The Effect of Household Poverty on Child Labor in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper uses the recent nationally representative household level data from Nigeria to empirically examine the effect of poverty on the likelihood of the poor households to engage their children in labor activities. Univariate probit model was used for the analysis and the result shows that per adult consumption expenditure as a proxy for household welfare has a significant negative effect on child labor decision of the households. The estimated result also suggests that the characteristic of the child, parent, household and the community significantly affects household child labor decision. Specifically, age of the child, household composition, education of the parents and rural locality determine child labor decision. Thus, it is inferred from this finding that the overall economic condition of the people needs to be improved to overcome child labor in Nigeria.

Keywords: Household Poverty; Child Labor; Nigeria

1.   INTRODUCTION

Child labor has been a fundamental economic problem in almost all the developing countries, and to a lesser extent in the developed world. The International Labor Organisation (ILO; 1996) has estimated that out of the world population, about 250 million children are engaged in different forms of full and part time employment activities instead of being in school. However, this situation is worsened in sub Saharan Africa, where about 35% of the children in the region engage in various forms of labor activities as a result of a high level of abject poverty. Unfortunately, Nigeria is one of the countries in the region that have high rates of child labor, which accounts for about 6.1% of its population in spite of its oil wealth (Basu, 2004). Giving the current situation, the policy makers, international organizations and researchers have focused their attention immensely on how to eradicate child labor in the region as it has grave consequences for the future development of the children and attainment of economic development. The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2010) reports that child labor is one of key human right issue that need to be tackled in the world, especially in the developing countries. Hence, the literature maintains that poverty is one of the main reasons why households engage their children in labor activities so as to assist them in financing household consumption expenditure.

Despite the potential effect of household welfare on child labor, there are few nationally representative studies on the effect of poverty on child labor in Nigeria. This is dictated by the lack of availability of comprehensive data on child labor in the country. As such, the existing studies tend to focus more on a few villages, at best a zone or region. Thus, their findings cannot be generalized for the entire country. Moreover, the studies failed to separate the poor households from the non-poor ones in their analysis, which is the basis of obtaining vital information needed in designing effective poverty reduction policies that targets at the poor. The current situation has immensely contributed to poor policy response to child welfare in the country, which resulted to persistent deterioration in the wellbeing of the children in the country and developing countries in general.

To contribute to the literature, this paper empirically examined the effect of household poverty on child labor in Nigeria, using the sample of the non-poor households obtained from the first wave of the recent nationally representative panel household survey data conducted in 2010/2011. The sample of 2750 poor households was extracted out of the total sample of 3380 rural households on the basis of the International World absolute poverty line of $1.25 dollar per day. The poverty line was further adjusted using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and exchange rate of 2010, which stood at 156 Naira per dollar to capture seasonal and regional variations of the household expenditure. This gives the annual poverty line of NGN 71,292, which is equivalent to USD457 dollars per annum. In line with this method, households whose per adult equivalent annual household consumption expenditure is less than NGN 71,292 are classified as poor and non-poor otherwise. In the context of this study, child labor is limited to all forms of economic activities engaged in by children, whether paid or unpaid except domestic chores. Such activities include, farming activity, waged employment, family enterprises and self-employment activities.

This research ascertained the effect of household poverty on child labor in Nigeria, which is one of the populated country in Africa where the incidence of poverty and child labour is very high. The outcome of this study offers the policy makers and other agencies interested in child welfare and poverty reduction a sound recommendations on how to formulate appropriate policies that will safeguard the future of the children and promote their contribution toward economic development of the country. To this end, the rest of the paper is

structured as follows. Section 2 reviews related literature on the effect of poverty on child labor. Section 3 discusses the method for sourcing of data, measurement of how variables and the empirical model while Section 4 presents the results and discussion. Lastly, Section 5 concludes with policy recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1   Related Literature
The concept of child work and child labor are often used interchangeably. However, there are differences in their conceptualizations. Child work refers to all forms of subtle work carried out by the children in their own houses for example, helping their parents at home and family for short period of time. It also encompasses children undertaking a light work for a few hours before or after school or during holidays (ILO, 2001). In this regard, child work is not considered to be harmful to the development of the child labor, but rather it is the part of the growing up process for the children and a societal way of acquiring the basic survival and practical skills for his future development. In contrast, child labor refers to the engagement of children in any form of work that denies them their childhood rights, hinders their capability to go to school, which tends to affect their mental, physical, social or moral existence (ILO, 2012). The most extreme form of child labor is obtained when the children are being enslaved, detached from their parents, visible to hazard jobs or they are left to take care of their expenditures at a tender age. In fact, the differences between child work and child labor depends on age of the employed child, the kind of employment he was engaged into and the number of hours he has worked in a day (ILO, 2010). To reaffirm this assertion, Basu and Van (1998) sees child work as all forms of work that are not harmful to the current and future livelihood of the children while child labor are those employment activities that are harmful to the child's livelihood.

There are two different schools of thoughts about the linkage between household poverty and child labor in the developing countries. The first view is that child labor served as one of the effective strategies that the poor households used to reduce household poverty (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1997; Basu, 1998). The second view is that child labor is detrimental to the child wellbeing, the household and even the country's human capital (Nielsen, 1998; Ray, 2000; Canagarajah). These two conflicting findings on the relationship between child labor and poverty may be due to a number of divergent assumptions of existing studies with respect to the conceptual definition of child labor, poverty, methodology and geographical location

A positive relationship has been found in some existing studies between child labor and household poverty (Bhalotra & Heady, 2003; Dumas, 2007). However, the recent work by Basu, (2009) has explained the theoretical and empirical justification of the positive relationship that exists between household poverty and child labor in developing countries. Basu (2009) reveals that the poor households adopts child labor as one of the strategies for improving their economic wellbeing, and it contributes as much as one third of household income in poor families, and it is inevitable due to high level of market imperfections in the region. Similarly, Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1997) report that income obtained from child labor assist immensely in improving the wellbeing of the poor households in developing countries. They further maintain that if the parents have irregular employment, this creates the need for additional or more stable income sources to be provided by children. Rimmer (1992) noted that in most cases, child labor is determined by the poverty status of the household and the level of parental education. This portrays that children's income in the poor households contributes positively to the improvement in the economic wellbeing of the households and therefore need to be given attention in the poverty alleviation efforts in developing countries.

In contrast to the positive findings, Ray (2000) reveals that child labor tends to have a negative effect on household welfare. This is because child labor prevents children from benefiting fully from school and may thereby condemn them to perpetual poverty and low wage employment in their adult age. He further observes that the universal perception of child labor as a problem stems from the widespread belief that employment at a tender age is destructive to children's intellectual and physical development. It may also be disastrous for children who work in hazardous industries as it may affect their health. Similarly, Canagarajah and Coulombe (1997) report that the incidence of child labor has no significant impact on the per capita income of the poor household in Ghana. Nielsen (1998) also raises doubts about the claim of poverty being a main determinant of child labor as he has not found any positive relationship between poverty and child labor. Castle and Diarra (2004) reveal that child labor in developing countries is positively associated with income poverty and it reflects the the extent of country's struggle toward attainment of economic growth and development. UNESCO (2007) also reports that child labor is not only a symptom of poverty but it contributes to poverty and in low-income countries, the rate of child labor generally declines when their gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increases. Studies by Lloyd and Blanc (1994) and Grootaert (1998) revealed that the characteristics of child, parents and the household distance to the school are also important in deciding whether children participate in economic activities in a given household or not beside the poverty status of the household. In the same vein, Siddiqi and Patrinos (1995) revealed that location of the household is another important factor that influences child labor decision at household level. They also observed that the rural households engaged more of their children in labor

activities than those in the urban areas. This may be because of the children in the urban areas are more opportune to attend schools than their counterparts in the rural areas.

2.2   Poverty and Child Labor in Nigeria

The household surveys conducted in the country over the past 34 years have shown that the incidence of poverty in the country is widespread and continually increasing. The statistical record has shown that the incidence of poverty rose from 27.2% in 1980 to 65.6% in 1996, and declines to 54.4% in 2004 and rose again to 69% in 2010. As at 1980, the statistics of the poverty trend reveal that out of 60 million Nigerians about 17.7 million people were poor going by the world poverty line. With the increased in population to 75 million in 1985, the number of poor people rose to 34.7 million. In 1992 the poverty rate reduced by 4%; but despite the decline in incidence of poverty the number of poor people increased to 39.2 million. Recent survey conducted in 2010 indicates that out of 160 million Nigerian population about 112 million people are classified as poor surviving on less than $2 per day as a means of sustaining their livelihood (NBS, 2010).

The unabated rise in the level of poverty in Nigeria has led to a continuous decline in the economic wellbeing of the households in Nigeria, which subsequently increases the intensity of child labor in the country. It also limits the capability of individual household members in the country to attain a minimal state of wellbeing measured in terms of education, health, food security and human development. It also poses a major threat to child development, income inequality, human, social and economic development of the nation, and it has been the cause of all forms of social vices that the country has been facing over the years. In addition, the majority of the rural households has no access to good shelter, they live in poor and overcrowded houses; have only one or two pairs of worn clothing; do massive physical work either in the farm or in other occupations; they cannot afford the educational expenses of their children such as school uniforms, school fees and transportation costs

The incidence of poverty and child labor are inexorably linked. However, poverty can still exist even without the incidence of child labor. This implies that poverty tend to have more effect on child labor than child labor on poverty. In the context of Nigeria and most of the developing countries, the vast majority of the working children are engaged in farming activities that is predominantly owned by their families (ILO, 1996). There is also evidence of structural changes in the child labor across child's gender, age, zones and sectors in the country. The children that attend school are less likely to be involved in the labor activities, but the majority of them are from the non-poor households. The enhancement of the living standard of the poor households through development of the children is often neglected in the country. Incidentally, the country has also been experiencing an overall decline in its standard of living due to adverse effects of the Structural Adjustment programme since 1980 to date and frequent shock events.

3. METHODS
3.1   Source of Data

The data for this study was obtained from the first wave of the General Living Standard panel survey of Households in Nigeria conducted by the Nigerian Bureau of statistics (NBS) in conjunction with the World Bank from August 2010 to April 2011. The survey collected data from a nationally representative sample of 4,851 households from all the 36 states of Nigeria, which gives a total sample of 27,993 household members, among whom are 12,065 children that are of 5-14 years of age. The survey covered a wide array of issues that measured the overall household welfare with primary objective of providing a complete and integrated data set to better understand the socioeconomic status of the households in the country. However, as this study focuses on the effect of poverty on child labor it uses the data of only poor households that accounted to 2750 households. The poor households are those that their per adult equivalent annual household consumption expenditure is below the international World absolute poverty line of US457 dollars per annum, which is equivalent to NGN 71,292. The poverty line was constructed on the basis of the International World absolute poverty line of $1.25 dollar per day deflated by Consumer Price Index (CPI) and exchange rate of 2010, which stood at 156 Naira per dollar as at the period.

3.2   Measurement of Variables

The dependent variable for this study is child labor and its information was generated from the labor module of the household survey questionnaire. In the survey,   each and every household member that is 5 years and above was asked: 'weather in the past one week he has been engaged in any form of economic activity'. The recall information for household chores for the previous one week tend to give a more precise estimate of the economic activities that an individual member undertakes for a livelihood. However, the answer to this is question is not restricted to the only past one week, it also provides information on all forms of income generating activities that the household members partake in the past one year. It also provides information of the nature of the economic activity ha has undertaken in the past one year.

The explanatory variables in this study include per adult household consumption expenditure as a

proxy for household poverty, followed by the vector of control variables for child, household and locational characteristics. Age and the sex of the child were used to control for child characteristics. Child' Age is measured in terms of the actual age of the children that are between 5 to 15 years while child's Sex is measured as a dummy variable with one for a male child and zero otherwise. Share of male and female adult members, number of children under five-aged children, age of the household head, age of the child's mother and the sex of the household head were used to control for household demographic characteristics that also reflect the intra household labor supply situation. Additionally, years of the educational attainment of the child parents and presence of biological mother were used to control for household level characteristics. Community level characteristics were controlled for by the inclusion of dummy variable of the regional location of the respondent and the distance to the nearest primary school.

3.3 Empirical Model

The basic theory underlying this study is the household utility model. The model posits that a given household chooses a particular child activity option when the utility derived from such activity it is greater than utility to be derived from other activities. Assuming a unitary household model suggested by Strauss, Mwabu and Beegle (2000), the utility that a given household obtained from engaging his child in any given labor activity must be equal to or greater than the utility derived from other usage. In this case, the household decides to allocate children's time for a given activity taking only if the marginal return is equalized across all uses of child time. The crucial question is whether, at that point, equality is achieved with the marginal social return. In this case, the decision of household to engage its child in a labor activity is determined by a vector of child, parent and household characteristics, community level characteristics as well as regional location in the model. However, the child labor decision is a latent variable, which has a likelihood of becoming either zero or one depending on the child labor decision of the household. Child labor decision takes a value one if the household engage any of its children into any form of economic activity and zero otherwise.

In view of the above framework, the probability of the household to engage his child labor activity is specified in probit model as follows:

$$\text{Prob } (D_i = 1) = \frac{e^{\lambda_i + \beta X_i'}}{1 + e^{\lambda_i + \beta X_i'}}$$

where D_i is a dummy variable representing child labor decision for household i, which takes a value of one if any member of the household between 5 to 14 years is engaged in any form of activity and zero otherwise. β is a vector of maximum likelihood parameter estimates, and X is a vector of independent variables that affects child labor decision, which comprises of per adult household consumption expenditure, followed by the characteristics of the child, parent, household, community level characteristics and regional location. In this regard, Grootaert and Kanbur (1995) maintain that the research outcome on the effect each one of these variables in the model on household child labor decision provides effective policy recommendations on how to tackle child labor in developing countries.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of both the dependent and independent variables in the model are presented in Table 1. The statistics show that about 19% of the children in the sample engage in various forms of labor activities. The annual of the average of per adult equivalent household capita consumption expenditure of the households was NGN 47,720, which is below the international world absolute poverty line of NGN71,292 established by the World Bank.

The mean of the child's age indicate that the high proportion of the children are above 5 years old, which implies that the high proportion of the children can be engaged in economic activities by their parents with the expectation that they can contribute to the consumption expenditure of the household. The statistics also show that the population of female children is higher than that of male children. This may imply that the female ones can easily be used for domestic and self-employed activities. The mean of the distance of the households to the nearest primary school suggest that most of the households are living in a place that is very far from the school. This shows that most of the poor households cannot afford the transportation cost of sending their children to school as such they have to engage them in labor activities.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable name	Measure of variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Dependent Variable			
Child labor	1 if a child (5-14 years) is involved in any form of economic activity, 0 otherwise	0.19	0.39
Independent Variables			
Poverty (POV)	Per adult annual household consumption expenditure	47,720	1440
Children Characteristics			
Age (CHLAG)	Age of the child in years	9.37	2.88
Age square (CHLAG2)	Square of the child's age	19.38	5.88
Gender ((CHLGD)	1 if male; 0 otherwise	0.47	0.24
Parent Characteristics			
Fathers Education (FEDU)	Years of education of father	5.32	1.23
Mothers education (MEDU)	Years of education of mother	1.53	0.87
Household Characteristics			
Head gender (HHGD)	1 if male, 0 otherwise	0.69	0.11
Share of children (SRCHL)	Share of children in the household	0.56	0.19
Share of adults (SRADT)	Share of adults in the household	0.36	0.23
Mothers presence (MPRE)	1 if the child's mother is in the household; 0 otherwise	0.63	0.13
Community Characteristics			
Distance to School (DTSHL)	Distance to school in kilometers	0.33	0.13
Region (RGN)	1 if the household resides in Northern Nigeria, 0 otherwise	0.60	0.13
Sector (SEC)	1 if the household resides in the rural areas, 0 otherwise	0.76	0.17

Source of Data: NBS/World Bank 2010/2011 General Household Living Standard Survey

The summary statistics also indicates that the fathers of the children are more educated than their mothers. This implies the cultural bias against female education in among the poor households in the country, especially in the rural areas. With regard to the gender of the household, the result shows that the majority of the households are headed by males and the majority of the children are living with their biological mothers in the household. This may indicates the rate of divorced is very minimal in the country. The descriptive also suggest that the percentage of children in the rural parts of the country is higher than that of urban Nigeria. This may be because of the rural people are more into polygamous marriage than their urban counterparts.

4.2   The Effect of Household Poverty on Child Labor in Nigeria

The result of probit regression suggests that the predictors in the model are significant in explaining child labor as indicated by the chi-square. This implies that the overall independent variables in the model are significant in explaining the likelihood of the poor household to engage their children in labor activities. The result reveals that the per adult consumption expenditure of the household as a proxy for its welfare as well as the characteristics of the children, their parents, the household and the community are having a significant effect on child labor in the country.

Table 2: Probit regression result of the effect of poverty on Child labor decision

Independent variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Per adult household consumption	-0.11**	0.03
Children Characteristics		
Age (CHLAG)	0.04**	0.01
Age square (CHLAG2)	0.01**	0.01
Gender- Male ((CHLGD)	0.04**	0.02
Parent Characteristics		
Fathers Education (FEDU)	-0.06**	0.02
Mothers education (MEDU)	-0.09	0.24
Household Characteristics		
Head gender-Male (HHGD)	0.26	0.29
Share of children (SRCHL)	0.18**	0.03
Share of adults (SRADT)	0.16	0.15
Mothers presence (MPRE)	0.12	0.11
Community Characteristics		
Distance to School (DTSHL)	0.03**	0.01
Region- North (RGN)	0.08	0.09
Sector – Rural (SEC)	0.23**	0.09

Source of Data: NBS/World Bank 2010/2011 General Household Living Standard Survey

***, ** and * implies 1%, 5% and 10% levels of significance respectively

Per adult household consumption expenditure as a proxy for household welfare tends to have significant negative effects on the child's engagement in economic activities. A decrease in per adult equivalent consumption expenditure of the household increases the likelihood of engaging children into labor activities. This indicates that the poor households are engaging their children in labor activities so as to supplement their little earnings, which is inadequate to provide the basic needs of the household. Thus, the finding confirms the influence of the poverty status of the poor household in Nigeria in increasing the odds of engaging children into labor activities and they forfeit the human development of their children for the sake of the little income they will earned from the child labor.

The coefficients of child characteristics indicate that the older the age of a child the higher the likelihood of engaging him in labor activities. This signifies that child labor is one of the sources of income to the poor households, which makes the children loss the benefits of schooling, implying a loss of human capital formation to the household and the economy as a whole. This finding is consistent with virtually all empirical works on the determinants of child labor in developing countries. The result also suggests that male children are more likely to be engaged in economic activities than the female ones. This may be because of the gender and religion bias against female participation in certain forms of income generating activities, such as formal employment, farming among others. The educational status of the child's father is having a negative significant influence on child's engagement in labor activities. This implies that the children that their parents are opportune to be educated they are less likely to engage their children in labor activities because they know its implication for the future development of the children. A similar result has been reported by Psarachapolous (1997).

The result of distance to primary schools suggest that the children that are residing far from the schools are more likely to be involved in economic activities than those household living closer to schools. This signifies that those households in remote areas cannot afford the cost of transporting their children to such schools, therefore they will remain illiterate and in perpetual cycle of poverty. An increase in the share of the number of children in the household is also having a positive effect on a child's engagement in economic activities, implying that an increase in the number of children in the household increases the likelihood of engaging more children in economic activities. This shows that the households have no option other than to rely on the labor of their children for their consumption spending coupled with the fact that they cannot afford he child's educational expenses. Rural location is also having a positive significant influence on the child's engagement in economic activities. This indicate that the rural households are more likely to engage their children in labor activities than their urban counterparts, which may be as a result of high level of illiteracy in the rural areas coupled with their over dependence on farming activity as a means of their livelihood. This situation is more apparent in the rainy season, when the children are fully involved in farming activities, especially in the rural parts of the country.

5.   CONCLUSION

This paper examines the effect of household poverty on child labor in Nigeria, using the recent nationally representative household level data, with a view to identify the possible appropriate actions to be taken by policy makers to overcome the problem of child labor in the country. Several interesting results are obtained from this study. However, the major conclusions that emerged from this study is that there is negative relationship

between household welfare and child labor in the country, a conjecture that has been questioned by the recent literature. This suggest that the the poor households are more likely to engage their children in labor activities than the non-poor ones as the poor households have taken child labor as one of the sources of income to the take care the needs of the household. The study also revealed that the percentage of the households that engaged their children in economic activities is higher in the rural areas than the urban areas of the country. Child labor also tends to be gender sensitive, as more males participate in economic activities than female children. In terms of age of the children, the study revealed that the higher the age of the child the more likely for the household to engage the children in economic activity. The result also shows that urban poor households are better than the rural urban households.

Giving the above finding, any policy that will address child labor in the country need to improve the economic wellbeing of the poor households through introducing diversification initiative scheme, formal credit with simple collateral and basic education programs. There is also need for the policy makers to take cognizance of gender diversity in formulating policies that will reduce child labor in the country. They should also give priority to national educational programs such as girl's education and adult literacy campaigns to increase school enrollment of children in general and specifically for the rural residents. The government should also ensure that the children are enrolled into primary and secondary schools by providing free and compulsory basic education or, alternatively, by affording them the opportunities to acquire necessary entrepreneurship and apprentice skills to make up to some extent their lack of education. In addition, the government needs to organize a very strong campaign against the involvement of children into harmful labor activities. Thus, the fundamental finding of this study suggest that the policy makers should take cognizance of incidence of poverty, child and household characteristics, along with regional and sectorial diversity in formulating appropriate policies for effective reduction of the menace of child labor in the country.

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