

# Exploring The Perspectives of Child Labour Victims on The Sociocultural Determinants of Child Labour: A Case of Yeji on Lake Volta

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## ABSTRACT

Child labour is a growing phenomenon on Lake Volta, Yeji in Ghana. However, knowledge about the key sociocultural factors that sustain child labour has been given less attention. This study has addressed this issue by employing a qualitative case study design to collect textual data from research participants through purposive and snowball sampling techniques and conducted Focus Grouped Discussion with selected stakeholders and personal interviews with 10 children who work as child labourers on Lake Volta in Yeji. Based on the thematic analysis, peer pressure, debt settlement, parental education and incapacitation and disability of the breadwinner were the key sociocultural factors sustaining child labour. The finding is potential contributes to both the appraisal theory and the growing empirical literature on child labour in the fishing industry as well as provide immense benefits to policymakers and other stakeholders to reduce child labour in the fishing sector in Ghana and beyond.

**Keywords:** child labour, fishing sector, Ghana, Lake Volta, sociocultural factors

## INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a global phenomenon with over 160 million children below 18 years working in prohibited economic activities for their livelihood and to complement their families' income (Dekkiche, 2021; Labour, G. E. O. C, 2022).

The children involvement in prohibited economic activities denies them of the opportunity to attend school, or interferes with their schooling and may be forced to leave school prematurely. Moreover, the physical growth and mental development of these children can be impaired due to the excessive long and heavy work load carried. In effect child labour deprives children of their childhood potentials and dignity.

In Ghana, child labour is also widespread in the productive sectors with 1.9 million children between the ages of 5 to 17 years involved (Awotwe, 2020; Boateng & Darko-Gyeke, 2022; Pugmire, 2022). In recent times, there is rapid growth of child labour in the fishing industry, particularly, Lake Volta in Yeji (CNN-Inside the troubled waters: the child slavery trade on Ghana's Lake Volta, 2019) and United Nation's (Briffett, 2019; Dzoka, 2010; Hamenoo et al, 2015; Olden, 2021; Talbot, 2018; UNICEF-Ghana, 2011). There are about 20,000 child labourers working in Lake Volta, particularly Yeji and its Satellite communities in the Pru East District of the Bono East Region (Iversen, 2006).

In Lake Volta, both male and female and even orphans work as child labourers. The Ghana Child Labour

Survey Report (2003) reveals that more than “49, 000 children” are in working in the fishing sector, with 87% boys and 13% girls. Such children engage in different fishing activities. Boys mostly work on the lake while girls are involved in the fish processing such as salting, smoking of fish and marketing of fish (Aho, 2013; Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; Briffett, 2019; ILO, 2013).

The children work under uncomfortable environment. They work for long hours and in return for low wages (Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; Briffett, 2019). They are also subjected to several abuses and death threats by their masters (canoe owners/masters). The physical abuse of child labourers can lead to irreversible physical damaged like broken ribs, facial and body, fractured bones and musculoskeletal problems (Ahad et al., 2021; Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2015; Moylan et al., 2010; Oluremi, 2015; WHO, 2020). Moreover, due to the psychological and emotional abuse, such children suffer from behavioural problems including low self-esteem, isolation, aggression, alienation and display other behavioural disorders (Kumar & Fonagy, 2013; McDonald-Harker, Drolet & Colvin, 2021; Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2015; Şalcioğlu & Başoğlu, 2008).

These children face health risk. They are not only sexual abuse and harassed resulting to HIV/AIDs and other STDs but also involved in the production of pornographic and prostitution (Adu, Geidam & Jarma 2009; Fawole & Dagunduro, 2014; Fassa et al., 2000; Parcesepe et al., 2016). Indeed, child labour is detrimental to children’s education, growth and development, and future livelihood (ILO, 2016; Udry, 2006).

Although much of the literature assumed that poverty is the immediate or the main cause of child labour (Fassa et al., 2000; ILO, 2010) in countries having per capital income of US\$500 or less, have children between 10-14 years who are child labourers ranging between 30% to 60% as compared to 10-30 % in countries that have per capital income of US\$501-1000 (Fallon & Tzannatos, 1998), however, income shocks, parental characteristics and cultural practices in certain societies that mandate children to learn skills at early young to be a responsible adult in future, or contribute and sustain legacy of the family are contributing to the growing trend of child labour (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Beegle et al., 2006) which scholars have not given much attention.

In child labour decision, income shocks for example, unexpected crop loss potentially increase the extent of child labour thereby affecting the stability of household income (Beegle et al., 2006). Moreover, death of chief wage-earner, largeness of family and other significant income shock factors leads child labour due to depressed household income (Rowntree, 1901).

Furthermore, a parental education levels play a major role (Behrman & Rosenzweig, 2002; Black et al., 2005) and determines the education attainment of child, to a large extent. So, children who receive more education as a child may grow up as parent with higher human capital and may earn higher income. Consequently, such people would like their children to attain their status (Basu & Tzannatos, 2003). Likewise, the cultural practice of bond debt has contributed to child labour. Children whose parents are indebted to boat owners are put in bond labour as means to defray the debt, and are subjected to abuse (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Fassa et al., 2005).

In Ghana, although child labour is thriving due to cultural practices and sociocultural issues which influenced the household decision on child labour, however, the issues have not been given considerable research attention, particularly in the fisheries sector (Blunch & Verner, 2000; Twum-Danso, 2009; Takyi, 2014). The utmost concern now is why some families and relatives tend to force their children into child labour at the expense of their future in exchange for immediate benefits to the household (Udry, 2006)? Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore the sociocultural factors that sustain child labour along the Volta Lake in Yeji, Ghana. The renaming of the paper is as follows: Research Design, data management. Findings and discussion, conclusion and the limitation of the future study and recommendation.