



## Understanding the Causes and Consequences of Child Labor in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the patterns and associated factors of child labor in Gombe Local Government, Gombe State, Nigeria. The primary aim of the research was to explore the socio-demographic characteristics of children engaged in various forms of child labor, identify the underlying factors contributing to child labor, and assess the consequences it has on the lives of these children. A descriptive survey research design was employed, targeting children involved in child labor, their parents, employers, and other relevant stakeholders, such as educators and social welfare officers. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and non-participant observation, with a sample size of 332 respondents, selected through a stratified random sampling technique. The study utilized quantitative data analysis methods, including descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that poverty, lack of access to education, cultural practices, and large family sizes were the major contributing factors to child labor in the area. The study also found that children working in sectors such as street hawking, domestic work, and agricultural labor faced numerous challenges, including long working hours, physical abuse, poor working conditions, and disruptions to their education. Despite these hardships, a significant proportion of children expressed a desire to stop working if given financial support. Based on the findings, the study concludes that child labor in Gombe Metropolis remains a pressing issue that requires comprehensive intervention. The research highlights the need for increased access to education, stronger enforcement of child labor laws, and financial support for vulnerable families. Additionally, the study recommends awareness campaigns and collaboration with international organizations to reduce the prevalence of child labor in the region.*

**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Child Labor, Education, Poverty, Street Hawking

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### 1. Introduction

The International Labor Organization defines child labor as the engagement of children below 15 years in regular work or employment aimed at earning a livelihood for themselves or their families (Buonomo, 2020). This practice is widespread among children from rural areas and impoverished families, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Various methods are employed to entrap these children, including persuasion, deception, threats, and coercion. In some cases, children or their families willingly enter into such labor arrangements, often unaware of the

severe consequences (Caselli & Coleman, 2022). Even when aware of potential hardships, children rarely comprehend the nature or duration of the suffering they will endure.

Child labor refers to any work that deprives a child of their childhood and right to education, or is detrimental to the physical, mental, moral, and social well-being of the child (Elliot, 2018). Hence, any vocation that is exploitative and/or injurious to different aspects of the developing personality of the child refers to child labor (Bastia, 2023). Child labor has evolved from a regional and national concern to a



critical issue of international debate, prompting global policy interventions. The 20th century witnessed heightened awareness of child labor's detrimental effects, including its association with child trafficking (Abubakar & Ahmed, 2021). Today, child labor is recognized as a severe violation of children's rights. Efforts to eradicate child labor date back to 1802 with the enactment of Robert Peel's Factories Act in Great Britain (Basu & Pham, 2022). Despite over two centuries of economic growth and social progress, child labor remains a significant global challenge (Beker, 2017). Recent reports indicate that in Nigeria alone, over 24 million children aged 5 to 17 are involved in child labor, with approximately 14 million engaged in hazardous work (National Bureau of Statistics & International Labor Organization, 2022). While industrialized nations experienced reductions in child labor during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the issue persisted and even intensified in developing economies (Aliyu, 2019).

In Nigeria, particularly in Gombe State, the situation has become increasingly concerning. Challenges in data collection and the integration of child labor into family work have historically obscured its true extent (Adepoju & Okunmadewa, 2020). Child labor is a pressing social issue globally, as the future of any society hinges on its ability to nurture and protect its younger generation. The international community has recognized the devastating effects of child labor, leading to concerted efforts to safeguard children's rights. In Nigeria, the prevalence of child labor is alarming. A 2022 survey by the National Bureau of Statistics, in collaboration with the International Labor Organization, revealed that 39.2% of Nigerian children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in child labor (National Bureau of Statistics & International Labor Organization, 2022).

In Gombe State, reports have highlighted the increasing involvement of underage

girls in farm labor, exposing them to exploitation and hindering their educational opportunities (Adepegba, 2022). Parents and guardians often fail to adequately supervise or monitor the environments where their children work, such as marketplaces, motor garages, and other public spaces (Bessell, 2015). Prolonged interaction with individuals of questionable character in these settings can lead to the initiation and recruitment of children into deviant activities (Kabeer, 2000). In Gombe State, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare has expressed concern over the rising cases of child labor, particularly among young girls employed as farm laborers (PM News Nigeria, 2019).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Child labor has long been recognized as a societal menace, with efforts to combat it dating back to the early 19th century, such as the enactment of Robert Peel's Factories Act in Great Britain in 1802. Despite global initiatives, child labor remains a pervasive issue, particularly in Nigeria (Caselli & Coleman, 2022). In Gombe State, the prevalence of child labor is alarming, manifesting in various forms and increasing at an unprecedented rate. Economic challenges have significantly contributed to the rise of child labor in Nigeria (Mahmood & Usman, 2021). The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s adversely affected the welfare of many families, eroding the purchasing power of parents amid an unstable economy characterized by inflation, unemployment, and rising living costs (Silver, 2024). Consequently, many parents struggle to provide basic necessities for their children, such as healthcare, education, and nutrition, leading children to engage in labor activities to supplement family income (Davies, 2020).

The disparity between rural and urban areas exacerbates the problem. Government efforts to bridge this gap have



often fallen short, resulting in deficient infrastructure and basic amenities in rural regions (De Hoop, 2021). This neglect deepens the socio-economic challenges faced by rural populations, prompting both youth and children to migrate to urban centers like Gombe Metropolis in search of better opportunities (Okojie, 2018). However, upon arrival, many find themselves engaging in various forms of labor, often in environments that expose them to delinquent behaviors and exploitation. In Gombe, specific practices further entrench child labor. For instance, reports from the United Nations (2020), UNODC (2021), US Department of Labor (2022), ILO (2020), & NBC (2022). have highlighted the increasing number of underage girls employed for cheap labor on farmlands. These girls, often between the ages of 9 and 14, come from poor backgrounds and are subjected to hard labor for meager wages. This trend not only deprives them of education but also exposes them to various forms of exploitation (Todaro & Smith, 2015).

According to UNICEF (2018) & World Bank (2021) children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to their limited ability to assert their rights. They can be compelled to work long hours under harsh conditions, with minimal compensation and inadequate living conditions. This exploitation not only deprives them of their childhood but also fuels the demand for cheap labor. Many child laborers work extensive hours without the opportunity to attend school, thereby hindering their education and prospects. The rapid socio-cultural changes and declining family incomes have led to parental indifference regarding their children's activities. This neglect creates an environment where children are easily recruited into various anti-social activities within society. The high prevalence of child labor is closely linked to low socio-economic status among parents and a lack of education. This situation renders

children vulnerable to diseases, high mortality rates, squalor, and low life expectancy. Moreover, it leads to the underutilization of their potential capacities and capabilities within society.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. Explore the major causes of child labor in the study area
2. Examine the relationship between gender and child labor in the study area
3. Identify the forms of child labor in the study area.
4. Evaluate the consequences of child labor in the study area.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Concept of Child Labor**

Child labor refers to any work that deprives a child of their childhood and right to education, or is detrimental to the physical, mental, moral, and social well-being of the child (Elliot, 2018). Hence, any vocation that is exploitative and/or injurious to different aspects of the developing personality of the child refers to child labor (Bastia, 2023). Child labor is a significant global issue that affects millions of children, particularly in developing countries. It refers to work that is harmful to children's physical, mental, social, or moral well-being and interferes with their education and development. According to the International Labor Organization (2020), child labor includes work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous to children and disrupts their access to education by preventing school attendance, causing premature school dropout, or forcing them to combine schooling with excessive work (ILO, 2020). While not all work performed by children is considered child labor, the distinction lies in the nature of the work, the child's age, and the working conditions. Light work that does not interfere with education or harm a child's health, such as assisting with family chores or engaging in skill-building activities, is generally



acceptable. However, work that exploits children, deprives them of education, and exposes them to hazardous conditions is classified as child labor and is strictly prohibited under international and national laws (UNODC, 2021)

**Family breakdown and parental neglect** also contribute to child labor. Orphaned children, children from broken homes, or those abandoned by their parents are more vulnerable to labor exploitation. In some cases, children are left to fend for themselves and their younger siblings, making labor their only option for survival (US Department of Labor, 2022) This problem is further exacerbated by conflicts and displacement, where families lose their sources of livelihood, forcing children to work for sustenance (Elliot, 2018). A combination of poverty, lack of education, cultural norms, weak law enforcement, economic demand for cheap labor, family breakdown, and rapid urbanization drives child labor in Gombe Local Government. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach that includes poverty alleviation programs, improved access to education, cultural reorientation, stricter law enforcement, and policies that protect children's rights. Without these interventions, child labor will continue to deprive many children of their childhood, education, and future opportunities.

Child labor manifests in various forms, ranging from street hawking and begging to domestic servitude, agricultural labor, and hazardous work in mines or factories. Many children in Gombe Local Government are engaged in street vending, where they are exposed to harsh weather conditions, accidents, and exploitation. Others work in farms, construction sites, or small-scale industries, performing physically demanding tasks that negatively affect their health and development (Kabeer, 2020). In some cases, children are trafficked and forced into labor, further exposing them to abuse and long-term psychological distress. The persistence of

child labor in Nigeria highlights the need for stronger policies, public awareness, and economic interventions to support vulnerable families and ensure children's right to education and a safe childhood (Eweje, 2021). Addressing child labor requires a multi-sectoral approach that involves government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community stakeholders working together to create sustainable solutions.

Child labor has far-reaching consequences that negatively impact the physical, psychological, educational, and economic well-being of children, families, and society as a whole. In Gombe Local Government, as in many parts of Nigeria, child labor deprives children of their fundamental rights, exposes them to hazardous conditions, and limits their future opportunities. The consequences of child labor can be broadly categorized into health-related, educational, socio-economic, and psychological effects.

#### Causes of Child Labor

Child labor is a multifaceted issue influenced by various socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. The persistence of child labor in Gombe Local Government, as in many parts of Nigeria, is largely attributed to poverty, lack of access to quality education, cultural practices, weak legal enforcement, and economic demand for cheap labor. These factors interact in complex ways, making it challenging to eliminate child labor without a comprehensive approach that addresses its root causes.

Many families in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas like Gombe Local Government, struggle to meet basic needs due to high unemployment rates and economic hardships. As a result, children are forced to contribute to household income by engaging in various forms of labor such as street hawking, domestic work, and agricultural labor (Okafor, 2019). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), poverty is the



leading driver of child labor worldwide, as children from low-income households are more likely to drop out of school and start working at an early age to support their families.

Another significant cause is lack of access to quality education. Many children in Gombe State do not have access to affordable and well-equipped schools, forcing them into labor instead. In some cases, parents may prioritize short-term financial gains over long-term educational benefits, leading children to work instead of attending school (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, the hidden costs of education, such as uniforms, books, and transportation, discourage many families from enrolling their children in school, thereby increasing their chances of being involved in labor (Eweje, 2021).

Cultural and traditional beliefs also play a role in perpetuating child labor. In many Nigerian communities, particularly among the Hausa/Fulani population in Gombe Local Government, children are expected to assist their parents in farming, trading, and domestic activities from an early age. The Almajiri system, where children are sent to Quranic schools without adequate financial support, has also contributed to child labor, as these children are often forced to beg for alms to sustain themselves (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2020). While such practices are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, they expose children to exploitation and deny them access to formal education.

Another contributing factor is weak enforcement of child labor laws. Although Nigeria has ratified international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and has enacted the Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, enforcement remains weak, especially in rural areas. Many employers continue to exploit children due to poor monitoring and lack of strict penalties for violations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2003). Furthermore,

corruption among law enforcement agencies sometimes enables child labor to persist without consequences for perpetrators (ILO, 2020).

Economic factors, particularly the demand for cheap labor, also contribute to child labor. Many businesses, particularly in the informal sector, prefer to employ children because they can be paid lower wages and are less likely to demand better working conditions (Okafor, 2019). In Gombe Local Government, children are frequently engaged in activities such as selling goods in markets, working as apprentices in mechanic workshops, and assisting in construction sites. Employers see children as a source of cheap labor, and in the absence of strict labor regulations, they continue to exploit them for economic gain (ILO, 2020).

Family breakdown and parental neglect also contribute to child labor. Orphaned children, children from broken homes, or those abandoned by their parents are more vulnerable to labor exploitation. In some cases, children are left to fend for themselves and their younger siblings, making labor their only option for survival (UNICEF, 2021). This problem is further exacerbated by conflicts and displacement, where families lose their sources of livelihood, forcing children to work for sustenance (Eweje, 2021).

Child labor in Gombe Local Government is driven by a combination of poverty, lack of education, cultural norms, weak law enforcement, economic demand for cheap labor, family breakdown, and rapid urbanization. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach that includes poverty alleviation programs, improved access to education, cultural reorientation, stricter law enforcement, and policies that protect children's rights. Without these interventions, child labor will continue to deprive many children of their childhood, education, and future opportunities.





### Forms of Child Labor

Child labor manifests in various forms, depending on the socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and legal frameworks of a given society. While some forms of child labor are more visible, such as street hawking and domestic servitude, others remain hidden, particularly those involving hazardous work or exploitation. The International Labour Organization (ILO) classifies child labor into different categories based on the severity of exploitation and harm it causes to children (ILO, 2020). These forms include domestic work, agricultural labor, street work, industrial labor, forced labor, and illicit activities. Each of these forms has specific consequences on children's physical, emotional, and educational development.

One of the most prevalent forms of child labor is domestic work, where children, particularly girls, are employed as housemaids in private households. They often work long hours performing household chores, caring for younger children, and sometimes enduring physical or emotional abuse (UNICEF, 2021). In many cases, child domestic workers are deprived of education and social interactions, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Due to the hidden nature of domestic work, these children face difficulties in seeking help or escaping abusive employers (Eweje, 2021).

Another common form is agricultural labor, where children are engaged in farming, fishing, and livestock herding. In rural areas like Gombe Local Government, many children work on family farms or plantations, helping with planting, weeding, and harvesting crops. While some agricultural work may be considered part of family responsibilities, exploitative agricultural labor involves long working hours under harsh conditions, exposure to chemicals, and carrying heavy loads, which can have severe health consequences (Okafor, 2019). The ILO considers hazardous agricultural work as

one of the worst forms of child labor due to the risks involved, including injuries from tools, bites from venomous animals, and respiratory issues from pesticide exposure (ILO, 2020).

Street work is another widespread form of child labor, particularly in urban centers. Many children engage in street hawking, begging, and carrying goods as porters in markets and bus stations. This form of labor exposes children to dangers such as road accidents, exploitation, and abuse from criminals or law enforcement agents (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2020). In Gombe Local Government, it is common to see children selling sachet water, snacks, and other items in busy streets, often during school hours. These children face high risks of kidnapping, trafficking, and sexual exploitation, making street work one of the most dangerous forms of child labor (UNICEF, 2021).

Another significant category is industrial and artisanal labor, where children work in construction sites, mining activities, and small-scale manufacturing industries. Children involved in these jobs are often exposed to hazardous environments, including dust, chemicals, and unsafe machinery, which can lead to severe health complications and even fatalities (Eweje, 2021). In some cases, children work in mechanic workshops, welding shops, and quarries, performing tasks beyond their physical capabilities. This form of labor significantly affects their growth and educational opportunities, trapping them in cycles of poverty and exploitation (Okafor, 2019).

Forced labor and trafficking represent some of the worst forms of child labor. Children are trafficked within and outside Nigeria for forced labor in domestic work, commercial sex work, and forced street begging. Some are taken to distant places under the false promise of better opportunities but end up in exploitative labor situations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2003). Many children are also



forced to work in debt bondage, where they must labor for years to repay debts owed by their parents. This form of labor is highly exploitative, violating children's rights and exposing them to extreme physical and psychological harm (ILO, 2020).

Children are also engaged in illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, armed conflict, and other criminal acts. Some are recruited by gangs or armed groups and forced to work as informants, drug couriers, or even child soldiers in conflict-prone areas (UNICEF, 2021). These children are often subjected to violence, substance abuse, and psychological trauma, severely impacting their well-being and future prospects. The use of children in such activities is a grave violation of human rights and is strongly condemned under international law (UNCRC, 2021).

In summary, child labor takes many forms, each with serious implications for children's health, education, and future opportunities. While some children work to support their families, many are exploited in hazardous and abusive conditions. Addressing child labor requires coordinated efforts from governments, NGOs, communities, and international organizations to enforce child protection laws, provide access to education, and alleviate the economic pressures that drive families to engage children in labor. Without proper intervention, child labor will continue to undermine the rights and well-being of millions of children across Nigeria and beyond.

#### Consequences of Child Labor

Child labor has far-reaching consequences that negatively impact the physical, psychological, educational, and economic well-being of children, families, and society as a whole. In Gombe Local Government, as in many parts of Nigeria, child labor deprives children of their fundamental rights, exposes them to hazardous conditions, and limits their future opportunities. The consequences of

child labor can be broadly categorized into health-related, educational, socio-economic, and psychological effects.

Many children engaged in labor-intensive activities, such as street hawking, farming, construction work, and domestic service, are exposed to physical dangers, toxic substances, and long working hours without adequate rest or nutrition (Okafor, 2019). Studies have shown that children working in hazardous environments are at risk of injuries, respiratory problems, malnutrition, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections, especially for girls involved in domestic work (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, child laborers often lack access to proper healthcare, leading to long-term health complications (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020).

Child labor disrupts children's access to schooling, either by causing them to drop out completely or by affecting their ability to concentrate and perform well academically. Many working children struggle with irregular school attendance, fatigue, and lack of motivation due to the burden of work responsibilities (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2020). In Gombe Local Government, children involved in street vending and domestic service often miss school hours or fail to complete assignments, which ultimately limits their chances of acquiring quality education and breaking the cycle of poverty (UNESCO, 2020). The long-term implication is a poorly educated workforce, which negatively impacts national development and economic growth (Eweje, 2021).

Child labor also has serious psychological and emotional consequences. Children who engage in labor at a young age often suffer from stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem due to excessive workloads, mistreatment, and lack of parental care (UNICEF, 2021). Many child laborers experience emotional trauma, especially those subjected to exploitative or abusive work conditions, including



physical and sexual abuse (ILO, 2020). The psychological distress from these experiences can lead to long-term behavioral and mental health issues, affecting their ability to integrate into society and lead fulfilling lives (Okafor, 2019).

Child labor perpetuates the cycle of poverty in families and communities. Since working children often miss out on education and skill acquisition, they grow up with limited employment opportunities and remain trapped in low-income, unskilled jobs (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2020). This economic disadvantage is often passed down to their children, creating a generational cycle of poverty that hinders community and national development. According to the ILO (2020), countries with high rates of child labor tend to have slower economic growth due to the prevalence of an uneducated and unskilled workforce.

Child labor also has broader social consequences, such as an increase in crime rates and social instability. Many children who grow up working under harsh conditions without proper education or parental guidance are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors, including theft, drug abuse, and gang activities (Eweje, 2021). The lack of educational and economic opportunities forces many youths into criminal activities, contributing to insecurity and instability in society (UNESCO, 2020). Additionally, girls engaged in child labor, particularly in domestic work, are often vulnerable to early marriage and teenage pregnancy, further limiting their future prospects and contributing to gender inequality (UNICEF, 2021).

Child labor has devastating consequences on children, families, and society at large. It leads to poor health outcomes, hinders educational attainment, causes psychological distress, perpetuates poverty, and contributes to social instability. Addressing child labor in

Gombe Local Government requires a multifaceted approach, including poverty reduction strategies, increased access to quality education, strict enforcement of child labor laws, and public awareness campaigns. Without urgent intervention, child labor will continue to undermine children's rights and hinder the socio-economic development of the region.

### **Empirical Review**

Globally, child labor remains a persistent challenge, particularly in developing regions. Studies conducted by international organizations such as the International Labor Organization (2020) and the US Department of Labor (2022) reveal that millions of children worldwide are engaged in various forms of labor, ranging from agricultural work to hazardous industrial activities. A study by Okojie (2018), examined the global trends and determinants of child labor, identifying poverty as a primary driver. The study found that households with lower incomes are more likely to send children into the workforce to supplement family earnings. Similarly, Basu and Tzannatos (2003) analyzed the economic implications of child labor and concluded that in societies with widespread poverty, child labor becomes a coping mechanism for survival. Their findings emphasized that child labor is deeply rooted in economic structures, requiring comprehensive policy interventions to eradicate it.

Further, UNODC (2021) report estimated that over 160 million children worldwide are engaged in child labor, with a significant proportion involved in hazardous work. The report highlighted that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of child labor, attributing this to economic hardships, conflicts, and weak enforcement of child protection laws. Another global study by Diallo, Etienne, and Mehran (2020) used data from multiple countries and found that gender disparities exist in child labor, with boys being more involved in physically demanding work,





while girls are more likely to engage in domestic service, which often exposes them to abuse. The role of education in mitigating child labor has also been widely studied. Bessell (2015) found that increasing school attendance significantly reduces child labor rates. The study emphasized that when education is made affordable and accessible, parents are less likely to rely on their children's labor for economic survival. Similarly, Becker (2017) explored the relationship between child labor and schooling in developing countries, concluding that providing financial incentives for school attendance reduces child labor participation.

A more recent study by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020) assessed the impact of COVID-19 on child labor. The findings showed that the pandemic exacerbated child labor rates due to economic downturns, school closures, and increased household vulnerabilities. Many children who dropped out of school during the pandemic were forced into work, and a significant number have not returned to formal education. Overall, global studies on child labor emphasize the strong link between economic conditions, educational opportunities, and child labor prevalence. While international efforts have led to some progress, the persistence of child labor in many parts of the world underscores the need for sustained policy interventions, economic empowerment programs, and stronger enforcement of child protection laws. A study by Basu and Pham (2022) found that child labor is more prevalent in households with low income and poor parental education. Similarly, Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) highlighted the link between economic growth and declining child labor rates, emphasizing the role of poverty reduction in addressing the issue.

A study by Okojie (2019) examined the prevalence of child labor across different sectors in Nigeria. The research found that children are primarily engaged in

agriculture, street hawking, domestic service, mining, and construction. In rural areas, agricultural work is the dominant form of child labor, where children assist in farming activities such as planting, harvesting, and animal rearing. In urban areas, children are more likely to be involved in street hawking, which exposes them to risks such as accidents, exploitation, and abuse (Okojie, 2019).

Another study conducted by Okafor (2021) highlighted the role of economic hardship in child labor prevalence in Nigeria. The findings indicated that families experiencing financial difficulties often send their children to work as a survival strategy. Many children in low-income households contribute to family income by engaging in street vending, begging, and casual labor. The study also pointed out that inadequate social welfare policies and limited access to free education contribute to the persistence of child labor in Nigeria (Okafor, 2021).

The impact of child labor on education in Nigeria has also been widely studied. Adegoke (2018) investigated the relationship between child labor and school attendance in selected states in Nigeria. The study found that children engaged in labor activities tend to have lower school attendance rates, poor academic performance, and a higher likelihood of dropping out. The findings revealed that child labor not only affects children's educational attainment but also their long-term economic prospects and social mobility (Adegoke, 2018).

Several empirical studies have examined government policies and interventions aimed at reducing child labor in Nigeria. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2020), Nigeria has implemented various programs such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme and social intervention programs like the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program. However, weak enforcement of child labor laws,



corruption, and inadequate funding have hindered the effectiveness of these interventions. The report emphasized the need for stronger policy implementation, increased investment in education, and enhanced social protection programs to combat child labor in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2020).

Furthermore, studies have identified cultural and traditional practices as contributors to child labor in Nigeria. In some regions, children are expected to contribute to family livelihood through apprenticeship, farming, and domestic work. According to a study by Yusuf and Adamu (2022), cultural beliefs that prioritize work over formal education contribute to high rates of child labor, particularly in northern Nigeria. The study suggested that community-based interventions and awareness campaigns are essential in changing societal attitudes toward child labor and promoting the value of education (Yusuf & Adamu, 2022).

Overall, empirical studies on child labor in Nigeria highlight the complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors contributing to the problem. Despite various interventions, child labor remains a persistent issue requiring comprehensive policy reforms, stronger law enforcement, and greater investment in education and social welfare programs.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the patterns, causes, and consequences of child labor in Gombe Metropolis, Gombe State, Nigeria. The design was chosen due to its effectiveness in collecting and analyzing data from a representative sample to make generalizations about a larger population. The study population comprised children actively engaged in various forms of child labor, as well as their parents or guardians, employers, educators, community leader, and government officials responsible for child welfare. This diverse population

enabled a holistic understanding of the issue from multiple stakeholder perspectives. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that all relevant subgroups were adequately represented. The population was stratified into five key groups: Children involved in child labor, Parents/guardians of child laborers, Employers of child laborers, Teachers and school administrators, and Government and social welfare officials. Within each stratum, participants were selected randomly to reduce selection bias. A total of 390 questionnaires were distributed, and 332 were returned duly completed, resulting in an 85.1% response rate. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator (2020), ensuring statistical significance and generalizability.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was divided into sections that captured socio-demographic data, types and causes of child labor, and its impacts on education and well-being. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to facilitate quantitative analysis. Additionally, non-participant observation was employed to validate responses and gather contextual insights on children's working environments. Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Participation was strictly voluntary, and informed consent was secured from the parents or guardians of child participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained throughout the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and charts were used to summarize demographic profiles and key trends. Inferential analyses helped identify patterns and associations, particularly concerning the socio-economic and educational impacts of child labor.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discusses the findings therefrom

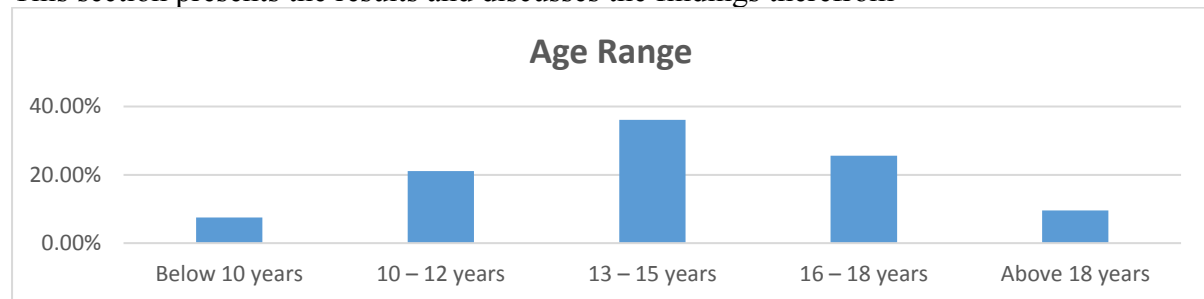


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

36.1% of the respondents were between 13 and 15 years, the largest group. This suggests that a significant number of children engaged in child labor are at an age when they are expected to attend school, but are instead involved in work. 21.1% of respondents were aged between

10 to 12 years, further indicating a concern with younger children being engaged in labor activities. Children below 10 years accounted for 7.5% of the total, showing that some younger children are also involved, although this is a relatively smaller percentage.

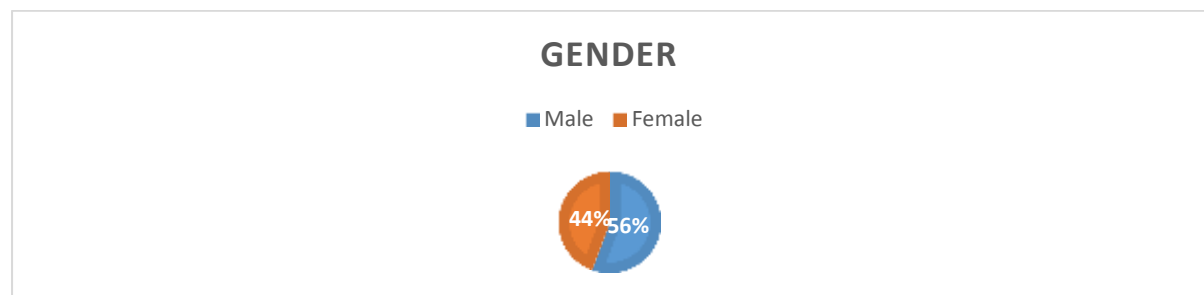


Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

The study indicates that more males (55.7%) are involved in child labor than females (44.3%). This may be due to cultural and economic factors that place

more economic burdens on boys, pushing them to work. However, the percentage of females involved is still significant, suggesting that both genders are affected by child labor.

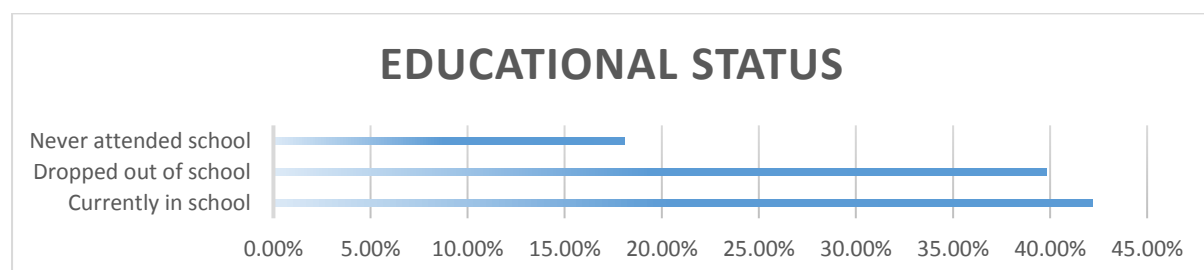
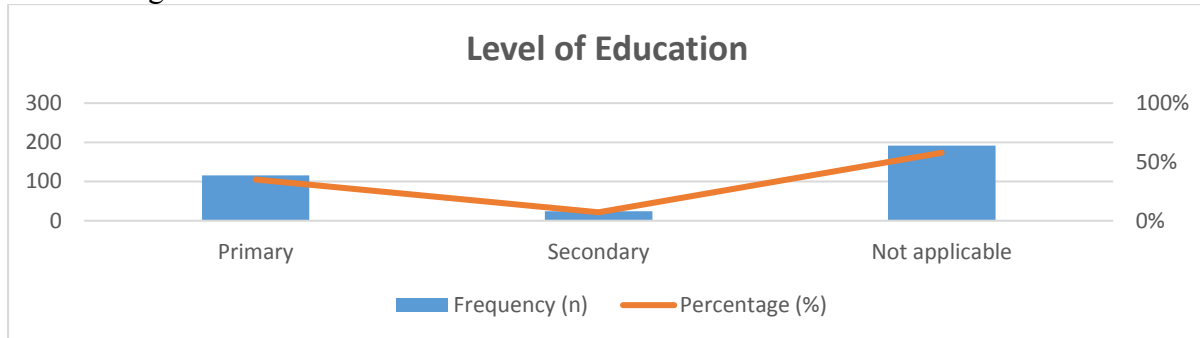


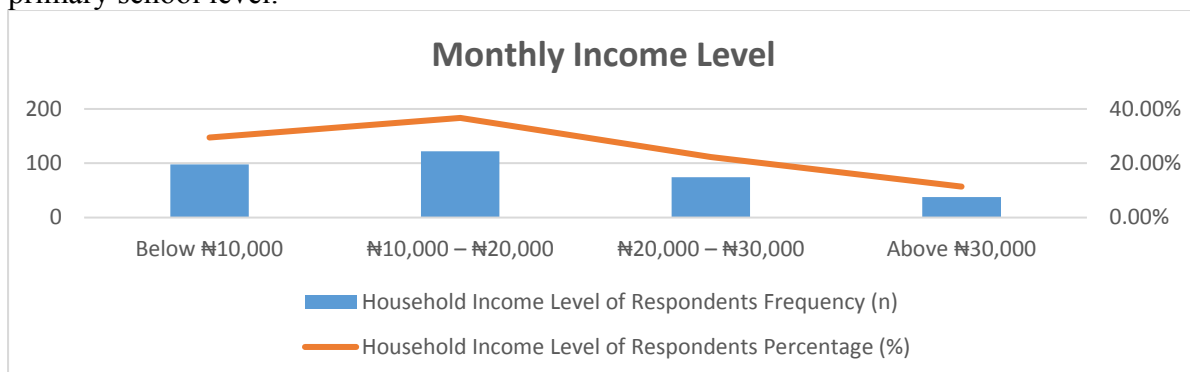
Figure 3: Educational Status of Respondents

39.8% of respondents have dropped out of school, showing the extent to which child labor impacts education. 42.2% of the children are still in school, indicating that although many children are working, some are balancing work and education, or can attend school. 18.1% have never attended school, which suggests that lack of access to education is a significant factor contributing to child labor.



*Figure 4: Level of Education of Respondents*

A majority of the respondents (57.8%) are not in formal education or have had very limited schooling. This aligns with the high rate of child labor, where children are either working or forced to drop out of school. 35% of the respondents have completed at least primary education, and 7.2% have attained secondary education, suggesting that few have advanced beyond primary school level.



*Figure 5: Monthly Income Level of Parents*

The study shows that 66.2% of the parents earn ₦20,000 or less per month, highlighting that economic hardship is a major driver of child labor. Only a small percentage (11.4%) of households have an income above ₦30,000, further supporting the argument that poverty plays a key role in perpetuating child labor.

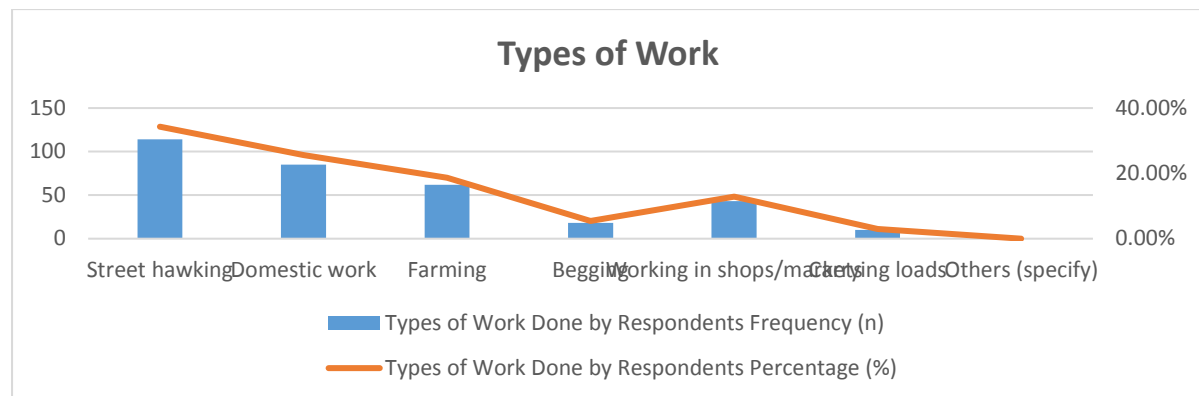


Figure 6: Types of Work Done by Respondents

34.3% of the children engage in street hawking, indicating it is the most common form of child labor in Gombe. 25.6% of children work as domestic workers, including roles like house help or babysitting. 18.7% of children work in farming, which is likely tied to the agricultural economy of the region. 5.4% are involved in begging, suggesting the severe poverty in certain parts of the community.

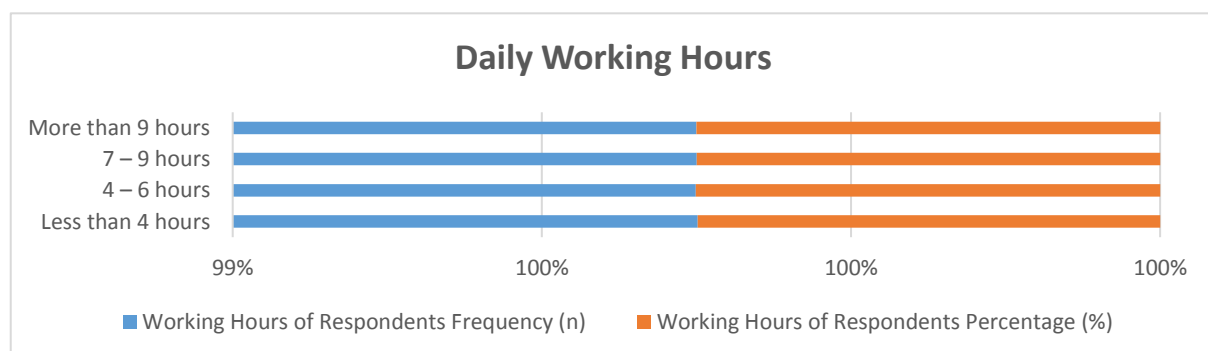


Figure 7: Working Hours of Respondents

The majority of children work for 7 to 9 hours (39.1%), while a significant portion work more than 9 hours (31.3%), demonstrating that child labor often involves long working hours, which can have serious health and developmental consequences. 22.9% work between 4 to 6 hours, showing a moderate level of involvement.

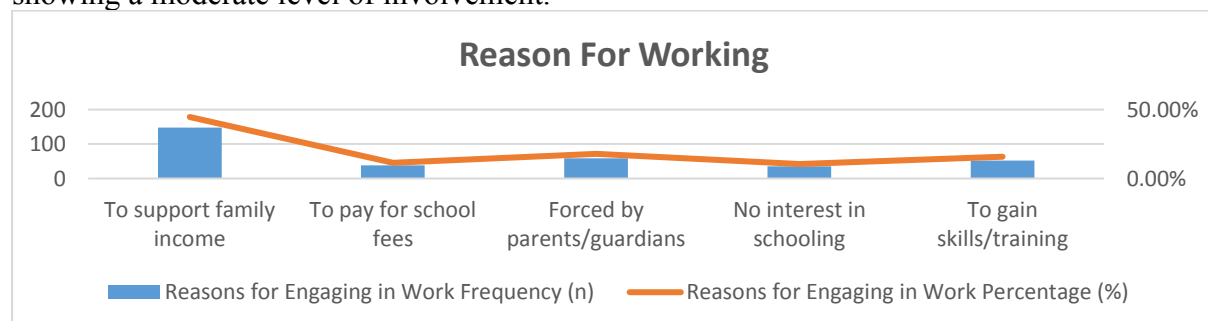


Figure 8: Reasons for Engaging in Work

44.6% of children work to support family income, highlighting the critical role of poverty in driving child labor. 17.8% of children reported being forced by their parents/guardians to work, reflecting a lack of choice in their situation. 15.7% of children work to gain skills or training, indicating that some children may perceive work as a way to learn trade skills.



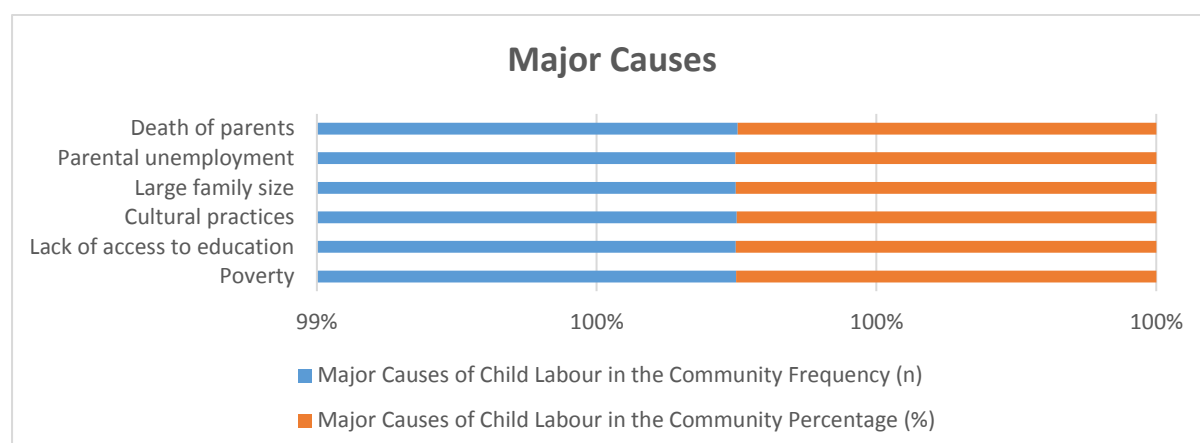


Figure 9: Major Causes of Child Labor in the Community

The study found that 75.3% of respondents identified poverty as the primary cause of child labor, indicating that financial constraints compel families to send their children to work to meet basic needs. A significant 66.3% of respondents pointed to the lack of access to education as another contributing factor, suggesting that when children do not have opportunities for schooling, they are more likely to be engaged in work instead. Additionally, 43.7% of respondents highlighted the impact of large family sizes, where the economic pressure on parents to provide for many children often results in children being sent out to work, as families struggle to survive on limited income. These factors create a cycle where children are forced into labor at a young age, depriving them of education and a chance for a better future.

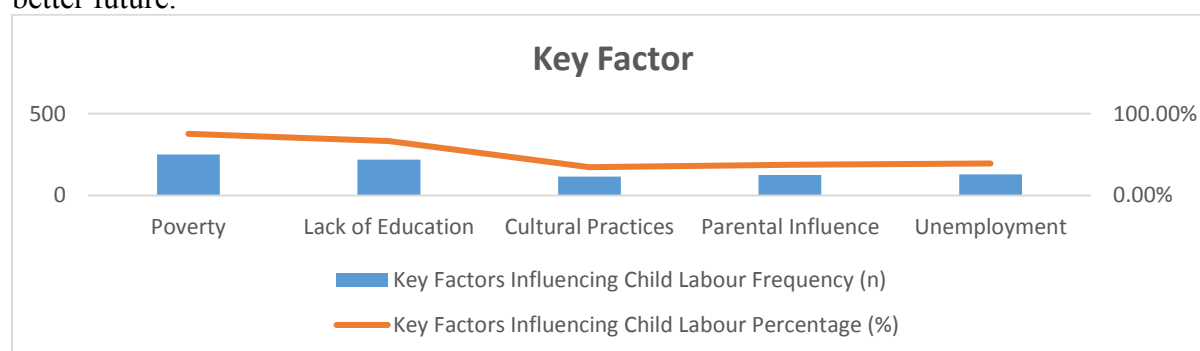


Figure 10: Key Factors Influencing Child Labor

The table highlights several key factors influencing child labor, with poverty being the most prominent, cited by 75.3% of respondents. Families facing financial hardship often send their children to work to supplement household income. Lack of education, identified by 66.3%, also forces children into the workforce as they lack access to schooling. Cultural practices (34.6%) and parental influence (37.7%) further contribute, with some communities encouraging child labor due to tradition or economic necessity. Unemployment (39.1%) also plays a significant role, as adult joblessness leads to greater reliance on children for income. These interconnected factors underscore the need for comprehensive solutions to address child labor by tackling poverty, improving access to education, and changing cultural and societal norms.

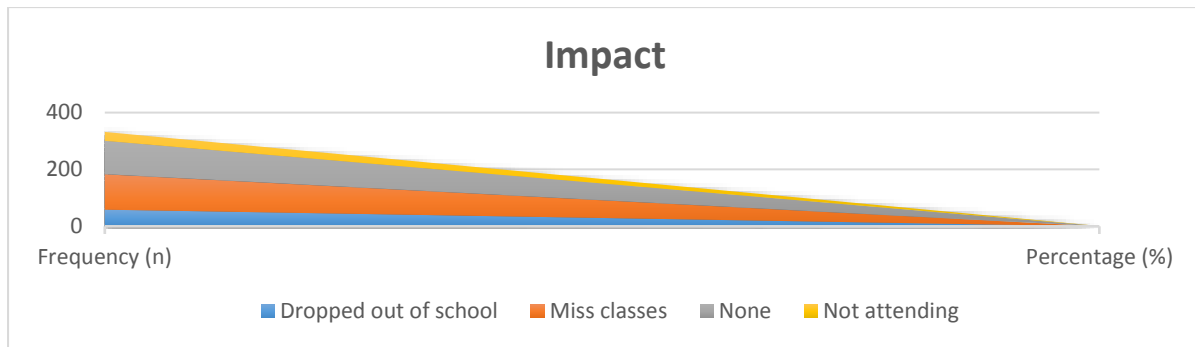


Figure 11: Impact of Child Labor on Education

37.3% of children report that working makes them miss classes, highlighting the conflict between attending school and working. 17.8% have dropped out of school as a result of their work, a significant impact that further perpetuates cycles of poverty. A smaller percentage, 9.3%, stated that they do not attend school at all, suggesting the severe educational exclusion faced by some children.

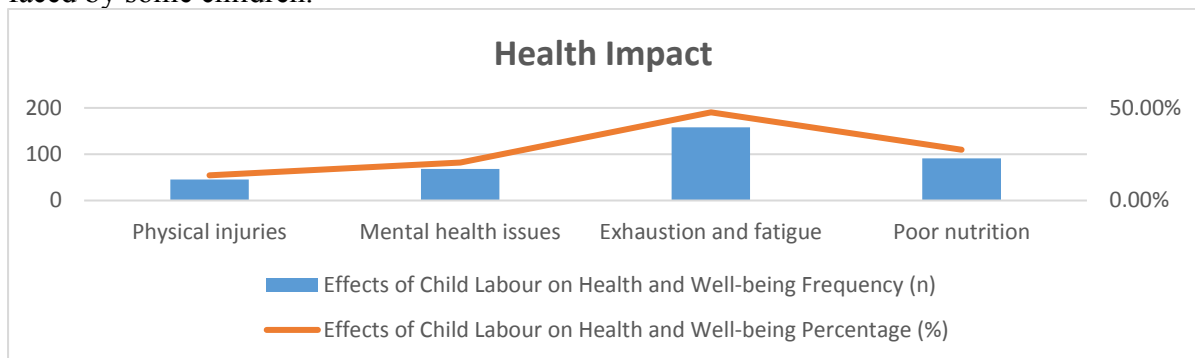


Figure 12: Effects of Child Labor on Health and Well-being

47.6% of respondents identified exhaustion and fatigue as a primary health issue resulting from child labor, while mental health issues and poor nutrition were also significant concerns. The data shows that the impact of child labor extends beyond economic hardship and includes long-term physical and mental health consequences.

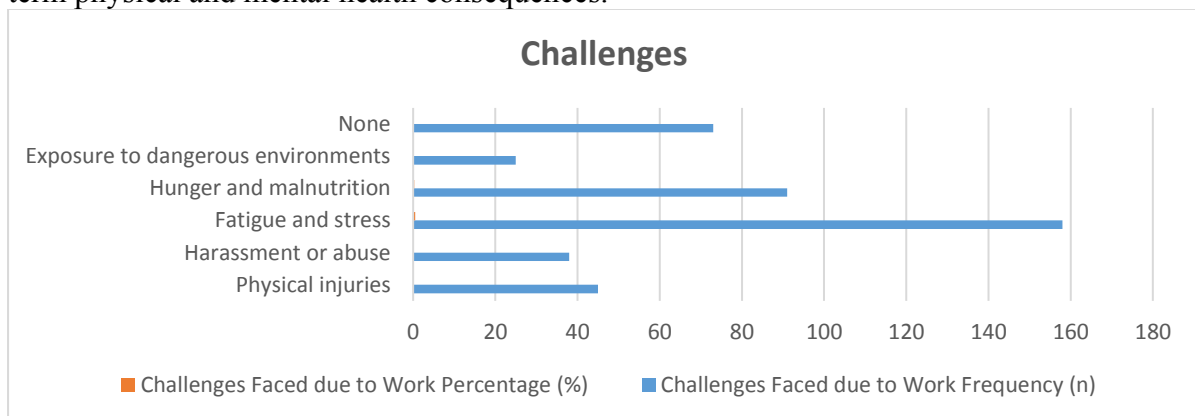
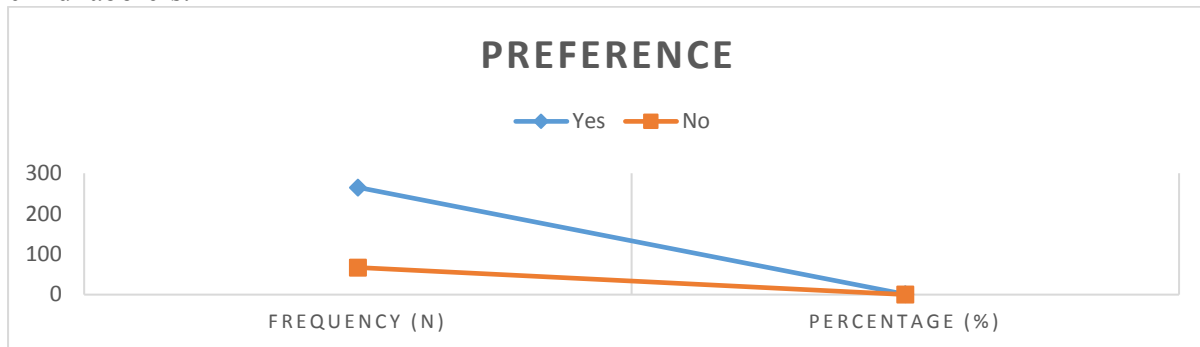


Figure 13: Challenges Faced due to Work

47.6% of children reported suffering from fatigue and stress, which are common consequences of working long hours under harsh conditions. 27.4% faced hunger and malnutrition, a serious consequence, indicating that many child laborers may not have access to proper nutrition. Physical injuries and harassment/abuse were also notable problems, with 13.6% and 11.4% of

respondents indicating they had suffered from these issues, highlighting the vulnerability of child laborers.



*Figure 14: Preference to Stop Working if Given Financial Support*

A significant majority (79.9%) of respondents expressed a desire to stop working if they were provided with financial support, underscoring the strong desire for alternatives to child labor. 20.1% of respondents did not wish to stop working, which could reflect either personal motivations for work (e.g., desire for independence or gaining skills) or a belief that work is essential to their livelihood.

### Discussion of Findings

A key objective of this study was to examine the socio-demographic characteristics of child laborers in the area. The results revealed that the majority of child laborers were between 10 to 15 years old, with a smaller number in the 16 to 18 age group. This finding agreed with the findings of Davies (2020), which found that child labor usually occurs among children aged 10 - 17. The gender distribution showed that the majority of child laborers were male, suggesting a higher prevalence of child labor among boys, possibly due to cultural and gender norms. Additionally, a significant percentage of respondents had dropped out of school or were not attending school, which highlights the direct impact of child labor on education. The majority of children came from households with low-income levels. The study also identified the types of child labor that are most prevalent in Gombe Metropolis. The findings showed that street hawking, domestic work, and working in markets or shops were the most common forms of child labor. A considerable portion of children engaged in street hawking, with domestic work being the second most common

occupation. The long working hours, ranging from 4 to 9 hours per day, were another concerning finding, as these extended work schedules significantly hindered the children's ability to attend school and participate in other developmental activities, the find confirmed the findings of a study conducted by Buonomo (2020) which found that majority of the children found that the most affected children by child labor were children coming from lower income families to supplement the family income and working between 5 – 8 hours daily.

Regarding the factors driving child labor, the study found that poverty was the primary cause, with 75.3% of respondents identifying it as a major contributor. The lack of access to education was the second most significant factor, as many children reported being unable to attend school due to financial constraints or the absence of nearby schools, this finding also confirmed the report by US Department of Labor (2022) which stated that uneducated parents were the most likely parents to send their children to hawking and not minding the consequences attached to it. Cultural practices and parental influence were also



identified as contributing factors, with some children being encouraged or forced by their parents to work. These findings underline the complex interplay of economic, cultural, and familial factors that perpetuate child labor in the region. Finally, the study examined the consequences of child labor on children's well-being. The findings highlighted the negative impact of child labor on education, with many children missing school or dropping out altogether. Health issues such as fatigue, stress, and physical injuries were also common among child laborers, further exacerbating their vulnerability. However, a significant percentage of children expressed a desire to stop working if they received financial support, indicating that many of them view work as a necessity rather than a choice. Additionally, the study found that the majority of respondents felt the government was not doing enough to address child labor, pointing to a need for more effective policies, legal frameworks, and social welfare programs to combat this issue.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study has revealed several key insights into the patterns, causes, and consequences of child labor. The findings indicate that child labor remains a prevalent issue in the region, driven primarily by economic factors, lack of access to education, and cultural influences. Children involved in child labor are often subjected to long working hours, dangerous working conditions, and negative impacts on their education and health. Despite the government's efforts to reduce child labor. The study has shown that while many children would prefer to stop working if they had the opportunity, poverty and a lack of viable alternatives continue to force them into labor.

Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Poverty Reduction through Economic Empowerment Programs:** Government

agencies and NGOs should implement targeted poverty alleviation programmes, such as conditional cash transfers, microcredit schemes, and income-generating projects, to economically empower vulnerable households and reduce the financial necessity of child labor

2. **Expand Access to Free and Compulsory Education:** This includes building more schools in underserved areas, providing school supplies and uniforms, and implementing school feeding programmes to encourage enrolment and retention.
3. **Strengthen Enforcement of Child Labor Laws:** Regulatory agencies such as the Ministry of Labor and Productivity must intensify surveillance, enforce child protection laws, and sanction individuals or businesses that exploit children
4. **Establish Community-Based Child Protection Committees:** These committees should monitor at-risk children, mediate in families where child labor is prevalent, and facilitate access to social services.
5. **Collaborate with International and Civil Society Organizations:** Gombe State should seek technical and financial support from UNICEF, ILO, and other child-focused international organizations to design evidence-based interventions and implement sustainable solutions to end child labor.
6. **Conduct Continuous Research and Monitoring:** Finally, there is a need for continuous research and monitoring to assess the dynamics of child labor in the state. Updated data will help policymakers and stakeholders develop responsive and adaptive interventions.



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