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Personal Characteristics Predisposing Children to Agricultural Involvement among the Yoruba's in South West Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The study examined personal characteristics of children that predispose them to agricultural involvement among the Yoruba tribe in the southwest of Nigeria. Multi-stage and purposive sampling technique was used to select three states in the southwest of Nigeria and 540 children from the ages of 5 to 14 years old. Descriptive statistics, chi-square and Spearman rho analyses were used to test the significance of the associations between children's level of involvement in agriculture and their personal characteristics. Regression analysis revealed age of the children, gender of children and position of children among children in the household had positive relationships with level of involvement while level of education of children had an inverse relationship. They were all significant predisposing characteristics accounting for 14% of variations in level of involvement. It was recommended that government should make basic education compulsory to secondary school completion. Schools holidays should also be made to coincide with farming seasons.

INTRODUCTION

Children, according to Ennew and Milne (1989), constitute the largest single category of human beings, yet the most powerless. They were once regarded as a residual category of persons lacking full human rights and a property of their parents, who have absolute power over what they should do and be. There is however, no generally acceptable definition of a child as people define a child based on their socio-cultural as well as vocational inclination. The classification and age grouping, into infant, children, adolescent, adults and aged is slightly blurred, in our traditional society. Considerations of different sociological, biological, psychological, cultural, religious and economic factors tend to make a definite definition almost impossible. Article 1 of the Rights of the Child however categorizes every human being under the age of 18 years as a child unless otherwise stated by the law of his/her state, that he/she has attained maturity earlier. This gives room for socio-cultural, political and economic variations.

Africa is a continent bound to culture and traditions which western ideologies and civilization has not been able to eradicate. The socialization process for example has built into itself a way of continuing such traditions and to ensure that family livelihoods, societal values and beliefs are not abandoned, lost or eroded. Folktales, folksongs, rhymes, masquerades, festivals, taboos are among such instruments used to teach, enlighten and entrench this over generations.

Agriculture among the Yoruba's in the south west of Nigeria is a traditional livelihood as shepherding is to the Jews. There is virtually no family that does not have their predecessors involved in agriculture or related activities that children also take on. However, some may have other means of livelihood like the arts and crafts and the entertainment industry. Children in the Yoruba culture are made to understand that agriculture is their primary occupation and that any other activity even western education cannot substitute for it. This is reflected in a folksong

'Ise agbe ni'se ile wa , eni ko sise a ma ja le
Iwe kiko 'laisi oko ati ada, koipe o, koipe o'

Children are thus, still involved in agriculture as studies over the country and especially in the southwest have shown (Etim 1989; Ebigbo 1990; Adedoyin 2000). Olawoye (2001) has however revealed that agricultural activities are divided along gender and generational lines in households and research should be focused along

these lines. In recent times, Laogun et al. (2000) discovered that about 90% of children are found on farms after school hours and during holidays in rural south west Nigeria. These who constitute the third category after the adult males and females in the household unit are however not given recognition in interventions and national surveys (UNICEF 1995). Apart from culture, the socio economic characteristics of households in which the children find themselves have been shown to significantly influence children involvement in labour activities (UNICEF 2002).

Children involvement in agriculture is seen by the western world as child labour while many in Africa see it as part of the socialization process. The fact that many of the present adult generation have farmer parents whom they accompanied to and assisted on the farms, yet are now accomplished persons in their various fields of endeavor makes the claim of child labour ridiculous to many. Given this background, the study tried to further uncover personal characteristics of children that predispose them to involvement in agricultural activities within their households.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to determine personal characteristics of children that predisposes them to involvement in agricultural activities.

The specific objectives were to

1. examine the personal characteristics of the farm children
2. determine their level of involvement in agricultural activities
3. determine whether a relationship exists between the children's personal characteristics and their level of involvement in agriculture.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in the south west of Nigeria, comprising 6 states of the federation (Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun and Ekiti State). The region lies in the rainforest belt between latitude 6^0N and 9^0N and longitude 2^030^1 E and 6E. It is an agrarian region with over 60% of its population living in the rural areas and engaged in agriculture as the major income generating activity. It has a population of 17,600,64 constituting approximately 20% of the Nigerian population (NPC 1998).

Sampling Technique/Sampling Size

The study employed a household based approach using a purposive and multi-stage sampling technique. Fifty percent of the states namely Ogun, Osun and Ondo States were selected based on their similar population figures. Two local government areas were chosen to represent the rural areas in each state based on their infrastructural development and level of agricultural activity. Local governments hosting the state capitals were selected to represent the urban centers. Each local government area was then stratified based on the number of political wards from which 5 (50%) was chosen in each local government area. A community was selected in each ward and twelve households involved in agricultural activities, with a child from the age of 5 to 14 years were selected. Five hundred and forty children were used in the study.

Analytical Techniques

The level of involvement was measured at the ordinal level using a two-hour interval for the average number of hours a child spends on agricultural activities in a week. This included time spent in walking to and from the farm. Face and content validity of the interview schedule were established by researchers in the field of agricultural extension, rural sociology and child developments studies at the University of Ibadan.

Data collected were analysed using frequency tables, percentages, means and bar charts. The chi-square and spearman rho's correlation analysis were used to test relationships between variables measured in the study. The regression analysis was further used to test the degree of the influence of the various personal characteristics of the children on their level of involvement in agriculture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Personal Characteristics of Children Involved in Agriculture Gender of the Children

Majority of the children involved in agriculture were males (76.2%). This corroborates findings that revealed male children being more

involved in agricultural activities (ILO 2005). This is likely due to the physical build up of the male gender, being relatively more muscular and physiological stronger as agricultural activity is still labour intensive in the region making male children more physically fit for such tasks.

Age of the Children

Majority of the children (86.9%) were in the 10 - 14 years category, with a mean of 12 years. This can also be attributed to the fact that agricultural tasks are energy tasking which may be beyond the capacity of the 5 - 9 years category. This also corroborates other findings that work load increases with age of the child (Kabebwe 1998)

Position of Child in the Household

Majority of the children (87.6%) were among the first five of the children in the households with a mode of one i.e. majority were the first child. Mean number of children was 6. This implies a heavy social responsibility on the child, who is looked upon, to provide general assistance to the parents in the day to day livelihoods of the household. Majority (93.1%) were also among the first five of their mother's children in the case of polygamous households and mostly the first child too. Therefore, in line with, the age of the child, the children's position in their households influences the child's involvement in agriculture.

Level of Education

Table 1 also reveals majority of the children (64.1%) are in the secondary school. Most of these (40.6%) were in the junior secondary school. 1.3% were not enrolled in formal education. This signifies a high net enrollment rate (98.7%) than that recorded (50%) for low-income countries (ILO 2005). This implies that majority of the children will be engaged in educational activities for about half of the daytime which will limit their involvement in agriculture. This finding reveals the importance the Yoruba's place on formal education despite their agrarian nature.

Parental Status of Children

Majority of the children had double parentage (87.3%) i.e. the child resides with both father and mother of the house. Single parenthood has, however, been discovered to have strong correlations with child involvement in labour activities (ILO 2005).Thus the fact that most of the children live with both parents may moderate the children's involvement in agriculture as the dependence on the child's labour will be dispersed.

Children's Guardian

Majority of the children interviewed were also living with their biological parents (89.3%). Those who stayed with family relations, as in the case with the extended family system, followed (7.6%) then those living with employers (3.1%). Those living with employers may be house helps or involved in trade apprenticeship arrangement which makes them to stay with their tutors (masters). A study on family tobacco farms in the Dominican Republic also revealed over 80% living with their biological parents (ILO 2005).

Table 1: Personal characteristics of children Respondents

Variable	*Frequency*	*%*
A. Sex		
Male	412	76.2
Female	128	23.7
Total	540	100.0
B. Age (in years)		
5 – 9	71	13.1
10 – 14	469	86.9
Total	540	100.0
C. Position Father's Children		
1 – 5	473	87.6
6 – 10	53	9.8
11 – 15	11	2.0
> 15	3	0.6
Total	540	100.0
D. Position among Mother's Children		
1 – 5	503	93.1
6 – 10	37	6.9
Total	540	100.0
E. Educational Level of Child		
No formal	7	1.3
Primary 1 - 3	82	15.2
Primary 4 - 6	105	19.4
Junior Secondary school 1- 3	219	40.6
Senior Secondary school 1- 3	127	23.5
Total	540	100.0
F. Parental Status of Children		
Double parentage	471	87.3
Single parentage	69	12.7
Total	540	100.0
G. Guardian		
Biological parent	482	89.3
Relative	41	7.6
Employer	17	3.1
Total	540	100.0

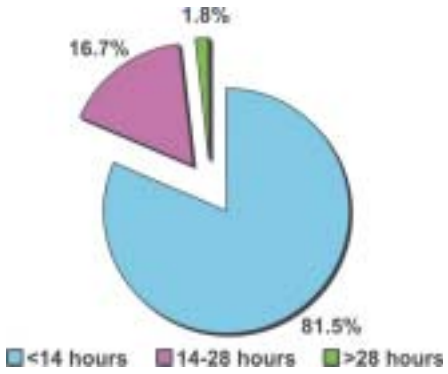

Fig. 1. Children's level of involvement in agriculture

Level of Involvement of Children in Agriculture

Majority of the children (81.5%) as shown in Figure 1, spent less than or equal to 14 hours on agricultural activities per week. Those who spent between 14.1 - 28 hours followed (16.7%).Those spending greater than 28 hours (1.8%) were negligible.

According to the Nigerian labour Act of 1974, young persons under the age of 16 years are prohibited from working for a long period of four consecutive hours. Based on this, a figure above 28 hours is regarded as high for children in this study. Majority had low level of involvement in agricultural activities with a mean of 10-12 hours per week. This is may be because they are in schooling age and attend formal educational institutions that occupy their time for between 6-8 hours daily.

Test of Association

Table 2 reveals the results of the chi-square analysis for relationships between children's personal characteristics measured at the nominal level and level of involvement in agriculture using an apriori level of 0.05. P-value for the gender of the children was below 0.05 which makes the relationship significant. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternate accepted. This means the gender of the child whether male or female is a determinant factor in children's involvement as well as the intensity of their involvement in agriculture. In the study, males were more involved signifying the fact that males are more involved in agriculture than the female sex. This agrees with studies in other African countries (ILO 2005). Parental status of the children is however not significantly related to the children's level of involvement in agriculture because the p-value is greater than 0.05. Therefore, whether the child has a single parent as guardian or not, does not significantly affect his/her level of involvement in agriculture. This result may be because about 90% of the respondents have double parentage. This skewed distribution could affect the chi square test.

Table 3 shows the results of the correlation between personal characteristics of respondents and their level of involvement. It shows all the variables have significant positive relationships with the children's involvement in agriculture. This means the older the child, the more involved he will be in agriculture (r = 0.402). The positions of the child among the children in the house (r = 0.166) as well as his/her position among his/her mothers children (in the case of polygamous families) (r = 0.196), were also positively related to the child's level of involvement in agriculture.

Table 3: Results of Spearman Rho's correlation analysis between children's personal characteristics and level of involvement

	Children's level of involvement
Age of children	0.402**
Position of children among father's children	0.166**
Position of children among mothers children	0.196**
Educational level of children	0.232**

** Significant at the 0.01 level

Regression Analysis

All significant personal characteristics of children were fitted into a regression analysis to

Table 2: Chi-square analysis results between children's personal characteristics and level of involvement in agriculture

	Variable	*Calculated χ^2 value*	*Df*	*P-value*	*Decision*
1.	Gender of children	23.65	2	0.00	Reject H_o
2.	Person stayed with	37.53	6	0.00	Reject H_o
3	Parental status of children	8.34	4	0.08	Accept H_o

Table 4: Results of regression analysis on children's personal characteristics

Variable	*Unstandardized β coefficients*	*t-value*	*Sig.*	*R^2 change*
Age of child	0.83	6.96	0.00	0.09
Educational level of child	-0.98	-3.73	0.00	0.11
Gender of child	1.50	3.34	0.00	0.13
Position of child among mothers children	0.24	2.15	0.03	0.14
Constant	-2.35	-2.36	0.02	

R= 0.36 R^2 = 0.14
F = 19.99 p = 0.00

determine their individual contribution in the presence of other variables to children's level of involvement in agriculture. The following five characteristics retained their significance and contributed 14% to children's level of involvement in agriculture. The β coefficient of all the variables had positive signs except that of educational level of the child (Table 4). Age of the child had the highest influence on children's level of involve-ment in agriculture contributing 9% of the variations. Educational level of the child contributed 2% of the variations and its negative sign indicates that the higher the educational attainment of the children, the less time they have for agricultural activities. This is likely due to the extra mural classes attended after school hours which reduces free time left for agricultural activities. It further shows the seriousness with which they view educational pursuits. Gender of children also contributed 2% and the positive sign reveals that males are more involved in agriculture as a dummy variable of "1" was used for males and "0" for females. Position of the child among his/her mothers children contributed 1% of the variations observed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has revealed that personal characteristics of children predispose them to agricultural involvement in their households. Prominent among these is the age of children. Gender of the child also contributed significantly as well as their position among the children in the household. The ability of the children to shoulder responsibility due to physical maturity is revealed a major predisposing factor. Male children are thus more predisposed to agricultural activities than female children are. Involvement in agriculture however does not hinder enrollment in formal education. A higher level of education on the contrary was discovered to reduce level of involvement in agriculture.

It however implies that agricultural extension workers need to educate parents to moderate the agricultural activities of their male children. Compulsory free primary and secondary education should be legalized for all children as this will reduce their involvement in agriculture and consequently reduce child labour. The present intention of the federal government of Nigeria to make basic education to be 9 years as from the year 2006 academic session is therefore a welcome idea. Therefore, financial handicaps/ poverty of guardians will not be an excuse for non-enrollment of children. Furthermore, since parents desire the assistance of their children, the school calendar should be adapted to the farming seasons so that children will be available to assist as well as learn the art of agriculture.

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