



Child labour in Ghana: Implications for children's education and health

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Child labor
Children's health
Education
Health
Parental absence
Labor Laws

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this study investigated child labour experiences of children in Ghana. Using a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 25 participants who were purposively selected. Data collected were analyzed thematically and the findings indicated that reasons why children engaged in child labour included poverty, parental absence, and poor enforcement of educational and child labour laws. The findings further revealed that children's engagement in selling on the highway could negatively affect their health and education. Based on the findings, we recommend that there should be effective implementation of educational and child labour laws in order to mitigate this menace.

1. Introduction

Many nations, including Ghana have enacted legal instruments, such as the [Children's Act of Ghana \(1998\)](#) and the [Human Trafficking Act \(2005; \[as amended in 2010\]\)](#) just to mention a few, to criminalise child labour given its criminalization in the African Sub-region and globally. Internationally, the [Convention on the Rights of the Child – CRC \(1989\)](#) under article 32, clause 1, prohibits the exploitation of children through labour. Similar prohibition is noted by the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children \(1990\)](#) under article XV, clause 1. The criminalization of child labour; an activity that is often economical in nature is a laudable achievement as it could be on the grounds that it has been found to be detrimental to children's development and wellbeing ([Holgado et al., 2014](#)). No matter the form child labour takes, it deprives the children involved, their rights to education and healthy development, among others ([Thu Le & Homel, 2015](#)).

In Ghana, 21.8% of children between the ages of five and seventeen years are engaged in child labour with additional 14.2% involved in hazardous forms of child labour ([Ghana Statistical Service, 2014](#)). Defined as an economic activity engaged in by children, child labour is hazardous, detrimental and exploitative to children's health, development and deprives them of their education ([International Labour Organisation - ILO, 2002](#)). It adversely affects children's commitment to education in terms of school attendance, enrolment and performance ([Odonkor, 2007](#)). In rural settings of developing countries where more than 70% of the world's child labour occurs ([ILO, 2002](#)), it tends to be a moderate-intense activity that makes children part-time pupils instead of being regular at school every working day of the week ([Beegle et al., 2005](#)).

A study by [Anumaka \(2012\)](#) in the Nebbi District of North-East Uganda noted the negative impact of child labour on the academic performance of children. The study involved 2307 pupils preparing for Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) and it was found that many of the children who performed poorly were those engaged in labour. Similarly, in Brazil, [Bezerra, Kassouf and Arends-Kuenning \(2009\)](#), found that children who worked seven hours or more per day had a 10% decrease in their test scores, in comparison to students who did not engage in any kind of work. Moreover, a household survey conducted by [Heady \(2003\)](#) found a negative relationship between child labour and objective measures of reading and mathematics competence in Ghana.

In terms of health, [Porter, Blaufuss and Acheampong \(2011\)](#) noted that all the trades children engaged in on the streets required them to carry loads on their head and this adversely affected their health. Some of the negative health effects of carrying heavy loads according to [Porter et al. \(2013\)](#) are energy cost of head-loading, long-term biomechanical impacts, risk of acute injury, and physical deficiencies. Also, [Omokhodion et al. \(2005\)](#) established that the disadvantage of working as a child could lead to ill health and road traffic accidents. Children working on highways are likely to experience these health complications because they carry heavy loads for almost the period they spend each day selling on the streets.

Recognizing child labour as a global canker, some measures have been put in place internationally and nationally to lessen its intensity. The United Nations (UN), United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) and ILO are some of the key international organizations that have made attempts to control the prevalence of child labour through legislative instruments, such as the CRC, Convention on Worst Forms of Child

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Labour and Slavery Convention. In July 1995 in Bangladesh for instance, UNICEF, ILO and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association concluded an agreement to end child labour in the country's garment factories (UNICEF, 1997).

The UNICEF, ILO and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters agreement led to the release of child workers in some of the garment factories and the allocation of stipends provided by the Association, UNICEF and ILO to enable them attend school. As of 1998, 10,500 children had been removed from factory work under the programme and about 80% were enrolled in community-based schools organized by two Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). A follow-up agreement was designed to keep these children in school beyond the age of 14 years. Furthermore, UNICEF has supported the creation of the Parliamentarian Front for the Rights of Children and Adolescents, which monitors legislations affecting children (UNICEF, 1997).

At the Regional level, Ghana joined other nations in 1999 in a 3-year ILO/IPEC -International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour- a regional project to eliminate the trafficking of children for labour purposes within the sub region. In 2000, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Government of Ghana with ILO/IPEC to formulate a national policy and plan of action to combat child labour (Kukwa, 2013). All these are evidence of the nation's efforts at tackling child labour.

Given the existence of child labour despite statutory provisions, this current study investigated experiences of child labour among children who hawked on a highway in Accra, Ghana. Specifically, the study aimed to explore (a) reasons why children are engaged in child labour, (b) how child labour affects children's education and (c) how child labour affects children's health. This is important because as noted by Holgado et al. (2014), child labour is a disinvestment of social and human capital, as it compromises the development of the individual, as well as hinders the development of skills, abilities and knowledge necessary to make a significant contribution to society. Furthermore, this study is useful because many of the studies on child labour in Ghana focused on areas, such as artisanal fishing (e.g., Hamenoo and Sottie, 2015) and cocoa-growing (Nyavor, 2011).

1.1. Theoretical underpinnings

Considering that child labour is a complex issue, its explanation has to be done within a broader context. As noted by Pierik and Houwerzijl (2006), contextualizing a social phenomenon requires consideration of social, legal, economic and cultural issues. Although the issues could be discussed independently, it is important to perceive them as interactive as well (Liao & Hong, 2010). The current study is therefore approached from Bronfenbrenner's, (1979) ecological systems perspective, which perceives the environment as being made of systems that are interactive and interwoven in nature. From an ecological systems perspective, children who engage in economic activities (children selling on the highway in this context) are inseparable part of their environment. The environment according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) consists of the macro-, exo-, meso-, and micro- systems. Each of these systems can be taken as a whole with their own subsystems (Algood et al., 2011).

The macro system from an ecological systems perspective is a cultural pattern for the social structures and actions in the other system levels (Liao & Hong, 2010). It is important to emphasize specific cultural beliefs that could influence processes at the micro systems level (Algood et al., 2011). For instance, the culture of kin fostering by blood relatives could serve as an avenue for child exploitation, when its intended purpose of supporting needy children is not adhered to (Sossou & Yagtiba, 2009). In Ghana and other West African countries, many fostered children are exploited in forced labour on cocoa plantations, mines and quarries, as well as being used as beggars, street hawkers and head porters (Sossou & Yagtiba, 2009).

The exo-system is both formal and informal, and consists of relationships between two separate systems of which the child is in direct

contact with one (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Pittenger, Huit & Hansen, 2016). At the exo-system level, parenting stress and lack of parental social support are some of the factors that could influence child exploitation (Algood et al., 2011). While the Ghanaian extended family system is like a social security net that serves as a buffer to many economically deprived and children in need of care, in recent times, the role of the extended family has dwindled, due partly to a shift in social institutions, from being community oriented to being more individualistic (Kumado & Gockel, 2003). In addition, there are limited child care benefits or state support to families with children. In the absence of these social support schemes (both formal and informal) children are sometimes required to work to support households when parental efforts are not enough.

Furthermore, the meso-system is the interrelationship between at least two systems of which the child is a member (Liao & Hon, 2010). The relationship between the family and the educational system has direct impact on a child engaging in labour or being in the classroom. However, having educational policies that aim at making education accessible to all in a nation does not necessarily make it affordable to all. Many issues, including economic hardships, distance of families from schools and the cost of education, impact on families' ability to access education in Ghana (Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equality, CREATE, 2007). Though many parents desire to educate their children, they are compelled to opt for skill training instead of formal education due to their inability to support their children beyond the basic school. The practice of skill acquisition Afenyadu (2010) noted, could be exploitative in nature considering the early age at which children are exposed to harsh work conditions.

The micro system is the fundamental unit (e.g., family, school) where the child develops and consists of activities, social roles and interpersonal relationships of which the child is directly a part (Bronfenbrenner 1977). The family environment, specifically family poverty could be the main reason children engage in labour at the microsystems level (Liao & Hong, 2010). While there are child protective laws, such as the Children's Act (1998) and the Human Trafficking Act (2005) that forbid child labour, the need to survive in poor households has forced many children to work. As Pittenger, Huit and Hansen (2016) explained, the value of work and education to families [at the moment] informs their choice.

The environment (family, school etc.) in which children are nurtured is important in determining their wellbeing. Thus, child labour could be understood by considering the various systems (macro, exo, meso and micro levels) that influence children development and wellbeing. It is therefore important to give voice to children experiencing child labour in these to share their experiences.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

The study employed a qualitative design as a means of exploring and understanding child labour. Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative research approach is most suitable in finding meanings ascribed phenomenon by those who experienced it. The design was useful as it enabled the researchers to gain in-depth information about the phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

2.2. Study site

The study was conducted in Pokuase in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It is one of the major peri-urban towns in the Ga-West Municipality of the Greater Accra Region with a population of about 14,223 (50.2% males and 49.8% females, GSS, 2014). Pokuase has a low literacy rate of about 66% for males and 34% for females (GSS, 2014). The influx of immigrants has created a more diverse population with Northern immigrants living among the local Ga and Akan ethnic

groups (Women's Trust, 2010). Many residents in Pokuase participate in the informal economy, working as petty traders, hairdressers and shopkeepers. Other economic activities, include subsistence agriculture and sand winning (Women's Trust, 2010).

2.3. Study participants

The study participants were purposively selected and they were children and key informants. Included in the study were twenty-five participants comprising fourteen children (56% of the participants), two teachers, four parents, two social welfare officers, one Assembly Member of the area, one Christian Pastor and one Market Queen - female leader of traders in the market- making a total of 44% of the study population. Children selected for the study were (a) aged 10–17 years, (b) able to speak English or Twi (dominant Ghanaian language), (c) enrolled in school and (d) engaged in hawking along the highway at least three times in a week. The sample size was in line with Hammersley (2013) and Marshall et al.'s (2013) assertion that saturation could be reached in a qualitative study with a sample size of between twenty to thirty participants.

For the key informants, their ages ranged between 35 and 55 years and had been in service for more than 10 years. Sixteen (64%) of the participants were females and the remaining nine (36%) were males. Many of the children who engaged in hawking on the Pokuase highway were girls. As noted by the ILO (2002), about 90% of child domestic workers are girls. In this study, it was found that the children sold different items, including sachet water, soft drinks, pawpaw, sugarcane, and handkerchiefs. Out of the 11 key informants, four were guardians of some of the children. Some of the key informants were married, others were divorced. In terms of career, the guardians were carpenters, traders, electrical workers and hairdressers.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using an interview guide that was developed by the researchers. This approach enabled probing of issues raised and provided opportunity for participants to express their views about the topic under study (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Interviews involving children were conducted in their homes with the permission of their parent(s) or legal guardians at a time that was convenient for both the children and their parents/guardians. Although the interviews were done in the homes of the children, their guardians were not present at the interviews. This enabled the children to express their individual views with regard to their experiences. Key informants were either interviewed at home or at their place of work depending on their preference and convenience. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 min for children and 45–60 min for key informants. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The generated data was analyzed thematically using the six phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) based on the objectives of the study.

2.5. Ethical consideration

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and written consent was obtained from each participant. For the children, in addition to the child assent form which each child completed, permission was sought from their legal guardians before the interviews. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were assured that they could opt out at any stage of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by concealing the identity of participants.

2.6. Findings

The study aimed to explore the reasons why children engaged in child labour, how child labour affects children's education and how

child labour affects children's health. The findings are presented in the next section.

2.7. Reasons why children engage in child labour

The study found that the following reasons contributed to children's engagement in hawking on the Pokuase highway: (a) poverty, (b) parental absence (death, divorce or separation), and (c) poor enforcement of educational and child labour laws.

2.7.1. Poverty

The children's narratives indicated that although they were enrolled in school, they had to sell on the highway mainly because their basic needs at home, as well as some of their school materials could not be provided by their parents/guardians. Also, according to some key informants, if parents were able to provide school materials, many of the children would have been in school like their peers who were not on the streets. In relation to poverty, two of the children asserted:

My parents are unable to provide me with clothing, shoes, printing fees, (examination fee at school) and other school related expenses. I therefore have to sell to pay for such fees myself (Male, handkerchiefs seller).

I live with my parents, but because they don't have money, they said I should sell to help buy our school items like books and shoes. My father is trying his best, but he alone cannot do everything for me and my siblings (Female, sugarcane seller).

Many of the key informants explained that children were compelled to sell on the streets due to poverty. A social welfare officer stated that “there are several reasons, but the main reason is poverty. Out of poverty, a parent or guardian may tell a child to sell something to assist”. Similarly, a Market Queen noted:

Some of the children you see on the streets selling are compelled to do so out of hunger. I don't think it is their wish to do that dangerous job at that age...but if they don't sell on the streets, they may die of hunger due to poverty.

Also, a parent who experienced financial hardship believed selling on the highway was an exciting activity for her child:

She is selling because of the hard economic situation I find myself in. She sells the water to support herself and she is happy doing it. The money she gets from the pure water is what I save and add some to it to buy her books, dresses, and other things for her.

Furthermore, participants indicated that in addition to paying their school-related and other expenses from the money they earned from selling, some children had to support their families. A parent noted: “it is because of hard times in life that I asked her to sell to assist me feed her and enroll her in school. I don't get a lot of income from my work, that is why”. Also, one of the child labourers asserted:

Even though I live with my parents, I still have to sell to provide some of my needs and support the family. My parents are not able to provide my textbooks, school uniform and school bag. My school uniform is very old, and I don't feel comfortable in it. As for school bag, I don't have (Female, pawpaw seller).

Adding his voice, one of the teachers included in the study explained child labour from children's rights perspective. She said “I have taught pupils who were in this situation; I got to know that they engaged in these jobs to support their parents. This is a serious problem because it is against their rights”.

The experiences of the children regarding their engagement in selling on the high way due to parental poverty clearly demonstrates how issues in the micro system (i.e. immediate family unit) of which the

child is a part could affect the child.

2.7.2. Parental absence due to death, divorce or separation

Parents could be absent in a child's life through death, divorce or separation. The death of a parent (s) could become a turning point in children's lives as it can lead to inadequate care by other family members. In such situations, the children would have to provide for themselves and support their immediate families. A boy selling handkerchiefs on the highway narrated 'I sell on the highway because my father is dead leaving mother to take care of us. She is sick and unable to work. I have to sell to support the family'. Likewise, a girl selling sachet water said:

I sell on the highway because my parents are dead and I am staying with my mother's sister. My aunt told me she doesn't have money so I should sell pure water in order to earn some money for school and buy other things I need.

A parent further explained that her status as a divorcee compelled her to involve her children in selling on the highway:

My children are doing this because of economic hardship. I trained as a hair dresser but I don't have my own saloon so I do work and pay with a friend. My divorced husband too does not bring money every month. Sometimes after six months, he will send me GHC 100. It is not enough, so two of them sell to help me (Female, parent).

As a community leader, the Assembly member of the area noted child labour is as a result of broken homes:

Some of these children come from broken homes. They don't normally get good parental care and it is difficult for them to have one meal a day. I have been an assembly member for about 12 years now; there are a lot of such cases. Sometimes women come to complain that the father of their children is not performing his responsibilities and because of that they are compelled to ask their children to help by selling on the highway.

In like manner, a member of the clergy who has advised parents on several family issues explained:

What I have observed over the years is that some men are not responsible. After giving birth to a child; they leave everything on the women. You will see a woman struggling alone to cater for her children. These women are compelled to send their children to the streets to sell and bring money home (Male, Pastor).

The absence of parents in a child's life could not have impacted their lives to the point of pushing them on to the streets to sell, had there been other formal and informal support systems available (i.e. child maintenance and kin fostering). Even though kin fostering system (a meso structure) was useful to this effect some years back, currently, this has lost its value.

2.7.3. Poor enforcement of educational and child labour Laws

From the study, it was evident that poor enforcement of educational and child labour laws contributed to children selling on the highway. A male Social Welfare Officer recounted, 'you find so many children selling on the highway and no one questions them or does anything about it; and their parents walk free just because child labour laws are not effectively implemented'. In addition, by acknowledging their role in providing interventions to children engaged in child labour, a female Social Welfare Officer noted 'many children are selling on the highway because laws against child labour are not fully implemented and institutions to ensure that the laws are enforced like ours are weak and under resourced.

Aside child labour laws, a teacher expounded on how the failure to

implement laws in other sectors, such as education could lead to child labour:

If we say basic education is free, compulsory and universal in the country, then laws to ensure that it really is compulsory must be enforced, but this is not so in Ghana.

Parents allow their wards to sell during school hours and nothing is done to them

(Female, teacher).

The above findings suggest that, a failure at the macro level of society has a trickle-down effect on the individuals in the society. Perhaps, had child labour and educational laws been enforced as they should in the Ghanaian society, many children would have been in school without having to sell on the high way.

2.8. Child labour and children's education

Child labour affects children in diverse ways. Children engaged in labour are likely to do so at the expense of their development as they may be deprived of their right to education. The study revealed that children engaged in selling on the highway performed poorly in class. A female participant said 'since I started selling, I have been repeated twice because of poor academic performance, which makes me feel bad. Sometimes I feel like quitting school because I sometimes feel embarrassed as a result of my performance in school. Similarly, a male participant added:

I don't perform well in class tests and exams and sometimes my friends laugh at me. At first, I was doing well in class. When I was not selling the pure water, I was among the best fifteen pupils in class but now because of selling; I am always last which makes me feel very bad.

A key informant who was concerned about the children's inability to combine work and schooling had this to say:

It is very hard for children to combine work with education. Even most adults find it difficult to combine work with education. I have had children like that in my class before and their performance was nothing good to write home about. To me, selling and working affect every aspect of the child's life especially their academic performance. I have had many pupils who used to sell before and after school. Sometimes, the parents themselves who made them engage in the businesses will come to find out why their children are not performing well (Female, teacher).

Another teacher (male) indicated that many of the children who engaged in economic activities usually came to school feeling tired and did not have much time to learn:

I remember in one of my class, the performance of some children was always poor. They will never do their homework and come to class in the morning looking very tired. I found out they were engaged in activities, such as selling pure water and sugarcane after school on the highway. As a result, they were not having time to study.... When it happens like this, the teacher may perform his/her part but when it comes to the part of the child it becomes difficult.

A Key informant from the Department of Social Welfare gave an account on how detrimental child labour was to children's education:

Children's engagement in selling on the highway has negative impact on their education. On one hand, they may not be given the opportunity to be enrolled in school by caregivers and on the other hand, those who may be lucky to be enrolled may not get time to study and may feel tired in class. In such situation they cannot concentrate in class and they cannot perform better because they spend a lot of their time selling (A Male Social Welfare Officer).

Affirming the negative effects of child labour on the education of his child, a father (key informant) of one of the participants expressed his frustration:

I pray this stops one day, this is not what I want for my child, but what can I do about it? It affects her studies a lot, because she uses her study time for selling pure water. Previously, I always make sure she learns before she sleeps but now she is unable to, due to tiredness. Her performance over the years has not been good and the truth is she doesn't study like she used to, I pray her performance gets better.

Furthermore, tiredness from the previous day's work did not only deny some children of study time at home, but also made them sleep during teaching hours at school, as a female teacher said *'such children normally sleep in class. While I am busily teaching, some of them would be sleeping because they sell at night along the highway and did not have enough rest at home'*. Likewise, a participant reiterated:

By the time I am done selling, it will be almost 10:00 pm. When I get home, I have to wash the utensils. I sleep around 11:30 pm and wake up the following morning around 5:00 am. Due to this I always sleep in class; making it difficult for me to understand what is taught
(Female, plantain chips seller)

In support of the above, the assembly member echoed:

Working children are affected badly. Some children start selling as early as 5:00 am and make sure they are in school by 9:00 am, why won't they sleep in class. They are always tired as a result and this makes their rate of absorption very low. No matter how the teacher teaches, such children cannot absorb anything, which affect their overall performance.

Moreover, in some instances, child labour may lead to school dropout as it encourages lateness to school and truant behaviours from students. A female teacher said *'I remember a boy and two other girls, selling on the highway before and after school who were not performing well. The two girls stopped schooling but the boy completed with a very poor grade'*. In addition, a male teacher stated: *'the shame of continuous repetition makes some of them eventually dropout of school. In this school, abysmal performance in promotion exams leads to class repetition. Its persistency embarrasses them so they drop out.'*

The findings above reflect an interaction at the meso level, where a dysfunction in one system influences situations in the other systems that it has a relationship with. The children's narrative clearly shows how the inability of families to support their wards in school and the ineffective implementation of labour laws has left children to sell on the high way. This has in effect affected the performance of the children in school.

2.9. Child labour and children's health

Children are susceptible to countless health complications due to their physic and weaker strength as compared to adults. It was found in this study that children who were exposed to dangerous and hazardous activities, such as selling on the highway were prone to a myriad of health complications. Some participants indicated that due to the long hours they spent selling in the hot sun, they had health complications. As a female participant recounted: *'this work affects my health a lot because, I regularly fall sick after walking and selling under the hot sun. I normally experience headache and body pain. Similarly, a male participant echoed:*

Sachet water business is not good in the morning, so I always sell in the afternoon because, during that time, people are very thirsty and they buy. Sometimes the sun is very hot and I had to sell because I need the money and this makes my head ache very much (Female, Sachet water seller).

In addition, sharing her experience, a child noted: *'sometimes I feel pains in my eyes and some fluid comes from my eyes whilst I am not crying. It is because of the smoke from vehicles and dust that enter my eyes when I come to sell and I cough as well.* In line with the negative health effects, a mother stated that *'my child sometimes complains of headache and body pains, but when I give her pain killer, she gets relieved and the next day she*

goes back to sell'. A male teacher also said that *'children who have been selling on the highway are not healthy; they look tired and normally complain of headache in school. Sometimes they complain of their eyes and even stomach ache.* Another teacher added *'some turn out to fall sick and as a result they will come to school today, and tomorrow they will not come due to sickness.* According to the Pastor included in this study, the night selling was his major concern because *'selling there at night, the children are bitten by mosquitoes so they can easily contract malaria'*.

For other key informants, the weight of the items children carried on their heads coupled with managing the vehicular traffic was very challenging. A market queen mentioned:

From my observation, it has a lot of effects on their health. Some are carrying heavy loads hawking and falling down in the process at times. Some passengers will be buying and you see children chasing cars to serve them. When I see all these, I get worried. It is tiring and they inhale a lot of dust, which could affect their health.

It also came to light that children selling on the highway sometimes got involved in motor accidents as shared by participants:

I have witnessed accidents on the highway and I have also had an accident before. A motor bike knocked me down. My past experience scares me sometimes but because I also want to further my education to at least senior high, I have to continue selling on the highway. This is not what I want to do but I am compelled to do it due to the situation at home (Male, handkerchiefs seller).

The highway is very busy with cars moving here and there and some of my friends have been involved in accidents before; both cars and motor bicycles knocked them down. Some died instantly and others were rushed to the hospital (Female, plantain chips seller).

Among the many health effects of selling on the high way are skin rashes, coughs and joint aches. A female participant said *'the street is full of different kinds of sicknesses. I have been treating skin rashes for a while now and I believe I got it because of the contact I had with someone while selling on the street'*. Another added:

Hmmm...look at my palm and arms. Skin rashes are common here because if one or two is affected, it spreads to most of us. Last time, one woman told us that when one has skin rashes he or she should stay home to prevent it from spreading but the problem is, if you stay home, what will you eat? (Male, Sugarcane seller).

The well-being of individuals is dependent on many situations including their living circumstances. As found by the study, the exploitative activities the children are exposed to has grievous consequences on their health. The health status of the children is thus, as a result of the negative relationship between the family unit (micro structure) and the economic systems (macro unit) of the Ghanaian society. Had the economic status of the parents/guardians of the children been favourable, the children's needs could have been met without they having to work.

3. Discussion of findings

The thrust of the study was to explore child labour experiences of children in Pokuase. The study found that poverty was the major reason children engaged in selling on the highway. Similar findings were reported by Odonkor (2007), who utilized a qualitative approach to explore factors that contributes to children's engagement in labour in eight cocoa growing communities in rural Ghana. The study included government officials, non-governmental organizations, school children, parents and leaders of the selected communities. The current study's findings also confirm the study of Osment (2014) in India and Nigeria, which used secondary data with emphasis on concepts, such as child labour, poverty, education and public health of child labour. Osment (2014) concluded that poverty was one of the major factors of child

labour. Rena (2009) also reported that poverty compelled children to engage in economic activities in order to make ends meet, based on an exploratory study using systematic literature review. In this study, evidence showed that children were likely to engage in labour based on the directives of their parents. Also, it was found that the inability of parents/guardians, especially divorced and single parents to provide for their families led them to encourage their children to contribute to families' income through selling on the high way.

As noted by Feigben (2010) in his study conducted in Northern Ghana, low income families may find it difficult to provide for all family needs, making child labour significant in increasing the family income. Some reports (e.g., ILO, 2002) have linked intense child labour to rural settings of low and middle income developing countries (Putnick & Bornstein, 2015). In a quantitative study involving 186,795 families with children between the ages of 7 and 14 years across 30 low-middle income countries, Putnick and Bornstein (2015) linked child labour to the socio-economic status of the nation in which the child lives. While the current study supports the findings of these two studies, it further demonstrates that, the involvement of a child in labour is not only dependent on the economic status of the country he or she lives in, but the immediate family (micro system) as well. As noted by HE (2016), the higher the income of a child's parent, the less likely that child would engage in labour and vice versa.

Furthermore, the study found that children's engagement in work affected their education negatively. This is consistent with the findings of Bezerra et al. (2009); HE (2016) and Heady (2003), whose studies reported similar findings. For instance, Bezerra et al. (2009), whose quantitative study was based on the Brazilian school achievement test data noted that children who worked seven hours or more per day had a 10% decrease in their test scores, in comparison to other students who did not engage in any kind of work. Working and schooling come with double pressure, which children are likely to find difficult to bear. Consequently, they may put much attention and effort on the work they are engaged in at the expense of their education, which could result in poor academic performance.

In addition, the findings of the study revealed that child labour, such as children selling on the streets leads to truancy and absenteeism. This agrees with the studies of Anumaka (2012) who reported that child labour prevents children from arriving at school on time, absenteeism, and poor examination results or performances. The output of a child in school which is a direct result of time spent studying, as this study found, is often influenced by happenings outside the child's control. Directly, a child is responsible for her educational performance. However, when the absence of basic school supplies and food compels the child to engage in economic activities, then focus would be redirected to the larger society (exo and macro systems). Generally, if parents/guardians earned enough income, they could have provided for their children's basic needs. Yet still, the inability of the government of Ghana to provide school supplies for some children, result in many children lacking school supplies and eventually finding themselves on the streets instead of attending school regularly.

Further, child labour, such as children selling on the streets could be detrimental to the health and lives of the children. Children's engagement in street selling exposes them to accidents, which could lead to injuries and sometimes death. It could also expose them to diseases, such as headache, cough and skin rashes among others. A similar finding reported by Omokhodion et al. (2005) indicated that the disadvantage of working as a child could lead to ill health and road traffic accidents. Omokhodion et al. (2005) based their conclusion on a cross-sectional study carried out in a large market at Ibandan, Nigeria involving 225 children comprising 132 females and 93 males aged 8–17 years using questionnaire. Likewise, Porter et al. (2013) in a comprehensive review of literature with emphasis on biomechanics and psycho-social impact of load carrying, noted that carrying loads on the head comes with both short and long term health complications. In its entirety, children's involvement in labour, such as selling on the

highway is dangerous to their health and overall development.

Although child labour is detrimental to children's wellbeing, the importance of this study to some extent, lies in the finding that some children used the money they accumulated from selling on the highway to further their education and meet their basic needs. However, other studies, such as Hamenoo and Sottie (2015) on hazardous child labour in the Ghanaian artisanal fishing industry as well as Sossou and Yagtiba (2009) on child labour on cocoa farms across West Africa noted that children worked longer hours under deplorable conditions, and these children had no access to the income generated from their labour. As noted in Hamenoo and Sottie's (2015) study, the beneficiaries of the children's labour were the fishermen and sometimes blood relatives, but not the children themselves. For many of the children included in this current study because the proceeds of their labour was used to provide for them as the study found could be the key reason why they continued selling on the highway despite its hazardous nature.

4. Conclusions and implications

The findings of the study have highlighted the reasons as well as the dangers associated with children's engagement in selling on the highway. It outlines poverty, parental absence and poor law enforcement as some of the reasons for children's engagement in selling on the highway. Child labour, as found in this study and other extant studies, is exploitative and deprives children of their health and education, among others. Engaging children in labour at the expense of their education is tantamount to depriving them of their development. Additionally, children's engagement in selling on the highway could cost them their lives as it is possible to be knocked down by vehicles while running in between vehicles in traffic and must be mitigated.

Given the findings of the study, it would be useful if law enforcement agencies like the Ghana Police Service enforce all legal provisions (i.e., Human Trafficking Act, 2005 and the Children's Act 1998) to ensure the protection of children from exploitation. Also, poor households with children of school going age could be supported by the government of Ghana through the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Program [LEAP]. Furthermore, the Department of Social Welfare and Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDA's) should collaborate to educate, sensitize and encourage parents of the dangers involved in exposing children to economic activities, such as selling on the streets. Moreover, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and other stakeholders like micro finance companies should organize frequent training programmes for petty traders and provide soft loans to help needy parents access capital for trading.

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