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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Determinants of Child Labour in Sudan: Evidence from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the determinants of child labour in Sudan. Data from the 2014 Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey are utilized. The sample consists of 34,278 children aged 5 to 17 years. Survey logistic regression is employed to analyze the data, accounting for the complex survey design. The findings revealed that 24.9% of children aged 5 to 17 years were classified as engaged in child labour, with the highest prevalence observed in East Darfur State (49.4%), followed by South Darfur State (48.2%), and the lowest prevalence in Khartoum State (7.5%) and Kassala State (9.6%). Child labour was more prevalent in rural areas (29.8% in rural areas vs. 13% in urban areas) and among the poorest households (40.6% in the poorest households compared to 10.2% in the richest households). It was particularly common among children aged 15–17 years (29.7%), males (27.9%), those with a birth order of 7 or higher (25.1%), children in households with an uneducated head (32%), children of mothers with no formal education (31.8%), and children of mothers aged 45–49 years (27.4%). Logistic regression analysis further revealed that, after adjusting for socio-demographic and household characteristics, the odds of child labour were significantly higher among children from the poorest, second, and middle wealth index quintiles compared to those from the richest quintile, with the highest odds in the poorest quintile (AOR: 3.75; 95% CI: 2.11, 6.68). Additionally, the odds were higher for males (AOR: 1.32; 95% CI: 1.12, 1.55) compared to females. Conversely, the odds were significantly lower in urban areas (AOR: 0.62; 95% CI: 0.47, 0.82) compared to rural areas, among children aged 5 to 11 years (AOR: 0.64; 95% CI: 0.49, 0.82) compared to those aged 15 to 17 years, and among children of mothers aged 15–24 years (AOR: 0.61; 95% CI: 0.37, 1.00) compared to those aged 45–49 years. The study recommends that stakeholders prioritize the formulation and implementation of child protection public policies.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a global social phenomenon predominantly observed in developing countries, including Sudan. According to data from international statistics, approximately 160 million children aged 5 to 17 years are engaged in child labour activities (Elsayed, 2024). As of early 2020, 160 million children were identified as child labourers, comprising 63 million girls and 97 million boys. This figure indicates that 1 in 10 children worldwide are involved in child labour. Moreover, approximately half of the 79 million child labourers are living in hazardous living conditions, poor health conditions, lack of safety, and absence of moral development (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). Congdon Fors (2024) states that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have obviously banned child labour practices as follows: “End modern slavery, trafficking and child labour and taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”). International statistics have shown that child labour becomes a global challenge confronting many developing and advanced countries. As stated by the United Nations (2020), there exist 72.1 million children who are subjected to child labour in Africa, including 31.5 million children who are being employed in hazardous circumstances. Besides that, more than 40% of all children aged 5 to 14 years old work for survival in sub-Saharan Africa, where the problem of child labour is becoming catastrophic (Musa & Magaji, 2023).

One of the difficulties in studying children's work is defining the term child labour itself. The challenge in reaching a unified definition of child labour is always confronted with local contextual and cultural factors. This difficulty increases as the child gets closer to the adolescence stage. Based on the Minimum Age Convention, the International Labour Organization ILO defines child labour as " work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development and/ or interferes with their schooling." (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). Several types of activities performed by children are regarded as positive. The activities that are considered positive, according to ILO, include assisting in a family business or earning money outside of school hours and house tasks. The ILO considers these activities to "contribute to the children's development and the welfare of their families; they provide them with skills and experience and help to prepare them to be productive members of society during their adult life." (ILO, 1996).

Similarly, Sudan legislation defines labour as " a child who practices work, and his age is between fourteen and eighteen years” (Child Act, 2010). The ILO Convention (1999) adopted mechanisms for the purpose of prohibiting and eliminating of the different types of child labour, such as: (a) slavery or alike, like the child trafficking and trading, debt slavery and involuntary labour, including fforcibly recruited children; (b) child recruitment for prostitution activities; (c) illegal activities such as drugs transferring; (d) activities hurt the children wellbeing, safety, morals. On the other hand, the Sudan Child Act of 2010 stipulated that the " state shall be assigned with care and protection of children and strive to prepare the appropriate circumstances for the proper upbringing thereof from all sides in the framework of freedom, human dignity, and spiritual and social values, and in a healthy environment.” (Child Act, 2010).

Working children face many challenges that seriously affect their personal growth and social development. These challenges include a high morbidity rate, poor health outcomes, and exposure to environmental and psychological danger in the workplace (Khan, 2023). Several studies have addressed child labour and its impact on sustainable development goals in both developing and advanced countries. However, few studies have examined child labour and its political and legal implications on sustainable development. According to research conducted by Save the Children in Sweden, most children begin working to supplement their family income. Since children frequently see themselves as family members, most of them consent to support their households, especially

when it could be necessary for the family to survive. Thus, children who work do so to support their family's income. On the other hand, the self-actualization theory states that poverty alone would not be a factor in child labour because some children were still interested in engaging in productive activities. Examples include children working on family farms and children looking for part-time jobs in developed and developing countries. On the contrary, some children flee their homes for employment when mistreated (Kaur & Byard, 2021). Baland and Robinson (2000) discuss the phenomenon of child labour based on the human capital theory. According to this theory, forcing children to work increases the household's earnings in the short term. Still, social and economic returns problems are possible over the long term. Also, children who decide to work lose educational opportunities, thus negatively impacting their socioeconomic development.

Concerning the causes of child labour, it seems that it is a multifaceted problem, and its causes are diverse. The critical factors are poor access to education, poverty, unemployment, low household income, social customs and traditions, and armed conflicts. In reverse, child labour encourages the continuance of the socioeconomic underdevelopment of society in the long term. As the children are forced to work for survival, this, in turn, negatively impacts their physical, psychological, and emotional development and deprives them of their natural childhood (Abdallah, 2020). All of these factors and others are gathered together to explain the causes of child labour in Sudan. During the last 10 years of political instability, economic crises, armed conflicts, migration, and displacement, Sudan has witnessed a worsening prevalence of child labour. According to the Sudan 2008 census, the number of child labourers for the age group (5-14) years old was estimated at 461,315. The children aged (5-14) years old had a proportion of 12.6% of the total population of Sudan, which shows the miserable reality of child labour in Sudan.

The impact of child labour on human capital development is clearly addressed in some studies with reference to the economic costs of child labour. Heady (2003) explored that child labour significantly harmed students' reading and math learning outcomes, which can be accounted for by children's fatigue from child labour or by their lack of time to study at home. According to the author, children who work outside the home only have lower math scores, and their reading scores can be up to twice as low as those of children who work at home. On the other hand, Ennew (1982) observed that when children are expected to look after their younger siblings, the older child loses out on school time, and the younger sibling frequently does not acquire the verbal and cognitive skills necessary to succeed in school later on.

Abdelmoneium (2017) confirms that child labour in Sudan influences child development and behaviour, harming the psychological aspects of children, the thing which might lead to family instability and fragmented family relations. Furthermore, Omar (2001) indicates that poverty is the primary source of child labour in different areas of Sudan. UNICEF (2019) states that 18% of children in Sudan are subjected to child labour.

This study examines the prevalence and factor associated with child labour in Sudan. It evaluates their association with child, household, and parental characteristics. By addressing the determinants of child labour in Sudan, it aims to bridge the existing knowledge gap. Additionally, the study provides valuable insights for decision-makers and researchers working in the field of child labour. A retrospective cross-sectional design is employed, utilizing data from the 2014 Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5), the most recent nationwide survey focused on children in Sudan. To identify the factors associated with child labour, survey logistic regression is used. This method is favored over standard logistic regression as it accounts for the complexities of survey design such as stratification, clustering, and weighting ensuring valid and unbiased estimates.

This paper is structured to include the following sections: 1- An introduction on child protection problem with relevant literature review. 2- focuses on methodology of the study including the

population of the study and sample size. 3- Presents the findings of the study in form of tables and percentages. 4- includes a brief discussion of the study. Finally, the last section concludes the study.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study employs a retrospective cross-sectional design, utilizing data from the 2014 Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5), the latest and most comprehensive survey focused on children in Sudan. The survey employed a multi-stage cluster sampling method. In the first stage, enumeration areas were selected from each state, with urban and rural areas as stratification variables. Within each stratum, a systematic sample of enumeration areas was selected. In the second stage, a systematic sample of households was drawn from each sampled enumeration area.

Data and Variables

The study included a total of 34,278 children aged 5–17 years. The outcome variable of interest is child labour, categorized as 'yes' or 'no.' Child labour is defined to include children engaged in household chores (28 or more hours per week for ages 5–14 and 43 or more hours per week for ages 15–17), economic activities (at least 1 hour per week for ages 5–11, 14 or more hours per week for ages 12–14, and 43 or more hours per week for ages 15–17), or working under hazardous conditions. The explanatory variables, including child and caregiver characteristics and certain household characteristics. Child characteristics include sex, age, and birth order. Caregiver characteristics include the mother's age and education and the household head's education. Household characteristics include the area of residence, state of residence, and wealth index quintile.

Statistical Analysis

First, we describe the sample characteristics of households, caregivers, and children. Then, we present and compare the percentage of child labour across states. Following this, we investigate the association between child labour and explanatory variables using the chi-square test, with a significance threshold set at a p-value of less than 0.005.

To assess the contribution of explanatory variables to this association, we used invariable and multivariable survey logistic regression models to account for the complexity of the sampled data. Initially, the contribution of each explanatory variable was examined individually using the invariable model, where we reported and interpreted the unadjusted prevalence odds ratios (UPORs) and their confidence intervals (CIs). Finally, adjusted prevalence odds ratios (APORs) and their associated CIs were reported and interpreted from the multivariable survey logistic regression, which collectively modeled the contribution of all significant explanatory variables. IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 is used to conduct the analysis.

RESULTS

The study included 34,278 children aged 5- 17 years, of whom 50.3% are males, 60.7% are females aged 5-11 years old, 71% of the children lived in rural areas, 35.8% of them were 2-3 birth order, 48.3% of them had none educated household head. Regarding mothers'/caregivers' characteristics, 53% of mothers or caregivers had no formal education, and 28.6% of them were 35-39 years old. Wealth status ranged from 16.5% in the wealthiest category to 22.8% in the poorest.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Variables	Count	Percent
Area		
Urban	9945	29.0
Rural	24332	71.0

Total	34278	100.0
State		
Northern	634	1.8
River Nile	1068	3.1
Red Sea	750	2.2
Kassala	1475	4.3
Gadarif	1784	5.2
Khartoum	4340	12.7
Gezira	5253	15.3
White Nile	1724	5.0
Sinnar	1166	3.4
Blue Nile	1512	4.4
North Kordofan	2303	6.7
South Kordofan	1135	3.3
West Kordofan	2147	6.3
North Darfur	2902	8.5
West Darfur	1248	3.6
South Darfur	2913	8.5
Central Darfur	678	2.0
East Darfur	1249	3.6
Sex		
Male	17255	50.3
Female	17021	49.7
Missing	2	.0
Child age		
5-11	20809	60.7
12-14	7942	23.2
15-17	5526	16.1
Birth order		
1	5934	22.7
2-3	9369	35.8
4-6	7923	30.2
7+	2972	11.3
Mother's education		
None	18163	53.0
Primary	9474	27.6
Secondary	4847	14.1
Higher	1144	3.3
Cannot be determined	585	1.7
Missing/DK	63	.2
Mother's age		
15-19	94	.4
20-24	835	3.1
25-29	4022	15.0
30-34	5888	21.9

35-39	7693	28.6
40-44	4951	18.4
45-49	3402	12.7
Education of household head		
None	16547	48.3
Primary	9440	27.5
Secondary	6318	18.4
Higher	1652	4.8
Missing/DK	320	.9
Wealth index quintile		
Poorest	7800	22.8
Second	7276	21.2
Middle	7133	20.8
Fourth	6420	18.7
Richest	5648	16.5

Overall, 24.9% of children aged 5 to 17 years were subject to child labour, with the highest prevalence of child labour in East Darfur State (49.4%) followed by South Darfur (48.2%) and the lowest prevalence in Khartoum (7.5%) followed by Kassala (9.6%) (Figure 1). Table 2 shows that there was a statistically significant variation in child labour prevalence according to exploratory variables. The prevalence was higher in rural areas (29.8% in rural areas vs. 13% in urban areas) the poorest households (40.6%) poorest households compared to 10.2% in the richest households). Also, child labour was higher in children aged 15_17 years (29.7%), in males (27.9%), in birth order 7+ (25.1%), in households with no educated head (32%), in none educated mother (31.8%) and in mothers aged 45-49 years old (27.4%).

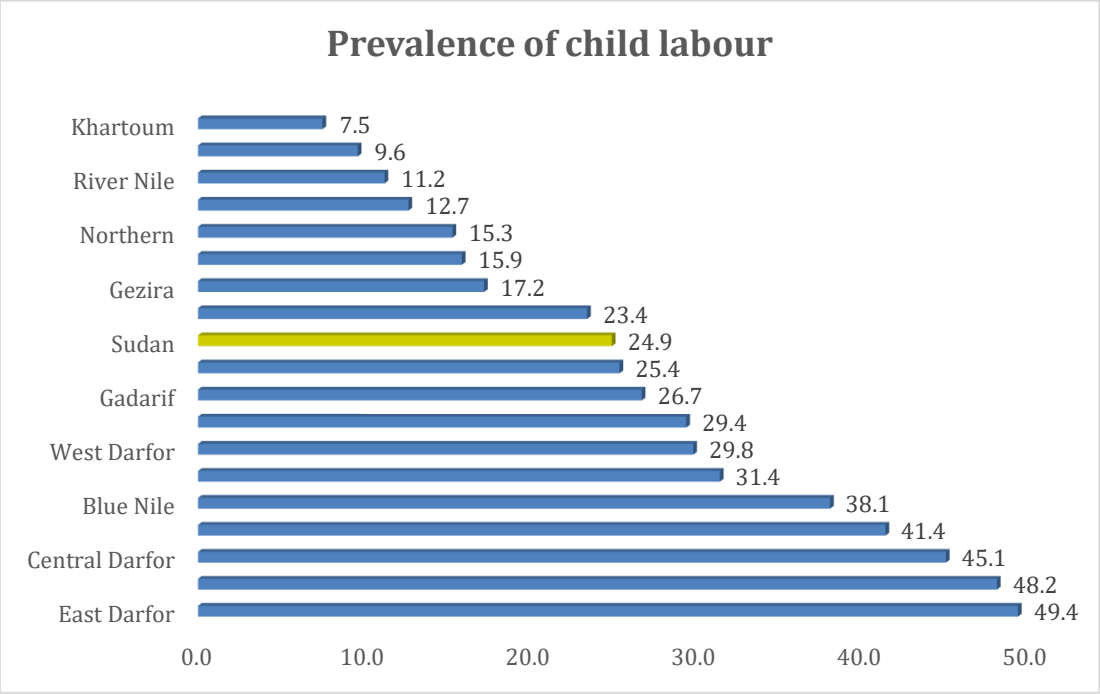

Figure 1: Prevalence of child labour at national level and per states

Table 2: Prevalence of child labour across exploratory variables

Variables	Prevalence of child labour		P-value
	Count	Percent	
Area			
Urban	1290	13.0	<0.0005
Rural	7249	29.8	
Sex			
Male	4821	27.9	<0.0005
Female	3716	21.8	
Child age			
5-11	4615	22.2	<0.0005
12-14	2281	28.7	
15-17	1644	29.7	
Birth order			
1	1415	23.8	<0.0005
2-3	2301	24.6	
4-6	1695	21.4	
7+	745	25.1	
Mother's education			
None	5779	31.8	<0.0005
Primary	1853	19.6	
Secondary	638	13.2	
Higher	92	8.0	
Mother Age			
15-24	158	17.0	<0.0005
25-29	895	22.2	
30-34	1400	23.8	
35-39	1796	23.4	
40-44	1144	23.1	
45-49	933	27.4	
Education of household head			
None	5293	32.0	<0.0005
Primary	1858	19.7	
Secondary	1140	18.0	
Higher	178	10.8	
Wealth index quintile			
Poorest	3166	40.6	<0.0005
Second	2379	32.7	
Middle	1656	23.2	
Fourth	760	11.8	
Richest	578	10.2	

Table 3 shows the logistic regression analysis results, which contains both unadjusted prevalence odds ratios obtained from a univariate logistic regression with one predictor and adjusted prevalence odds ratios obtained from multivariable logistic regression birth order variable is omitted from the final model. The unadjusted logistic regression results show that the likelihood of child labour is significantly higher in males (UOR: 1.39*, 95% CI: 1.21, 1.59) compared to females, in Poorest, second and middle levels of wealth index compared to the richest and it is the highest in the poorest (UOR: 5.99; 95% CI: 4.10, 8.73), in all levels of household head's education and it is the highest in the none educated (UOR: 3.89, 95% CI: 2.59, 5.83), in primary and educated levels of mother's education and it is highest in none educated (UOR: 5.35, 95% CI: 3.06, 9.35), but it's significantly lower in urban (UOR: 0.35; 95% CI: 0.29, 0.43) compared to rural, in children in aged 5 to 11 years (UOR: 0.67, 95%

CI: 0.57, 0.79) compared to 15-17 years, in mother aged 15-24 (UOR: 0.54, 95% CI: 0.34, 0.87) and 25-29 (UOR: 0.76, 95% CI: 0.60, 0.96) compared to 45-49.

After adjusting for socio-demographic and household characteristics, the results show that the odds of child labour are significantly higher in the poorest, second, and middle levels of the wealth index compared to the richest, and it is the highest in the poor quintile (AOR: 3.75; 95% CI: 2.11, 6.68). Also, it is higher in males (AOR: 1.32, 95% CI: 1.12, 1.55) compared to females, but it's significantly lower in urban (AOR: 0.62, 95% CI: 0.47, 0.82) compared to rural, in children aged 5 to 11 (AOR: 0.64, 95% CI: 0.49, 0.82) compared to 15 to 17, in mother aged 15_24 (AOR: 0.61, 95% CI: 0.37, 1.00) compared to 45_49.

Table 3: Survey logistic regression analysis results for investigating the association between child labour and exploratory variables

Variables	Unadjusted Prevalence Odds Ratio (UPOR)	Adjusted Prevalence Odds Ratio (APOR)
Area		
Urban	0.35* (0.29, 0.43)	0.62* (0.47, 0.82)
Rural	1.00	1.00
Sex		
Male	1.39* (1.21, 1.59)	1.32* (1.12, 1.55)
Female	1.00	1.00
Child age		
5-11	0.67* (0.57, 0.79)	0.64* (0.49, 0.82)
12-14	0.95 (0.79, 1.14)	0.97 (0.72, 1.30)
15-17	1.00	1.00
Mother's education		
None	5.35* (3.06, 9.35)	1.91 (0.94, 3.89)
Primary	2.79* (1.59, 4.88)	1.86 (0.91, 3.79)
Secondary	1.74 (0.96, 3.14)	1.61 (0.81, 3.22)
Higher	1.00	1.00
Mother's age		
15-24	0.54* (0.34, 0.87)	0.61* (0.37, 1.00)
25-29	0.76* (0.60, 0.96)	0.78 (0.59, 1.03)
30-34	0.83 (0.64, 1.07)	0.92 (0.69, 1.22)
35-39	0.81 (0.63, 1.03)	0.84 (0.65, 1.10)
40-44	0.80 (0.61, 1.04)	0.92 (0.69, 1.22)
45-49	1.00	1.00
Education of household head		
None	3.89* (2.59, 5.83)	1.20 (0.66, 2.17)
Primary	2.03* (1.35, 3.03)	0.91 (0.51, 1.62)
Secondary	1.82* (1.22, 2.72)	1.19 (0.68, 2.08)
Higher	1.00	1.00
Wealth index quintile		
Poorest	5.99* (4.10, 8.73)	3.75* (2.11, 6.68)
Second	4.26* (2.92, 6.21)	2.92* (1.66, 5.14)
Middle	2.65* (1.81, 3.87)	2.01* (1.18, 3.40)
Fourth	1.18 (0.75, 1.85)	0.93 (0.54, 1.60)
Richest	1.00	1.00
*Significant association		

DISCUSSION

The results of this study agree with several results from different studies focused on child labour. Based on the results of the present study and the regression analysis used in the study, child labour is significantly higher in males (UOR: 1.39*, 95% CI: 1.21, 1.59) compared to females in Poorest, second and middle levels of wealth index compared to the richest and it is the highest in the poorest (UOR: 5.99; 95% CI: 4.10, 8.73). This result is consistent with Middel et al. (2020), who linked a child's gender with child labour and family earnings in rural areas. Similarly, Hafeez and Sadam (2019) found that males are likelier to engage in the labour market than females. A study conducted by Psacharopoulos (1997) explored that the child labourers are primarily males and Indigenous citizens from poor households that females head, and their incomes contribute significantly to the households' wealth. Putnick and Bornstein (2016) pointed out that low and middle-income countries have higher percentages of female labourers engaged in domestic work and higher percentages of male labourers involved in work outside the home to develop survival skills.

Another study result reveals that child labour is the highest among non-educated household heads or those with a primary level of education (UOR: 3.89, 95% CI: 2.59, 5.83). This result is similar to Dayang et al. (2016), who studied the factors of participation in work among children aged 10-17 years old in Indonesia. This result shows that higher levels of household head education lead to lower cases of child labour. This result is also strongly supported by Kamga (2010), who shows that household education is the most trusted factor in the decision to engage in child labour. Moreover, the current study results demonstrate that child labour is significantly lower in urban (UOR: 0.35; 95% CI: 0.29, 0.43) compared to rural, in children aged 5 to 11 years old (UOR: 0.67, 95% CI: 0.57, 0.79) compared to 15-17 years old. In the same vans, Adonteng-Kissi (2021) found that cultural factors closely impact child labour because children are not working for economic reasons but for cultural factors. Conversely, children's participation in child labour in urban places is for financial reasons. Hence, formulating and implementing the best intervention and preventive strategies requires a deep understanding of the sociocultural and economic factors contributing to child labour. Ali et al. (2022) and Ogunyemietal. (2023) state that the prevalence of child labour is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Finally, the study results show that child labour is higher in children with mothers aged 15 to 24 (AOR: 0.61, 95% CI: 0.37, 1.00) compared to mothers aged 45 to 49. Parents' age, precisely mothers' age, is linked with child labour. Obviously, Omokhodion and Uchendu (2010) explain that the number of parents with child labourers increased with the increasing age of the parents.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the issue of child labour is a continuing problem across the rural and urban areas of Sudan, where household income determines the prevalence of child labour significantly in the eighteen states of Sudan with varying degrees and percentages. Moreover, the highest prevalence of child labour in the greater region of Darfur, mainly in the East Darfur State, followed by South Darfur respectively. The prevalence of child labour in greater Darfur may be attributed to the sociopolitical and economic instability in the region, plus a wide spread of bloody armed conflicts to date. In addition, the domination of nomadic culture among local individuals denies stability and formal education for the children besides frequent movements of children with their families from one place to another searching for pasture and water for their livestock; this reversely increases the incidents of child labour.

On the contrary, the level of child labour in Khartoum is the lowest, and this is due to the high standards of living and income in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, compared with other states of Sudan, in addition to the prevalence of educational opportunities and jobs and social services. This situation occurred before the last war in Sudan erupted in May 2023. Based on this, it is recommended that the government authorities at the different local, state, and federal administrative levels develop policies and plans and implement socioeconomic and political development programs that would empower household heads and children educationally, professionally, economically and socially in different states of Sudan.

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