

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS AND IMPLICATIONS OF GIRLCHILD LABOUR: A STUDY OF SOME COMMUNITIES OF KEBBI STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Governmental and non-governmental organisations have made concerted efforts to combat the menace of child labour. Still, millions of children across the globe continue to be involved in work that adversely affects not only their schooling but also their overall socio-economic development, especially in developing countries. This study investigated the socio-economic drivers and implications of girl child involvement in agricultural activities in fifteen communities of Kebbi State, where girls aged 5– 15 years are involved in agricultural activities that deny their education and expose them to health hazards. The study adopted a liberal feminist theoretical approach to guide the study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were employed, coupled with the administration of a questionnaire and focus group discussions on the target population. Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) and ATLAS.ti 9 software were used for the analysis and presentation of quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Findings from the study revealed that preparation for early marriage, poverty, peer pressure, shared traditional belief, support to the family, cheap labour, lack of male child in the family, rural neglect, large family size and being an orphan were the socio-economic drivers of girls' involvement in child labour, thereby exposing them to economic exploitation, sexual assaults, dangerous animals and school dropout. Standing on the principle of the adopted theoretical framework, this study recommends that the socio-economic and cultural roots of girl child labour should be tackled through social reforms in the form of, poverty alleviation, welfare services and reform of cultural norms and values that favour girl child labour.

Keywords: Agricultural activities, child labour, drivers of child labour, educational denial, socio-economic factors.

Introduction

Child labour remains a major bottleneck for the education process of millions of primary and secondary school-age boys and girls in many countries, cultures and civilisations. Child labour excludes chores/errands undertaken by children at home that do not hinder their education, safety, or development. It is the work undertaken by a child below the age of 18 that constitutes the worst form of child labour as defined by International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182, which includes work or economic activities that are

likely to harm the health, education, safety or morals of children (ILO, 2013). In this study, child labour is conceived as any agricultural activity engaged in by children that prevents their schooling and exposes them to health hazards. It is worrisome that millions of children are forced to work long hours, often in hazardous environments, at the expense of their schooling, especially in developing nations worldwide.

A recent joint report released by ILO and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), revealed that at the beginning of 2020, 160 million children were in child labour globally which was projected to increase to 168.9 million in 2022 and nearly half of all those in child labour engaged in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). The phenomenon is more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, which, according to the report, remains the region with the highest prevalence and largest number of children (87 million) in child labour. The prevalence of child labour in Nigeria is above the Sub-Saharan African average as findings from the 2022 Nigeria child labour and forced labour survey published by ILO and Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (ILO & NBS, 2024), indicate that 39.2 per cent of children aged 5-17 years old in Nigeria, are engaged in child labour and North-West geopolitical zone has the highest number of children in child labour with slight different between boys and girls (Daily Trust Newspaper of Sunday, 5 September 2021).

The menace constitutes a major global social problem due to its potential effect in hindering the socio-economic development of children, leading to keeping children out of school, exposing them to health hazards, illiteracy and poverty across generations. In response to these challenges, concerted efforts have been made by successive governments in Nigeria to address the menace by ratifying all the ILO conventions that are geared towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour. Among the conventions endorsed by the Nigerian government are ILO 138 on the minimum age for work, 182 on the worst forms of child labour, and conventions 25 and 105 on the abolition of forced labour (ILO & NBS, 2024). In line with the conventions' injunctions, Nigeria has reviewed the national policy on child labour and forced labour, as well as the national action plan for the elimination of child labour, which was implemented from 2021 to 2025. In furtherance of these, Nigeria has reviewed the Labour standard bill and adopted 15 years as the minimum working age for Nigerian children. Despite concerted efforts over the years, children in Nigeria, especially the girl child, continue to engage in activities that affect their schooling and future development, posing a great challenge to the country in its effort to realise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) child labour-related target by 2030.

Against the backdrop, to find out the drivers of girl child labour and come up with policy recommendations that would help address the menace for the betterment of the girls, this study explored the causes of girl child involvement in child labour in selected communities of Kebbi State, Nigeria and its implications on the socio-economic development of children.

Statement of the Problem

The agricultural sector remains the major employer of girl child labour. According to ILO & UNICEF (2021), globally, most child labour among boys and girls happens in agriculture. In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture plays a key role, accounting for over four of every five children in child labour. Girls are more likely than boys to engage in agricultural work, according to the report: 70.3% of girls are involved in agricultural work compared to 69.9% of boys. Over the years, involving young girls who are supposed to exploit the opportunity of

free and compulsory basic education in child labour during the rainy season has become a norm among fifteen (15) rural communities in Kebbi State. These young girls, mainly aged 5 to 15 years, gather in large numbers at strategic places along major roads, holding hoes waiting for employers as early as 6;30am daily. Surprisingly, these young girls are always ready to follow anyone who comes their way to farms, whether known or new in the area, regardless of the distance from their communities. This menace could have terrible consequences for the future of these girls, as they may be exposed to economic exploitation, sexual assault, kidnapping, dangerous animals, school dropout, etc.

Although studies related to child labour have been carried out in other places, a paucity of data exists in the literature regarding the condition in Kebbi State. To the best of my knowledge, a study of this kind has not been conducted in the State. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the socio-economic drivers of girlchildren's involvement in child labour and its implications on their socio-economic development in Kebbi State, Nigeria, with a view to proffering policy recommendations that would aid in addressing the menace.

Literature Review

Studies over the years on the causes of child labour have been conducted and revealed diverse findings. A study by Odo and Nkume (2013) on the factors inducing child-related work in Enugu state, using a survey research design and a sample size of 300 respondents, found that family size, poverty, level of parental exposure, place of residence, educational qualification and value orientation were the factors influencing child labour in Enugu State. Another study in Ikare Akoko, Ondo State, on the causes and implications of child labour on the development of children by Famadeji (2014) discovered similar factors.

Recent findings of the Nigerian 2022 child labour and forced labour survey show the influence of socio-demographic factors such as educational level, sex and income of household heads as the main factors influencing child labour (ILO & NBS, 2024). Children from low-educated parents and those from low-income families, as well as children from female-headed households, are more likely to be in child labour than children from higher-income and educational backgrounds or male-headed households. The findings corroborated those of a previous study in Awka South LGA by Oli & Nweke (2021), which identified poverty, parents' educational level, family size, cultural beliefs, and living in a slum area as determinants of child labour in the area. Similar findings were also reported by studies conducted in northern Nigeria, such as Abdu et al. (2020) in Katsina State, which examined the effect of child labour on children's education, where poverty, lack of uniforms and books, and problems with transportation fares were the push factors for child labour. A study in Bauchi by Ibrahim & Magaji (2023) reported low household income and a lack of economic opportunities as the major determinants of child labour. A study in Taraba by Francis & Yinalabi (2022) revealed family size, family conditions, poverty, and unemployment as the major causes of child labour in the area.

On the forms of child labour practised, a review of some studies (Dike, 2012; Famadeji, 2014; Hamid & Hassan, 2015) conducted in different parts of Nigeria using survey research designs revealed working in factories, hawking on the road and engaging in farming activities, street begging, street trading, and domestic chores as the most common forms of child labour practices in the areas. A study by Adeyemi et al. (2021) on child labour practices among market women and food sellers in the Ife Central Local Government Area of

Osun State, Nigeria, showed that domestic labour ranked as the most significantly influential form of child labour practised among the respondents. Agricultural activities continue to absorb a larger portion of children in child labour. According to a report, seventy per cent (70%) of all child labourers are in agriculture. Over three-quarters of all children aged 5 to 11 in child labour work in agriculture and often underlining agriculture as an entry point to child labour (ILO & UNICEF, 2021; ILO & NBS, 2024).

Two major gaps emerged from the foregoing discussion. First, although many related studies were conducted in Nigeria, to the best of our knowledge, no study was conducted in Kebbi State, and only one study was conducted in North-Western Nigeria. Secondly, the influence of income, education, poverty and illiteracy on child labour was the most common factor reported by the studies. None of the studies reviewed explored the effects of other factors, such as paying school fees (including uniforms and books), early marriage, peer pressure, and rural neglect, which this study seeks to address.

Theoretical Framework: Liberal Feminism

Feminism is a social movement and women-centred perspective that fights for socio-economic rights with a view to creating equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism was rooted first in the intellectual works of classical thinkers such as Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Simone de Beauvoir and Ann Oakley. Second, in the mobilisation for women's right to vote in the early 20th century. Later, Feminism became a philosophical and theoretical perspective in the analysis of human society (Amzat & Razum, 2014). One of the main arguments of Feminism is that in all aspects of social relations, women are in a disadvantaged position compared to men. Such gender inequality remains the major social problem, causing other life challenges, including poverty, health problems, sexuality, crime and socio-political underdevelopment.

There are many traditions of feminism, which include Marxist, Liberal, Radical, Structural and Socialist Feminisms. Although the Marxist and Radical are more critical than the Liberal, the common bond that binds all the versions is the presentation of gender as a universal and important feature of social life. According to Millett (in Amzat & Razum, 2014), the major social principle concerned in gender analysis is patriarchy, which grants the father overall control and ownership over his family (wife or wives and children), and such power could include that of physical abuse and other rights' violation. Thus, feminists believe that gender inequality is a major form of social problem, from which other challenges can be explained.

This study applied Liberal Feminism as a guide. The liberal version focuses on achieving equal opportunities through existing political and legal systems as well as social reforms within current societal structures. Engaging girl children in child labour is connected to the socio-economic condition of a family. Jennifer (2000) explored feminist perspectives on family structures and relationships and is considered among the best thinkers in this tradition. In a book, "Feminism and the Family", she analysed traditional family norms and explored how feminist perspectives could reshape our understanding of family dynamics through social reforms. Child labour violates principles of child rights. Liberal feminists argue that girls have the right to education and protection from harm and exploitation, just like boys. Child labour denies girls opportunities, preserving gender inequality, thereby suppressing their capacity to reason, which in turn prevents them from becoming fully human. Therefore, child labour driven by poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to school, early marriage, cultural norms, among others, could be addressed through structural reforms as

advocated by Liberal Feminism, including enforcing laws against child labour, promoting equal access to education and supporting economic empowerment for families and reform for social norms that are detrimental to the development of the girl child.

Methodology

This study was conducted in 15 communities from Birnin Kebbi and Kalgo Local Government Areas of Kebbi State. The communities were Goru, Kardi, Unguwar Nainu, Unguwar Nahoda, Yamama, and Sabongari, all in the Birnin Kebbi Local Government Area (LGA). Others included Unguwar Dole, Dadigoma, Unguwarjeji, Gayi, Unguwar Aduwa, Dongoma, Asarara, Gwargwabe and Ubandawaki from Kalgo LGA. All the inhabitants of the communities were farmers. The reason for choosing the communities is that the communities were popular in engaging young girls in child labour, which denies their education and exposes them to economic exploitation and health hazards.

Mixed methods were used. A cross-sectional survey through the use of a questionnaire was employed to gather the quantitative data. Focus group Discussion (FGD) was used in the qualitative design. The population of this study included all girls who were involved in child labour and their fathers/guardians. Girls who were not involved in agricultural activities were excluded across the communities. Due to a lack of accurate population figures for the communities, all the communities were regarded as enumeration areas. Enumeration areas (EAs), according to NPC (2023), are groups of compounds, settlements, or areas combined for data collection, and each EA must have a minimum of 450 and a maximum of 550 people. The maximum (550 people) was carefully used as EA in this study. It was presumed that each house contained three people (father, mother and two children, thus, 4 people multiplied by 135 houses = 540 people. Therefore, 135 houses were carved out of a bigger locality as EA. Based on using 135 Houses as EA and 540 as the total population of a given EA, the total population of this study for the quantitative data was $540 \times 15 \text{ communities} = 8,100$ people.

Primary data (both the quantitative and qualitative forms of data) were used for the study. Using Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) table of sample size determination, 385 girls were used for the quantitative design. Multistage Cluster Sampling was used to gather the needed data. In the first stage, each of the fifteen communities was considered an EA. Second stage, the Systematic Random Sampling technique was employed for the administration of the questionnaire to the targeted girls (one girl per house). When the targeted girl was not available, the next house was selected, and when more than one targeted respondent was found, balloting was used to select. In some communities, due to their size, sampling was done at an interval of one house, while 2 or more were used in larger communities. Regarding the qualitative data, 10 FGD sessions were conducted using purposive sampling.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were employed. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative data, while ATLAS.ti 9 was used to analyse the qualitative data. Ethical approval and permission to carry out the study were obtained from the Kebbi State Universal Basic Education Board Research Ethics Committee, with ethics approval number KSUBEB/1101//2004, on 20th November, 2025. Informed consent was obtained from both the parents and the children to participate in the study and publish the findings. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were assured.

Presentations of Findings

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less than 5 years	3	.8
	5-10 years	105	27.3
	11-15 years	153	39.7
	16-17 year	90	23.4
	18 years and above	34	8.8
	Total	385	100.0
Marital Status	Single	376	97.7
	Married	6	1.6
	Divorced	3	.8
	Total	385	100.0
Education Status	Never enrolled in a Western education	157	40.8
	Between primary 1 and primary 3	69	17.9
	between Primary 4 and Primary 6	53	13.8
	Primary school dropout	57	14.8
	Between JSS 1 and JSS 3	17	4.4
	Dropout after completion of JSS3	11	2.9
	Between SS 1 and SS3	13	3.4
	Senior secondary dropout	3	.8
	Islamiyya school	5	1.3
	Total	385	100.0
Religion	Islam	383	99.5
	Christianity	2	.5
	Total	385	100.0
Ethnic affiliation	Hausa	366	95.1
	Fulani	1	.3
	Lelna (Dakarkari)	17	4.4
	Zabarmawa	1	.3
	Total	385	100.0
Occupation	Firewood making and selling	53	13.8
	Hawking	159	41.3
	Not engaged in any other business	82	21.3
	Dry cleaning	2	.5
	Planting	12	3.1
	Food selling	74	19.2
	Craftswomen	3	.8
	Total	385	100.0
Income	Less than N1000	162	42.1
	N1001 - N2000	99	25.7
	2001 – 3000	78	20.3
	3001-4000	29	7.5
	5000 – Above	17	4.4
	Total	385	100.0

Fathers' educational attainment	No Formal Education	86	22.3
	Qur'anic education	123	31.9
	Primary Certificate	64	16.6
	SSCE	76	19.7
	NCE/ND	12	3.1
	HND	13	3.4
	University degree	4	1.0
	Others	7	1.8
	Total	385	100.0

Field Work, 2025

Table 1 discloses the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents for the quantitative data. Opening with age, a critical demographic variable that not only defines the respondents' age bracket but also has important implications for the study's findings. It is evident from the table that the majority of respondents (39.7%) were in the age bracket of 11 - 15 years, which is the appropriate age for children to be in secondary school. Girls in this age bracket were more likely to engage in farm labour in their communities because it was generally believed that they could effectively perform farming activities. Girl children aged 5 to 10 years (27.3%) constituted the second-largest age group engaging in farming activities. In this age bracket, children are too young to be involved in farm labour, but it is the right time for primary school education; yet, these children were actively engaged in hard child labour at the expense of their education.

As shown in the table, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (97.7%) were single. Such a finding not only reflects the reality of the area where purdah practices rooted in religion are more pervasive among married women, but also reflects the age composition of most of the study population. Regarding the educational status of the respondents, the majority (40.8%) had never attended a Western-style primary school, indicating the prevalence of out-of-school children among girls in the communities. The finding is not surprising because Kebbi State has, over the years, been among the Nigerian states with the highest number of out-of-school children. Furthermore, 14.8% of respondents were enrolled in primary school but later withdrew to engage in farm labour. About 31.7% of the respondents were currently in primary school but were combining schooling with farm labour.

Regarding the religious affiliation of the respondents, the finding reflects one of the real characteristics of a typical community in North Western Nigeria: the overwhelming majority of the respondents (99.5%) were Muslims, while only 0.5% were Christians; adherents of African traditional religion were not found in the communities. The girls/respondents were predominantly (95.1%) Hausa, followed by Lelna or Dakarkari (4.4%). However, none were found among the other two, the most politically and economically dominant Nigerian ethnic groups (Yoruba and Igbo) in these communities.

Apart from engaging in farming activities, these girlswere also involved in other income-generating occupations in their communities, such as hawking (41.3%), food selling (19.2%), and firewood making and selling (13.8%). Regarding the income generated per day, a significant percentage of the respondents (42.1%) earned less than N1,000 per day. About 46% earned between N1,000 and N3,000 per day, and only 4.4% earned N5,000 and above. Such a meagre amount earned by the respondents was the major attracting factor to be involved in farm labour in the communities. Regarding the educational attainment of the

children's fathers, most had a low educational background: 54.2% had no formal education, while 36.3% of those with formal education had not gone beyond secondary school.

Regarding the qualitative data, the Table below buttresses the socio-demographic characteristics of the FGD participants.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the FGD Participants

FGD	Sex	Approximate Age	Position	Name of the Community
FGD1	Males	60 years	Household heads	Goru
FGD2	Females	15 Years	Girls	Unguwar Nahuda
FGD3	Males	50 years	Household heads	Unguwar Nahuda
FGD4	Females	16 Years	Girls	Yamama
FGD5	Males	65 years	Household heads	Asarara
FGD6	Females	10 years	Girls	Asarara
FGD7	Females	12 years	Girls	Gwargwabe
FGD8	Males	55 years	Household heads	Gayi
FGD9	Females	15 years	Girls	Gayi
FGD10	Females	15 years	Girls	UnguwarJeji

Field Work, 2025

Table 2 illustrates the socio-demographic attributes of the participants for all 10 sessions of the FGD, with 8 participants in each session. Six sessions were conducted for the girls who were involved in girl child labour, while four sessions were conducted for the household heads.

On the types of activities the respondents engaged in, most of the respondents (82.1%) engaged in planting of seeds, fertilising (62.3%), and weeding (63.4%) across the communities. Other farm activities engaged by the respondents were land cultivation (17.9%), watering (40.3%), pest control (16.6%), harvesting (37.1%) and postharvest handling (21%). Although it can be argued that some of these activities were not hard labour, weeding, which most of the respondents engaged in, and land cultivation were hard labour that not only harmed the health of these children by exposing them to dangerous animals but also denied them the right to education.

Findings from all ten FGD sessions conducted complemented the findings of the quantitative data. Agricultural labour, such as planting seeds, hole-making, thinning, applying fertiliser, harvesting, spraying insecticides, weeding, and firewood making, was a common activity the girls engaged in, especially during the rainy season. In addition, the girls often engaged in other activities, such as hawking and making firewood.

One thing regarding their involvement in the labour is that they follow anyone who comes their way, looking for labourers, whether known to them or not. The girl participants in all FGD sessions believed that they would follow anyone, including strangers, to farms. According to a participant:

We serve both the employers we know and those we do not. Occasionally, employers come to this community and take us to their farms. During the rainy season, we occasionally go and wait at the side of the road for them to come and hire us daily (FGD9, 2025).

In another session, a discussant added that:

Since we are always under the protection of Almighty God, we follow everyone who comes looking for our service, whether he is well-known or not, and we have never had an abduction incident here (FGD4, 2025).

Considering the current insecurity challenges bedevilling the country in general and the Northwestern States of Nigeria in particular, the implications of this practice one day could be disastrous to the girls. Regarding the money earned per day, most participants could generate a minimum of N1,500 and a maximum of N6,000. A participant stated that “depending on the type of job, some people can earn 2,000 Naira, 1,500 Naira, or even 3,000 Naira a day when they work on farms (FGD2)

The girls could earn up to six thousand Naira per day, as argued by a participant from another session, thus:

One can occasionally make up to 6,000 Naira (6,000) a day working on a farm. We can occasionally leave for the farm as early as 8 a.m. and return home by 7 p.m. For instance, you could be paid N2,000 to go to a farm and make holes. When you are done, someone else can take you planting and pay you 1,500. After that, you can still obtain another job, like fertilising, planting, etc. and get paid up to 2,500 (FGD4, 2025).

Reasons for Engaging in Farm Labour

Table 3: Reasons for engaging in Farm labour

To pay for my school fee, including uniform and books	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	79	20.5
	No	306	79.5
	Total	385	100.0
High demand for domestic help	Yes	268	69.6
	No	117	30.4
	Total	385	100.0
Parents prioritise farming activities over schooling	Yes	70	18.2
	No	315	81.8
	Total	385	100.0
Poverty	Yes	296	76.9
	No	89	23.1
	Total	385	100.0
Lack of access to school	Yes	45	11.7
	No	340	88.3
	Total	385	100.0
Because we marry early, we have to get resources and prepare for the marriage	Yes	201	52.2
	No	184	47.8
	Total	385	100.0
Cost of tuition fee	Yes	24	6.2
	No	361	93.8
	Total	385	100.0
Peer pressure	Yes	143	37.1
	No	242	62.9
	Total	385	100.0
Loss of employment of parents	Yes	39	10.1

	No	346	89.9
	Total	385	100.0
Loss of a parent or family guardian	Yes	29	7.5
	No	356	92.5
	Total	385	100.0
Urban-rural migration	Yes	8	2.1
	No	377	97.9
	Total	385	100.0
Cultural norms	Yes	179	46.5
	No	206	53.5
	Total	385	100.0

Field Work, 2025

Table 3 presents the reasons respondents gave for engaging in farm labour in the areas. Although many factors such as buying for uniform and books, Parents' priority for farming activities over schooling, lack of access to school, loss of employment of parents, loss of parents or family guardian have been identified among the reasons for engaging these girls into farming activities, the main factors pushing the respondents into farming activities across the communities included high demand for domestic help (69.6%), poverty (76.9%), preparation for early marriage (52.2%), peer pressure (37.1%), and cultural norms (46.5%). These findings were strengthened by those of the qualitative data, as illustrated in the Figure below.

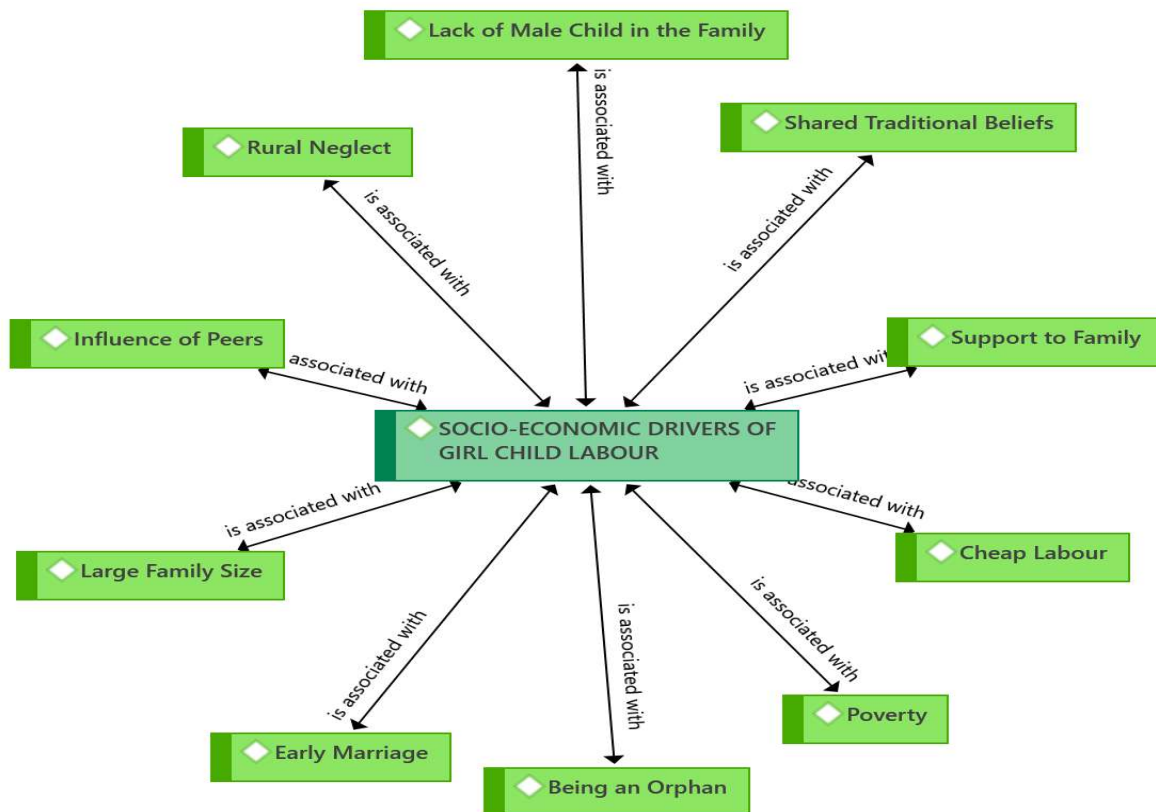


Figure 1: Socio-Economic Drivers of Girl Child Labour

Figure 1 presents the overall concept map/model developed from the qualitative data analysis, in which one theme and ten sub-themes were identified. The sub-themes constitute the socio-economic drivers of girl child labour in the communities. Some of the sub-themes, such as poverty, peer influence, support for family, early marriage, and shared traditional beliefs, complemented the quantitative findings. What follows is the explanation of the sub-themes in relation to the quantitative data.

Poverty/Support to Family

Poverty emerged as the most important cause, as indicated by the quantitative data; it also remains the most critical cause, as revealed by the qualitative data. Poverty has to do with the inability of an individual to meet his/her basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, health, and education. Most of the respondents engaged in child labour in order to earn a living and support their families. Male participants (fathers) in all the FGD sessions opined that poverty is the main reason for engaging girls in farm labour. A father argues thus:

We must prioritise farming activities for our daughters in our communities. This is because poverty causes many homes in our community to go without food. Most of the time, the girls' labour is utilised to supplement the father's efforts, who must go out and obtain something, even if it means begging (FGD1, 2025).

The foregoing shows that poverty is a reality in these areas, and most girls are pushed into child labour because parents lack the resources to cater for them. Therefore, the influence of poverty on child labour in the areas is a critical one, as most parents require their daughters' support in meeting the basic needs of the family.

Early marriage

Preparation for early marriage has also been identified as one of the critical reasons for engaging the young girls in child labour. Findings from the quantitative data revealed that 52% of the girls actively engaged in the activities to get money that could be used for buying materials necessary for marriage. This finding was corroborated by the findings of the different sessions of the FGD conducted, where most of the participants, including the fathers, believed that girls marry early in the communities and therefore, had to start preparations for marriage early to enable them to secure the materials necessary for marriage.

There is agreement between the views expressed by the fathers and the girls on the reality of early marriage across the communities, as a girl participant emphatically stated how early marriage, which has been entrenched in the social fabric of people in the communities, negatively affected the educational process of the girl child. According to her:

In our community, parents will never allow their daughters to attend school up to the tertiary level. This is because the moment a girl who is already enrolled in school reaches the age of marriage, she is immediately withdrawn from school to marry. For me, whenever a girl reaches puberty, the best thing for her is to get married. Honestly, it is better to be in your matrimonial house (FGD9, 2025).

This shows that the early marriage phenomenon in these communities has also been internalised and accepted by these girls as normal.

Shared Traditional Beliefs

Traditional beliefs refer to customs and practices shared by people in a given culture or community. Although some cultural beliefs are detrimental to the development of certain members of society, people uncritically believe in them. It is generally believed in these communities that girls have no right to make decisions regarding any issue affecting their lives; the parents exclusively make such decisions. A participant stated that:

Based on the tradition of our community, a girl child has no autonomy, your parents have the right to decide on anything affecting your life and it is generally believed that if a matured girl is not married and confined in her husband's house but roaming about from place to place she may get pregnant out of wedlock which is a taboo in the community (FGD9, 2025).

Another participant added thus:

It is an abomination for a daughter to reach the height of her mother at home without being married, especially if she has a younger sister following her; any family that allows such to happen faces a lot of mockery by members of the community (FGD3, 2025).

Such beliefs might be among the critical factors causing early marriage in the communities, which is detrimental to the socio-economic development of such girls.

Large Family Size\Cheap Labour

In many Nigerian cultures, a large family is seen as a blessing and a source of respect and honour. Having many children is associated with a successful life in old age. Such a belief tends to reinforce the idea of having a large family, even though having many children is problematic because the parents cannot adequately cater for the family. As discovered by this study, most parents engaged their children in child labour because the children are beyond the number they can effectively cater for. A father argues thus:

We have many children, so we cannot cater for all of them. The only way out is to send them, especially the girls, to engage in farm labour to support the family. The reason girls are mostly involved in such activities in our communities is that employers prefer employing girls over boys because they are humble and their services are cheaper (FGD1, 2025).

Based on the above submission, offering cheap labour and humility by the girls are what make them the most vulnerable group in the communities, and they are being exploited due to their submissiveness.

Influence of Peers

A peer group can be seen as a social grouping of people who are approximately the same age or social status. They are people you play with and relate to daily, who have a great influence on your behaviour. Many girls in the communities did not attend school but instead engaged in farm labour due to peer influence. Participants argue that

Some parents do not allow their daughters to attend secondary school for fear of their associating with bad friends. In addition, any girl who refuses to go to farm her parents will not be happy with her, and her friends will also blaspheme her. Therefore, whatever makes our parents happy, we do (FGD10, 2025).

Rural Neglect

Rural neglect refers to inadequate attention and development in rural areas compared to urban areas, resulting in limited access to essential services, poverty, and a lower quality of life. Many rural dwellers deliberately resist certain government policies and programmes, especially those targeting children, as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the government. A father argues that:

Unlike in the city, we now do not have a clinic in our community, we do not have a good road, and our central mosque is dilapidated. These are our pressing needs that the government has failed to address over the years. For this reason, we often reject any government policy or what the government bring to our children or wants us to do for our children due to such urban bias (FGD3, 2025)

This shows that the government's inability to provide rural dwellers with necessary social amenities is among the reasons many government policies are rejected.

Lack of Male child in the Family

The absence of a male child in a family is another factor that pushes girls into farm labour. Findings from the qualitative data revealed that parents without male children tend to involve their female children in farming activities. According to a participant,

In our community, any family that does not have a male child has female children who most often carry out the roles culturally defined for males, including farming activities (FGD9, 2025).

Being an Orphan

An orphan is a child whose parents are dead. In many African cultures, including Nigeria, orphans are not taken to orphanages but live with surviving relatives, such as uncles and aunts. If the relatives are poor, during the children's upbringing, the orphans often engage in many activities, including hard labour, to support the family. A participant argued that:

Even if you have orphans in your house, if you do not have the means to cater for them, there is nothing you can do but engage them in farming to support the family (FGD1, 2025).

Implications of Girl child Involvement in Child labour

The menace of girl child labour has a terrible consequence on the future development of these girls, as many were exposed to economic exploitation, sexual assault, dangerous animals, illiteracy, psychological effects and a high alarming incidence of school dropout. Furthermore, the quantitative data indicated that many of the respondents (49.1%) experienced quarrelling with co-workers, the employers economically exploited 40%, 35.1% experienced verbal abuse from the employers; 32.5% were exposed to bites of dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions, and 28.3% were emotionally abused, while 5.7% encountered sexual assaults. Similar findings were also discovered from the qualitative data, where many of the respondents, exposed to dangerous animals, experienced sexual harassment and economic exploitation.

Exposure to Dangerous Animals

Most of the participants of all the FGD sessions experienced scorpion bites and were exposed to snakes, dogs and other dangerous animals at farms on several occasions. Such animals are very harmful to their health. A father reported a bite from a dangerous animal called *Shanshani*, which led to the amputation of the leg of the victim, thus:

A boy in this community was bitten in the leg by a hazardous insect known as *Shanshani at the farm*. He battled for months without improving, and eventually his leg had to be amputated. His physical infirmity prevents him from working on farms anymore (FGD8, 2025).

Generally, the girls were exposed to dangerous animals such as snakes, scorpions, dogs and *Shanshani*, which are capable of causing injuries, infections, and even death. For example, venomous bites or stings could lead to pain, swelling of a part of the body and even organ damage. Others may include physical trauma from animal attacks and transmission of diseases like rabies, among others.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as an unwelcome remarks or behaviour of a sexual nature that make someone feel uncomfortable or offended. The study found that some of the girls were often sexually harassed by their employers. A girl participant reported thus:

Our employers occasionally harassed us. Sometimes, when you finish the work, the employer will say he is not happy with the quality of the work or even insult you, and there is nothing you can do but redo it. Sometimes, landowners rape their workers or intimidate them by speaking to them in a way that would trick them into having sex with them. If you yell at him, he would respond, "Are you not here to get money?" (FGD4, 2025).

Another participant from the same FGD session shared a sexual harassment related story, thus:

I have a story of a father and his child who showed up in a car one day and met several girls on the side of the road who were searching for female employees. The man stated that he only required one labourer because his work was so scanty. He then gestured to a girl and asked her to get in the car so he could drive her to the farm. Then the girl followed him into the car. As they arrived at the farm, he instructed the girl to begin work and informed her that he wanted to return home, drop off his child, and then return. The man wanted to rape the girl when he returned. With the help of Almighty God, the girl, who was very strong, got a stick and struck him on the head and fled away (FGD4, 2025).

What emerges from the foregoing discussion is that although most of the parents claimed their daughters never experienced any form of sexual molestation, some girls argued that it had happened. Therefore, their information is more credible. The reason is that daughters often find it difficult to report sexual harassment cases to their parents, especially in Hausa societies. Such cases might have occurred on farms or elsewhere but went unreported.

Economic Exploitations

Economic exploitation is the act of taking unfair advantage of a person or group for financial gain. Such an unfair relationship between farm owners and girl labourers across these communities is real, according to most of the participants, including the parents, who

believed that employers prefer girls due to cheap labour, which means economic exploitation. Most of the services were not adequately compensated. A girl argues that:

An employer once took us to his farm in the morning, and he left us there. Because he refused to bring us food until evening, we left the farm, went to the village, bought some food, and returned. When he returned to the farm, he informed us that we did nothing, so he would never pay us. We told him that we would never forgive him, and he replied that there would be no issue even if we did not (FGD10, 2025).

Another participant from a different session argues that:

Some employers used to yell at and mistreat us, while others stopped paying us altogether if they were not happy with the work, and there was nothing we could do about it. When you assert that God exists, some employers used to say, "Leave me with God." (FGD9, 2025)

Discussion of the Findings

Having examined the socio-economic drivers and implications of girl child involvement in agricultural activities in fifteen communities of Kebbi State, the study found plurality of socio-economic factors including preparation for early marriage, poverty, peer pressure, cultural norms/shared traditional belief, support to the family, cheap labour, lack of male child in the family, rural neglect, large family size as the significant socio-economic drivers of girls' involvement in child labour across the communities. These support the findings of previous studies in Nigeria (Nkume, 2013; Famadeji, 2014), which reported that poverty, family size, and cultural beliefs were important factors that exposed children to child labour. The findings further corroborated with findings of a previous study in Awka South LGA by Oli & Nweke (2021), which revealed poverty, educational level of parents, family size, cultural belief and living in a slum area as the determinants of child labour in the area. Feminist theory, which is the theoretical framework of this study, gave a detailed explanation of gender inequality as a major factor that condemns people to poverty and health problems, among others, which warrants the involvement of the girl child in child labour as a means to earn income for survival. However, urban-rural migration, loss of a parent or family guardian, loss of parents' employment, cost of tuition fees, lack of access to school, and parents' priority on farming did not significantly push children into child labour in these communities.

The implications of child labour on the girl's development are enormous. The study found that most of the girls were exposed to economic exploitation, sexual assault, experienced scorpion bites and were exposed to other dangerous animals such as snakes, dogs at farms on several occasions, illiteracy, and an alarming incidence of school dropout. The findings of a previous study in Bauchi by Ibrahim & Magaji (2023) are in line with one of this study's findings: they reported that children engaged in work do not have enough time to attend school or perform well in school. This is further corroborated by findings from the 2022 Nigeria child labour and forced labour survey (ILO & NBS, 2024), which revealed that children not in child labour were more likely to attend school compared to those in child labour. The foregoing implications are part of the thrust of the liberal feminist theoretical framework and could be addressed through structural reforms.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study investigated the socio-economic roots of child labour in fifteen communities of Kebbi State, Nigeria. While globally, concerted efforts have been made over the years by

governmental and nongovernmental organisations to end the menace of child labour in Nigeria and improve school enrollment, especially for the girl child, socio-economic and cultural factors have remained a holdup to the actualisation of such a dream in Nigeria and Kebbi State in particular. Child labour that denies girls schooling despite their needs for it is no longer news in these communities, but is a real social problem that is embedded in the social fabric of the society. Girl children are regarded as the future mothers who could play a significant role not only in the socialisation process of children but also in changing society for the better. When they engage in labour practices at a tender age at the expense of schooling, the future of the society is in jeopardy. It was observed that the most prevailing socio-economic drivers of girl child labour in the fifteen communities include preparation for early marriage, poverty, peer pressure, cultural norms/shared traditional belief, support to the family, cheap labour, lack of male child in the family, rural neglect and large family size. Consequently, the girls were exposed to dangerous animals, gross economic exploitation, and sexual abuse. This requires the government to strengthen and effectively enforce existing child labour-related laws in the country for the betterment of future generations.

In view of that, the paper recommends the following:

- Interrelated factors such as poverty, support to the family and large family size were among the drivers of child labour in the areas; therefore, poverty alleviation programs should be made available by the government through loans and fertiliser subsidy to the parents to enable them to finance their agricultural activities and engage their children in schools.
- Preparation for early marriage, peer pressure, and cultural norms/shared traditional beliefs were identified among the drivers of girl child labour. Therefore, the government should carry out enlightenment campaigns at regular intervals through the media, sensitising the general public to discard the cultural norms and values favouring girl child labour, including the practice of early marriage, thereby drawing attention of the public to the adverse consequences of girl child labour.
- It was observed that offering cheap labour remains a driver of girl child labour, which implies economic exploitation. Therefore, the government, in collaboration with traditional rulers, should ban all forms of economic exploitation against girl-children in the country.
- Being an orphan and having a family with no male child were among the drivers identified by the study; therefore, social welfare services should be made available to the orphans and families with no male children to enable engaging the girls in schools rather than in child labour
- Rural neglect has been identified as one of the drivers of child labour; therefore, the government should prioritise rural areas in terms of the provision of social amenities.

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