

Exploring the Socioeconomic Determinants of Child Labour: A Case of Child Labourers on the Volta Lake in Ghana

Garibah Mensah Dominic, Dolly Paul Carlo

University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)

Email: pcdolly@unimas.my

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Abstract

Child Labour is a global phenomenon. In Ghana, there is a high rate of Child labour on the Volta Lake in Yeji. However, knowledge about the key socioeconomic factors sustaining child labour has not been given considerable attention. Our study has addressed this phenomenon by employing a qualitative case study, and purposive and snowball sampling techniques to gather data from research participants through Focus Grouped Discussion and face-to-face interviews with 10 child labourers on the Volta Lake in Yeji. The key socioeconomic findings sustaining child labour, household poverty, household income or poverty, the largeness of the family, unemployment, and lack of access to employment opportunities. The findings contribute to both the growing body of knowledge and the empirical literature on child labour in the fishing industry and provide immense significance to policymakers and other stakeholders to reduce child labour in the fishing sector in Ghana and beyond.

Keywords: Child Labour, Fishing Sector, Ghana, Volta Lake, Socioeconomic Determinants.

Introduction

Child labour is a social menace defined by the United Nations System of National Accounts as the production of economic goods and services by children under 18 years (Edmonds, 2015; Schady & Edmonds, 2008; Swaminathan, 1998). It is also defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Hanson, Volonakis & Al-Rozzi, 2015 and Makinen, 2006, as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development” (Esin, Bulduk & Ince, 2005; Nuwayhid et al., 2005). Essentially, child labour can be regarded as any economic activity denying children under 18 years the opportunity to enjoy their childhood rights, interfering with their education, and impacting their growth and development, and future livelihood (Dubey, 2017; Edmonds, 2010; ILO, 2012; Udry, 2006).

Child labour is a global issue. About 215 million children are working in the economic sectors to make ends meet and support their families and relatives (Dekkiche, 2021; Edmonds

& Theoharides, 2021; Labour, 2022; United Nations Child Labour, 2015). This phenomenon is more common in developing and less developed economies than in developed economies (United Nations Child Labour, 2015). In developing countries, one in seven children is engaged in child labour activities; however, the highest number of child labourers (25.3 %) is in Africa (United Nations Child Labour, 2015). These children mostly work in the agriculture, mining, quarrying, commerce, transportation, construction, and services industries, which are full of hazards that affect their health and safety (Fossa et al., 2000; Hagemann et al., 2015; ILO, 2010) and logging, food processing and packaging, restaurant and catering, domestic services, factory and sex and entertainment” (ILO, 2008) but there is less attention to the growing trend of child labour in the fishing industry.

The fishing industry, despite its contributions to global food security, economic development and growth and an essential source of livelihood to coastal communities in many developing countries (FAO, 2012; ILO, 2013; Moffitt & Cajas-Cano, 2014; Pauly & Zeller, 2017; Lam et al., 2012), it has become an arena for child labour in many parts of developed and developing nations with the incidence of forced labour (ILO, 2013).

In Ghana, child labour is a common phenomenon. An estimated 1.9 million children below 18 years work in the economic sectors (Awotwe, 2020; Boateng & Darko-Gyeke, 2022; Pugmire, 2022). However, the fishing industry, despite being a source of livelihood for many fishers, has a high rate of child trafficking and child labour in several parts of the fishing communities, especially on the Volta Lake (Boateng & Darko-Gyeke, 2022; Tonetto, 2017; Briffett, 2019; Wambolt, 2021). Lake Volta has become a more popular destination for child trafficking as well as child labourers relative to other coastal communities like Winneba, Ashieman and others. About 49, 000 children are working in the fishing sector (Ghana Child Labour Survey Report, 2003), 20,000 of them ply their trade on Lake Volta in Yeji (United Nation’s (Briffett, 2019; Dzoka, 2010; Hamenoo et al., 2015; Olden, 2021; Talbot, 2018; Iversen, 2006).

It also estimated that between 4,000 and 10,000 children were trafficked by fishermen to Lake Volta annually (Briffett, 2019; Hamenoo et al., 2015; Ratner, 2014; Reid Maki, 2013). Thus, Volta Lake appears to be a haven for these fishermen trafficking children from the communities to work in the fisheries sector.

In Lake Volta, both boys and girls as well as orphans and single mothers work as child labourers with 87% boys and 13% girls (Ghana Child Labour Survey Report, 2003). The children engage in many fishing routines such as salting, smoking of fish, packaging and marketing of fish and other onshore operations (Aho, 2013; Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; ILO, 2013). While the boys engage in fishing, mending nets, loading and offloading packaged fish, the girls handle the fish processing through salting and smoking of fish as well as selling and marketing of fish (Aho, 2013; Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; Bøås & Hatløy, 2008; Briffett, 2019; Darko, 2008; ILO, 2013). The children work in an unsafe and stressful environment. These children work for longer hours and the workload is too heavy for them in return for low income (Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; Briffett, 2019).

The physical demands of the work have stalled the children's growth and development and caused several body injuries. To withstand the cold weather and the physical demands of fishing, these children have become addicted to substances such as weed/marijuana and other strong alcoholic drinks (ILO, 2016; Udry, 2006). Aside from the poor physical development of these children, the constant maltreatment and physical abuse of the children by their masters can lead to life-long physical and emotional damage.

Typically, the physical damage can lead to cuts (wounds), broken ribs, fractured bones and musculoskeletal problems as well as facial and body scars (Ahad et al., 2021; Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2015; Moylan et al., 2010; Oluremi, 2015; WHO, 2020). The psychological and emotional abuse of children can lead to aggression, low self-esteem, depression, isolation and other psychological disorders with musculoskeletal challenges (Das, 2019; McDonald-Harker, Drolet & Colvin, 2021; Kumar & Fonagy, 2013; McDonald-Harker, Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2015).

The children also are exposed to health hazards and risks. Sexually abused children can be infected with HIV/AIDs and other STDs (Parcesepe et al., 2016). They are also being sexually exploited in the production of pornographic and prostitution (Audu, Geidam & Jarma 2009; Fawole & Dagunduro, 2014; Fassa et al., 2000). Given the harmful effects of child labour to the well-being, growth and development, and future livelihood of children (Esin, Bulduk & Ince, 2005; ILO, 2016; Udry, 2006), why is child labour prevalent in Ghana?

There is a consensus that poverty is the root of child labour (Fassa et al., 2000; ILO, 2010). For this reason, children between 10-14 years living in economies with per capita income of US\$500 or less are more likely to be in child labour due to the high proportion ranging between 30% to 60% compared to children in economies with per capita income of US\$501-1000 and incidence rate of child labour between 10-30 % (Fallon & Tzannatos, 1998). In this regard, less developed countries facing high rates of employment tend to offer low wages and low income is more likely to influence a family's decision to consider income from children's labour to address their current needs. Thus, household poverty drives the children into formal employment or labour market to earn extra income to feed or to support the family budget.

Besides, the largeness of family, unemployment, and lack of access to employment opportunities can influence a family's decision to put children to work at an early age (Arthur, 2005; Chatterjee, 1972; Espenshade et al., 1982). Large families are those with three or more children (Bradshaw et al., 2006; Panova, Buber-Ennsner & Bujard, 2023). Most of these families have huge financial responsibilities and, due to inadequate finances, they find it difficult to adequately provide care for their children and utility bills including rent, water, electricity, and others (Conger et al., 2002; Conger et al., 1994).

In addition, the largeness of the family contributes to the growing trend of child labour. This kind of situation tends to increase the financial responsibilities of the household (Abou, 2014; Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007) and, the pressure on financial resources can hinder the family not to meet some of the pressing needs and other necessities of the children,

ultimately pushing the children into the labour market (Conger et al., 2002; Conger et al., 1994).

Moreover, unemployment and limited employment opportunities available to parents can drive children to work at an early age. For this reason, parents whose skills are less demanded in the labour market are more likely to have limited employment opportunities, have short periods of working life to be redundant and may have a possibility to experience poverty (Pemberton et al., 2014). However large families with low-paying jobs may supply fewer child labourers than unemployed households with no source of income (Feizi et al., 2023; Shahateet, 2022).

The question yet to be addressed is why some families and relatives tend to put their children to work at an early age at the expense of their future in exchange for immediate benefits to the household (Udry, 2006). Therefore, this study investigates the socioeconomic factors sustaining child labour along the Volta Lake in Yeji, Ghana. The renaming sections of the paper are as follows: Theory, literature review, research Design, findings and discussion, conclusion and the limitation of the study and recommendation.

Theory

Ideally, children below 18 years should be in school but are engaged in economic activities to meet their basic needs and support their families. Both economic conditions and some family characteristics compel parents to put their children to work tenderly as child labourers in the fishing sector. To explain why children are working as child labourers on the Volta Lake in Ghana, the Human capital theory and Minority Group theory have been utilized.

The Human Capital Theory

Scholars agree that household poverty remains the primary factor for child labour (Black et al., 2005, Mensah, 2013). The Human Capital Theory (HCT) asserts that human capital plays a key role in one's lifetime earnings (Becker, 1964). Human capital refers to individual skills, knowledge or any competence or ability that enables a person to be productive (Garibaldi, 2006; OECD, 2001). The level of an individual's knowledge, skill and competence is assessed by the person's educational background and experience which directly determines the person's income or earnings (Gonçalves, 1999; Lydall, 1968).

People who have the right skills, experience and educational qualifications demanded by the labour market will be rewarded with higher lifetime earnings and will have greater opportunities in the labour market than those whose skills are less demanded in the labour market. Machin (2009), asserts that poor families tend to under-invest in education and are more likely to receive low earnings. Plug (2004), and Solon (1999), also argue that most parents of child labourers have low academic background and are unskilled so their earnings are meagre which cannot meet the increasing household expenditure. This situation tends to influence such households to push these children to the labour market early or force them to work alongside the school to supplement the family income (Mensah, 2013; Mukherjee & Sinha, 2009).

It is also assumed that unemployment and lack of access to employment opportunities can contribute to child labour (Plug, 2003; Behrman & Taubman, 1985; Solon, 1999). The competition in the labour market means that only individuals with the requisite skills, competencies and outstanding academic accomplishments can access employment opportunities with better wages and salaries. Solon (1999) asserts that because most families of child labourers are less or uneducated and unskilled, they have limited access to better job opportunities and are not gainfully employed. So, they accept menial jobs or low-paying jobs and unstable employment. As a result, they trade off the costs of providing the basic needs of the family against the long-term benefits of educating their children (Udry, 2003; Pemberton et al., 2014).

By forgoing long-term educational benefits, the parents can not provide for the family with their meagre income (Das & Deb, 2006; Mukherjee & Sinha, 2009; Udry, 2003), motivating children to enter the labour market at an early age or forcing them to work alongside school to supplement the family income (Mensah, 2013; Mukherjee & Sinha, 2009).

Minority Group Theory

The Minority Group theory (MGT) attributes the child labour phenomenon to shocks to family income (Arthur, 2005; Chatterjee, 1972; Espenshade et al., 1982). Scholars agree regarding the extent large family size influences household decisions allowing children to work as child labourers in the fishing sector (Espenshade et al., 1982). Large families tend to struggle to meet household responsibilities due to a lack of financial resources (Abou, 2014). They are unable to provide sustenance for children and settle bills (rent, water, electricity, and others) when they are due (Conger et al., 2002; Conger et al., 1994).

Such families have a higher tendency to put children to work at a younger age will prioritize child labour income as an alternative source of income to support family welfare and maintenance over the future benefits of educating children (Ajefu, 2018; Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005; Fassa et al., 2003). A child from a large family is likely to be a child labourer; however, a child faced with certain family conditions (such as poverty, the loss of the breadwinner and income shocks) has a higher tendency to become a child labourer (Patricia, 2016; Soares et al., 2012).

Given the extent of lack of clarity as to which large families influence children to become child labourers, and whether children's exposure to family's income shocks are important factors influencing children engaging in prohibited economic activities, it is essential to explore how largeness of families sustain child labour on the Volta Lake to expand the body of knowledge and improve scholars' understanding.

Literature Review

Empirical studies suggest that many children work as child labourers in the economic sector. These children work because their parents' socioeconomic influence household decisions (Mahmood et al., 2005). Household poverty drives these children into formal employment or labour market to earn extra income to feed or to support the family budget (Buddelmeyer & Verick, 2008; Fonta et al., 2020; Ortiz et al., 2012). They reasoned that such families have a lower investment in human capital (education) (Basu and van, 1998; Ennew,

1982) and do not have the educational attainment or skills demanded by the labour market so they earn a low income. Machin (2009), and Pemberton et al (2014), argue that poor families tend to under-invest in their children's education so they reinforce the vicious cycle of poverty. In addition, the largeness of the family contributes to the growing trend of child labour. This kind of situation tends to increase the financial responsibilities of the household (Abou, 2014; Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007).

Besides the financial pressure, large families face non-financial pressure (Abou, 2014; Ajefu, 2018; Conger et al., 2002). The accommodation problems resulting in overcrowding tend to increase the financial demands of a large family to consider child labour as the best alternative source of income (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005; Fassa et al., 2003). However, Patricia (2016), and Soares et al (2012), indicated that children from less privileged or poor large families are more likely to be child labourers as compared to children who belong to large families. They reasoned that in approving child labour activities, the poor large families have a higher tendency whilst the other families have a lower tendency to allow children to enter the labour market.

Usually, such large families allow their children to work as part-time child labourers; they combine school and work to ease some of the financial pressure on the family (Abou, 2014; Ajefu, 2018; Patricia, 2016). However, due to work stress, lateness to school and poor concentration in class resulting in poor academic performance, they may be school dropouts and become full-time child labourers (ICF Macro, 2011). Therefore, such families rank child labour income high relative to the future benefits of educating the children and their future earnings (Ajefu, 2018).

Evidence is also clear that parental unemployment can lead young children into child labour. So the unemployed parents will struggle to support their children's education and provide sustenance, and other necessities for the children (Abou, 2014; Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007). Even parents with low-paying jobs seeking limited better employment opportunities hardly cope with the high cost of living (Porter, 1975). This situation can negatively affect a family's income and struggle to cater for the livelihood of the children (Akee et al., 2010; Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005; 2010; Kis-Katos & Sparrow, 2011). Feizi et al (2023), assert that unemployment and limited employment opportunities available to parents can drive children to work at an early age. Thus, families with low-paying jobs tend to supply less child labour than families with unemployed households with no source of income (Feizi et al., 2023; Shahateet, 2022).

Research Design

This research was carried out in Yeji and nearby communities along the Volta Lake in the Pru East District of the Bono East Region of Ghana (Figure 3.1). This location was selected due to the high rate of child labour activities on the Volta Lake. Yeji is well-known not only for commerce but also commuting goods and people through the Volta Lake to nearby districts and towns in the Northern Regions of Ghana (GSS, 2021; GSS, 2014).

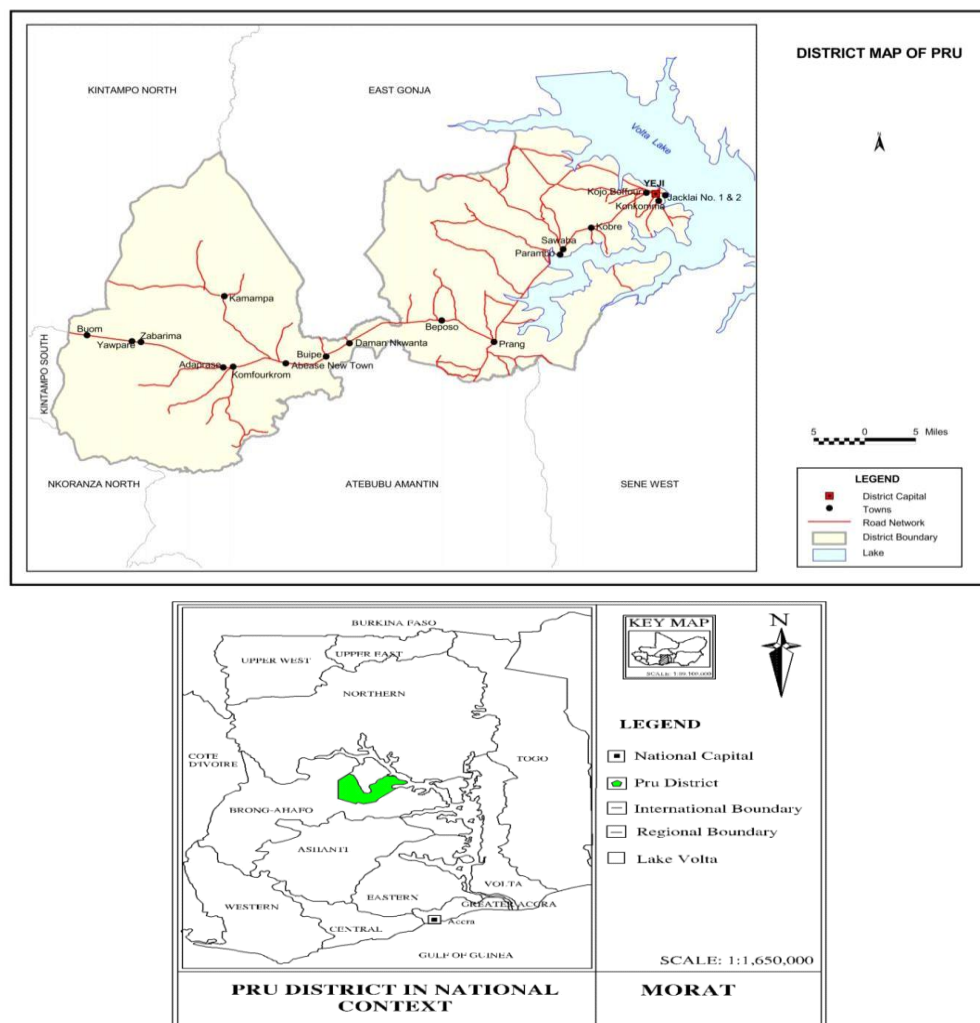


Figure 3.1: Map of the Study area (ghanadistrict.com, 2016).

This is a qualitative study aimed to understand the socioeconomic factors sustaining child labour in the fishing sector from the perspectives of child labour victims on the Volta Lake. The use of a case study was more suitable following the suggestions of Yin (2003) who described a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 1994; Stake, 2008). Specifically, we used a multiple case study instead of a single case study based on Stake’s (2008), advice that the former is more effective for studying different subjects from different background. As a result, we have gained an in-depth understanding of the child labour phenomenon, enabling us to identify patterns in a word or group of words across all cases for in-depth descriptions and outcomes, leading to better theorizing (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

This study utilized snowball and purposive sampling in the selection of research participants. By using the snowball sampling technique, we were able reached out to participants whom we have no relationship with to participate in the face-to-face interviews. We reached those participants by identifying key individuals such as active child labour

victims, ex-child labour victims, and others who recommended other potential research participants.

Through purposive sampling, we also reached out to participants to take part in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Chaim Noy, 2008; Silverman, 2016; 2017). So, the use of purposive sampling enabled the researchers to select research participants from Challenging Heights (NGO) Head Office, Challenging Heights Shelter and other interested persons such the opinion leaders at the study area. These techniques greatly helped us to contact potential research participants who discussed their valuable experiences on the socioeconomic determinants of child labour victims during the focus group discussion (FGD) and the face-to-face interviews.

The research participants were recruited based on strict requirements. For instance, child labour victims, who participated in the survey were between 14 to 18 years and have lived in Yeji between 2 to 5 years. The first FGD participants, the assemblyman, the community Chief, social welfare officers, parents, and community childhood protection members, have all stayed in these communities (Gadakope, Accra town and Fanti-Akura) for at least 5 to 10 years and were more than 35 years. The second FGD consist of one social welfare officer, three rescuing team members from Challenging Heights and three Challenging Heights Representatives have five to ten years of working experience with child labour activities.

Table 1

Stages of recruitment of research participants (child labour victims) for face-to-face interview

Stages	No. of Research Participants Contacted	Agreed No. to be Interviewed	Actual No. Interviewed Through Saturation
1	2	-	-
2	20	-	-
3	10	-	-
Total	32	25	10

The participants for the study were reached out to through the snowball method because of the sensitive nature of their work. In the first stage of the recruitment, we reached out to two (2) child labour victims based on our personal relationship. In the second phase, twenty (20) child labour victims were contacted through the first two child labourers, and in the final stage, ten (10) child labourers victims were reached out to with the assistance of the assemblyman. At the end of the recruitment exercise, 32 child labourers were contacted, but 25 agreed to participate in the face-to-face interviews voluntarily after they have understood the purpose of the study and the code of ethics. The recruited research participants were done in three phases as illustrated (table 1) above.

Table 2

Stages of recruitment of research participants for (Focus Group Discussion)

Stages	FGD	No. of Participants Contacted - FGD	Agreed No. for FGD	Actual No. for FGD
1	1=Opinion/Local Leaders	8	5	5
2	2=Rescuing Team Members	9	7	7
3	3=Instructors/Coaches	7	5	5

The research participants were contacted through a purposive sampling technique for the focus group discussion and their choices were based on their experiences with activities of child labour victims on the Volta Lake. Per their numbers, they are those who have genuinely agreed to be part of the discussion on child labour after they have also understood the purpose of the study and the code of ethics.

All the recruited research participants in this study were done in three phases (table 1) and (table 2) above respectively.

Of the 25 child labour victims recruited to participate in the face-to-face interviews, only 10 were interviewed at their chosen locations. The sample of ten (10) was ascertained based on data saturation during the interviews because of a lack of new data or new emerging patterns from the end of one interview to another interview (Boddy, 2016; Guest et al., 2006; Silverman, 2016 & 2017). Based on the data saturation, we had the assurance that the sample size was sufficient and should be capable to make some degree of generalization through inductive reasoning (Boddy, 2016).

The focus Group Discussions (FGD) was in line with Powell (1996), suggestions that this method is effective for obtaining an in-depth understanding on social phenomena (e.g., child labour victims). To that effect, three distinct FGDs were organized. The first FGD that happened at Yeji has 5 members; a community childhood protection committee member (CCPC), the chief, parent, an assemblyman and social welfare officer. The second FGD that took place at the Head office of Challenging Heights in Winneba involved 7 participants; three (3) rescuing mission team members, three (3) research participants, and one social welfare officer. The final FGD that involved 5 members involved two (2) research participants, one health officer, one instructor/coach, and one coordinator at the shelter took place at the Challenging Heights Shelter. These samples were ideal for a single focus group discussion because of the nature of the topic to be discussed by research participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

To ensure that the interview protocol was usable for data collection to achieve the study objective, a pilot study was carried out with ten experienced child labour victims; six (6) males and four (4) females, who did not participate in the actual survey. The inputs from the pilot survey significantly enhanced the interview protocol regarding interviews duration, awareness of personal bias, and probing/prompts.

Concerning the mode of interviews, the study used semi-structured interviews, which Fontana & Frey (2000) described as one of the most powerful ways to understand our fellow human beings. By conducting, face-to-face interviews with child labour victims, we were able to observe the research setting and interviewees facial expression and probed for in-depth

data. The interviews with the child labour victims took place at their homes, workplace, and at their playing grounds.

In order to properly coordinate the discussion, the FGD was structured into three parts. The first part covered demographic of participants, which set the tone for building rapport with the participants. After the introduction of the main agenda to the research participants, the second segment of the interview commenced.

During the discussion, we solicited interviewees' responses on the core questions. For instance, the discussants were asked the meaning of child labour and the socioeconomic factors driving children to work in the fishing industry in Yeji. In addition, we asked discussants how child labour could affect the social behaviour and health of child labour victims.

During the discussion, we also probed for in-depth understanding on emergent issue. For example, we asked participants how and why peer pressure could lead children to engage in child labour. In addition, we asked research participants (1) "Where does these children on the Volta Lake come from"? (2) "Could there be a reason (s) why these children are on the Volta Lake working as child labourers"? (3) "What are some of the reasons that necessitated the migration of these children from the Coastal regions to work in Yeji on the Volta Lake"? (4) "Do these children go through some kind of challenge (s) while working on the Volta Lake"?

The concluding segment of the interview was for reflection or introspection. Such an opportunity enabled the discussants to clarify or make changes or explain in detail issues they raised earlier to finalize their responses. We also used this opportunity to seek clarification and confirmation of the accuracy of their responses.

We used the most common and dominant Ghanaian languages spoken in the area for the interview. These languages were Akan/Twi and Ewe respectively to conduct the interview. The two interviews took place between June and July 2022.

Indeed, the use of the interview guide facilitated and enhance the flow of the conversation and that helped us to obtain thick and rich data capable to address the research questions. On average, the face-to face interviews, FGD lasted 40mins and 1 hour, 30mins respectively. After this, we thank all the research participants for participating in the survey. After digitally (video camera and audio) recording FGDs and interviews, and in addition to taking notes; the recordings were subsequently verbatim transcribed, stored in a google drive to be retrieved later for analysis.

Concerning the data analysis, the study employed the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which is a data reduction technique for identifying patterned responses or sequence in participants' responses as relevant portion of data or data unit addressing a research question (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Kiger & Lara Varpio, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). The thematic analysis began with familiarizing with the transcribed data to make sense of and to gain deeper understanding of participant's responses on the socioeconomic factors of child labour victims. Next is the data coding process. This involves searching for codes or repeated words in participants' responses (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The use of open coding was helpful in generating codes and coded data in single or multiple extracts or large segment of the

participant's responses that address the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After that, the initial themes were generated by sorting out and collating all the coded data and data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) into a meaningful whole or a broader perspective (Aronson, 1994), revealing a pattern of relationship between codes or coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, the themes were reviewed. The revision involves modifying and refining the coded data under each theme to ensure that every theme has enough data and coheres together meaningfully and with the identifiable distinction between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Consequently, the overlapping themes were emerged into a broader theme. So the final themes represent the findings of the study which clarify the descriptive account and tell the overall story of the lived experience of child labour victims to address the research questions. All the findings are trustworthy because the respondents agreed that their responses were represented and consented that their quotes can be used in the report during the respondent validation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) member checking (Burkholder, Cox & Crawford, 2016; Janesick, 2000).

Data Management

In qualitative research, data management is seen as a process that has to do with gathering, arranging, keeping and protecting information collected during fieldwork to be easily recoverable for the purpose for which it was congregated (Cypress, 2018 & 2015; Knafly et al., 1988; Lin, 2009; Williams & Moser, 2019).

According to (Cypress, 2018; Endacott, 2005; Lin, 2009), effective data management practices are vital to ensuring research results' integrity with confidentiality while preventing error and data loss as this increases the quality of the analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, credibility and quality of our data gathering, we conducted 2 to 3 interviews each day, with each lasting between 40 minutes and 1 hour, and 1 hour, 30mins while taking an interval of 1 to 2 hours to reflect on our observations and nonverbal cues. We validated the data gathered immediately by going through with research participants to find out the initial information made available was correct and also what we documented was exactly as provided by research participants.

We gathered the data in two folds namely face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). We did this through familiarization, coding, categorization and forming of themes from the data gathered (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Williams & Moser, 2019). Later, we labeled this according to interview questions under each research questions. This was done daily after each day's fieldwork. Also, as part of ensuring confidentiality and privacy of our research participants, audio visual tapes transcriptions, notes and other records of research participants were kept safely during and after the interviews so as to avert any possible drawback. This is meant for follow ups when there is the need for data verification of personal information about the research participants such as names, sex, date of birth, age, place of stay and work place were expunged from categorization of the data. This was ensured because our research participants are vulnerability beside our research ethics.

File-Folder “A” - RQ1-Interview Questions = Socioeconomic and Sociocultural factors of Child Labour along the Volta Lake in Yeji-Ghana.

File Folder “B” - RQ2 - Interview Questions = Social Behaviour and Health of Children in Child Labour along the Volta Lake in Yeji-Ghana.(

File-Folder “C” – RQ3 - Interview Question = How PES as a Psychosocial Tool Mitigate Psychosocial Problems of Child Labourers along the Volta Lake in Ghana.

This was done for easily accessibility and for retrieval purpose in google drive.

Findings

The findings presented in the context of demographic background of the various research participants in the study for clarity and understanding (Table 4.3). There are 10 active child labourers as research participants who are involved in the study at Gadakope, Accra Town and Fanti Akura, all in Yeji. The research participants are made up of 7 boys and 3 girls with an average age of 14 to 18 years who have no formal education. Five of these research participants have either lost a father or mother with 2 having their parents alive while 3 are orphans. All the research participants started work at a tender age. They have been working at Yeji for at least two years but most of them have spent more than three years working for their masters (fishermen/canoe owners).

Although these children came from a popular coastal community in the Central Region of Ghana, most came from Winneba, a famous fishing community in the Central Region of Ghana due to poverty and its prevailing cultural practices that insist children learn the basic skills in fishing occupation (e.g. fish trading, processing, etc) in other to take over from their parents’ businesses when they are old or no more, no matter the circumstances.

Table 4.3

Above is the Demographic of Active Child Labourers in the study at Gadakope, Fanti Akura and Accra Town

Participants	Gender	Age (Year)	Hometown	Parents Status	Years of Working in Yeji	Drop Out of School
1	M	15	Battor	Father-Alive Mother-Dead	3	P-4
2	M	16	Big Ada	Father-Dead Mother-Dead	3	P-4
3	F	16	Winneba	Father-Dead Mother-Dead	4	P-0
4	M	17	Swedru	Father-Dead Mother-Alive	5	P-4
5	M	14	Senya Breku	Father-Alive Mother-Dead	4	P-3
6	F	16	Winneba	Father-Dead Mother-Dead	4	P-4
7	M	16	Winneba	Father-Alive Mother-Alive	4	P-5
8	M	17	Cape Coast	Father-Dead Mother-Alive	2	JHS1
9	F	15	Big Ada	Father-Alive Mother-Alive	3	P-6
10	M	18	Salpong	Father-Dead Mother-Alive	5	P-5

Socio Economic Factors of Child Labour

The socio economic factors influencing child labour are discussed in the following subsections.

Household Poverty

According to this study, household poverty is one of the key factors that usually pushed children into the labour market prematurely. Their families were struggling to make ends meet because their meagre income could not meet the high household expenditure and to provide the children with all their basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. In some cases, their parents would borrow from friends to cover basic expenses.

As a result of house poverty, their families could not afford to send them to school. So, some children were forced to work to help support their families leading to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Other children were compelled to work to provide for their own basic needs, such as buying clothes or paying for school fees. In some cases, they may also resort to child labour as a means of generating income. Here are some of the responses from five child labourers supporting this finding when they were asked: "What are some of the primary causes or conditions that pushed you to work as child labour in Yeji"?

Participant 1 (15 years)-active child labour had this to say

(Na me ntumi nya anɔpa, awia ne anwummere aduane nni dakoro na mennya atadee nnhye. Ne nyinaa ne se akorɔmfɔɔ bewia me papa ewɔ n'apofodwumaye mu, ne saa nti na ɔnni sika enti meye m'adwen se meye adwuma na mede ahwe meho).

(I hardly have three square meals daily and does not have good clothes. This is because my father lost his fishing business to theft and do not have money so I decided to work to take care of myself).

Research participant 4 (17 years)-active child labour also opined that

(Me maame bɔ ne ho mmɔden se ɔbema yen nea ehia yen wɔ abusua no mu. Na ɔntumi mpo ntua eka a ne mma de wɔ sukuu mu. Eno nti m'antumi anwie sukuu wɔ agyinapɛn nsia efiri se na ese se meye adwuma na mede hwe me ho ne abusua no).

(My mother has been struggling to provide for the family. She could not even pay her children's school fees so I could not complete primary six since I had to work and take care of myself and family).

Participant 8 (17 years)-active child labour asserted that

(Me papa wuo yi akyi, abrabɔ mu aye den ama me. Me nnamfonom na medan wɔn ansa na mensa akɔ m'ano. Eɛsan me maame adwuma a ɔnye nti, na wɔn so abre me wɔ mmoa ho. Na me wɔfa na medan no wɔ biribiara mu na ɔno nso eduruu baabi no, na ɔntumi mmoa me enam sisi yaree a ekaa no ato ho beye mfie mmiensa nie. Enti mereye adwuma na mape sika de aka me wɔfa sika kakra no ho na aboa ama manya ntetee a ebeboa ama aye mfasodee daakye).

(Since the death of my father, life has been difficult for me. I depended on friends for my livelihood since my mom wasn't working but they were fed up supporting me. I had to depend on my uncle for everything but he also at a point couldn't support due to irregularity of waist pains which has kept him from working for the past three years. So, I am working to earn money to complement my uncle's meagre income and to acquire skills that would make me more relevant in the future).

Participant 2 (16 years)-active child labour equally answered with the following response

(Manhunu m'awofɔɔ da efiri bere a ɔwoo me. Me nana barima na ɔma me ne me nuanom nson no nea ehia yen. Mprenpren yi dee eɛsan akorɔmfɔɔ a ewiaa no bere a na ɔfiri edwam reba no nti ɔnni adwuma biara ye. Enti ama abrabɔ mu aye den ama yen afiri se yen nana barima ntumi mma yen nea ehia yen. se maye ɔbarima baako ewɔ nkwadaa yi mu yi, menni biribiara ye ka se magyae sukuu na m'aboa no wɔ nsuomdwumaye mu ewɔ tadee firaw (volta lake) senea menya daadaa aduane ama me nuanom).

(I never saw my parents since I was born. My grandpa provided for me and the seven of us. But he is currently out of business due to arm robbers who attacked and collected all his money when he was returning from the market one day. So, life has been very challenging for us because my grandpa could not provide our basic needs and as the only male among the children, I had no choice than to stop schooling and assist him by working with the fishermen on the Lake Volta to get my daily bread and for the rest of my siblings).

Research participant 7 (16 years)-active child labour also says

(M'awofoɔ ntumi nkeka wɔn ho enam yaree a ebɔɔ wɔn eberɛ a wɔkɔ ayie bi wɔ wɔn kurom. Wɔn antumi anyina wɔn nnan so ewɔ saa tebea no mu efiri mfie beye nnum a atwam no. abrabɔ no mu beye den ama mmɔfra nsia a yeye ne mma efiri se wɔn antumi amma yen nea ehia yen. Se meye panin wɔ wɔn mu yi, ewɔ se meye adwuma senea amanee kyere no na menyaa sika de boa mawofoɔ no senea ebeye a, wɔ betumi ahwe mmɔfra no).

(My parents are indisposed due to strange sickness they contracted when they visited their native home town for a funeral. They never recovered and had since been in that state for the past five years. Life had been very difficult for the six of us as their children because they could not provide our basic needs. As the elder son among the children, I had to work as custom demands to compliment the meager income of my parents in order for them to be able to cater for the rest of the children).

These responses from research participants may suggest the children from poor families are more likely to engage in child labour to supplement the income of their families.

Family Size (Large Family)

It is common to find children from large families working as child labourer in the fishing business at Yeji. Most of the children belong to a family of a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10. Their families had limited resources to support everybody in the family. This had created a situation for these children to work to take care of their younger siblings. Especially older children such as the male must work to help support their families at the expense of their education and well-being. These situations have highlighted by research participants as below:

Participant 10 (18 years)-active child labour indicated that

(Me na meye panin wɔ me nnuanom mu. Ma wofoɔ bɔ mmɔden ma yen nea ehia yen na jsan sie sika de boa sɔ chwah ahodoɔ ano ma yen. M'agyae sukuu senea ebeye a meye adwuma anya sika de aboa me ho ne m'abusua. Me maame antumi, eberɛ a me papa wuiɛ no).

(I am the eldest child of my seven siblings. My parents have been struggling to provide for the needs of the family and save money to take care of other pressing issues. I was compelled to drop out of school to work here to earn an income to support myself and my family. My mother could not, when my father passed away).

Participant 8 (17 years)-active child labour said

(M'awofoɔ ewɔ mmɔfra nnwɔtwe na me papa awu. Me maame sika kakra a nyina no ntumi mmoa mma yennya nea ehia yen nyinaa nsan nhwe yen sukuu. Se meye ɔbarimaa baako ewɔ abusua no mu no, eye m'asedee se meboa abusua no ne m'adesua. Esan se apofodwuma no ye den na esan di mmerɛ pii nti ema me gyae sukuu korɔ).

(My parents have eight children, but my father is late. My mother meagre income could not provide for all the children's basic needs and education. As the only boy in the family, it is my duty to work to support my family and my education. But because the fishing work is task demanding and time consuming, I stopped schooling).

Participant 1(15 years)-active child labour had this to say

(Mewɔ annuanom nkron, na yetumi nya nneema a ye hia no wɔ abrabɔ mu. Na me ye nnwuma nketenkete de nya sika de boa m'abusua. Ansa na merebɛnya apofodwuma aye wɔ Yeji no, manyaa adwen ne honam mu haw esan sika a na esua a na menya firi me panin hɔ nti).

(I have 9 siblings and we could barely feed and enjoy the necessities of life. I used to do mania jobs to survive and help my family. Until I secured the fishing job in Yeji, I experienced emotional and psychological trauma from my master in return for meagre wages).

The quotes above illustrated the crucial role of parents with large family size and low educational attainment contributing to the persistence of child labour in the fishing sector at Yeji.

Lack of Access to Employment Opportunities

It can be inferred from the study findings that child labour in the fishing sector at Yeji is due to either lack of employment opportunities available to their parents or due to low-paying jobs, low-skilled jobs/entirely out of job. Moreover, parents doing personal businesses could not earn enough income to cover operating expenses and household expenditure have their businesses collapsed. Consequently, their parents' finances have been and could not support their families. This had led to a situation where children must work to help supplement household income, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and limited opportunities. These situations have highlighted by research participants as below:

Participant 7 (16 years)-active child labour said the following

(Efiri bere a me papa adwuma see no, abrabɔ mu yee den maa m'abusua. Abusua no ntumi ntɔ aduane, nneema a yede siesie yen ho ne aduradee. Ene nea mede boa me sukuu korɔ. Megyae sukuu yee adwuma deboa abusua).

(Since my father lost his job, life has been difficult for the family. The family could not buy foodstuff, toiletries and clothing for the family and support my education. I dropped out of school to work to support the family).

Participant 7 (16 years)-ex-child labour had this also to say

(Na me papa ye ankoreankore adwuma bi wɔ Yeji mfie bi a atwam. Na n'akatua a ɔgyee no sua se ɔde behwe abusua. ewom se na ɔrehwe se ɔbɛnya adwuam a, n'akatua ye nanso wonya. Enti meyye m'adwen se meye adwuma nkakrankakra wɔ Yeji de aboa no. akyire no, na ewɔ se megyae sukuu efiri se na adwuma no boro me so wɔ m'adesua mu. Enti ehaa me sukuu korɔ). (My father has been working in one of the private companies in Yeji for many years. His take home pay is not enough to take care of the family. Although he has tried to get a better paying job, he could not get one. So, I decided to work in Yeji for part-time to assist him. Later, I had to quit school because the pressure of the work badly affected my academic performance).

Participation 3 (17 years)-ex-child labour also asserted that

(Mawofoɔ di dwa nketenkete, na wɔde wɔn sika a ɔnya no fa keseɛ noara hye nnoɔma a wɔde ye kua mu na kakra a ebeka no nso ntumi nhwe yen wɔ asetena a emu ye den no mu).

(My parents are petty traders. They spent the churn of their income on the high cost of farm inputs and other materials and left little income which could not adequately cover the high cost of living).

Participant 2 (15 years)-ex-child labour illustrated with the following response:

(Mede mfie mmieensa yee adwuma den wo Yeji de boa me maame wo bere a egya hyehyee see n'adwuma).

(I worked as child labour in Yeji for three years to support my mother who lost her business in a fire outbreak).

Discussion

The extent studies that suggest socioeconomic factors contribute to the persistence of child labour in the productive sectors of the economy have ignored the fishing sector. From the socioeconomic perspective, poverty is seen to be the main trigger driving children into the labour market as all factors hinges on according to the findings. Because most of the children found on the lake are either there to seek employment or job opportunity to earn income for their basic needs and support their siblings, families, friends and relatives have brought them to work on the Volta Lake.

These research findings confirm that socioeconomic factors Basu et al (2000), and Samonova (2019) push children below 18 years to engage in child labour at Yeji. This evidence shows that these factors have a strong influence to drive such children into child labour in any sector of the economy. In that case, the study evidence is accurate because they are consistent with these studies. For this reason, this study suggests that this finding is valid and relevant in the fishing industry in the context of Yeji. Therefore, this result adds to the growing studies that continuously explore socioeconomic factors sustaining child labour (Ajefu, 2018; Ortiz et al., 2012) and further adds to its validity and significance in social research.

Specifically, the study observes that household poverty tends to be pushing children into labour market prematurely. This kind of situation makes their families struggle to survive. They are unable to finance household expenditures and meet children's basic needs. To this extent, poverty-stricken families restore to selling their belongings to augment household finances and also borrow to survive. In doing so, they become heavily indebted, which further deepens their poverty (Ajefu, 2018).

This result concurs with Basu et al (2000), Samonova (2014), who stress that house poverty remains a key factor of socioeconomic factor pushing several children into child labour prematurely. This may be the reason children seem to be full-time workers or work for longer hours. However, this evidence contradicts (Akhtar Abdul Hai, Ambreen Fatima & Mahpara Sadaqat (2009), and Fatima (2013), who pointed out that house poverty is not an influential socioeconomic factor compelling a child to seek employment at a tender age.

One explanation for this disagreement could be context differences and background of the research participants. As household poverty declines, their children may engage in part time work or work for short hours. Regardless, poverty still drives children from the comfort

of their homes to seek greener pasture to share the burden of their families (Avais, Wassan & Erum, 2014; Fatima, 2017).

The results of this study further explain that household poverty may exist due to limited or lack of human capital investment in terms of skills acquisition like training and educating the child. Such families appear to be sacrificing the future earnings of the children for a short-term benefit from child labour, which will be costly in the long run (Black et al., 2005; Mukherjee & Sinha, 2009; Pemberton et al., 2014). In future, the children may enter the labour market with little or low educational achievements, and earn low wages and salaries. Eventually, poorly endowed families tend to reinforce the vicious cycle of poverty from one generation to another (Basu et al., 2000).

The largeness of the family is also found to be a key contributor to the sustainability of child labour. Such families may lack family planning. This kind of situation tends to increase the financial responsibilities of the household (Abou, 2014; Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007). Consequently, the pressure on financial resources can hinder the family not meeting some of the pressing needs and other necessities of the children and make it impossible to settle bills (rent, water, electricity, and others) when they are due (Conger et al., 2002; Conger et al., 1994). One method such families adopt to alleviate the pressure and be responsible is distributing the limited financial resources according to priority in which the livelihood of the family becomes the first choice over education and others (Ajefu, 2018).

Such families do not only face financial pressure but also non-financial pressure (Abou, 2014; Ajefu, 2018; Conger et al., 2002). They face accommodation problems due to the possibility of overcrowding. Therefore, due to the overwhelming financial demands, and the unpleasant conditions associated with large family size, the income from child labour is regarded as the best alternative source of income (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005; Fassa et al., 2003). This result is consistent with previous studies (Patricia, 2016; Soares et al., 2012). They reasoned that large families have a higher tendency to approve child labour activities, but they contended that children belonging to small size families and poor households have a lower tendency to enter the labour market. However, in this study, children from both small and large families are involved in child labour.

Furthermore, this study informs us that unemployment and the non-availability of employment opportunities for parents can drive young children into child labour. That means in a competitive labour market such parents have limited access to jobs. This kind of situation negatively affects household income and livelihood of the family (Akee et al., 2010; Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005; 2010; Kis-Katos & Sparrow, 2011). Unemployed parents will struggle to provide upkeep, and support children's education and provide other essential needs (Abou, 2014; Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007). Even those with low-paying jobs seeking limited better-paying jobs seem not to make ends meet due to economic pressure like the high cost of living, high costs of utilities and high costs of other essential services (Porter, 1975).

There are similar studies indicating that unemployment and limited access to employment opportunities contribute to the prevalence of child labour which agrees with this study's result (Feizi et al., 2023; Shahateet, 2022). So, the supply of child labour tends to be

higher in families with low-paying jobs than in unemployed households with no source of income.

In addition, the result further explains the lack of demand for parental skills in the labour market. The decline in demand for such skills or competence is due to a lack of investment in human capital as they grow older, which results in lower productivity. Also, it could be due to low investment in human capital to acquire higher skills to remain competitive in the Job market. These issues have also been highlighted by Pemberton et al. (2014) that individuals whose skills are less demanded in the labour market are more likely to have limited employment opportunities and have short periods of working life and be redundant and may have a possibility to experience poverty. In this case, the finding of this study is an addition to the growing body of knowledge and empirical evidence on child labour in the fishing sector and its usefulness in practice.

Conclusion

The current study explored the perspectives of child labour victims on the socioeconomic factors of child labour on the Volta Lake. The findings indicate that the prevalence of child labour on the Volta Lake was caused by household income or poverty, the largeness of family, unemployment, and lack of access to employment opportunities. Therefore, the largeness of family improves upon the Minority group theory (Arthur, 2005; Chatterjee, 1972; Espenshade et al., 1982), while household income (poverty) and unemployment and lack of gainful job opportunities support the Human Capital Theory by their potential contributions (Garibaldi, 2006 & Lydall, 1968).

In this regard, there is a reason to believe that unemployed parents or relatives with limited access to a good-paying job tend to put children to work at a young age to financially support the family just like those children belonging to poor and large families. These findings support the study of (Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007) and ICF Macro, (2011) demonstrating that house poverty and employment are primary causes of child labour. Moreover, Chatterjee, (1972); Chatterjee & Ray, (2019) and Espenshade et al., (1982) observed that large family prioritised short term child labour income over future benefits of education. Therefore, it can be concluded that household poverty, large family and unemployment were the key contributors to the persistence of child labour on Lake Volta.

Implications, Limitation for Future Study and Recommendation

Identifying socio-economics factors that sustain child labour on the Volta Lake is a major concern for stakeholders all over the world, particularly in Ghana due to the recent increase in this phenomenon. Considering the results, all parents and relatives get a right understanding of the socioeconomic factors that tend to influence them to put their children to work at a tender age.

More especially, the findings on socioeconomic factors deepen the perspectives of parents on the consequences of allowing their socioeconomic status push them to engage their in child labour on the Volta Lake. This insight will also guide families to minimize their preference for short-term income from child labour to long-term income from the future

employment of their children. These results are also beneficial to policymakers to formulate social and economic intervention programmes to better the lives of these families.

There are limitations for future research direction. The limitation was on the topic and research setting. Child labour in the fishing sector extends to all coastal communities in Ghana like Ashieaman, Winneba, Tema Manhenyia, Battor, Bupe and others, but the study was limited to the Volta Lake in Yeji and its satellite communities due to the recent commentary of (Inside the troubled waters: the child slavery on Ghana's Lake Volta (CNN, 2019; Olden, 2021 & Talbo, 2018). Although, the findings lack the predictive power for understanding the underlying factors of child labour in other productive sectors of the economy, the findings may be useful to those seeking information on how to reduce child labour. Finally, while the findings of the present cannot be generalized to child labour in other sectors of the economy in Ghana and beyond, the findings are indicative of what stakeholders can do to remedy this social menace. The results of the current study serve as reference for child labour and its implementation practices. Therefore, some recommendations have suggested to relevant organization and other stakeholders to apply for minimize the growing rate of child labour in the fishing sectors on the Volta Lake. The study recommends that since the households play instrumental role, assemblymen, opinion and traditional leaders to educate parents, families and relatives would minimize incidence of child labour. Moreover, the government and other stakeholders should consider making child labour a subject or a topic in both the junior and senior high school curriculum and in the colleges of education, the universities to create awareness of the damaging nature of child enslavement, especially in the fisheries sector.

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