

# Exploring The Perspectives of Child Labour Victims on The Sociocultural Determinants of Child Labour: A Case of Yeji on Lake Volta

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## ABSTRACT

Child labour is a growing phenomenon on Lake Volta, Yeji in Ghana. However, knowledge about the key sociocultural factors that sustain child labour has been given less attention. This study has addressed this issue by employing a qualitative case study design to collect textual data from research participants through purposive and snowball sampling techniques and conducted Focus Grouped Discussion with selected stakeholders and personal interviews with 10 children who work as child labourers on Lake Volta in Yeji. Based on the thematic analysis, peer pressure, debt settlement, parental education and incapacitation and disability of the breadwinner were the key sociocultural factors sustaining child labour. The finding is potential contributes to both the appraisal theory and the growing empirical literature on child labour in the fishing industry as well as provide immense benefits to policymakers and other stakeholders to reduce child labour in the fishing sector in Ghana and beyond.

**Keywords:** child labour, fishing sector, Ghana, Lake Volta, sociocultural factors

## INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a global phenomenon with over 160 million children below 18 years working in prohibited economic activities for their livelihood and to complement their families' income (Dekkiche, 2021; Labour, G. E. O. C, 2022).

The children involvement in prohibited economic activities denies them of the opportunity to attend school, or interferes with their schooling and may be forced to leave school prematurely. Moreover, the physical growth and mental development of these children can be impaired due to the excessive long and heavy work load carried. In effect child labour deprives children of their childhood potentials and dignity.

In Ghana, child labour is also widespread in the productive sectors with 1.9 million children between the ages of 5 to 17 years involved (Awotwe, 2020; Boateng & Darko-Gyeke, 2022; Pugmire, 2022). In recent times, there is rapid growth of child labour in the fishing industry, particularly, Lake Volta in Yeji (CNN-Inside the troubled waters: the child slavery trade on Ghana's Lake Volta, 2019) and United Nation's (Briffett, 2019; Dzoka, 2010; Hamenoo et al, 2015; Olden, 2021; Talbot, 2018; UNICEF-Ghana, 2011). There are about 20,000 child labourers working in Lake Volta, particularly Yeji and its Satellite communities in the Pru East District of the Bono East Region (Iversen, 2006).

In Lake Volta, both male and female and even orphans work as child labourers. The Ghana Child Labour

Survey Report (2003) reveals that more than “49, 000 children” are in working in the fishing sector, with 87% boys and 13% girls. Such children engage in different fishing activities. Boys mostly work on the lake while girls are involved in the fish processing such as salting, smoking of fish and marketing of fish (Aho, 2013; Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; Briffett, 2019; ILO, 2013).

The children work under uncomfortable environment. They work for long hours and in return for low wages (Bellwood-Howard & Abubakari, 2023; Briffett, 2019). They are also subjected to several abuses and death threats by their masters (canoe owners/masters). The physical abuse of child labourers can lead to irreversible physical damaged like broken ribs, facial and body, fractured bones and musculoskeletal problems (Ahad et al., 2021; Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2015; Moylan et al., 2010; Oluremi, 2015; WHO, 2020). Moreover, due to the psychological and emotional abuse, such children suffer from behavioural problems including low self-esteem, isolation, aggression, alienation and display other behavioural disorders (Kumar & Fonagy, 2013; McDonald-Harker, Drolet & Colvin, 2021; Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2015; Şalcioğlu & Başoğlu, 2008).

These children face health risk. They are not only sexual abuse and harassed resulting to HIV/AIDs and other STDs but also involved in the production of pornographic and prostitution (Adu, Geidam & Jarma 2009; Fawole & Dagunduro, 2014; Fassa et al., 2000; Parcesepe et al., 2016). Indeed, child labour is detrimental to children’s education, growth and development, and future livelihood (ILO, 2016; Udry, 2006).

Although much of the literature assumed that poverty is the immediate or the main cause of child labour (Fassa et al., 2000; ILO, 2010) in countries having per capital income of US\$500 or less, have children between 10-14 years who are child labourers ranging between 30% to 60% as compared to 10-30 % in countries that have per capital income of US\$501-1000 (Fallon & Tzannatos, 1998), however, income shocks, parental characteristics and cultural practices in certain societies that mandate children to learn skills at early young to be a responsible adult in future, or contribute and sustain legacy of the family are contributing to the growing trend of child labour (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Beegle et al., 2006) which scholars have not given much attention.

In child labour decision, income shocks for example, unexpected crop loss potentially increase the extent of child labour thereby affecting the stability of household income (Beegle et al., 2006). Moreover, death of chief wage-earner, largeness of family and other significant income shock factors leads child labour due to depressed household income (Rowntree, 1901).

Furthermore, a parental education levels play a major role (Behrman & Rosenzweig, 2002; Black et al., 2005) and determines the education attainment of child, to a large extent. So, children who receive more education as a child may grow up as parent with higher human capital and may earn higher income. Consequently, such people would like their children to attain their status (Basu & Tzannatos, 2003). Likewise, the cultural practice of bond debt has contributed to child labour. Children whose parents are indebted to boat owners are put in bond labour as means to defray the debt, and are subjected to abuse (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Fassa et al., 2005).

In Ghana, although child labour is thriving due to cultural practices and sociocultural issues which influenced the household decision on child labour, however, the issues have not been given considerable research attention, particularly in the fisheries sector (Blunch & Verner, 2000; Twum-Danso, 2009; Takyi, 2014). The utmost concern now is why some families and relatives tend to force their children into child labour at the expense of their future in exchange for immediate benefits to the household (Udry, 2006)? Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore the sociocultural factors that sustain child labour along the Volta Lake in Yeji, Ghana. The renaming of the paper is as follows: Research Design, data management. Findings and discussion, conclusion and the limitation of the future study and recommendation.

## **THEORY**

To understand the sociocultural factors that sustain child labour along the Volta Lake in Yeji, Ghana, the Human capital theory and Minority theory have been employed.

Normally, children below 18 should not work but be in school because their parents will provide their basic needs. Unfortunately, these children work to fend for themselves and their families. That is so because some family characteristics and conditions often influence parents to put a child to work as child labour in the fishing industry.

### **The human capital theory**

Scholars agree that parental education is a key determinant sustaining child labour (Black et al., 2005; Mensah, 2013). The human capital theory asserts that human capital determines an individual's lifetime earnings (Becker, 1964). Human capital simply refers to the skills, and knowledge or any inborn aptitude or acquired potential or any ability possess by a person that enables him or her to be productive (Garibaldi, 2006; OECD, 2001). The level of one's skills and competence is gauged by his or her level of education, and training or experience, which eventually determines his or her level of income or earnings (Gonçalves, 1999; Lydall, 1968).

Those who possess the right skills, competence and educational achievement demanded by the labour would be adequately compensated with higher lifetime wages and earnings, and would have greater opportunities in the labour market than those whose skills are less demanded in the labour market. Machin (2009) has observed that poor household usually under-invest in education so they face a higher risk of obtaining lower earnings. Plug (2003) and Solon (1999) also maintained that most families of child labourers have low educational achievements and are unskilled so they are not gainfully employed; therefore, they engage in menial jobs or low paid jobs. Because such parents' earnings are meagre, they trade off the costs of providing substance and maintenance for children against the long terms of educating their children (Udry, 2003; Pemberton et al., 2013). By forging educational expenditure, the family can support household expenditure with meagre income (Das & Deb, 2006; Mukherjee & Sinha, 2009; Udry, 2003). Such a decision often compels these children to enter the labour market at an early age or forced them to work alongside school to supplement the family income (Mensah, 2013; Mukherjee & Sinha, 2009).

Nonetheless, researchers argue that the connection between parental education and child labour is unclear due to the differences in the operational definition of parental education. Some studies used the length of education to determine whether a child entered the labour market or not (Emerson & Souza, 2003; Ray, 1998) thus resulting in inconsistent evidence across different jurisdictions.

### **Minority Group Theory**

The minority group theory (MGT) is also used in this study as a complement to the limitation of the human capital theory. The MGT argues that child labour still persist because of some external shock to household income, including the death of chief wage-earner; incapacitation of chief wage-earner through accident, illness or old age; and other uncontrollable conditions or circumstance faced by a family (Authur, 2005; Chatterjee, 1972; Espenshade et al., 1982).

A focus on incapacitation or death of chief wage-earner, and bond labour used in this study to refer the extent they affect family decision about child labour in the fishing sector (Espenshade et al., 1982). First, the death and incapacitation of the breadwinner greatly affect household income. This condition increases the financial burden to a family and can hardly provide for the household (Chatterjee, 1972). As a result, tend to

consider child labour as a survival mechanism to their livelihood (Loken, 2010; Loken, Mogstad & Wiswall, 2010). So children from these families are compelled to participate in the labour market to earn extra income to survive or support the family budget (ICF Macro, Inc. 2011; Bjorkman-Nyqvist, 2013).

The theory has also indicated that debt settlement is a key factor sustaining child labour. Fassa et al., (2003) and Soares et al., (2012) argue that in certain cultures where children are used as a medium of debt exchange between creditors and their parents or relatives lead them into bond labour. The child is set free after the creditor has fully recovered his money from the parents. (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Fassa et al., 2003; Soares et al., 2012) have emphasised that bond labour is the worst form of child labour because the child does not earn any wages due to their parents' indebtedness to creditors.

However, there are several external shocks to family income and other potential sociocultural factors that may force children into child labour along the Volta that researchers are not aware of. The discovery of such factors will expand the body of knowledge and improve scholars' understanding.

### **Empirical Evidence**

Research shows that many children work as child labourers in the productive sectors. They work because several sociocultural factors support child labour. Studies have shown that parents' educational background has a strong connection with child labour (Abou, 2006; Grootaert, 1998; Nkamleu, 2009).

Souza and Emerson (2003) revealed parents with low education achievements or uneducated parents tend to put their children to work at a tender age. They reasoned that such parents do so because of a lack of understanding.

Mensah (2013) also agreed with Souza and Emerson (2003) and added that parents with a lower level of education compelled their children to engage in economic activities because the low income could not meet both the rising household expenditure and the educational expense. However, Nielsen (1998) argued that low parental education does not contribute to child labour. This is because households with regular sources of income will not approve of their children seeking employment at the tender age at the expense of education. Therefore, stable employment encourages families to enrol their children in school (Abou, 2014).

Nonetheless, several studies have shown that parents with low educational achievements would allow their children to work to support the family finances (Mensah, 2013; Akee et al., 2010; Kis-Katos & Sparrow, 2011). They argued these parents do not appreciate the children's rights to education and its importance in the labour market. As these parents prefer the short-term benefits of child labour to the future benefits of educating their children, they push the children to the labour market to make money for their families and relatives at the expense of their children's education.

Evidence is also clear that family conditions and external shocks to income can influence household decisions on child labour wages as a source of livelihood (Loken, 2010; Loken, Mogstad & Wiswall, 2012). ICF Macro, Inc. (2011) pointed out the death of the breadwinner of the family puts pressure on household income and thus forces children to work. Similarly, the incapacitation or suffering from prolonged or severe ailments forces children to work to support their siblings and themselves. Björkman-Nyqvist (2013). In addition, Björkman-Nyqvist (2013) stressed that rainfall significantly affects household income, preventing children's school enrolment. This condition forced children to engage in economic activities to support family income. Other economic shocks resulting in high unemployment adversely affected the children's attendance in school and significantly increased the likelihood that a child becomes a child labourer (Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007).

Recent studies have indicated that debt settlement has contributed to child labour. That is so because many

parents who owe allow their children to work for the creditor to settle the debt. Adeborna & Johnson, (2015) pointed out the debt responsibility of these children, resulting in bonded labour. Fassa et al., (2005) and Soares et al., (2012) revealed that bonded labour is more severe because the child receives no compensation for his or her labour. Regrettably, many households consider debt settlement practices as a means to earn income (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Soares et al., (2012).

### Research Design

This study was conducted in Yeji and its satellite communities along Lake Volta in the Pru East District of the Bono East Region of Ghana (Figure 3.1). This setting was chosen because of the growing trend of child labour on the Lake Volta. Yeji is strategically position not only for fishing activities, and trading commodities but also provides means of transporting goods and people through the Volta Lake linking a number of districts and the Northern Regions of Ghana (GSS, 2021; GSS, 2014).

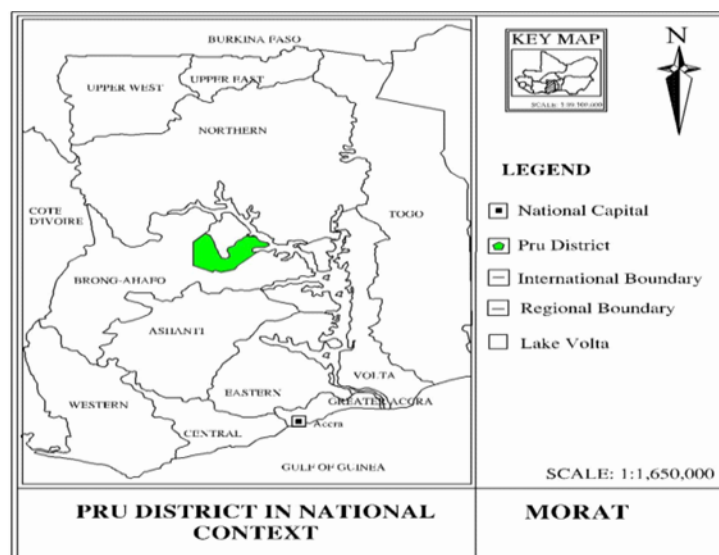
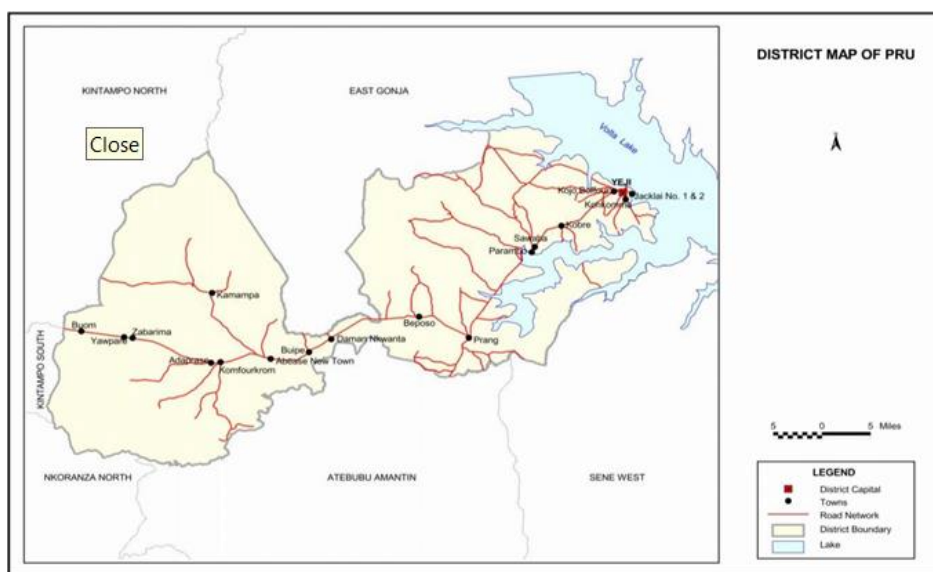


Figure 3.1: Map of the Study area (ghanadistrict.com, 2016).

This study employed qualitative research methods to understand the perspectives of child labourers. The use of case study suggested by Yin (2003) as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear

(Yin, 1994; Stake, 2008) was more suitable due to the nature of child labour.

More importantly, a collective or multiple case study was used instead of the single case allowing the researcher to obtain data from different sources. This choice is consistent with Stake (2008) who suggested collective or multiple case study can be used to study more subjects from different sources. Using this approach, I obtained a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, leading to better theorizing (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Studying multiple cases also gives the researcher reassurance that the events in only one case are not “wholly idiosyncratic”. In the end, I had the opportunity to clearly see the patterns in a word or group of words across all cases for in-depth descriptions and outcomes.

Concerning the selection of research participants, this study utilized snowball and purposive sampling. The use of snowball sampling technique was helpful in reaching out to participants who were difficult to locate to participate in the face – to – face interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Chaim Noy, 2008; Silverman, 2016 & 2017). To do so, some key individuals, active child labourers, ex-child labourers, and others were contacted who recommended other potential research participants. Besides, by using purposive sampling strategy suggested by Creswell (2005), the researcher was able to select representatives of Challenging Heights (NGO) from the Head Office and Shelter and potential research participants. Overall, the use of these strategies helped to locate potential research participants who shared their rich experiences on the study during the face – to – face interviews and focus group discussion (FGD).

The recruitment of participants was based on strict criteria. For example, only child labourers from the fishing industry on Lake Volta and were between 14 to 18 years, who have stayed in Yeji at least 2 to 5 years qualified. Moreover, participants for the FGD consisted of the community Chief, assemblyman, parent, social welfare officers and Community childhood protection members have stayed in these communities, Accra town, Fante-Akura and Gadakope for at least 5 to 10 years and are above 35 years served as the criteria for their selection. The second group of the FGD comprised three Challenging Heights officers, three rescuing team workers from Challenging Heights and one social welfare officer. Those selected have also been working with the Challenging Heights for at least five (5) to ten (10) years.

Table 1: Stages of recruitment of research participants (child labourers) for face – to – face interview

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

The research participants were contacted through snowball technique due to the sensitive nature of their work. Because of this, the first two identified served as the best to assist in identifying other potential research participants since they are difficult to reach out to let alone to get the sample needed for the study. The recruited research participants were done in three phases as illustrated (table 1) above.

Table 2: Stages of recruitment of research participants for (Focus Group Discussion)

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

3	3=Instructors/Coaches	7	5	5
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The research participants were contacted through purposive sampling technique for the focus group discussion and their choice were based on their experiences with activities of child labourers on Lake Volta. Per their numbers, they are those who have genuinely agreed to be part of the discussion on activities of children in child labour.

All the recruited research participants in this study were done in three different stages (table 1) and (table 2) above respectively. In the initial phase of the recruitment, I contacted 2 child labourers through my personal rapport. In the second stage, 20 child labourers were reached out to through the first two child labourers while at the last stage, 10 were also contacted through the help of the assemblyman. At the end of the recruitment exercise, 32 were contacted, but 25 children agreed to participate in the face – to – face interviews voluntarily after they understood the purpose of the study and the code of ethics. The same process was used in recruiting research participants for the three FGDs. In the first phase, 8 research participants were contacted: assemblyman, 3 traditional rulers, 2 parents, social welfare officer and a representative of the Community Childhood Protection Committee member (CCPC). At the end, 5 research participants genuinely agreed to take part on the due day. The second stage, I recruited 9 officials of Challenging Heights who were made of staff members, rescuing mission team on the Lake Volta and a social welfare officer but 7 willingly took part in the discussion on that day. At the third and final phase of the recruitment were the instructors/coaches, coordinator and a Health Officer at the Challenging Height Shelter, 7 agreed to take part in the FGD, however, 5 of them were able to make it. These research participants were chosen because they have much knowledge about the phenomenon of inquiry.

Out of the 25 child labourers who have willingly agreed to be interviewed, 10 of them were interviewed face to face at a selected destination of their choice. This number was determined by data saturation during interviews because there was no new information or new emerging themes from the data from the end of one interview to another interview (Boddy, 2016; Guest et al., 2006; Silverman, 2016 & 2017). Based on the data saturation, I had the assurance that the sample size was sufficient and should be capable to make some degree of generalization through inductive reasoning (Boddy, 2016).

With regards to the FGDs, the first group had 5 participants, the second group had 7 participants and the last group had 5 participants. These samples were made up of five research participants as the first focus group in Yeji on the Lake Volta, another seven research participants also from Challenging Heights as the second focus group while the last focus group came from Challenging Heights Shelter with five members as the third focus group. These samples were ideal for a single focus group because of the nature of the topic to be discussed by research participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

To ensure the piloting testing of the interview protocol relating to the purpose of the research work (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) achieve its objective, a pilot study was conducted with ten (10) child labourers who were not part of the targeted group (fishing). The group consisted of (6) males and four (4) females because their experiences provided information that helped reviewed the data collection instrument. The inputs from the participants in the pilot study improved the interview protocol concerning the duration, personal bias, and probing/prompts. Specifically, I collected data through semi-structured interviews which Fontana & Frey (2000) described as one of the most powerful ways we try to understand our fellow human beings. The face-to-face interviews with child labourers allowed me to directly observe their facial expression and research settings to probe for in-depth data. Most of the interviews conducted on child labourers at Yeji on Lake Volta took place at their workplace, their homes and at their playing grounds.

Moreover, the focus Group Discussions (FGD) was consistent with the suggestion of Powell (1996), who argued that this method is most appropriate to gain an in-depth perspective on social phenomena (e.g., child labour). Three separate FGDs were conducted. The first FGD took place at Yeji, with the chief,

assemblyman, parent, social welfare officer, and community childhood protection committee member (CCPC). The second FGD took place at the Challenging Heights Head Office in Winneba with three research participants, three Rescuing mission team and a social welfare officer. The final FGD took place at Challenging Heights Shelter with three research participants as instructors/coaches, health officer and the coordinator at the Shelter. I structured the FGD into three segments. The first segment focused on demographic issues which helped me to set the tone of the conversation and to rapport with research participants. I later introduced the main topic to research participants to commence the second interviews. During the second segment of the discussion, I solicited participants' responses on the key questions. For example, I asked the discussants the meaning of child labour and the causes of the phenomena in the fishing industry in Yeji. I also asked them how child labour could affect the social behaviour and health of child labourers. During the discussion, I also probed for in-depth understanding on emergent issue. For example, I asked participants how and why peer pressure could lead children to engage in child labour. In addition, I asked research participants (1) "Where do these children on the Lake Volta come from"? (2) "Could there be a reason (s) why these children are on the Lake working as child labourers"? (3) What are some of the reasons that necessitated the migration of these children from the Coastal regions to work in Yeji on Lake Volta"? (4) "Do these children go through some kind of challenge (s) while working on the Lake"? The last segment of the discussion was meant for reflection. This gave the discussants the opportunity to make any changes or elaborate more on something they have already said to conclude their responses.

I recorded the interview with a video tape recorder which was verbatim transcribed later and stored in a google drive for retrieval and analysis. I used the most common and dominant Ghanaian languages spoken in the area for the interview. These languages were Akan/Twi and Ewe respectively to conduct the interview. The two interviews took place between June and July 2022. I also used this opportunity to seek clarification and confirmation of the accuracy of their responses. The recorded FGDs and interviews were later transcribed verbatim and stored in a google drive to be retrieved later for analysis. All the interviews and FGDs were digitally video/audio recorder with a camera (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981 Liamputtong, 2011) and in addition to taking notes. Indeed, the use of the interview guide facilitated and enhances the flow of the conversation and that helped me to obtain thick and rich data capable to address the research questions. On average, the face-to face interviews, FGD lasted 40mins and 1 hour, 30mins respectively. After this, I thank all the research participants for participating in the survey.

The data were analysed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke (2006) which is regarded as a data reduction tool capable of identifying patterns and sequence in participants' responses (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Kiger & Lara Varpio, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017) as relevant segment of data addressing a research question. The analysis commenced with data familiarisation through reading of transcribed data to gain deeper understanding of meanings of participant's responses on the sociocultural factors of child labour. After that, I search for codes and coded pattern in words or sequences in participants' responses (Sutton & Austin, 2015) using open coding to generate the codes and coded any data which is useful to the research question. The coded data are in single or multiple extracts or large segment of the participant's responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the coding process, I searched for themes through sorting out and collating all the coded data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to bring together all data segments into a meaningful whole or a broader perspective which usually is meaningless when viewed separately or individually (Aronson,1994), revealing a pattern of relationship between codes or coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Later these themes were reviewed by modifying and refining the coded data extracts under each theme so that each theme has adequate supporting data and coheres together meaningfully and with the identifiable distinction between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). In doing so, some of the themes were emerged into separate themes to form a broader theme due to overlapping. Finally, the themes included in this paper are (findings) that give clarity of the descriptive account which tell the overall story of the research participants experience that addresses the research questions. All the findings are trustworthy because the respondents agreed that their responses were represented and consented that their quotes can be



used in the report during the respondent validation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) member checking (Burkholder, Cox & Crawford, 2016; Janesick, 2000).

## Data Management

Data management in qualitative research is a process which involves collecting, organizing, storing and preserving information collected during fieldwork to make it easily retrievable for the purpose for which it was collected (Cypress, 2018 & 2015; Knafl et al., 1988; Lin, 2009; Williams & Moser, 2019).

Effective data management practices as noted (Cypress, 2018; Endacott, 2005; Lin, 2009) are vital to ensure research results' integrity, maintaining confidentiality, prevent error and data loss, and increases the analysis's quality.

As part of ensuring trustworthiness, credibility and quality of my data collection, I conducted two to three interviews per day, with each lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour, and 1 hour, 30mins while taking an interval of 1 to 2 hours to reflect on my observations and nonverbal cues. I verified data collected instantly by going through with research participants whether the initial information provided was correct and also what I documented was same as was provided by research participants.

I organized the data in two folds namely face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). This was done through familiarization, coding, categorization and forming of themes from the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Williams & Moser, 2019). This was later labeled according to interview questions under each research question. This was done after each day's work from the fieldwork. To also ensure confidentiality and privacy of my research participants, audio visual tapes transcriptions, notes and other records of research participants were safe kept during and after the interview to prevent any possible negative consequences. This was also to make a follow up in case of verification of data after personal information of research participants such as names, age, sex, date and place of births, work and place of stay were expunged from the data categorization. I did this because of the vulnerability of my research participants aside my research ethics.

The data collected was later transcribed with regards to audio-video tape recorder, preserved and stored in a google drive to prevent data lost and for retrieval through two folds namely face-to-face interview and focus group discussion (FGD). I later re-categorized the data into interview questions and placed them under each research question in a file folder with each theme and code name:

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

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

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

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

In overall, the data management was essential for my study as it assisted in saving me time in accessing any information needed at each point in time because information gathered was packaged and kept in folder form which could have been otherwise difficult. The data management was also useful as I can contact research participants with ease in case of loss or clarity of information. Additionally, managing my data assisted me in preventing errors and duplication, and improved the quality of my analysis and allows for

validation and replication of the findings.

## FINDINGS

The findings presented in the context of demographic background of the various research participants in the study for clarity and understanding (Table 4.3).

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

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

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

8	M	17	Cape Coast	Father-Dead Mother-Alive	2	JHS1
9	F	15	Big Ada	Father-Alive Mother-Alive	3	P-6
10	M	18	Salpong	Father-Dead Mother-Alive	5	P-5

Table 4.3: Above is the Demographic of Active Child Labourers in the study at Accra Town, Fanti Akura and Gadakofo

### Social Cultural Factors of Child Labour

The social cultural factors influencing child labour are discussed in the following subsections.

#### Parental Education

Most of the parents of child labourers had low education. Some had no formal education; those with formal education up to junior secondary never completed. Because such parents lack awareness of their children's rights and the importance of education, they did not pay serious attention to their children's education and were reluctant to spend their limited resources. Such an attitude negatively impacted the attendance of some of their children leading them to drop out of school to engage in labour to make money for their families and relatives. Moreover, some of the parents view their children as sources of income and put them to work at a young age to help support the family. Such an attitude negatively impacted the attendance of their children, leading them to drop out of school to engage in labour to make money for their families and relatives. These situations have highlighted by research participants as below:

Participant 8 (17 years)-active child labour illustrated the situation:

*(Me maame ye sugyani a agyae sukuu, Ne saa nti woantumi amfa me ankɔ sukuu amma m'anwie ntoasoso sukuu gyinapɛn baako mpo (JHS1) enam sika sem nti. Enti asusuu se mensua apofodwuma na me mfa nhwe me ho ne me nuanom).*

*(My mother is a single parent and a school dropped out. She did not enrol me in school because she couldn't afford the fees at JHS1. So, she suggested I learn the fishing business to make a leaving for myself and help her provide for my siblings).*

Another research participant 1 (15year)-active child labour illustrated by saying:

*Ebere a mewie gyinapɛn nnan ena me papa de me baa Yeji beyee adwuma. Esan se wowie sukuu ntoasoso sukuu pɔn a wonnya adwuma ye nti, me papa anha ne ho se ne kakra a ɔwo no, ɔde beta me sukuu so).*

*(My father brought me to Yeji to work after completing primary four. He refused to enrol me to continue because he sees that would be a waste of his limited resources since there are limited jobs for senior secondary school and university graduates).*

Participant 2 (16 years)-active child labour opined that:

*(Esan se wode me kowaree obi a adwumaden nti woantumi ankɔ sukuu nti, wɔnfa me ankɔ bi eberɛ a m'awofɔɔ mmienu no nyinaa nyaa kaa akwanhyia ewuuɛ nso na me pɛ se mekɔ bi, Na na ɔtae su wɔ sika sem ho).*

*(My step parents were uneducated and product of child labour. They did not send me to school after I lost both parents to car accident even though I wanted to, but they always complained of lack of money).*

The following research participant 7 (16year)-active child labour indicated that:

*(Me papa gyae sukuu wɔ eberɛ a na ɔwɔ JHS ntoaso sukuu. M'antumi antoa me sukuu so eberɛ a mewie gyinapɛn nnum. Na ɔdwen se wo ye adwuma ntɛm a eye sen se wobekɔ sukuu akɔsee eberɛ ne sika esan mmabunu dodɔ a abusu na ɔnya adwuma nye ewɔ ɔman yi mu nti).*

*(My father was a junior secondary school dropped out. I could not continue my education after I completed primary five. He thought working at a younger age was best for work rather than schooling, which would be a waste of time, and money because of the high rate of youth unemployment in the country).*

### **Incapacitation and the Death of the Breadwinner**

It is common to find children working in Yeji as child labourers when the breadwinner is incapacitated or dead. The passing away or incapacitation of the breadwinner of the family affected the family finance. The breadwinner (father or mother) was unable to work and provide food, clothing, and other necessities to their children due to permanent disability as a result of illness, injury, or disability. Moreover, the death of breadwinner impacted negatively on the livelihood of these children. Some of them had to depend on their friends, or relatives for food and other daily needs.

The children who had no other means of support were compelled to work to make ends meet and support their family, siblings and other relatives due to the financial burden. In some cases, they had to leave school to work full-time. In an extreme case, they had to drop out of school because of inability to concentrate in class, poor academic performance, and lateness to school and frequent punishments. These children opted to work to fend for themselves and support themselves financially. Here are some excerpts of the interviews that validate the results when research participants were asked the following question: “What brought you to Yeji”?

Participant 4 (17 years)-active child labour had this to say:

*(Eberɛ a na agya tease no, na ɔboa abusua no ma yen anigye. Ne wuo akyi no, nnoɔma mu yɛɛ den maa abusua no. Esɛn se na yen nnoɔ nto nti, ne maame antumi amma yen nya nnoɔma nketenkete a esɛ yen mmɔfra nsia yi. Na meye bere tiawa adwuma de boa abusua ne me sukuu korɔ enti ehaa m'adesua emaa me gyae yɛɛ adwuma no eberɛ nyinaa ede boa me ho ne m'abusua).*

*(When father was alive, he provided for the family, and we were all happy. But the family had rough time after his death. As a peasant farmer, my mom couldn't adequately provide for the basic needs of the family of six. I worked on part-time basis to support the family and my education which affected my academic performance but quit to work full time to earn more money to support myself and siblings).*

Participant 6 (16 years)-active child labour responded with the following answer:

*(Abrabɔ mu yɛɛ den maa me m'awofɔɔ wuo akyi, ebaa saa no, na medan ne nnamfonom ansa na me nsa*

*akɔ m'ano. Eduruu baabi no, na wɔn nyinaa aberɛ me. Enam so ma me wɔfa nso sɔɔ me mu wɔ abrabɔ mu mmerɛ kakra bi. Me wɔfa antumi anhwɛ me ankɔ akyiri ɛfiri sɛ akwanhyia a ɔnyaa no kaa no too hɔ koraa a na ɔntumi nye hwee. Na mennya mmoa firi baabiara enti me hyɛɛ aseɛ yɛɛ adwuma senea ɛbeyɛ a, metumi ahwɛ me ho ɛwɔ mmoa kakra a na menya firi me wɔfa hɔ na mede ayɛ apɔfodwuma na aboa me nne ne daakye).*

*(After the death of my parents, life was difficult for me. I depended on friends for my livelihood, but they were fed up supporting me. I had to depend on my uncle for some time but couldn't continue supporting me because the terrible accident paralyzed him permanently. I had no other support so i started working here to make ends meet and complement that of my uncle's meagre income and to acquire the fishing skills to help me in the future).*

Participant 7 (16 years)-active child labour recounted that:

*(Akorɔmfɔɔ werɛmfɔɔ wiaa me papa ɛwɔ n'apɔfodwumayɛ mu. Ne saa nti no, me maame na na ɔhwe mmɔfra nnum a ɔwɔ abusua no mu. Kɔsii sɛ ɔno nso kaa dɛɛm. Ansa na no, na mekɔ sukuu ɛberɛ korɔ no ara mu, na meyɛ adwuma, saa nti berɛ biara na meyɛ leti wɔ sukuu mu. Ne saa nti, na mente adesua no ase esan berɛ a na me berɛ no nti megyae sukuu tɔ kɔɔ so yɛɛ adwuma de boa me maame ɛne ne nua maa ketewa).*

*(After my father lost his fishing business to arm rubbers on the lake, my mother provides for the family of 5 until she also became indisposed. Previously, I schooled and worked, and was always late to school. As a result, I could not understand the lesson due to fatigue. I dropped out of school to work to support her and my younger sisters).*

Participant 8 (17 years)-active child labour indicated that:

*(Kaa akwanhyia a me maame nyaa no maa no beyɛɛ abubuani kaa dɛm, esan sɛ na meyɛ ba panin nti na nea ɛwɔ sɛ meyɛ ara ne sɛ meyɛ adwuma de boa abusua no).*

*(After my mother had had a serious accident that rendered her crippled for life, as the elder's son, I had no option than to work to support the family).*

## Peer Pressure

The negative influence from friends had lured many children into child labour on the Lake Volta. The consequences of lack of parental control, divorce, broken homes, and the inability of parents to provide necessities for their children have compelled them to seek the company of friends to enjoy their livelihood. After their friends have provided for their needs, these children became convinced of having a comfortable life. They felt pressured to work to keep up with the lifestyles of their peers. So, they succumbed to the empty promises of their friends that they would be better off working to earn money, buy material possessions and to appear cool or popular among their peers and help their families make ends meet and began working in Yeji.

When research participants were asked about who brought them to Yeji and their mission, they gave the following responses as presented below:

Participant 10 (18 years)-active child labour responded with the following answer as:

*Me maame yɛ ɔbaakofoɔ a ɔhwe mma. Na ɔpere pɛ aduane de si yɛn anim, fira yɛn ntoma na ɔsan so mma*

(*yen nnooma ahodoɔ a eba ma yen ho ato yen wɔ abrafo mu. Eto dabi mpo a, ɔbo bosea firi nnamfonom ho de to aduane ma abusua no. mehunu me nnafonom se wotumin to biribiara a wape eno nti emaa mede me ho boɔ won. Na nnamfonom yi boa ma menya nea mepɛ nti, meyeɛ se mede meho bebɔ won ewo aduma a wape no senea menya sika na mede aboa me maame ne me nuanom nson).*

(*My mother is a single parent. She struggles to put food on our table, buy us clothes and provide us with other necessities of life. Sometimes she had to borrow from friends to buy food for the family. I saw my friends could buy anything they needed so i moved in with them. As they provided for my needs, i wanted to be like them so i joined them in their business to earn income to help my mom and my seven siblings).*

When the same question was posed, it was buttressed with the following response from research participant 2 (16 years)-active child labour:

(*M'awofoo aka nkyene agu na onipa a mete ne nkyen no ntumi nhwe me yie. Eno nti meko tenaa me nnamfonom nkyen senea ebeye a, ɔbeboa me sika sem mu kosi se me hyee aseɛ yeɛ adwuma wɔ Yeji se mmofra a yede won ye adwuma).*

(*My parents are dead and the person I was staying with wasn't able to take care of me. So, I stayed with friends who supported me financially until I started working at Yeji as a child labour with them).*

Another research participant 3 (16 years)-active child labour responded by saying:

(*Me nnamfonom daadaa me se menya sika bebree ahwe me ho ne menuanom. Meyeɛ se me ne won beye adwuma no, mehunu se na akatua no sua. Na adwuma no nso eye den na ateetee nso wɔ mu. Na menni biribiara ye se ewo se meye no saa ara, senea menya me daadaa nneema a ehia me).*

(*My friends misinformed me that I could earn more money to provide for myself and siblings. When I finally moved in with them to do the same work, I realized that the pay is meagre and the work too very difficult and emotionally stressful. But I had no choice since there was no one to fall on for my daily necessities).*

Unfortunately, peer pressure can often lead children into participating in child labour, which can have detrimental effects on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

## Debt Settlement

Debt settlement is one-way children were pushed into child labour. These children were given to the fishermen or canoe owners/masters by their parents and relatives as means to pay their debts. These children work for their masters for the agreed period until the debt has been cleared.

Moreover, they suffer the worse forms of abuses which affects their physical, emotional and psychological well-being besides working in hazardous and exploitative conditions and long hours for little pay or no wages. They may also feel isolated from their peers and unable to engage in normal childhood activities and perpetuate a cycle of poverty and lack of education. Here are some of the responses supporting the finding through the following question: "What are some of the primary causes or conditions that pushed you to work as child labour in Yeji"?

Participant 1(15 years)-active child labour also illustrated by saying:

(*Me papa ka kyerɛɛ me se, ɔde madwuma mu panin no ka eno nti me mfa mfie mmiensa nye adwuma mma no na ente ka. Menyaa sika efiri som no mu, me panin wɔ adwuma mu ma me aduane di na osan to ntaade*

mame. Ne nyinaa mu no, mehunu amane yie efiri se na oteete me wo adwuma no mu).

*(My father told me he owed my master a lot of money. So, I must work for him for three years to service the debt. I did earn money for my service. My master fed me and sometimes buy me clothes. However, I really suffered during this period because I was maltreated and abused from my master).*

Here is a response from a research participant when the same question was asked:

Participant 3 (16 years)-active child labour asserted that:

*(Mewo ha se mere som de atua eka a na me papa yere de m'adwuma panin no. me papa yere bo m'adwumamu panin bosea mfi beye mmien a atwam no, na wantumi antua, mpo mmoden a obwe se anka obenya sika afiri baabi foforo no nyinaa ye hwaboada anaa okwa. Meye adwuma dabiara a menya da koro mpo mfa nhome. Eduru baabi na meka a, me panin no teete me na ota ekom de me).*

*(I am here to serve to pay the debt owed by my step mother to my master. My step mother borrowed some money from my master two years ago and couldn't pay on the due and her efforts to raise from other sources has been futile. I work every day and do not have enough rest. Sometimes when I complain, my master will abuse and starved me).*

Another response from a research participant 6 (16years)-active child labour opined that:

*(Yede meye adwumaden wo Yeji efiri se me sewaa antumi antua eka a na ode m'adwuma panin no. na eye suahumu bi a na emu ye den ma me efiri se me panin no dii m'ani yie maa no haa me ma emaa me soroe anaa meye hagyahagya).*

*(I worked as child labour in Yeji because my Auntie couldn't settle her debt to my master. It was terrible experience because my master maltreated me which affected and made me aggressive and violent).*

## DISCUSSION

The motivation for carrying out this research is that past studies have not directly address child labour in the fishing sector. Consistent with previous studies, the findings of this study confirm that key sociocultural factors pushed these children into the labour market. This tendency usually happens when there is no clear cut between children's work that is intended to socialize them to learn and take over from their parents and relatives' businesses when they are old and those that are meant for productive ventures (Okpukpara & Odurukwe, 2006; Togunde & Carter, 2006 & 2008). Similarly, as indicated (Bourdillon et al., 2009) it might not be the work they do per se which determine the boundary between harmful and benign work for children, however whether the children and their interests are respected by the canoe/boat owners/masters. These factors play a crucial role in the involvement of children in fishing in Ghana Lake Volta (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). This result means that these factors have greater generality across the productive sectors engaging children in child labour (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Nanjunda, 2014; Togunde & Carter, 2006). This study finds that children work as child labourers because of these factors. In this case, this study suggests that this finding is valid and relevant in the fishing industry in the context of Yeji. Therefore, this result adds to the growing studies that continuously explore sociocultural factors sustaining child labour (Ajefu, 2018; Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013; Ortiz et al, 2012) further adds to its validity and significance in social research. More specifically, parental education plays a significant role in child labour, especially for parents with little or no educational achievements. Such parents seem not to be informed about their children's rights to education and its value to the labour market. Even if they understand the importance of education, they appear not to be financially committed to their children's education. Such negative attitudes of parents compel such children to drop out of school to engage in labour to make money for their families

and relatives. This result is consistent with (Akee et al., 2010; Kis-Katos & Sparrow, 2011; Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013) which makes it valid and further adds to the body of knowledge and extends our understanding of this phenomenon in the fishing sector.

Besides, this finding also implies that parents regard their children as a source of income (Bradshaw et al., 2006; Katz & Redmond, 2009; Krishnan et al., 2002). Consequently, such parents tend to push their children to the labour market at a tender age to financially assist the family and relatives. Because past studies have reported similar findings and have observed similar behaviour among such parents, suggests that this result is also accurate and useful in the context of the fishing sector in Yeji. Therefore, the result expands the body of growing research that teases out fine-grained aspects of child labour in Yeji Lake Volta (Ajefu, 2018; Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013; Wahba, 2006). In addition, this study finding confirms that incapacitation and the death of breadwinners contribute to the persistence of child labour. What this result means is that the children's families have no reliable source of income or limited sources of income (Beneria & Feldman, 1992; Grootaert & Knabur, 1995; Knaul, 2001).

This kind of situation tends to badly affect the livelihood of these children. This is because their families will struggle to provide them with the necessities of life. And in extreme cases, the family cannot give their children a balanced diet and three-square meals daily. As a result, some of them may depend on their friends, or relatives for food and other daily needs. Earlier studies also found the death of a breadwinner impacted negatively on the livelihood of these children and that suggests the result of this study is also accurate (Macro, Inc. 2011; Løken, 2010; Løken, Mogstad & Wiswall, 2010). Moreover, the passing and permanent disability, or disability of the breadwinner could also increase the financial burden on children. While their families struggle financially, they cannot cope with a high standard of living. So, their parents tend to borrow from friends and relatives or sell some of their valuables to cover household expenditures. To reduce the financial burden, these families tend to withdraw their children from school and, especially, the eldest child is compelled to drop out of school to help provide financial support for their siblings and themselves. This finding concurs with the studies of (Grootaert & Knabur, 1995; Beneria & Feldman, 1992; Knaul, 2001) who pointed out that the loss and permanent disability of the breadwinner leads to higher constraint on household income and poor standard of living of children, forcing them to working at a young age. Hence, this result extends our understanding of child labour and its usefulness in practice.

Furthermore, the result shows child labourers are susceptible to peer pressure. These children seem to overly trust and believe in their peers. This usually occurs when these children are convinced that they can also acquire the material possession of their peers and live their lifestyles. So, they tend to do whatever their peers say to better their lives. The finding also suggests a weak or lack of a child-parent relationship. Such a relationship may exist because of the failure of the family and relatives to properly inculcate societal values and norms in the children. This situation often leads to a lack of parental control and makes the children struggle to function well in society at a young age. Besides, the existence of this relationship may be exacerbated due to the inability of parents to be responsible by providing for both the material and non-material needs of their children. This result also allows us to understand the context specificity of why such children seek the company of friends to enjoy their livelihood. They do so because of broken homes, and loss of the breadwinner. This result is unique because empirical studies on child labour so far have not considered it. It is important to note the neglect to include such factors undermining our ability to fully understand the key factors sustaining child labour. Therefore, the inclusion of peer pressure may lead to a better conceptualization of sociocultural factors promoting child labour in the fishing sector.

The results confirm debt settlement as a key factor in sustaining child labour. In this regard, children become bond labour to the creditor, the canoe owners/fishermen/masters. In this cultural practice, the child is used as a medium for debt exchange between canoe owners or masters and their parents or relatives. Consequently, when the canoe owner has fully recovered his money from the parents, the contract ends, and



the child is set free. This finding agrees with previous studies (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Dumas & Lambert, 2008; Fassa et al., 2005; Soares et al., 2012) the children to settle their parents' indebtedness to creditors, then child enslavement is the consequence of putting the child in debt bondage which demonstrated that this study's finding is valid and extends our knowledge of child labour in the fishing sector in Yeji, Ghana.

## CONCLUSION

This purpose of this paper is to explore the sociocultural factors contributing to child labour in the fishing sector in Yeji in the Bono East Region of Ghana from the perspective of child labourers. Indeed, debt settlement, peer pressure and incapacitation and the death of the breadwinner and parental education pushed children to work in the fishing sector on Lake Volta at Yeji. These findings inform us that households that are unable to settle their indebtedness are likely to offer their children to the owner of the canoe or the fisherman in exchange for the debt. Moreover, uneducated, and less educated parents would encourage their children to enter fishing early. This will happen if such parents do not believe that their children have the right to education and prefer short-term benefits; the less these parents will invest in their education. This finding directly supports the study of (Adeborna & Johnson, 2015; Knaul, 2001) who concluded that poverty-stricken families resort to selling their belongings and borrow to finance their needs, and when they are not able to do so, they resort to using their children to settle their indebtedness to creditors.

Additionally, children susceptible to peer pressure have a high chance to engage in child labour. They will work to keep up with the lifestyles of their peers and be popular among them. The study's results confirm the finding (Agordzo, 2013; Metta et al., 2023 & Otero, 2013) who argued that peer pressure stems from in-school children and other non-school children who admired the material possessions of their peers who are engaged in child related works and as such, children from very poor households and those who are uneducated parents who cannot afford to provide them with everything would eventually follow such children to work as child labourer. Hence, it can be concluded that the increasing rate of child labour on Lake Volta is directly connected with peer pressure, the poor educational background of parents.

## IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATION FOR FUTURE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATION

Identifying socio-cultural factors that sustain child labour on Lake Volta is a major concern for stakeholders all over the world, particularly in Ghana due to the recent increase in this phenomenon. Considering the results, all parents and guidance get a right understanding of the sociocultural factors that tend to influence them to put their children to work at a tender age. More especially, the findings on sociocultural factors deepen the perspectives of parents on the consequences of allowing their social status and cultural beliefs push their children to Lake Volta for greener pastures at an early age. This insight will also guide families to minimise their preference for short-term income from child labour to long-term income from the future employment of their children. Insight into especially bonded labour, allows parents to avoid excessive borrowing from the owners of canoes for their children to be bonded. Furthermore, the insight from the peer pressure households will be more committed to the socialization process to build a strong relationship. These results are also beneficial to policymakers. Policymakers can use the findings to formulate social and economic intervention programmes. Similarly, opinion leaders and Traditional rulers can use this finding to make an informed decisions regarding the role of culture in the socialization of children.

There are limitations for future research direction. First, the limitation was on the topic and research setting. Child labour in the fishing sector extends to all coastal communities in Ghana like Ashiama, Winneba, Tema Manhenyia and others, but the study was purposely limited to Lake Volta due to the recent commentary of (Inside the troubled waters: the child slavery on Ghana's Lake Volta (CNN, 2019; Olden,

2021 & Talbo, 2018). In particular, the study was limited to child labourers along the Lake Volta whose perspectives were not documented. The reason was to gain in-depth understanding of their experiences but some measure of degree of intensity was limited. Also, the study was limited to personal interviews and focus group discussions to obtain multiple perspectives to generate valid and consistent findings with high degree of trustworthiness.

Although, the findings lack the predictive power for understanding the underlying factors of child labour in other productive sectors of the economy, the findings may be useful to those seeking information on how to reduce child labour. Finally, while the findings of the present cannot be generalized to child labour in other sectors of the economy in Ghana and beyond, the findings are indicative of what stakeholders can do to remedy this social menace. The results of the current study serve as reference for child labour and its implementation practices.

Therefore, some recommendations have suggested to relevant organization and other stakeholders to apply for the improvement of child labour phenomenon.

First, the study recommends that since the households play instrumental role, assemblymen, opinion and traditional leaders to educate parents, families and relatives would minimize incidence of child labour. Second, it is also recommended to opinion leaders and traditional leaders to educate families on the traditional concept of socialization which require children to acquire basic skills without becoming a child labour. Thirdly, government and other stakeholders should consider making child labour a subject or a topic in both the junior and senior high school curriculum and in the colleges of education, the universities to create awareness of the damaging nature of child enslavement, especially in the fisheries sector.

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