THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN ARTISANAL FISHING IN NIGERIA: IMPACTS ON LIVELIHOODS AND CHILD WELFARE

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ABSTRACT
Artisanal fishing is a critical livelihood activity that supports millions of households globally, particularly in coastal and rural communities. Children involvement in artisanal fishing is not uncommon in many coastal and riverine communities in Nigeria. This study examines children involvement in artisanal fishing in Ilaje coastal area of Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria. A field survey was conducted using direct observation and structured interviews to assess children's involvement in artisanal fishing. Roles assigned to children varied by age; children aged 3–5 years participated in simple tasks like baling water, while those aged 6–8 years sorted fish, an entry-level activity requiring attention to detail. Older children, aged 9–11 years, engaged in setting fishing gears. Adolescents aged 12–14 were tasked with paddling, while those aged 15–17 participated in cast netting and fishing with hooks/lines. Seasonal trends showed a decline in the number of boats and crew from September 2020 to February 2021, with peak fishing months corresponding to an increased reliance on child labor. Boys were the sole participants, with their involvement peaking in November 2020. School attendance remained persistently low, dropping to 13.44% in December 2020 and rebounding slightly in early 2021.
Keywords: **Children, Fishing communities, Gender, Badagry, Nigeria**

INTRODUCTION

Artisanal fishing is a critical livelihood activity that supports millions of households globally, particularly in coastal and rural communities (Wanyonyi *et al.* 2016). The artisanal fishing sector in Nigeria plays a vital role in ensuring food security, livelihood sustainability, and poverty reduction in many coastal and rural communities (Akintola and Fakoya, 2017). These fisheries are typically small-scale operations, employing simple technology and involving entire households in various stages of the fishing process, from harvesting to processing and marketing (Tietze, 2016). In regions like Badagry, Lagos, fishing is a deeply ingrained economic activity, with entire households often engaged in its various facets. However, the increasing involvement of children in artisanal fishing activities raises significant concerns regarding their education, health, and overall well-being (Arulingam *et al*., 2019).

Children involvement in artisanal fishing is not uncommon in many coastal and riverine communities in Nigeria. Their participation is often seen as a form of socialization and skill acquisition, where fishing knowledge is transferred across generations (Oni and Olaniran, 2018). It is frequently viewed as a means of cultural transmission and economic support for their families. However, this engagement raises concerns about the implications for their education, health, and overall development. Many children are exposed to hazardous working conditions, long hours, and the physical demands of fishing activities, which can negatively affect their well-being and hinder their academic progress (Maliao *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, these activities can conflict with formal education, leading to high dropout rates and perpetuating cycles of poverty and limited opportunities within fishing communities (Dème *et al*., 2024).

In Badagry, Lagos, a historical fishing hub, the involvement of children in artisanal fisheries is influenced by cultural norms, economic necessity, and family traditions (Oloko *et al.* 2022). Despite the socio-economic and cultural significance of this issue, there is a dearth of empirical research focused on the scale, nature, and implications of children's involvement in artisanal fisheries in Nigeria, particularly in Badagry. Existing studies tend to generalize findings across regions, overlooking the unique socio-cultural and economic dynamics of specific communities. This gap in knowledge limits the ability of policymakers and stakeholders to design targeted interventions that balance the preservation of traditional livelihoods with the safeguarding of children's rights and development. This study addresses this critical knowledge gap by examining the factors influencing children participation in artisanal fishing in selected communities of Badagry, Lagos. It seeks to provide evidence-based insights into the roles children perform, the risks they face, and the socio-economic implications of their involvement, thereby contributing to the development of sustainable policies and practices in artisanal fisheries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study focused on Ilaje coastal area of Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria (Figure 1). Primary data were collected on working days between 09:00 and 14:00 GMT over a six-month period (September 2020 – February 2021) using

questionnaires. Children were sampled through a multistage sampling technique, which involved the purposive selection of the fishing community known for the high involvement of rural children in artisanal fishing. Data were collated and analyzed using frequency distribution and percentages, based on the study's objectives. Key factors considered in the analysis included the total number of fishing boats, the number of people on each boat, the number of children on board, the age and educational background of the children, and the specific roles they played in the boats. The study targeted fishermen for data collection.

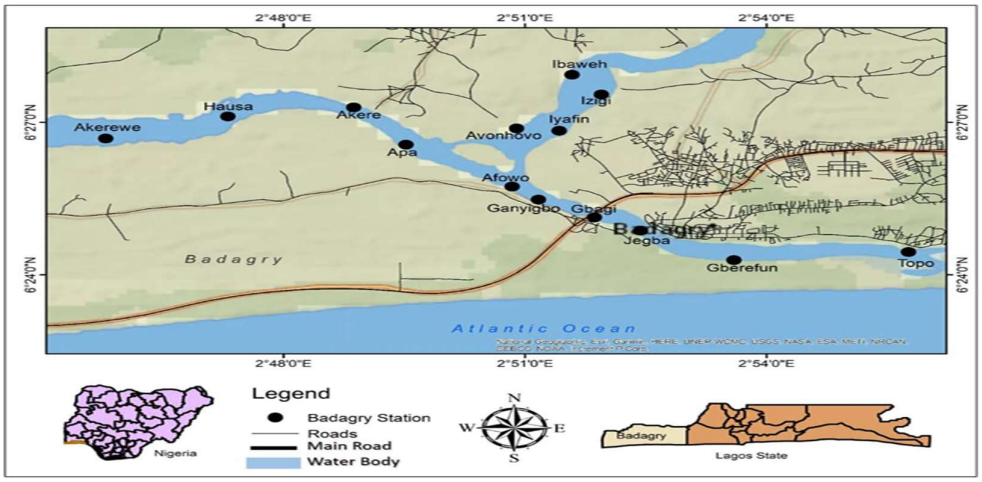


Figure 1: Map of the study area showing the location of fishing communities in Southwestern Nigeria

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The various roles performed by children of different age groups in fishing communities in Badagry is illustrated in Table 1. Children aged 12–14 are tasked with paddling, a physically demanding activity that requires sufficient strength and stamina. This role aligns with the developmental stage where children are becoming more physically capable. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, such as Leonard (2015), which noted that pre-adolescents and early adolescents in fishing communities often assume more active roles requiring physical exertion, as they are considered mature enough to contribute effectively. The setting of fishing gears is assigned to children aged 9–11, who are likely developing fine motor skills and basic knowledge of fishing tools. Oni and Olaniran (2018) also highlighted that children in this age range often take on roles requiring moderate dexterity and technical understanding in artisanal fishing communities.

Table 1: Activities of children and their age in some fishing communities in Badagry

S/N	Roles of Children	Ages of Children
1	Paddling	12-14years
2	Setting of Fishing Gears	9-11years
3	Castnet	15-17 years
4	Fishing with Hook/Line	15-17 years
5	Baling of Water	3-5 years
6	Sorting	6-8 years
7	Doing nothing	0-2 years
8	Cleaning/Mending of nets	15-17 years

Castnet, fishing with hook/line, and cleaning/mending of nets are associated with older adolescents (15–17 years), reflecting their advanced physical and cognitive abilities. Similarly, cleaning and mending nets demand precision and knowledge of fishing techniques. This aligns with Maliao *et al*. (2023), who found that older adolescents in fishing households often handle tasks critical to the success of fishing expeditions.

Children as young as 3–5 years engage in baling water, a task requiring minimal skill. The involvement of very young children highlights the cultural norm of early participation in family livelihood activities. This observation is consistent with Arulingam *et al*. (2019), who noted that even toddlers in fishing communities often assume simple, supportive roles to inculcate a sense of responsibility. Children aged 6–8 years are primarily involved in sorting fish, an activity that is less physically demanding but still requires attention to detail. Similar trends were identified by Dème *et al.* (2024), who described sorting as an age-appropriate activity that introduces children to the fishing trade. Infants (0–2 years) are understandably not engaged in any activities, reflecting their

dependency stage. However, their presence on fishing expeditions suggests early exposure to the trade, which has implications for their socialization within these communities.

Table 2 offers an insight into the dynamics of child involvement in fishing activities. The number of boats steadily decreases from September 2020 (214 boats) to February 2021 (175 boats). This decline may reflect seasonal fishing trends, weather conditions, or resource availability. Correspondingly, the total number of people in the boats also declines, from 42 in September 2020 to 27 in February 2021. The number of children involved per boat increases during peak fishing months (e.g., 40 in November 2020), reflecting higher demands for labour. This trend coincides with an increase in the crew size of boats with children, peaking at 30 in December 2020 before declining to 22 in February 2021. The rise in child participation during peak months suggests that children may be employed to meet seasonal labor demands. The observed fluctuations in the number of boats and crew size align with findings from studies such as Wanyonyi *et al.* (2016), which note that artisanal fishing activities are highly seasonal, with peak periods requiring additional labor. No girls were recorded among the children participating in fishing activities during the observed period. This suggests a significant gender disparity, possibly due to cultural norms or expectations, which restrict girls from engaging in fishing-related tasks. Boys exclusively account for the recorded children involved, starting at 17 in September 2020 and peaking at 40 in November 2020 before gradually declining to 30 by February 2021.

Table 2: **Children in artisanal fishing in some fishing communities in Badagry**

Months	Number of Boats Counted	Number of People in all the Boats	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Number of Children in the Boat	Crew Size of sitting in a Boat
Sept 2020	214	42	42	0	17	14
Oct 2020	200	39	39	0	34	18
Nov 2020	203	34	34	0	40	24
Dec 2020	180	28	28	0	36	30
Jan 2021	150	28	28	0	35	26
Feb 2021	175	27	27	0	30	22

Figure 2 reveals the extent and nature of their participation based on age groups. Only one child in age group 0–2 Years is involved, likely in a passive capacity, such as being present with caregivers during fishing activities. A noticeable increase in participation occurs in this 3–5 Years age range, with 24 children involved. This aligns with findings by Arulingam *et al.* (2019), which highlight that cultural norms encourage early exposure to artisanal fishing as part of socialization. The majority of children fall within the 6–8 years (168) and 9–11 years (173) age ranges, representing the peak of involvement. These children are often tasked with roles like setting fishing gears or assisting in active fishing, as they possess growing physical strength and developing cognitive skills. Sultana (2020) reported similar trends, noting that children in these age groups form the backbone of child labor in fishing communities. Participation declines significantly in older age groups (12–14 and 15–17 Years), with 96 children aged 12–14 and only 6 aged 15–17 involved. This decrease may reflect adolescents transitioning to roles outside fishing, attending school, or assuming responsibilities that are less labor-intensive but require more skill, such as net mending. According to Oni and Olaniran (2018), older children in fishing households often balance schooling or vocational training with occasional participation in fishing activities, reducing their overall involvement.

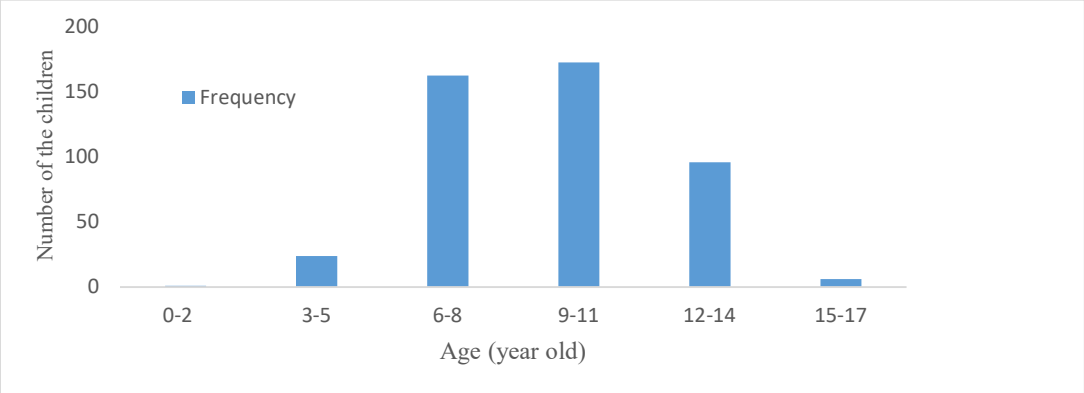


Figure 2: Total number of children at a particular age in the various communities

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Children in Badagry communities actively participate in artisanal fishing, with roles structured by age and seasonal demands. Economic pressures drive increased child labor during peak fishing periods, affecting child welfare. Addressing these challenges requires interventions promoting education and livelihoods.

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