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SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN STRENGTHENING HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SUPPORT: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR WORKING CHILDREN'S PARENTS

Tracy Omorogiuwa,
PhD, Senior Lecturer,
Department of Social Work,
University of Benin, Nigeria.
tracy.omorogiuwa@uniben.edu
ORCIDiD: 0000-0002-8675-7180

Abstract. Child labour studies worldwide have acknowledged the need to explore how empowering parents could strengthen household means of support. Hence, it is crucial to investigate the ideas that builds sustainable livelihoods of families to recovered child labourers in Nigeria, given the influence on children's education, human relations, social and holistic development. This study is qualitative and examines the feedback obtained from social workers on social intervention measures that could strengthen household economic development with a view to addressing the problem of child labour. Using the thematic data analysis, the social workers interviewed put forward various elements of a holistic strategy for improving parents or guardians economic status as well as remediating children involved in child labour, which included; schooling assistance and socio-economic development. Hence, recommendations are made that policies and programmes need to be focused on developing and strengthening household economic sustainability. Social workers as service providers should ensure that support measures are significant to responding to clients' needs.

Keywords: Child labour; households' economic empowerment; poverty; socio-economic development; social work; sustainable livelihoods.

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Introduction

The need for researches to examine how households' empowerment can influence children's non-involvement in child labour is well recognized (Togunde & Carter, 2006; Abebe & Bessel, 2011; Omorogiuwa, 2015, 2016, 2017). The general idea among researchers is that poverty is the key influence for child labour and is often a consequence of domestic dynamics (Omorogiuwa, 2016). Hence, child labour studies worldwide have acknowledged the need to explore how empowering the parents of working children through strengthening their social and economic livelihoods can influence children's remediation and restoration from labour activities (Togunde & Carter, 2006; Osiruemu, 2007; International Labour Organization ILO, 2016; Omorogiuwa, 2018). It is crucial to investigate the ideas that build sustainable livelihoods of families of recovered child labourers in Nigeria because of the impacts these may have on their education, human relations, social and holistic development. Therefore, successful responses to child labour issues involve locating the parents or guardians of children involved in child labour.

Previous research (Togunde & Carter, 2006; Omorogiuwa, 2016) reveal that child labour is perpetuated given parents/guardians socio-economic contexts. Thus, locating parents is an initial priority and critical as part of a systemic approach to dealing with the issue. Research confirms that even when children participating in child labour are assisted, they may still continue working if parents are not involved in the intervention process (Betcherman, Fares, Luinstra & Prouty, 2004; Omorogiuwa, 2018). This gives an indication of the necessity of working with parents for positive outcomes for intervention. Hence, for the remediation process with children involved in child labour to be effective, enhancing the livelihoods of their parents or guardians was identified by social workers as a vital measure in tackling the child labour phenomenon. One of the key reasons why most children resort to working is the lack of sufficient household income. Thus, the social workers in this study suggest that it is crucial at the macro level to provide support services that facilitate and enable household economic empowerment of parents of working children. It seemed evident that poverty and the scarcity of funds in the households force the children into the work environment for survival.

The major objective of this study is to examine how social work practices could strengthen household economic empowerment and support: towards building sustainable livelihoods for working children's parents. This study describes social workers experiences and concerns about child labour issues, in Benin City, Nigeria. It also focuses on practitioners perceptions on the intervention measures from five domains of work such as; facilitating income earning, provision of school materials, micro credits loans, cash transfer schemes, skills acquisition programmes for parents and children.

In this study the feedback obtained from social workers on social intervention measures in response to child labour were examined. The need to consider social workers' views on intervention strategies for tackling child labour is well documented (Brand et al., 2005; Iravani, 2011, Omorogiwa, 2015, 2016, 2018). The perspectives of the six social workers who participated in the study are analysed using an ecological framework. This is because the opinions of practitioners can elicit an appropriate response to the phenomenon of child labour at the micro, meso and macro levels of intervention.

The research questions

The research questions in this study are:

- What are the experiences of social workers, with regards to working on child labour issues?
- What are the social work measures in providing a holistic empowerment for working children's households?

Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative research approach adapting the intervention design. This study utilized the purposive sampling to select six social workers, who are experienced in working on child labour issues, males and females from both government and non-governmental organisations in Benin City, participating in a focused group discussion. Selection was based on willingness as permission was sought from their gatekeepers, such as heads of departments and coordinators. The consent of willing participants was obtained in writing. In order to establish rapport two visits were made to each of the social worker participants for familiarizations and introductions, which helped to build trust and guarded the researcher's ability. The main criterion for inclusion was that social work practitioners have at least four years experience in working with child labour issues. One interview guide was prepared for the six practitioners, since it is the same information it is to be obtained. The interview guide was subsequently validated by three experts working with child labour and protection issues and researchers and adjustments were made based on comments.

Methods of data analysis

In this study, data was analyzed qualitatively by the application of the thematic data analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), linked with the ecological perspective facilitated an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic situations of households. Consequently, the data collected was verified and trustworthiness established by utilizing the audit trail to ensure the research is audible and replicable (Koch, 2006). Whilst confirmability was achieved by demonstrating that the findings were not

imagined but can be connected to the data (Padgett, 2008) with descriptions in the interpretations.

Data Presentation

This study examined the social work practice in strengthening household economic empowerment and support. The following findings were derived from the data analysis:

Facilitating income earning

Discussions with social workers revealed the importance of facilitating access for parents or guardians to financial schemes to develop trades and build their capacities to become employable through skills development programmes. Sim (2009) suggests that strengthening the livelihoods of poor households would therefore serve as a remedial function, given that working children would not only remain in school but would stop work entirely. In particular, linking parents or guardians with access to suitable work or financial opportunities is likely to prevent the perpetuation of child labour, as discussed below:

“In the past some parents were not cooperative with removing children from work. As they complained of not being economically empowered, so, our efforts were not effective. . . .there is need to facilitate income earning for parents”.

“The parents of these children should be empowered economically to increase their capacity to provide for the children, as this will reduce involving children in child labour. Also need for educational empowerment as mentioned before”.

“I think the need for economic empowerment is essential and should be included in the intervention. . . because if most families, and especially the mothers, are economically empowered it will go a long way to reduce child labour issues drastically. Here, the need to assist parents or guardians to have access to funds to strengthen their source of livelihood...”.

These social workers expressed the need for economic support for parents of working children as a prominent strategy. Similarly, these practitioners convey:

“Households’ economic strengthening should be made essential in the guidelines. Households here means all those responsible for the care of children, it could be relatives, orphanages and the likes taking care of these children that are labouring. Empowerment of this households taking care of these children will further strengthen their source of funds and therefore help to avoid exposing these children to labour activities”.

“There is the need to support families economically, families that are less privileged, should be included in the guidelines. So this will augment families’ income; with this, putting children on the streets to scavenge, beg, hawk will be minimised”.

The accounts above support the view that income sustainability for parents and caregivers will reinforce the family’s economic circumstances, which will remove the

need for children to participate in labour ventures. These statements illustrate that if poor parents or guardians/grandparents are financially stable, they will possibly be able to maintain their households and their children will be less likely to need to work. Hence, Olagbegi et al. (as cited in Jones et al., 2012) and Omorogiuwa (2018) confirm the significance of economic development strategies targeted at empowering parents of child labourers as a means of support to combat children's participation in the labour force.

Part of the strategy could be the provision of microcredit schemes to facilitate income generation. Although social workers do not directly provide such schemes, they can facilitate and link parents or guardians with relevant schemes where possible. The practitioners interviewed, specified how assisting parents with credit facilities as well as guidance could enhance their finances, thereby relieving children of the burden of income earning. This is illustrated in the narratives below:

“... Just like showing somebody how to fish and not giving the person fish, we (social workers) can link parents with agencies and others that do give microcredit, and also help these parents to develop a business plan and based on their business plans, we factor all forms of successes that are available to them to enable them do well in the business. With this they can take care of their families”.

“Secondly, proper linking to funding for clients by social workers will help to attend to child labour issues. That is parents or guardians can also be empowered through soft loans or schemes to start a business, to help their households. . . children should be provided for and not to be working. As most parents do not know how to find where resources can be drawn, this will enable us assist or respond to children involved in child labour and their parents if need be”.

“As said earlier concerning our past activities, businesses were followed up and monitored monthly, because the beneficiaries are supposed to make returns of payment also monthly. There were officers that were sent to the fields to monitor these businesses. So when they know that they are being monitored, they are on their toes and that is what we must ensure so that the empowered parents can support the child even his school needs. Thus, monitoring of the economically empowered as indicated now should be included in the guidelines”.

These narratives describe how the notion of facilitating credit schemes for parents could be help start generating further family income. In particular, the social workers mention the notion of parents improving their business knowledge as a strategy to ultimately enhance the family's finances. If parents are supported in financial management, it will enhance the well-being of their households and children through the possibility of regular income. Togunde and Carter (2006) and Betcherman et al. (2004) confirm that properly directed financial support, such as credit or low interest loans to parents could help to address the exposure of children to work.

Provision of school materials

The interviews with social workers in this study reveal that providing schooling essentials for children involved in child labour is effective for tackling child labour issues. The climate for the provision of school materials was noted in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2010) to the effect that the provision of schooling materials often helped interventions in combating child labour phenomenon. The social workers voice:

“Okay, for us in our NGO, in my agency we are involved in various networks that carryout different interventions against child labour, for example we provide support by furnishing school materials to assist children with their education and so they do not have to continue working. This assistance has been instrumental in children’s recovery from poor academic attainment”.

“So we provide some children with school books, uniform, bags, and socks, including transport to school. The intervention curbed the child labour these children were earlier engaged in”.

These narratives suggested that access to schooling materials could help respond to child labour issues. The feedback from children substantiates that the assistance in the form of school materials such as books for child labourers would help curb child labour, since most children work to meet their schooling needs. Rosati and Lyon (2006) and Omorogiuwa (2015) support the view that the children who have access to schooling basics are more likely to stay in school instead of focusing on work. The need for adequate provision for educational system is critical for the reintegration of working children.

Micro credits loans

One of the existing interventions in response to child labour issues is the provision of micro loans. Covarrubias, Davis and Winters (2012) assert that provision of microcredit loans improves household savings and business ventures and so could prevent child labour. One of the social workers interviewed, specified how assisting two families with credit facilities enhanced their income generation, and in so doing relieved their children of the burden of income earning.

“Micro credits loans with little or no interest were given to these two families, they have done well as they are trading and supporting their families and the children are back to school and not involved in child labour as it were. Although the scope was not wide; but the intervention was very effective while it lasted”.

This account describes how the provision of credit schemes for the parents of working children was beneficial to them as they commence earning to sustain the family without children working. Research confirms that properly directed financial support, such as credit or low interest loans to families of child labourers, helps to address the exposure of children to work, as parents now work instead of children

(Togunde & Carter, 2006; De Hoop & Rosati, 2014). If parents are assisted with opportunities to access income, possibly through soft financial schemes, they are more likely to stop the involvement of their children in working to earn.

Cash transfer schemes

The need for sustainable income for households suggested to social workers that consistent financial relief through cash transfers for parents or guardians could help to address child labour practices. De Hoop and Rosati (2014) state that the access to regular cash transfers lower children's engagement in child labour and these transfers reduces the effect of economic shocks that may lead households to use children's earning as a coping strategy. The provision of steady material resources to parents through organised funds transfers could serve as an incentive to relieve children of work, given that some parents are unaware of the existence of such funds. The social workers also believed that this could help in reducing the perpetuation of child labour because a number of the parents, and particularly mothers, are unemployed, sick and not economically independent. Such measures would help to sustain their households, which were currently without support. The social workers state:

"Families can also be empowered through cash transfer or schemes and even employment for parents; we can facilitate this because most parents do not know where to access such supports. If the parents are not strong to work (sick or old), and no support from elsewhere, then they can be assisted to get resources from helping NGOs to help their families".

"Funds such as Women's Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) can be encouraged or facilitated by social workers, (funded by the government in the past) as it will help our women to earn money and provide for their families. I also believe government provision of money for unemployed women to set up small scale businesses will also help, we need such (WOFEE) now".

These practitioners recognised that the cash transfer or a constant supply of funds to poverty-stricken parents or guardians can be facilitated by social workers as some parents are unaware of the existence of such funds. In particular, they suggest that parents, and mostly mothers of working children who are financially dependent, weak or sick and unable to depend on friends or relatives for assistance or unable to meet the terms of microfinance, can be aided to obtain financial support from government and non-government organisations. A social worker elucidates further that:

"Social service grants are important for poor families; in Nigeria we do not have social grants. So, we have a lot to do in enabling parents of children involved in labour to have regular income, by reaching out to other partnering organisations to help When parents are empowered the children will be better cared for".

The comments above illustrate the lack of availability of social security allowances for the less privileged in Nigeria, which requires social workers to organise financial

viability of parents whose children are involved in child labour through collaboration with NGOs or by lobbying government for better social security. This is because constant financial insecurity drives parents or guardians to consider children's involvement in child labour as a means of assisting with the financial upkeep of the household. Covarrubias et al., (2012, p. 58) confirm "that social cash transfer scheme[s] increased household investment in productive assets; as a result, there is evidence of reductions in child labour". This shows that intervention measures which address the financial circumstances of families do indeed contribute to reducing child labour. The processes of helping parents or guardians develop their economic capacity and employability in order to address the phenomenon of child labour involves skills development.

Skills acquisition programmes for parents and children

Rosati and Lyon (2006) indicate that interventions directed at dealing with child labour should ensure development of parents' income-earning capacity, especially with parents with low skills. It was evident from the interviews conducted with the parents or guardians in this study that a number of them did not possess specific skills that would secure them sustainable careers. One of the social workers mentioned the need to help parents or guardians build capacity to place them in a position to generate income through engagement in skills development activities, as shown in the excerpt below:

"Also the need for skills acquisition programmes should be in the guidelines. Encouraging families to learn or acquire skills can also help empower families economically. There are some skills acquisitions centres owned by the state government; some of these parents or guardians can be trained to acquire skills to enable them work or trade to earn money for their households. So the need for family empowerment should be included in the guidelines".

"Vocational institutions should be put in place and even made free for all, so that parents can be trained and thereby empowered to be creative and provide for their children. The need for employment for parents where possible, can also assist families and children. To address this issue, there are skills acquisition centres established by the State Government, so parents who are not educated, not working or have not learned trades should be encouraged to acquire skills . . . And on the completion of these training, they can be helped to be empowered economically, so that they can set up businesses and make money, this could reduce the tendency of engaging their children in child labour".

The comments above illustrate how enabling individuals to attain skill development can assist in generating sustainable income. Parents can improve their abilities by engaging in such training where they can be linked with resources, thus encouraging earning and saving. If parents are sponsored in acquiring skills and supported to be employable in this manner, children are less likely to be engaged in work and their

well-being will be ultimately protected. Further, practitioners expressed the need for skills acquisition for children who cannot cope with formal schooling:

“In my agency for example, we have a huge resource centre where young people between the age of 7 to 18 years are encouraged to learn various skills, so children can be encouraged to learn a skill if they cannot continue with school”.

“...and those [children] who cannot benefit from regular schooling should be made to acquire skills, vocational skills that can fit them properly into the society later in life”.

These views suggest that when working children with educational difficulties or who are unable to continue schooling are supported with skill learning resources, they obtain skills for productive engagement in future. Sim (2009) found that parents with few skills or resources who use child labour can be supported to undertake skills development that can ensure future economic prosperity. The process of skills acquisition is not for immediate benefit but trains the child to acquire skills that will be needed latter life. This suggests that when parents or guardians are supported with material resources, the possibility of them engaging their children in labour ventures for income generation decreases.

The social workers interviewed in this study put forward various elements of a holistic strategy for children involved in child labour as well as their parents or guardians, who included the following: schooling assistance and socio-economic development. They emphasised that engagement of children in child labour, irrespective of the reason, was an offence prohibited by child protection legislation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In accordance to the research objectives, this study has underscored the perceptions of social workers regarding the measures to strengthening and building sustainable livelihoods for working children’s parents, thereby addressing child labour issues. The findings discussed in this study were based on the data obtained from the focused group interview with six social workers who were engaged with child labour issues. In the discussion with social workers, it emerged that child labour has undesirable consequences for the children, the family and the society at large. Further, the following conclusion was attained; that facilitating income earning, provision of school materials, micro credits loans, cash transfer schemes, skills acquisition programmes for parents and children, could facilitate economic empowerment for the parents and children engaged in child labour in order to strengthen their livelihood. Therefore, the application of these measures will enable social workers to address child labour issues with the aim of enhancing the children’s well-being and family circumstances.

This research highlights the possibility of dealing with child labour issues with the view of strengthening children and parent’s effective functioning. Given the conclusions, recommendations are made that indication of the occurrence should be

reported by community members to social workers, in order for children and parents to be linked with intervention measures. This is because social work practice in strengthening household and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for working children and parents include; awareness, counselling services and other assistance provision for children and family members.

Human relations as well as children's well-being is of crucial concerns in the Nigerian context, but there are significant gaps in relation to national policy on social support for children involved in child labour as well as their families. Thus, social support, which offers provision of money and aids from governments and philanthropists to the children and families in appalling dearth of support with the intention of retreating scarcity of fund, could possibly help empower parents and safeguard children from economic activities. Therefore, policy and practice need to be focused on developing and strengthening household economic sustainability. Social workers as service providers should ensure that support measures are significant to responding to clients' needs. As a consequent, assistance provision should be sustainable and capable of averting child labour phenomenon and rescuing children and parents through family-focused remediation strategies.

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ПРАКТИКА СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ РОБОТИ ДЛЯ ЗМІЦНЕННЯ ЕКОНОМІЧНИХ МОЖЛИВОСТЕЙ ТА ПІДТРИМКИ ДОМОГОСПОДАРСТВ: ПОБУДОВА СТІЙКОЇ ЖИТТЄДІЯЛЬНОСТІ ДЛЯ БАТЬКІВ ПРАЦЮЮЧИХ ДІТЕЙ

Трейсі Оморогіува, доктор наук, старший викладач, кафедра соціальної роботи, Університет Беніна, Нігерія, tracy.omorogiuwa@uniben.edu

***Анотація.** Потреба у вивченні впливу наснаження батьків на посилення ресурсів сім'ї підтверджується багатьма дослідженнями. Мета даного дослідження полягала у визначенні ідеї, реалізація якої може забезпечити стабільні доходи для сімей, неповнолітні у яких були залучені до дитячої праці, з врахуванням їх впливу на освіту дітей, їхні взаємовідносини з іншими людьми, соціальний та особистісний розвиток. До участі у фокус-груповому обговоренні було залучено шість соціальних працівників з м. Бенін, Нігерія з досвідом діяльності не менше шести років у сфері вирішення проблем, пов'язаних з дитячою працею. Питання, які задавалися соціальним працівникам стосувалися досвіду їхньої роботи та рівня досвідченості щодо питання дитячої праці; заходів соціальної роботи, що давали можливість здійснювати цілісне розширення можливостей для домашніх дітей, які працюють.*

Проведене якісне дослідження дало можливість визначити соціальні інтервенції, спрямовані на підвищення економічної спроможності домогосподарств з метою подолання проблеми дитячої праці. Використовуючи тематичний аналіз даних, було визначено складові цілісної стратегії покращення економічного становища батьків або опікунів, а також способи реабілітації дітей, залучених до дитячої праці, які включали: сприяння підвищенню доходів, надання шкільних матеріалів та мікро-кредитів, впровадження механізмів переказу готівки, програм розвитку навичок для батьків і дітей. Сформульовані рекомендації щодо розвитку та зміцнення економічної стабільності домогосподарств та визначена роль соціальних працівників у системі їх підтримки.

***Ключові слова:** дитяча праця; розвиток економічної спроможності домогосподарств; бідність; соціально-економічний розвиток; соціальна робота; стабільна життєдіяльність.*