



An Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Curbing Child Abuse, Trafficking, and Labour in Nigeria


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ABSTRACT	Original Research Article	
<p>There is a need to explore if there are improvements when it comes to attending to different issues that children face in the Nigerian space which always impede their rights. In this discourse, the extent to which legislation has been able to manage child abuse, trafficking, and labour will be investigated. The study also investigates the prevalence of child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria in the 21st century; and determines the capabilities of local and international policies in promoting the fundamental human rights of children in Nigeria. This study adopts the secondary method of data collection which is concerned with assessing data through secondary sources. The interpretive research philosophy is engaged which gives room for the systematic analysis of robust findings. It has been found that there is still a prevailing rate in the number of children that are faced with trafficking forced labour and abuse in Nigeria, regardless of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It has been recommended that awareness promotion through the use of television and face-to-face means about the subject should be promoted.</p> <p>Keywords: Child abuse, Human trafficking, Human right, Child labour, Universal declaration.</p>	<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 01-03-2025</p> <p>Accepted: 02-05-2025</p> <p>Published: 10-05-2025</p>	
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	<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>On the event of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), there are more debates on whether there have been some sets of positive experiences and developments for maintaining the rights of people in Nigeria. Human rights have to do with the freedom that people should exhibit in the process of living in a given society (OHCHR, 2024). Some of the prominent human rights in the world today in tune with the submission of the United Nations are freedom from slavery, freedom from torture, the right to life, liberty, the right to work and education, and freedom of opinion and expression (UN, 2024). All these are pointers to the fact that humans must live without any form of discrimination or segregation whatsoever. However, there is a need to explore if there are improvements when it comes to attending to different issues that children faced in the Nigerian space which always impeded their rights, especially during the 75th anniversary of the UDHR. The three areas of human rights that will be investigated in this study are child abuse, children trafficking and child labour.</p>	
	<p>Child abuse is the sexual, psychological, and emotional neglect of children by their parents, caregivers, or people in society (Garstang, Eatwell, Sidebotham, & Taylor, 2021). Cruelty to children has been found to negatively affect the social and emotional development of children. It is a form of mental slavery where the children express harsh privation and torture which leads to sadness and fear among children (Garstang <i>et al.</i>, 2021). In some cases, it has been found that when parents do not have time for their children, they put them in the care of friends and families where they tend to be abused. As this study unfolds, the prevalence in the rate of child abuse in Nigeria will be investigated. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), child maltreatment or child abuse is a form of emotional and/or physical sexual abuse, ill-treatment, and negligent treatment that can hinder the growth, development, and survival of the child (WHO, 2024). Scanning across these forms of child abuse, the study will explore if there is a reduction in the rate of child abuse in Nigeria.</p>	

Another aspect of human rights that is investigated in this study based on the 75th anniversary of the UDHR is child trafficking. As the names imply, child trafficking and forced labour have been linked to the inability of children to have access to education. It has been linked to the insecurity of our children and other health and sociological challenges. The education and health of our children and youths are critical ingredients in self and national development. Article 3a of the UN protocol which is the current internationally accepted definition of child trafficking developed in consultation with the government and a wide range of international organisations working in the field of human rights is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a person using force or other forms of coercion, of abduction of fraud or deception, the abuse of power or position of vulnerability, or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation. Child trafficking and forced labour as observed among school-going children can be described as a situation where children are faced with services and labour to find food and survival for themselves or the larger family, whereas they are made to travel from one location to another to render these compelled services (Alsalem et al., 2019).

Trafficking and forced labour activities affect children's health and personal development; it also interferes with their schooling. Such activities as; helping parents around the home, assisting family business, or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays contribute to children's development and the welfare of their families and hence come under the UN Protocol Article 3a to be regarded as child labour (Gonzalez, Bethencourt Mirabal, & McCall, 2024). However, it is arguable that these activities could be referred to as child labour activities. Indeed, the child is not just meant to be seen as immature. He or she is meant to be seen as a great potential to make a nation better and bigger. The is a seed of greatness in every child and this is one of the reasons why both the teachers, parents, and the community at large should attend to grooming without underestimating their potential to become great in life.

Observations have shown that all leaders that exist today were once children and were taught and groomed by the elderly. Gonzalez *et al.*, (2024) claimed that when these children are introduced to child labour, then, the whole essence of their existence is nullified and stamped upon. In this discourse, the extent to which legislation has been able to manage child abuse, trafficking, and labour will be investigated.

Statement of the Problem

The 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a hallmark of excellence when it comes to ensuring that human rights are acknowledged and respected. The UDHR also covers

a spectrum of children's fundamental needs encircling their entitlement to healthcare, education, protection from discrimination, violence and access to justice. However, while the UDHR covers ensuring that human rights are expected in 196 countries of the world, there is a need to study the realities and implementation of human rights in Nigeria.

Child abuse, trafficking, and labour have become notorious in this part of the world- children's rights are stamped upon. Forced labour relates to a situation when children are forced to carry out activities that they do not like, thus damaging the biological, intellectual, and physical abilities of such children. Some of the issues that necessitated the findings of the present study include the increasing rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria as well as poverty which tends to increase the rate of child abuse, child trafficking, and child labour, regardless of the 75th anniversary of UDHR. According to a report by UNICEF, there are more than 20 million out-of-school children in Nigeria. In the same vein, 1 of every 5 children in Nigeria are not in school (UNICEF, 2024). In the same vein, the role that the government plays in reducing the menace has not been consistently reported as effective.

Studies (Alsalem et al., 2019; Gonzalez *et al.*, 2024) revealed that the victims of child trafficking are tricked, forced, threatened, or otherwise coerced into moving to a situation in which they are then exploited for labour, sexual acts, domestic services, identity abuse, removal of organs or other criminal acts. In the same vein, the failure of society to eradicate poverty is one of the main causes of child labour making the children exposed to all forms of violence and unease. Also, this is not unlinked to the menace in the society that the National Laws, Regulations, and Acts are against. It has been suspected that certain demographical factors facilitate child trafficking and forced labour. However, empirical studies are yet to be equivocal as to the factors and to what extent they facilitate child trafficking, child labour, and abuse- especially after the 75th anniversary of UDHR.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this study is to explore the effectiveness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in eliminating child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria. The specific objectives guiding the findings of the study are to;

- i. Assess the factors that aid child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria.
- ii. Investigate the prevalence of child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria in the 21st century.
- iii. Determine the capabilities of local and international policies in promoting the fundamental human rights of children in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The main question that is asked in this study is:

How effective is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in eliminating child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria?

The following questions have been asked to guide the findings of the study.

- i. What are the factors that aid child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria?
- ii. What is the level of prevalence of child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria in the 21st century?
- iii. What are the capabilities of local and international policies in promoting the fundamental human rights of children in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the secondary method of data collection which is concerned with assessing data through secondary sources. Hence, the interpretive research philosophy is engaged in the study which gave room for the systematic analysis of robust findings. Some of the databases that were engaged for the collection of data in this study are Research Gate, Pub Med, Science Direct, and Scopus among others. In the same vein, datasets such as books, textbooks, journals, and educational media among others. To this end, the deductive research approach is used in the study as data generation was done from “general” to “specific”. More so, proper data sorting was done as a way of engaging critical analysis in the study research. The study search strategy is presented in Table 1.1. and 1.2.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Parameters	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Topics	The level of prevalence of child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria in the 21 st century; and the capabilities of local and international policies in promoting the fundamental human rights of children in Nigeria.	Any theme that does not align with any of the themes will be excluded from the search button.
Publications types	Well-referenced studies. Journals that are peer-reviewed and have structured abstracts. Websites that offer viable information to the study.	Studies that are not well referenced. Journals that are not peer-reviewed and have structured abstracts.
Keywords	Human rights, child abuse, trafficking, and labour	Any keyword that is not relevant to the study.
Language of publications	English Language	Any language aside from English.
Time of publication	2010 to 2024	Before the year 2010

The inclusion and exclusion criteria presented in Figure 1 show how the findings in the study have been gathered based on the objectives of the study.

Table 2: Boolean Operator

S/N	Theme Search	Or	Alternative Search	among	Population	in	Country
1	Abuse, trafficking, and forced labour	Or	Maltreatment, discrimination, and segregation	among	Children	in	Nigeria
2	Capabilities of policies	or	Roles of legislation	among	Children	in	Nigeria

The content analysis will be used in this study. This includes the collection, sorting, and decoding of data based on the needed themes. An interpretation and discussion of the findings will also be done.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: What are the factors that aid child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria?

The factors that bring about child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria are the age, sex, and income status of the parents as well as the age, education, and sex of the child. Violence against children is pre-eminently a preoccupation of the young, whether male or female in most places in Nigeria (Anurioha, 2024). In

Africa, kinship is a very important part of living whereby the children connect with their family. Here, the family structure works in such a way that children contribute largely to work done in the family such as running errands, etc. However, non-governmental organisations ensure that they educate parents and people in society on the need not to misuse children via abuse, forced labour, or any form of trafficking. Developing the right attitude which will enable parents to stay positive about how they appreciate their children is key.

Apart from socio-economic factors, several other factors that influence the incidence of violence and abuse against children have been identified by several studies. These include urbanization, unemployment,

poverty, inequality, political democratization, poor physical planning and design, the concentration of political power, congestion, disorganisation, and moral decadence confronting the urban system (Anurioha, 2024; Kiss et al., 2022). In other words, the effects of the factors listed above, lead to the prevalence of child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria.

The increase in abuse against children has been attributed to some of the world's largest social problems. For instance, observations revealed that households in areas with high growth rates are more susceptible to abuse and forced labour against children than the ones in the countryside (Anurioha, 2024). Rapid urbanization places increased pressure on the ability of authorities to meet public security and safety demands. Accordingly, city growth and the increase in violence against children occurrence especially in developing countries can be explained based on three factors. The first is that the reward for abuse against children in larger cities is higher because of the presence of a wealthier populace, a greater opportunity to commit child abuse and forced labour because of the large and heterogeneous population over space, and an easy opportunity to dispose of whatever it is the reward of violent acts (Badoe, 2017).

In addition, it has been found that because of the heterogeneity of the population in larger cities achieving resident-police cooperation is always a herculean task. In larger cities, a greater chunk of the population of larger cities are unemployed and their migration into the city in the first instance was because of employment opportunities (Barber, 2014). Hence, involvement in violence against children is often fueled by frustration arising from unemployment. There is a widely held belief that violence against children and unemployment are linked positively.

The existence of a causal link between unemployment and abuse against children has been widely investigated in the past, even if the strength of this relationship remains ambiguous both in its nature and in its robustness (Kiss et al., 2022). Unemployment has been pin-pointed as one of those factors influencing the occurrence of child abuse and trafficking. When an individual is unemployed, it makes the individual vulnerable to committing abuse against children to make a living (Kiss et al., 2022). It is also suggested that youths who are grossly unemployed are more likely to be perpetrators and victims of violent activities against children.

Poverty and inequality have been recognized as important risk factors related to high child abuse and trafficking in urban areas. The vast majority of the Nigerian population lives below the poverty line (Kiss et al., 2022). A few others are extremely wealthy and flaunt their wealth before the poor. The poor are referred to be socially excluded from the rich. An attempt by the poor and downtrodden in society to bridge the gap of

inequality leads them to violence against the children of the poor.

Another cause of violence is political democratization. A change in government sometimes disrupts the social and economic tempo of a society, thus, leading to a short-term increase in abuse against children (Barber, 2014). In Nigeria for example, there are cases of child abuse, forced labour, and trafficking as a result of politics in urban centres. Political opponents use unemployed children as well as youths to perpetuate violence based on discrediting one another (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Schermerhorn, Merrilees, & Cairns, 2009). It is no longer news that the electioneering period in Nigeria is accompanied by documented cases of violent attacks, in which children are sometimes involved (Jonah, 2018).

Child abuse is the main cause of child trafficking and forced labour. As such, child trafficking and forced labour are forms of child abuse. Therefore, the two concepts are not unrelated. Children who have been abused and made to work in hazardous industries and occupations are worse off health-wise than other working children (Meinck, Cluver, Boyes, & Mhlongo, 2015). There are also significant differences in the general health status of children working in different sectors and modalities of employment. As such, parents are viewed as the primary decision-makers for child labour supply and schooling. Also, while parents may make child labour decisions, they do not fully internalize the costs of these decisions. Kiss et al. (2022) added that children in Africa face harsh risks and are often subjected to hostile environments that severely limit their emotional, mental, physical, and social growth and development as compared to other developed countries due to economic depression and severe poverty.

According to Meinck et al. (2015), the income and types of work or professions that parents engage in have a great probability of determining children's experiences and the types of life they will or can be exposed to. Parental income has a long way to go if parents choose to use their children for hazardous or non-hazardous jobs of any form. Meinck et al. (2015) categorized hazardous jobs as those that involve the physical use of children for making money such as child soldiers, market work, etc. Non-hazardous jobs are works that need children to supervise or need to stay in a work environment for a while; for example, the use of children to monitor or supervise family businesses.

Klabbers et al. (2023) added that educational opportunities are themselves a major influence on Child trafficking and forced labour as well as Child trafficking and forced labour activities have a direct link with the physical and mental health of children. As such, schooling and child labour decisions are joint outcomes out of a single time allocation problem (Klabbers et al., 2023). Therefore, there is an opportunity cost between

the hours of working and schooling. Moreover, child trafficking and forced labour will undermine human capital accumulation by interfering with learning making children more comfortable.

Research Question Two: What is the level of prevalence of child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria in the 21st century?

International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2021) added that over 5% of every child in the nations of the world is trafficked and used for forced labour activities annually in the globe at large. This is a re-occurring problem that does not exclude the Nigerian Society. In as much as children are faced with life challenges such as social and economic marginalization, dysfunctional family backgrounds or neglect from family or peers, abuse or violence within the family institutions, exploitative relationships, gender-based violence and discrimination, and many more (ILO, 2021).

According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (2016), in the year 2014, 11% of male children went through some form of sexual violence while 17% of female children went through the same reality. Miller, Chiang, and Hollis (2018) emphasized that embarrassment, shame, or fear of being blamed and a desire to keep the abuse secret make disclosure not uncommon. In this trend, most parents in Africa are not willingly interested in using their children for violence but the likes of socio-cultural factors make it alarming. Observations have shown that children in the Yoruba culture are believed to have their parents as the Almighty. Their parents decide what they do and they have to adhere respectively (Miller, Chiang, & Hollis, 2018).

USDOS (2019) asserted that in the same way, children are brought down to Nigeria for the sake of forced labour from countries like South Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas; Nigeria as a country also transit children to other countries like Benin Republic, Togo, Mali and some other neighbouring African countries (USDOS, 2019). This shows that child trafficking is a connective job that has a liking chain among countries of the world.

Research carried out by Enebe *et al.*, (2021) revealed that the majority of children in polygamous families are not educated and work on the farm which makes children take to the streets to look for freedom during which they are predisposed to trafficking and child labour. In the same vein, children may choose to live in the street because of the gross abuse and violence that they go through at the hands of their parents/guardians making them vulnerable to illness and death as the case may be (Enebe *et al.*, 2021). Many of these problems are not unassociated with the acts and actions of families, parents, guardians, and societies

towards children in the early life of children. All these impacts negatively on child development and education.

Antislavery International (2024) mentioned that aside from just trafficking children from one country to the other, the trafficked children and persons are used for many purposes- for example, they are used for street begging, pornography, organ harvesting, early marriage, and many more. It was added that more than 65% of people and children who are trafficked globally are always used for sexual exploitation. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2021) found that more than 40 million people are trafficked every year globally which is about 15% in Nigeria.

Some of these activities are; sending children errands working miles the street, hawking on the street, excessive flogging in school, academic workload, being child soldier, etc. However, it is arguable that these activities could be referred to as child labour activities. One of the solutions to trafficking and forced labour is that parents with skills and experience should assist the children in preparing them to be productive members of society during their adult life (Anti-Slavery International, 2024).

Research Question Three: What are the capabilities of local and international policies in promoting the fundamental human rights of children in Nigeria?

The Executive Council of the Federation (FEC) in the year 2013 adopted a draft policy on Child Labour by the Minister of Labour and Productivity, Chukwuemeka Wogu, while briefing journalists on the outcome of the Council meeting presided over by President Goodluck Jonathan (ILO, 2014). The meeting was aimed at addressing the challenges faced by over 6 million Nigerian children involved in child labour. The draft policy was presented to the FEC to address the prevalence of child labour which undermines national development and provides a reservoir of children for easy recruitment into violent acts. The National Policy on Child Labour is aimed at providing the needed coordinated and comprehensive framework for multi-sectoral action against the worst forms of child labour in Nigeria.

The following are the specific National Policies on Child labour: provision of guidelines in form of creating awareness, advocacy, and sensitization among the general populace about the effects caused by child labour as well as its prevention; provision of guidelines and modalities for action creations in forms of projects and programmes being carried out by critical stakeholders and government in fighting child labour in the country; provision of guidelines for effective resource mobilization and sustainability of action programmes and projects amongst implementing partners and agencies; provision of guideline for the coordinating and networking programmes among critical

stakeholders and government with the view to streamlining and strengthening efforts; as well as the provision of guideline for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing policies, legislations on projects and programmes on child labour.

UNICEF in the year 2010 started an initiative tagged; Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (GOSCI) which kicked started as a way of ensuring that the rights and privileges of children are guided and protected (Brown, Annor, Swahn, & Self-Brown, 2020). Further goals of the organisation are to enable out-of-school children and street children to be taken to the classroom and properly educated. The specific purposes of the initiative are to; ensure that children are well taken care of and that all forms of discrimination against children are removed; encourage school participation among children regardless of the social status of their parents; and scale up enrolment and sustaining attendance rates for excluded and marginalized children, including children formerly or currently engaged in child labour. This includes recognition that children who have been working from an early age often need special 'transitional' support to enable them to catch up with their peers who have attended school regularly (Ifeakandu, 2019).

The UN (1984) against Nigeria's Anti-Torture Act, 2017 (s.1 (2) found that Torture and Other Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT) which is rampant in Nigerian society is a way of violating children's rights. In the same vein, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2010) buttressed that extreme corporal punishment of children in school or at home might expose children to the dangers of trafficking.

The CRC and ILO Convention 182; have made provisions for different forms of imported Child's Rights Acts which ensures that apart from children living with their parents, they must not be exposed to any forms of activities that deprive them of their human rights. The s. 14 of CRA reads that children can only be separated from their parents only in their own interest and not in the interest of the parents (African Union, 1990).

According to Section 28 of the CRA, no child in any form or type should be employed or put in any capacity to work to make money for themselves or others not even in agriculture, horticultural, or domestics. Following the CRA, other sections that connect with the use, rights, and laws of the child are; five years' imprisonment for traffickers with a fine of N50,000.00 (s. 59 (1-8), no form of family business, employment, or apprenticeships at 12 years (s. 49, 59), no form of weight lifting among children (ss. 59, 61), no form of industrial work and maritime employment at the age of 15 years (s. 60 Labour Act).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has investigated the effectiveness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in

eliminating child abuse, trafficking, and labour in Nigeria. It has been found that there is still a prevailing rate in the number of children that are faced with trafficking forced labour and abuse in Nigeria, regardless of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It is recommended that the government should not relent in its efforts to educate its citizens on the need to be aware of the menaces. In the same vein, awareness promotion through the use of television and face-to-face means about the subject should be promoted.

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