have my small farm very close to his (Focus Group Discussion at Shao, Kwara State, May 1, 2021).

Another participant in Focus Group Discussion in Ejigbo said:

I join my daddy on his cocoa farm during weekends and holidays. I want to study Agricultural Science to become a big cocoa farmer in the future. So, as-

sisting him now has allowed me to know more about cocoa farming and business, which will help my study at the university later (Focus Group Discussion at Ejigbo Central Market, April 10, 2021).

An official of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Ado-Ekiti explained:

We may not say it is child labour if a child helps his/her parents in their economic activities when it does not affect the child's education and physical/mental capability. Such engagement is even good for the overall development of a child into becoming useful to society (Stakeholder Interview with an NHRC Official, Ekiti State Office, Ado-Ekiti, May 13, 2021).

However, some participants believed that some parents, pretending to be training their children, inadvertently engage in child trafficking for labour. For instance, a Social Welfare Officer in Edo State explained:

Here in Edo State, there is a prevalent culture of exposing children to work/labour early so they can quickly stand on their own and will not be the responsibility of the parents. This contributes to how the children are used in an unethical manner. For instance, some parents facilitated the trafficking of their children because of things like this (Stakeholder Interview with a Social Welfare Officer, Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development, April 12, 2021).

Another stakeholder stated:

In Benue, it is common to find children working on farms while their parents are doing nothing. To them, the children are being trained. But, this is pure abuse of children's rights (Stakeholder Interview with the Public Relations Officer, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Ekiti State Command, May 13, 2021).

Thus, some participants believed that unethical child training or socialisation contributes to child trafficking for labour, mainly when parents think it is the responsibility of their children to work to take care of them. The current study's finding is consistent with Adonteng-Kissi's (2018, 2020) studies that parents in Ghana engage their children in child labour as part of the socialisation process to expose them to work ethics and competencies. Consequently, while child labour may be frowned upon and considered harmful in developed countries, it is usually crucial in child-rearing in Nigeria as it allows children to learn practical work knowledge and skills essential to growing into valued family and community members. Indeed, many do not consider child labour a problem in Nigeria because it is widely believed that it is a socialisation process of the children (Olutayo, 1994).

## **URBANIZATION AND MATERIALISM**

Many stakeholders, employers and traffickers believed that urbanization and the need for cheap labour, mainly domestic services, have contributed to Nigeria's rising internal child trafficking. Many participants argued that due to rapid urbanization, many elite households have been pressured to engage housemaid services to take care of their children and/or house chores when they are away at work. Unfortunately, many of these households use children's services because their services are cheap.

Children employed to service the elites may be younger than their children. A social worker in Lagos said:

Because most couples are working in corporate organizations and couple with the challenges of urbanization, especially traffic gridlocks, they leave home very early in the morning and return late at the night. In such a situation, they leave their children in the care of a housemaid. Unfortunately, many of these people could not afford the demands of adult maids. So, they engage the services of young children, who, in some cases, may be a bit older than the children they are catering for. You can imagine an 11-year-old girl employed to cater for children of ages 7 and 9 years (Stakeholder Interview with a Social Worker, Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs & Poverty Alleviation, April 4, 2021).

A trafficker explained:

The demand for housemaids is on the increase almost daily to the extent that I cannot meet all the demands. But most people do not want adults for many reasons. Apart from the fact that the services of the children are cheap, it is also safe to engage them because they may not be exposed enough to steal and run away with the properties of their employers (In-depth Interview with a Trafficker, Ikorodu, Lagos, April 2, 2021).

Virtually all employers interviewed corroborated the above assertion. Participants believed that the dominant culture of get-rich-quick and greed in Nigeria today has made many people, including young children and adults, vulnerable to trafficking. They said children are cheap, easy to control, and may not cart away their properties. However, several other participants believed that the inordinate craving for materialism is also core to child trafficking and labour in Nigeria. They argued that some parents encouraged their children to travel with strangers, at times, because they felt that would bring fortune to them. Many young people want to travel abroad for greener pastures. Some parents even facilitate the travelling of these young children. Unfortunately, many of them have fallen victim to trafficking.

## IGNORANCE AND ILLITERACY

Findings equally reveal that the high illiteracy recorded in Nigeria is an essential factor contributing to child trafficking and labour. Participants noted a very low level of awareness of the concept, implications, and government laws or policies to curb child trafficking in Nigeria, particularly among parents. Some explained that it is rare to find educated parents engaging their children in trafficking and exploitative labour. However, some participants contended that education did not necessarily curb child trafficking and labour since most employers of children's services are educated elites. For instance, an Immigration Services Official in Ado-Ekiti explained:

We have had a situation where a female professor employed a young girl (age 12). She sold her and subjected her to all manners of abuse. The girl does everything for the professor—selling in her shop, washing and ironing, shopping for groceries, and even cooking. When the girl was rescued, we found scars all over her body. Would you have expected a professor to treat a human being in such a manner? (Stakeholder Interview with an Immigration Services Official, May 15, 2021).

Thus, some participants argued that someone's level of education might not necessarily determine respect for a child's rights. They said it was innate to the personality involved, irrespective of the level of education. However, participants generally agreed that the neglect of the educational sector as a nation has increased the vulnerability of children to trafficking. They contended that child trafficking and labour would flourish when the government did not pay adequate attention to the educational needs of children.

## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to identify the many roles social agency plays in creating conditions where child labour trafficking within states flourishes and constrains local and international policy responses to the problem. The study focused on Nigeria as a country of origin, transit, and destination for both internal and international child labour trafficking. The study data revealed that child labour trafficking is a complex practice in Nigeria, as in other low-income countries. The complexity is due to many intricate socio-cultural and economic factors such as poverty, practices like fostering and socialisation, illiteracy and ignorance, urbanization, and excessive materialism. Consequently, a significant conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that international child labour trafficking thrives because conditions within certain states provide an enabling environment for child rights violations and child labour and trafficking.

Thus, any global efforts to eradicate child labour trafficking must consider the individual states' peculiarities. For example, and as shown by the findings of this study, such global efforts must not be seen as attempts at imposing specific cultural practices or world views on other cultures. Consequently, while there is the need for universal child rights, such must be flexible in considering the particular situation within individual states.

However, in the specific case of Nigeria, which is the focus of this study, the policy response to the problem of child labour trafficking would require coordinated and constructive efforts and methods, which include education and increased awareness against some obnoxious cultural and religious practices, child welfare and diverse strategies to reduce poverty, and the control of labour markets. This will involve a strategic dialogue to change cultural practices and attitudes that encourage child abuse, labour, and trafficking.

Furthermore, policy response must include making child labour trafficking an educational priority. That is, it has to be integrated into education curricula from primary to tertiary levels of the education sector. Equally, there is the need to design an enhanced evidence-based method to determine the level and dynamics of child trafficking and labour and the profiles and strategies adopted by those involved. This may involve conducting studies that reflect the reported experiences of victims of child labour trafficking. Also, this may include setting up databanks of trafficked persons by national and state governments.

There is equally the need for enhanced inter-agency collaborative efforts involving government agencies – National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Police Force, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Customs and Immigration Services – and civil society organizations (CSOs), to improve policymaking and enforcement of the laws against human trafficking.

Lastly, the Nigerian government has to urgently codify into law or regulation the list of the Worst Forms of Child Labour prohibited for children as identified by the National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour

in a 2013 report. However, above all, all stakeholders need political will—government, security agents, civil society organizations, and community leaders—to walk the talk and match their words with actions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Dignity* thanks the following people for their time and expertise in reviewing this article: Norah Hashim Msuya, Legal Lecturer, Mzumbe University, Tanzania; and Jody Raphael, Senior Research Fellow Emerita, Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center, DePaul University College of Law, USA.

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Omotoso, Femi; Oladeji, Olayide; & Alokun, Babatunde. (2022). Qualitative analysis of factors supporting child trafficking in Nigeria: Public perceptions and cultural relativism. *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*. Vol. 7, Issue 3, Article 6. Available at <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol7/iss3/6>.  
<https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2022.07.03.06>

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