



Caregiver Perceptions of Children's Engagement in Economic Activities: Evidence from a Semi-Urban Community, Edo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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Background: Children's involvement in economic activities remains a major child protection and public health concern in low- and middle-income countries. Caregivers play a central role in determining children's participation in such activities, yet evidence on their knowledge and attitudes remains limited.

Objective: To assess caregivers' knowledge and attitudes towards children's involvement in economic activities and identified associated sociodemographic factors.

Methods: A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted among 380 caregivers selected using a two-stage cluster sampling technique. Data were collected using a pretested interviewer-administered questionnaire. Knowledge was assessed using a six-item checklist, while attitude was measured using ten Likert-scale statements. Scores were categorized into knowledge and attitude levels. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's chi-square test, and multivariable logistic regression were performed, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Overall, 350 (92.1%) caregivers were aware that children engaged in economic activities, but only 63 (16.6%) demonstrated good knowledge, while 195 (51.3%) had fair knowledge and 122 (32.1%) had poor knowledge. Awareness of child labour legislation was low, with only 128 (33.7%) reporting knowledge of existing laws and 152 (40.0%) correctly identifying the legal minimum working age. Most caregivers, 339 (89.2%), demonstrated positive attitudes towards limiting children's involvement in economic activities.

Conclusion: Although caregivers generally demonstrated favourable attitudes towards protecting children from economic exploitation, knowledge of child labour and relevant legislation remained inadequate. Educational interventions, strengthened public awareness campaigns, and socioeconomic support programmes are needed to improve caregivers' knowledge and promote evidence-based child protection practices.

KEYWORDS:

Child labour, Caregivers, Knowledge, Attitude, Economic activities.

BACKGROUND

Children's involvement in economic activities remains an important social and public health concern, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where poverty, household financial constraints, and cultural expectations often encourage children's participation in income-generating activities.^{1,2}

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While age-appropriate work may foster responsibility and life skills, excessive or hazardous work can interfere with children's education, physical growth, psychological well-being, and overall development.^{3,4}

Globally, the International Labour Organization estimates that approximately 140 million children are engaged in child labour, representing nearly one in ten children worldwide, with almost half involved in hazardous work that threatens their health and safety.⁵ According to the United Nations Children's Fund, Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for more than half of the global burden of child labour.⁶ Despite international commitments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals, progress toward eliminating harmful

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child labour has slowed due to economic instability, population growth, conflicts, and public health emergencies.^{7,8}

In Nigeria, children commonly engage in street trading, farming, domestic service, artisanal work, and other informal occupations.^{9,10} Although many caregivers view such activities as necessary for household survival or as a means of teaching responsibility, they may expose children to injuries, exploitation, school absenteeism, poor academic performance, and long-term socioeconomic disadvantages. Caregivers play a central role in determining children's participation in economic activities, their knowledge of child rights, labour laws, and the health consequences of child labour, together with their attitudes shaped by culture, education, and economic realities, strongly influence these decisions.^{11,12} Understanding caregivers' knowledge and attitudes is therefore essential for developing effective child protection policies, educational programmes, and poverty alleviation interventions. However, few community-based studies in Nigeria have specifically examined caregivers' knowledge and attitudes toward children's involvement in economic activities, highlighting the need for further research to inform evidence-based interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in Okada, the headquarters of Ovia North-East Local Government Area (LGA), Edo State, Nigeria, over a six-month period from December 2024 to May 2025. Okada is a semi-urban community in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with an estimated population of 153,849 according to the 2006 National Population Census.

Study Design

This was a community-based quantitative cross-sectional study designed to assess caregivers' knowledge and attitudes towards children's involvement in economic activities and to identify their sociodemographic predictors.

Sampling Technique and Data Collection

A two-stage cluster sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, three of the six residential clusters in Okada were selected by simple random sampling using balloting. In the second stage, every second household within each selected cluster was systematically sampled until the required sample size was achieved.

Data were collected using a structured interviewer-administered questionnaire adapted from previously validated instruments used in similar studies. The questionnaire was pretested among 20 caregivers in a neighbouring community, after which minor modifications were made to improve clarity. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires in English or the local language where necessary.

Selection Criteria

The study population comprised caregivers aged 18 years and above who had primary responsibility for the daily care of at least one child aged 5–17 years and had resided continuously in Okada for at least six months. Caregivers who declined participation or were unable to communicate in either English or the local language were excluded.

Sample Size

The sample size was determined using the Cochran single population proportion formula, $n = Z^2pq/d^2$. A prevalence (p) of 34% obtained from a comparable study conducted in South-East Nigeria, a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), and a precision of 5% ($d = 0.05$) yielded a minimum sample size of 345. After adjusting for a 10% non-response rate, the target sample size was increased to 383. A total of 380 completed questionnaires were analyzed, giving a response rate of 99.2%.

Measurement of Study Variables

Knowledge was assessed using a six-item checklist covering awareness of children's involvement in economic activities, types of economic activities, awareness of their adverse consequences, knowledge of specific consequences, awareness of child labour legislation, and knowledge of the legal minimum working age. Each item was scored on a five-point scale, giving a maximum score of 30. Composite scores were converted to percentages and categorized as good ($\geq 70\%$), fair (50–69%), or poor ($< 50\%$).

Attitude was assessed using ten statements rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with a maximum obtainable score of 50. Items supporting children's involvement in economic activities were reverse-coded so that higher scores consistently reflected more protective attitudes. Percentage scores were categorized as positive ($\geq 50\%$) or negative ($< 50\%$).

Data Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics were summarized using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Associations between sociodemographic characteristics and knowledge or attitude categories were examined using Pearson's chi-square test, with unadjusted odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) reported. Variables were subsequently entered into separate multivariable binary logistic regression models for good knowledge and positive attitude using the enter method. Model fit was assessed using the Nagelkerke pseudo- R^2 statistic. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Community Medicine, Igbinedion University, Okada. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants

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before data collection. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of unique identification codes and secure storage of both hard-copy and electronic data.

RESULTS

A total of 380 caregivers participated in the study, giving a response rate of 99.2%.

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Caregivers (Table 1)

The mean age of the caregivers was 37.0 ± 9.5 years (range: 21–58 years). The largest age group was 25–35 years, comprising 156 (41.1%) respondents, while 295 (77.6%) were female. Most caregivers were married, 274 (72.1%), had secondary education, 165 (43.4%), and practiced Christianity, 284 (74.7%). The most common ethnic groups were Bini, 47 (12.4%), Hausa, 45 (11.8%), Esan, 36 (9.5%), and Igbo, 24 (6.3%), while 113 (29.7%) belonged to other ethnic groups. The mean monthly household income was $\text{₦}56,079 \pm \text{₦}41,162$, with 277 (72.9%) earning below $\text{₦}70,000$ per month. Households had a mean of 4.0 ± 2.3 children, and 179 (47.1%) had more than three children.

Knowledge of Caregivers Regarding Children's Involvement in Economic Activities (Tables 2 and 3; Figures 1 and 2)

Overall, 350 (92.1%) caregivers were aware that children in Okada engage in economic activities, with personal observation reported by 331 (87.1%) as the commonest source of information. Hawking was the most frequently identified activity, reported by 288 (75.8%), followed by street trading, 219 (57.6%), farming, 210 (55.3%), domestic work for others, 163 (42.9%), and car washing, 51 (13.4%). Among the 279 (73.4%) respondents who were aware of the consequences, increased risk of exploitation or abuse was the most frequently identified consequence, 242 (63.7%), followed by poor academic performance, 179 (47.1%), and exposure to hazardous conditions, 166 (43.7%). Only 128

(33.7%) were aware of child labour legislation, while 152 (40.0%) correctly identified 18 years as the legal minimum working age. The mean knowledge score was $54.33 \pm 17.48\%$.

Overall, 63 (16.6%) caregivers had good knowledge, 195 (51.3%) had fair knowledge, and 122 (32.1%) had poor knowledge. Knowledge level was significantly associated with age group ($p < 0.001$), monthly household income ($p < 0.001$), and marital status ($p < 0.001$), while educational level ($p = 0.069$) and religion ($p = 0.050$) showed borderline associations.

Attitude of Caregivers Towards Children's Involvement in Economic Activities (Table 4; Figures 3 and 4)

Most caregivers demonstrated positive attitudes towards limiting children's involvement in economic activities. A total of 284 (74.7%) agreed that children should only work after school hours or during holidays, 167 (43.9%) supported the abolition of child labour, and 115 (30.3%) supported prosecuting offenders. The mean attitude score was 29.7 ± 4.8 , corresponding to a percentage score of $59.37 \pm 9.63\%$. Overall, 339 (89.2%) caregivers demonstrated a positive attitude, while 41 (10.8%) had a negative attitude. Attitude was significantly associated with educational level ($p = 0.003$), sex ($p = 0.034$), and number of children ($p < 0.001$), but not with religion ($p = 0.535$), marital status ($p = 0.259$), or monthly household income ($p = 0.331$).

Independent Predictors of Knowledge and Attitude (Table 5; Figure 5)

Educational level and monthly household income of at least $\text{₦}70,000$ independently increased the likelihood of good knowledge, whereas being married independently reduced the likelihood of good knowledge. Male caregivers and those with more than three children were independently less likely to demonstrate a positive attitude. No other sociodemographic characteristics independently predicted knowledge or attitude.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of caregivers in Okada, Ovia North-East LGA, Edo State (N=380)

Socio-demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age group (years)		
18–24	36	9.5
25–35	156	41.1
36–45	116	30.5
>45	72	18.9
<i>Mean $\pm$ SD: 37.0 $\pm$ 9.5 years</i>		
Sex		
Male	85	22.4
Female	295	77.6

Marital status		
Married	274	72.1
Single	52	13.7
Divorced/Separated	8	2.1
Widowed	42	11.1
Other	4	1.1
Level of education		
No formal education	24	6.3
Primary	55	14.5
Secondary	165	43.4
Tertiary	136	35.8
Religion		
Christianity	284	74.7
Islam	88	23.2
African Traditional Religion	8	2.1
Ethnicity		
Bini	47	12.4
Hausa	45	11.8
Esan	36	9.5
Igbo	24	6.3
Isoko	23	6.1
Ngas	20	5.3
Yoruba	19	5.0
Urhobo	19	5.0
Tiv	18	4.7
Igala	16	4.2
Others†	113	29.7
Number of children		
≤3	201	52.9
>3	179	47.1
<i>Mean ± SD: 4.0 ± 2.3</i>		
Monthly household income (₦)		
<₦70,000	277	72.9
≥70,000	103	27.1
Mean ± SD: ₦56,079 ± ₦41,162		
Household size (members)		
1–3	66	17.4

4–6	211	55.5
7–9	79	20.8
>10	24	6.3

Note. † Others include Ijebu (*n*=15), Ikale (*n*=14), Gbari (*n*=11), Etsako (*n*=11), Ijaw (*n*=8), Igarra (*n*=8), Nupe (*n*=8), Ebira (*n*=8), Idoma (*n*=8), Ishekiri (*n*=7), Ilaje (*n*=7), Efik (*n*=4), and Calabar (*n*=4).

Table 2. Awareness and knowledge of caregivers regarding children's involvement in economic activities (N=380)

Item	n	%
A. General awareness (N=380)		
Aware — Yes	350	92.1
Aware — No	30	7.9
B. Types of economic activity identified (multiple response; n=350)		
Hawking	288	75.8
Street trading	219	57.6
Farming	210	55.3
Domestic work for others	163	42.9
Car washing	51	13.4
C. Negative consequences identified (multiple response; n=279)		
Increased risk of exploitation/abuse	242	63.7
Poor academic performance	179	47.1
Exposure to hazardous conditions	166	43.7
Physical and mental health issues	82	21.6
Social stigma and discrimination	49	12.9
D. Knowledge of child labour legislation		
Aware of child labour laws in Nigeria	128	33.7
Correctly identified legal working age (≥ 18 years)	152	40.0
E. Composite knowledge classification (mean 54.33 $\pm$ 17.48; N=380)		
Good ($\geq 70\%$)	63	16.6
Fair (50–69%)	195	51.3
Poor ($< 50\%$)	122	32.1

Table 3. Knowledge classification by socio-demographic group (N=380)

Variable	Poor n (%) ($< 50\%$)	Fair n (%) (50–69%)	Good n (%) ($\geq 70\%$)	Mean score (%)
Level of education ($\chi^2=11.70$, $df=6$, $p=0.069$)				
No formal education (<i>n</i> =24)	8 (33.3)	16 (66.7)	0 (0.0)	42.8
Primary (<i>n</i> =55)	16 (29.1)	31 (56.4)	8 (14.5)	50.4
Secondary (<i>n</i> =165)	45 (27.3)	90 (54.5)	30 (18.2)	55.5

Tertiary (n=136)	53 (39.0)	58 (42.6)	25 (18.4)	56.5
Religion ($\chi^2=9.47$, df=4, p=0.050)				
Christianity (n=284)	95 (33.5)	149 (52.5)	40 (14.1)	53.3
Islam (n=88)	23 (26.1)	42 (47.7)	23 (26.1)	59.1
African Traditional Religion (n=8)	4 (50.0)	4 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	40.0
Age group ($\chi^2=17.99$, df=2, p<0.001)				
<35 years (n=177)	38 (21.5)	102 (57.6)	37 (20.9)	58.4
≥35 years (n=203)	84 (41.4)	93 (45.8)	26 (12.8)	50.8
Monthly income ($\chi^2=17.86$, df=2, p<0.001)				
<₦70,000 (n=277)	106 (38.3)	130 (46.9)	41 (14.8)	51.6
≥₦70,000 (n=103)	16 (15.5)	65 (63.1)	22 (21.4)	61.7
Marital status ($\chi^2=30.10$, df=2, p<0.001)				
Married (n=274)	110 (40.1)	127 (46.4)	37 (13.5)	52.8
Unmarried (n=106)	12 (11.3)	68 (64.2)	26 (24.5)	58.3

Table 4. Attitude towards children's involvement in economic activities by socio-demographic group (N=380)

Variable	Positive Attitude n (%)	Negative Attitude n (%)	χ^2	p-value
Level of education ($\chi^2=13.61$, p=0.003)				
No formal education (n=24)	24 (100.0)	0 (0.0)		
Primary (n=55)	43 (78.2)	12 (21.8)		
Secondary (n=165)	154 (93.3)	11 (6.7)		
Tertiary (n=136)	118 (86.8)	18 (13.2)	13.61	0.003
Sex ($\chi^2=4.47$, p=0.034)				
Male (n=85)	70 (82.4)	15 (17.6)		
Female (n=295)	269 (91.2)	26 (8.8)	4.47	0.034
Number of children ($\chi^2=11.39$, p<0.001)				
≤3 (n=201)	190 (94.5)	11 (5.5)		
>3 (n=179)	149 (83.2)	30 (16.8)	11.39	<0.001
Religion ($\chi^2=1.25$, p=0.535)				
Christianity (n=284)	254 (89.4)	30 (10.6)		
Islam (n=88)	77 (87.5)	11 (12.5)		
African Traditional Religion (n=8)	8 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1.25	0.535

Marital status ($\chi^2=1.28$, $p=0.259$)				
Married (n=274)	248 (90.5)	26 (9.5)		
Unmarried (n=106)	91 (85.8)	15 (14.2)	1.28	0.259
Monthly income ($\chi^2=0.94$, $p=0.331$)				
<₦70,000 (n=277)	244 (88.1)	33 (11.9)		
≥₦70,000 (n=103)	95 (92.2)	8 (7.8)	0.94	0.331

ATR = African Traditional Religion.

Table 5. Logistic regression: independent predictors of good knowledge and positive attitude (N=380)

Predictor	Good Knowledge aOR (95% CI)	Positive Attitude aOR (95% CI)
Age (≥35 vs <35 years)	0.77 (0.42–1.40) $p=0.390$	0.62 (0.29–1.31) $p=0.212$
Sex (male vs female)	1.23 (0.62–2.46) $p=0.553$	0.27 (0.12–0.60) $p=0.001$
Marital status (married vs unmarried)	0.24 (0.11–0.50) $p<0.001$	1.81 (0.73–4.51) $p=0.203$
Educational level (ordinal)	1.65 (1.11–2.45) $p=0.013$	0.67 (0.42–1.05) $p=0.081$
Religion (Christian vs other)	0.57 (0.30–1.07) $p=0.079$	0.73 (0.30–1.74) $p=0.474$
Monthly income (≥₦70,000)	1.98 (1.01–3.88) $p=0.046$	1.57 (0.61–4.06) $p=0.352$
Number of children (>3)	0.66 (0.35–1.26) $p=0.206$	0.23 (0.10–0.53) $p<0.001$
Model fit	Pseudo $R^2=0.080$	Pseudo $R^2=0.109$

Note. aOR = adjusted odds ratio; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval.

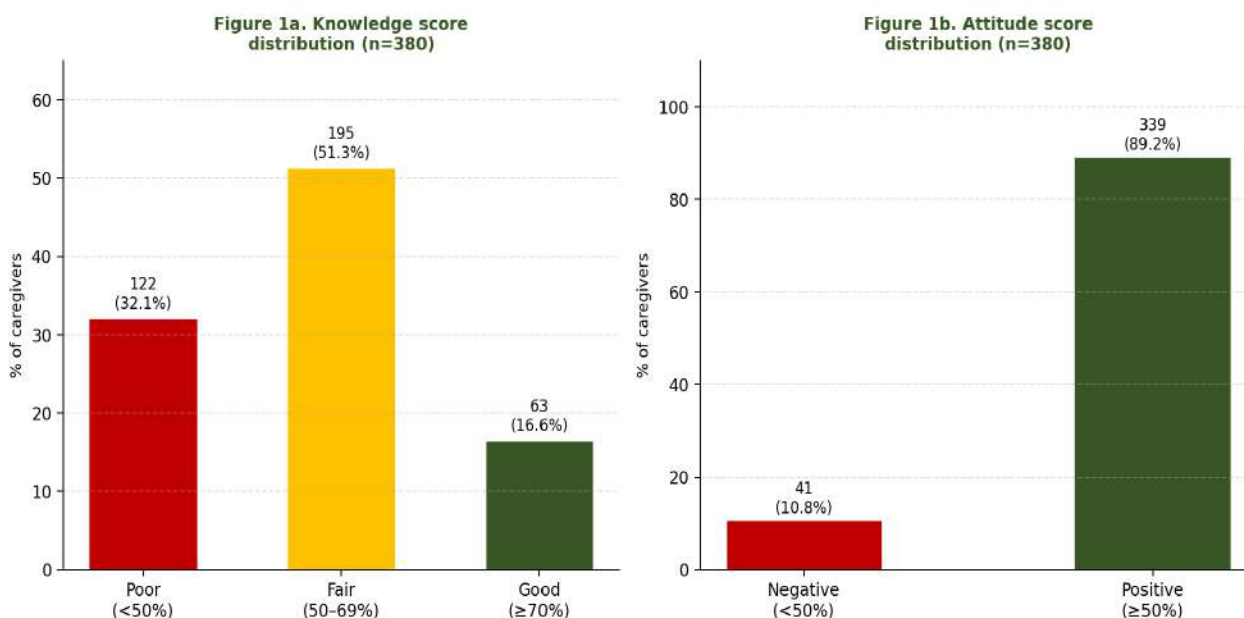


Figure 1. Distribution of composite knowledge (a) and attitude (b) score categories among caregivers in Okada (N=380).

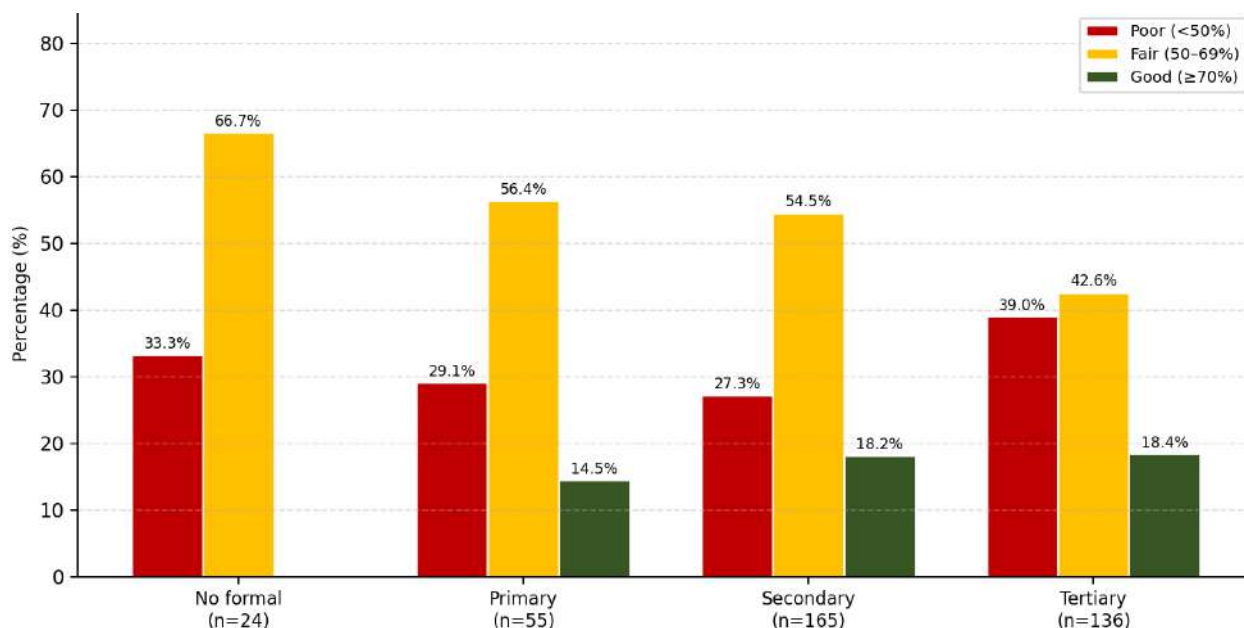


Figure 2. Knowledge classification by educational level ($\chi^2=11.70$, $df=6$, $p=0.069$; $N=380$).

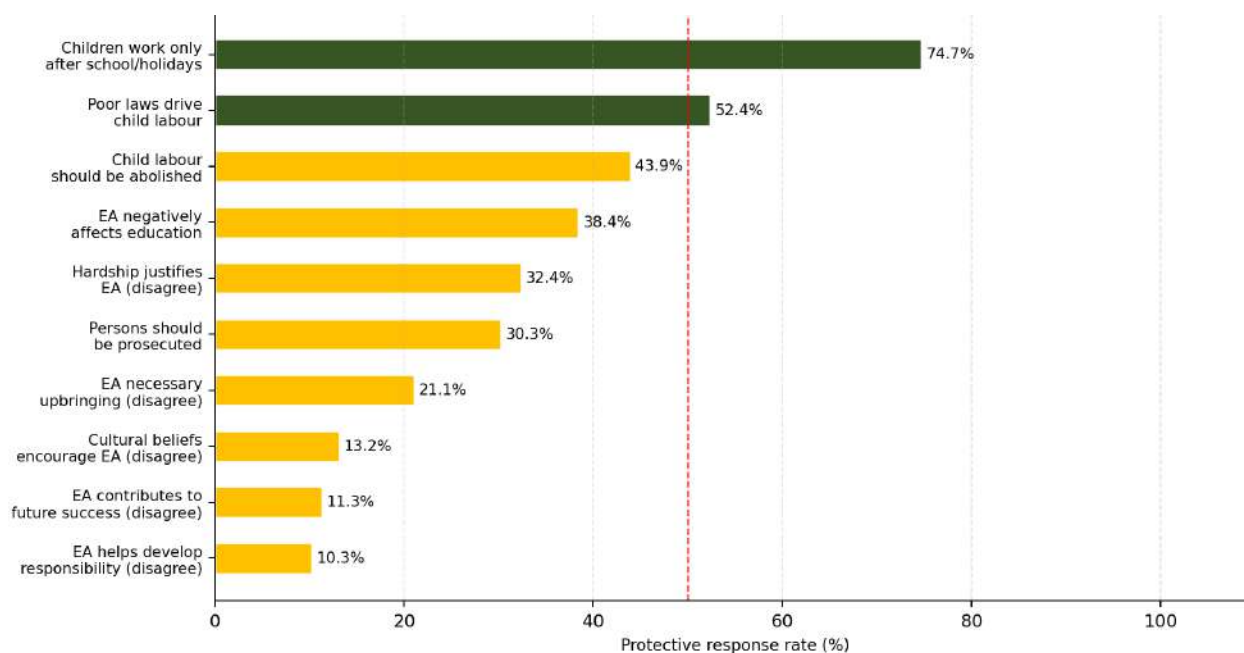


Figure 3. Protective response rate per attitude item ($N=380$). † Items endorsing child labour; reverse-scored in composite. Dashed line: 50% threshold.

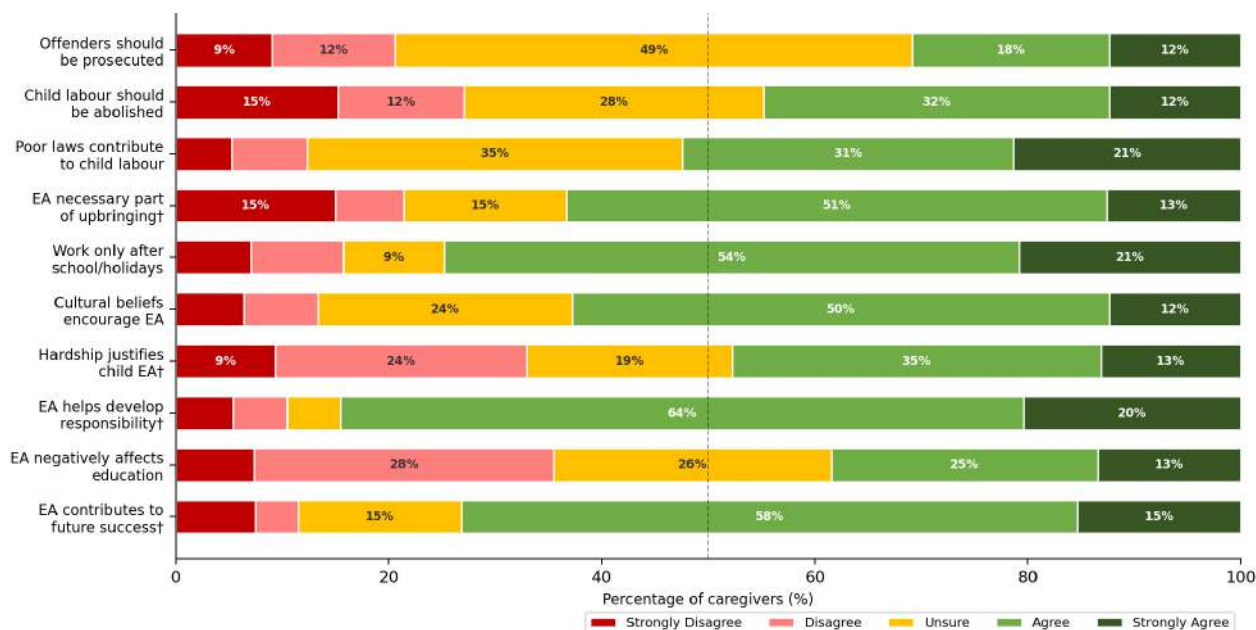


Figure 4. Response distribution per attitude Likert item (100% stacked; N=380). † Items endorsing child labour; reverse-scored in composite.

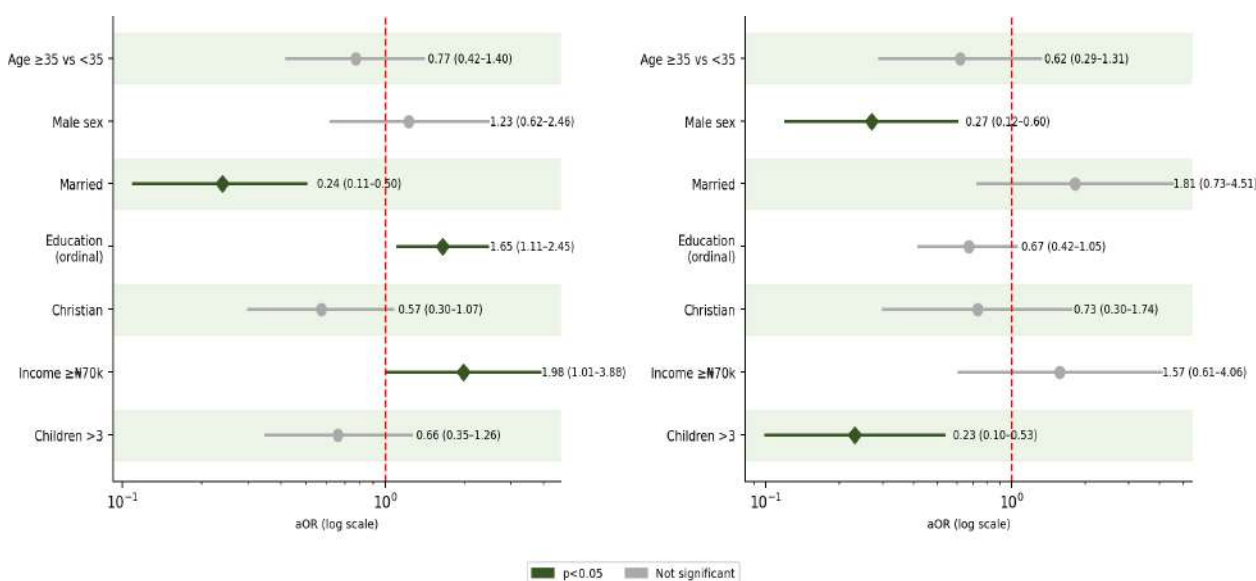


Figure 5. Forest plots of adjusted odds ratios for independent predictors of good knowledge (left) and positive attitude (right) on multivariable logistic regression (N=380).

DISCUSSION

This study found that although awareness of children's involvement in economic activities was high, comprehensive knowledge of child labour and its legal framework remained limited. Furthermore, despite the relatively low level of knowledge, the majority of caregivers demonstrated positive attitudes towards limiting children's participation in economic activities. Educational attainment, household income, and marital status independently predicted knowledge, while sex and family size independently predicted attitude.

The finding that only a small proportion of caregivers demonstrated good knowledge, despite widespread

awareness of children's involvement in economic activities, suggests that awareness does not necessarily translate into adequate understanding. This finding varies with study done in Anambra,¹³ Nigeria which showed high levels of knowledge regarding hazards and forms of child labour, but agreed with study conducted in Ondo, Nigeria, which reported that while caregivers commonly observed children engaging in economic activities, many had limited knowledge of child labour legislation and its long-term consequences.¹⁴ This may reflect the normalization of children's economic participation within many Nigerian communities, where such activities are often viewed as part of socialization rather than a child protection issue. Poor

knowledge may reduce caregivers' ability to distinguish acceptable household responsibilities from exploitative or hazardous labour, highlighting the need for community-based education on child rights and existing labour laws.

Although knowledge was generally modest, the majority of caregivers expressed positive attitudes towards limiting children's involvement in economic activities. The relatively favourable attitudes observed in the present study may reflect increasing public awareness of the educational and health consequences of child labour through schools, healthcare facilities, religious organisations, and mass media campaigns. Nevertheless, the comparatively lower proportion supporting prosecution of offenders suggests that while caregivers recognise the problem, many remain reluctant to endorse strict legal sanctions, possibly because of prevailing economic realities and cultural acceptance of children's contribution to household income.

Educational attainment independently predicted good knowledge. This finding agrees with reports from similar LMIC settings, which consistently demonstrate that better-educated caregivers possess greater awareness of child rights and are more likely to understand the harmful consequences of child labour.^{12,15} Education likely improves access to information and strengthens critical appraisal of traditional practices. This finding shows the importance of integrating child protection education into adult literacy programmes and community health promotion activities, particularly among caregivers with lower educational attainment.

Caregivers with higher household income were also more likely to demonstrate good knowledge. Comparable findings have been reported in studies done in Nigeria.^{14,17} in a literature review encompassing several countries, where improved socioeconomic status was associated with greater awareness of child protection issues. Financially stable households may have greater exposure to health information, educational opportunities, and social services, while households experiencing financial hardship often prioritize immediate economic survival over child protection concerns. This highlights the need for poverty alleviation and social protection programmes as complementary strategies for reducing children's involvement in economic activities.

Married caregivers were less likely to demonstrate good knowledge after adjustment. This may reflect the greater economic responsibilities faced by married households, particularly those with multiple dependents. Under such circumstances, children's participation in economic activities may become normalized, reducing caregivers' motivation to seek information on child labour regulations. Further qualitative research is needed to better understand this relationship.

Male caregivers and those with larger families were less likely to demonstrate positive attitudes towards limiting children's involvement in economic activities. Similar observations have been reported in studies from other low-

income settings, where fathers and caregivers with larger households were more likely to perceive children's work as an economic necessity.^{18,19} Increasing family size places greater financial pressure on households, potentially encouraging acceptance of children's economic contributions. These findings highlight the need for interventions that specifically engage fathers and large households in child protection education while strengthening family economic support programmes.

CONCLUSION

Caregivers in Okada community generally demonstrated positive attitudes towards limiting children's involvement in economic activities; however, their knowledge of child labour, its consequences, and relevant legislation was inadequate. Educational attainment and higher household income were associated with better knowledge, while male caregivers and those with larger families were less likely to demonstrate positive attitudes. Improving caregiver knowledge through targeted education and addressing the socioeconomic factors that encourage children's participation in economic activities are essential for strengthening child protection and promoting healthy child development.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited by its cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference. Information was obtained through self-report and may therefore be subject to recall and social desirability bias. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single semi-urban community, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Community-based health education programmes should be strengthened to improve caregivers' knowledge of child labour, child rights, and existing legislation.
2. Government and non-governmental organizations should intensify public awareness campaigns on the health, educational, and social consequences of children's involvement in hazardous economic activities.
3. Poverty alleviation and social protection programmes should be expanded to reduce the economic pressures that encourage children's participation in income-generating activities.
4. Child protection interventions should specifically engage male caregivers and households with larger family sizes, as these groups were less likely to demonstrate positive attitudes.
5. Further multicentre and longitudinal studies should be conducted to better understand caregivers' perceptions and evaluate interventions aimed at reducing harmful child labour practices.

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