

In Their Own Words: Consequences Of Child Labor in Urban Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This paper utilizes a 2002 datasets gathered through interviews with 1,535 children (aged 8-14 years) and their parents in urban Nigeria to examine the dangers and hazards reported by children who work in the urban economy. Findings indicate that slightly over half of interviewed child laborers are female; they begin work as early as age 7; and work for an average of 4 hours a day in order to contribute financially to the sustenance of the family; and to acquire training needed in future occupations. The children come mostly from large households of about 6 persons, where many of their parents have low levels of education, income, and occupational statuses. Furthermore, because the sample is urban based, children come mostly from nuclear and monogamous households. A significant percentage of working children are involved in motor accidents, face attempted kidnapping, rape, and sexual molestation. Many are also invited by gangsters to participate in robbery and anti-social activities. Others suffer from physical exhaustion and pains due to frequent long walks. These health problems have detrimental effects on children’s school attendance, punctuality, school performance, and leisure time. This study has policy implications for regulating child labor in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Of the 191 million children aged 5-14 years engaged in economic activity throughout the world in 2004, more than one third of these children – 74.4 million – are considered to be involved in employments which are hazardous to their physical and/or mental health (International Labour Organization (ILO, 2006). With great efforts from the international community and national governments, child labor has declined in various countries. The reduction has been most evidently observed in the Latin American and Caribbean region where child labor has dramatically fallen by two-thirds (ILO, 2006). However, the same observation cannot be made in regards to the region of Sub-Saharan Africa. The incidence of child labor in this region continues to remain the highest for any continent, where 49 million children are found to be economically active (ILO, 2006). As for Nigeria, the focus of our study and the most populous nation in Africa with 130 million individuals, it is pertinent to mention that there exists a high incidence of child labor rates within the country (Bass, 2004; The World Bank, 2006). The most recent data indicates that about 26

percent of children aged 10-14 years in Nigeria are engaged in economic activity (ILO, 1995). Hence, the magnitude of children’s labor force participation in Nigeria serves as a compelling reason to investigate the consequences of child labor for children’s social and human capital development.

The global phenomenon of child labor can be attributed to several factors. The rapid population growth of many less developed countries, high rates of unemployment, inflation, and low wages have contributed to the occurrence and necessity for children to engage in economic activity (Bass, 2004; Lopez-Calva, 2001). Furthermore, globalization which tends to manifest itself in the proliferation of industries in many less developed countries has been cited as a cause of child labor (Arat, 2002; Cigno et al., 2002; Sancho-Liao, 1994). However, unlike in Asia and Latin America where children are mostly employed in industries, the effects of globalization in Africa are much more visible in service-oriented sectors such as communication and retail trade within and outside the household. As a result, children are engaged as street hawkers, hustlers, vendors, and domestic servants. In addition, child labor has been attributed to socialization. This is a process where children, under the guidance of parents or guardians receive training that develops their future vocational skills. Furthermore, in other studies at the micro-level, violence within the

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household has been found to be related to the occurrence of child labor (Longford, 1995; Makhoul et al., 2004; Verma, 1999).

The consequences of child labor have also been documented in Asia (Ali et al., 2004; Hasan and Debnath, 2000; Makhoul et al., 2004; Singh, 1999), Latin America (Binder and Scrogin, 1999; Duryea and Arends-Kuenning, 2003; Taracena and Tavera, 2000; Wyer, 1986), and Africa (Aderinto, 2000; Francavilla and Lyon, 2002; Hope, 2005; Manda et al., 2003; Olutayo, 1994; Robson, 2004). However, very few studies have reported about the dangers experienced by children at the household level in urban areas of Africa. Furthermore, many of the previous studies on Africa have focused predominately on the effects of children's activities in rural and agricultural areas (Grootaert, 1999; Robson, 2004). As such, this paper seeks to document the consequences of child labor at the household level where child labor evolves by utilizing datasets gathered from interviews with 1,535 children (aged 8-14 years) to examine the health, educational, and social consequences of child labor in urban Nigeria.

This study is important for two reasons. First, its findings will shed light on the effects of child labor, especially in Nigeria, where the prevalence of child labor is very high. Second, the study has policy implications for child labor regulation and poverty alleviation in Nigeria, where many children from poor households contribute to the economic sustenance of the family. Therefore, the goal is to bring to the fore the dangers and hazards of child labor as reported by children who engage in sales and services. Although the major objective of this paper is to identify health, educational, and social consequences of child labor, the paper will address the reasons for working and also provide information regarding the characteristics of the working children.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. A review of the recent literature and research findings regarding the consequences of child labor in different sectors of the economy is provided. Next, the data source and research methodology are discussed. Then the findings are presented. Finally, the conclusion and policy implications are articulated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The consequences of child labor can be

categorized according to the sectors of the economy where children are engaged. Previous literature has examined the consequences of child labor within the industrial, agricultural, and sales and service sectors of the economy. Not only do differences by sectors have been analyzed, but the inherent location (rural or urban) of the children's work has been discussed. The paragraphs that follow provide a review of these consequences according to the sectors of the economy in which child labor takes place.

Consequences of Child Labor in the Industrial Sector: The globalization of the economy has led to the desire for cheap labor and profit maximization, especially in urban areas of Asian and Latin American regions. However, one major backlash of this global development and spread of industries has been the exploitation of children in terms of low wages and their deplorable working conditions. For countries of Africa, these industries have not fully spread and developed as a major source of employment for children due mostly to political instability (Bass, 2004; Manda et al., 2003).

Research has indicated the inherent hazards and risks that children often experience when working in exploitative industries. Physical consequences that range from malnourishment, diseases, musculo-skeletal disorders from heavy labor, physical and sexual abuse, to injuries, exposure to toxic agents, and prolonged working in cramped and hazardous conditions have been well documented (Das and Sekhar, 1992; Gulrajani, 1994; Harari et al., 1997; Hasan and Debnath, 2000; Postol, 1993). These physical effects of the industrial sector have been determined to be detrimental to the well-being of the child worker.

Socially, children in industries have been found to experience negative consequences to their educational development and performance. The prevalence of illiteracy, low school attendance, and low enrollment has been attributed to children's economic participation (Hasan and Debnath, 2000; Weiner, 1991). Furthermore, the mental health of the child is negatively affected. Indeed, children engaged in hazardous industries have been observed to suffer from oral abuse from their employers, consistent fear of job termination, low self-esteem, and a loss of imagination and future direction in life (Das and Sekhar, 1992; Gulrajani, 1994; Hasan and Debnath, 2000).

Consequences of Child Labor in the Agricultural Sector: In the rural sector employment

where agricultural activities prevail, some children work on family farms while others are employed on farms outside of the sphere of the familial household. In both cases, child labor has been found to have negative consequences for the children. The heavy and intensive labor that children undergo in the fields may lead to lack of pay, long hours on the job, physical exhaustion, physical abuse, and exposure to toxic pesticides and herbicides (Arat, 2002; Gill, 1994; International Labour Conference, 1996; Longford, 1995; Sancho-Liao, 1994). In addition, studies that are particularly focused on child agricultural workers in Africa have recognized a high incidence of injury, inferior living conditions resulting from substandard housing, poor access to clean water and food, poor sanitation, and low wages (Anyanwu, 1993; Francavilla and Lyon, 2002; Manda et al., 2003).

It has also been noted that children employed in the agricultural sector experience mental and social consequences. For instance, in one Latin American study, child workers in agriculture have been perceived negatively and their employment has been a source of tension and change of inter-familial relations (Wyer, 1986). In another study conducted in Asia, child labor has been found to negatively affect the educational outcomes of the children, but these effects vary by the gender of the child (Hazarika and Bedi, 2003). Furthermore, in the region of Africa, particularly in rural Nigeria, it has been detected that child workers engaged in farming have lower school attendance compared to their urban working peers (Robson, 2004). However, there are inconclusive results regarding the effects of agricultural work on children's leisure time (Francavilla and Lyon, 2002; Grootaert, 1999).

Consequences of Child Labor in the Sales and Service Sector: Children are engaged in the sales and service sector economy in both rural and urban areas as street hawkers, domestic servants, vendors, car washers, beggars, and even prostitutes. In some studies, children employed in this sector are regarded as "street children" or "children of the street" who run away from parental or guardian abuse, leaving them to eke out a living on their own (Aderinto, 2000; Verma, 1999). Yet, other studies regard children as workers from legitimate households who assist their parents by contributing financially to the sustenance of the households where they live and come from (Togunde and Carter, 2006).

Physical and health consequences of children participating in the sales and service sector have been identified in the Latin American, Asian, and African regions. Child workers suffer from various diseases such as respiratory problems, injuries and accidents, physical and sexual abuse such as rape and molestation, malnourishment, extortion of income, police harassment, and participation in harmful or delinquent activities (Ali et al., 2004; Hope, 2005; Manda et al., 2003; Okeahialam, 1984; Taracena and Tavera, 2000; Verma, 1999). In other studies, child laborers face robbery, inadequate sleep due to fatigue and long hours on the job, and confinement in juvenile homes (Aderinto, 2000; Charles and Charles, 2004; May, 1996).

Moreover, children engaged in the sales and service sector of the labor market encounter problems related to their mental well-being. Stigmatization from the press and public, feelings of disheartenment, stress and irritability, personality disorders and anti-social behavior, and alienation and isolation from their family have been identified (Amin, 1994; Gill, 1994; Grier, 2004; Makhoul et al., 2004; Taracena and Tavera, 2000; Verma, 1999). Furthermore, similar to other sectors of children's employment, child labor in the sales and service economy in the less developing countries has a significant negative effect upon the level of education, school attendance, grades, literacy, leisure time, and overall human capital formation of the child worker (Binder and Scrogin, 1999; Duryea and Arends-Kuenning, 2003; Francavilla and Lyon, 2002; Grootaert, 1999; Singh, 1999). In addition, other studies have noted that child laborers tend to keep bad company and are negatively pressured by peers to engage in delinquent behaviors (Gill, 1994; Verma, 1999).

One common thread emerging from the synthesis of literature in all the three sectors is that child labor has detrimental effects for children's health, social, and educational well-being, although such effects are more serious in exploitative industries than in the other two sectors. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to contribute to the voluminous literature on this topic by using datasets that give voice to the children who are involved in child labor in Nigeria. Furthermore, unlike previous studies carried out in Nigeria with relatively few sample sizes that focus on street children, our study utilizes a much larger sample size drawn from

children who come from households where child labor originates

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes datasets gathered between the months of May and August of 2002 from interviews with 1,535 children and their parents in Abeokuta, the capital city of Ogun state, Nigeria. Abeokuta is one of the major Yoruba cities located in the South-Western part of Nigeria. This research project was supported by generous funding from Faculty Development Grants; The Center for Ethnicity, Gender, and Global Studies; and The Center for History and Culture at the authors' institution.

The survey employed a two-stage stratified sampling technique in order to increase the level of sampling accuracy and to cover a range of socioeconomic classes in the population. We began the first stage of the stratification by identifying four residential zones within the city: the elite zone (comprised of individuals with high-income); the mixed zone (encompasses medium- to low-income migrant and non-migrant households); the migrant zone (consisting of medium- to low-income migrant households); and the traditional zone (made up of indigenous households). The second stage of the sampling technique consisted of identifying the major streets within each of the four residential zones. Households were then systematically selected from each major street identified in the residential zones. To participate in the survey, a household must have had at least one child between the ages of 8 and 14 years engaged in a paid activity within or outside of the household. The age range of the child workers was chosen in accordance with the definition of a working child as determined by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 1991). Another requirement was that parental consent had to be obtained before a child would be interviewed. Finally, parents and children were interviewed separately.

A wide range of socio-economic and demographic information was obtained from the parents. The children also supplied data regarding their demographics, patterns of work, and consequences of their employment activities. In particular, interviewers queried children about the social, physical, and educational effects of child labor. As earlier mentioned and unlike previous studies, the

uniqueness of this paper lies in the opportunity given to children to express their opinions about the dangers and benefits of child labor.

We proceed with the analysis by presenting in Table 1 information regarding the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the parents and children. This table also includes information about children's work patterns as well as reasons for child labor. In Table 2, descriptive data about the health, social, and educational consequences of child labor are presented. In addition to Table 2, qualitative data as quoted by children are infused. Please note that pseudonyms are used in the quotations presented in the findings in an attempt to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, a little over half of the working children are female, and the average age of the child worker is 12 years. While one out of four children started working as early as age 7, the average age when work started is 9 years. Not surprisingly, because of the urban nature of the study, larger proportions of the children come from both nuclear and monogamous households. Furthermore, households are relatively large, comprising of six persons on average per household. Within the households, an average of four children is present and out of which about two are engaged in economic activities.

The socio-economic characteristics of the parents are varied. As Table 1 further shows, while 4 out of 10 parents had obtained an elementary education, only 1 out of 4 had received post-secondary education. The relatively low educational status of the sample reflects in the occupational classification. While more than two-thirds of the parents engage in trading and services, the remaining 28.4 percent are employed in administrative and professional occupations that indicate their higher education. Regarding parental income, an overwhelming 8 out of 10 parents earn about 20,000 Naira per month. The low earning power of the parents is a reflection of the deteriorating economic situation in Nigeria, which unsurprisingly has led many households to utilize the labor of their children in order to augment the family income. This assertion is evident in Table 1 which indicates that a staggering 90 percent of parents had engaged their children in child labor in order

Table 1: Socioeconomic and demographic variables characteristics of the parents and children

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Sex of Child</i>		
Male	674	43.9
Female	861	56.1
<i>Child's Age by Years**</i>		
8	40	2.6
9	68	4.4
10	166	10.8
11	119	7.8
12	283	18.4
13	337	22.0
14	522	34.0
** Average age of child = 12.3 years		
<i>Age When Child Started Working**</i>		
7	373	24.3
8	296	19.3
10	408	26.6
11	233	15.2
12	172	11.2
13	37	2.4
14	16	1.0
**Average age when work started = 9.37 years		
<i>Child's Parent Family Structure</i>		
Nuclear	1124	73.2
Extended	411	26.8
<i>Child's Type of Household</i>		
Monogamy	1035	67.4
Polygyny	500	32.6
<i>Size of the Child's Household**</i>		
0 - 4	272	17.7
5 - 9	1187	77.3
10+	76	5.0
**Average household size = 6.09 persons		
<i>Total Number of Children in the Household**</i>		
1	42	2.7
2	167	10.9
3	360	23.5
4	458	29.8
5	282	18.4
6	152	9.9
7	48	3.1
8	14	0.9
9	6	0.4
12	6	0.4
**Average number of children = 4.0 children		
<i>Number of Children Working in the Household**</i>		
1	769	50.1
2	509	33.2
3	197	12.8
4	46	3.0
5	14	0.9
**Average number of children working=1.7 (approximately 2)		
<i>Parental Education</i>		
Primary/Elementary	617	40.2
Modern school/Secondary	266	17.3
Post secondary/Grade two/	405	26.4
Polytechnic/ NCE*/		
College Education		
Drop out/ No education	247	16.1
*National Certificate of Education		

Table 1. Contd.....

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Parental Occupation</i>		
Trading/Business	507	33.0
Services (hairdressers, tailors)	592	38.6
Admin/Management/Professional/ Teachers	436	28.4
<i>Parental Income per Month[^]</i>		
Below #20,000	1243	81.0
#21,000 - 40,000	178	11.6
#41,000+	114	7.4
# denotes Nigeria's Naira currency		
<i>Parent's Reasons Why Child is Working</i>		
Training so that he/she learns about business early in life	155	10.1
Financial contribution to the household consumption needs	1380	89.9
<i>Child's Reasons For Working</i>		
Make additional money (for parent for feeding/education)	1007	65.6
Working is important training (prepares me for future)	528	34.4
<i>Child's Hours of Work per Day**</i>		
1	18	1.2
2	165	10.7
3	391	25.5
4	660	43.0
5	188	12.2
6	113	7.4
** Average hours of work per day = 3.76 (approximately 4 hours)		
<i>Types of Activities Child is Doing Services (domestic servant, carwash, etc)</i>		
Sales (selling, hawking of food stuffs, etc)	1382	90.0
<i>Child's Income per Week[^]</i>		
< #1,000/not applicable/ unknown/unstated	515	33.6
#1,101 - 1,500	82	5.3
#1,501 - 1,999	116	7.6
>#2,000	822	53.6
[^] # denotes Nigeria's Naira currency		

to contribute to the economic survival of the household, although about 66 percent of the children gave similar reasons for their employment. Children in this study work an average of about four hours a day, and 9 out of 10 participate in sales such as street hawking, hustling, and food vending. And on the average, more than half of them earn more than 2,000 Naira per week, which is about half of what four-fifths of the parents earn in a week. This finding indicates that children's work earnings constitute an important element of the household survival strategy in urban Nigeria.

Despite the economic benefits of child labor, the findings as revealed in Table 2 show that children face a myriad of problems in their daily activities which involve sales and services. One-

third (34.5 percent) of the working children have experienced accidents involving motor vehicles.

“John,” boy, aged 9, complained as follows: “I get hit by car and motorcycles when I want to cross the roads.”

Similarly, “Bola,” girl, aged 12 said, “I have been knocked

out by the Okada motorcycles several times from behind,

and that makes my daily job as a child hawker very scary.”

Surprisingly, 1 out of 7 children told our interviewers about attempted kidnapping.

“Sola,” boy, aged 11 said, “Sometimes a strange car would pull

by my side and ask me to enter the car. When I run, my

stuffs will fall off from my head.”

In addition, “Laide” (10 year old girl), narrated a scenario

where two men wanted her to follow them by promising to

give her a lump sum of money (about 5,000 Naira).

Furthermore, this study finds that about 1 out of 10 children had been subjected to rape, sexual molestation, or assault while on the streets selling foodstuffs and fruits.

“Tayo” (girl, age 13) stated, “At times, some men would

pretend that they want to buy things from me, but later would be

touching my body. That tends to be uncomfortable and discouraging.”

“Kehinde” (14 year old girl) had this to say: “I was raped

twice and became pregnant on one occasion by two men

who dragged me inside. My parents aborted the pregnancy

so that it wouldn’t ruin my education.”

Because children spend considerable time away from their family and household, about one-quarter (22.8 percent) reported that gangsters would invite them to join in their bad activities.

“Tolu” (11 year old boy) said, “Touts and gangsters would

come to me and ask me to smoke Indian hemp (marijuana).

Sometimes, they would ask me to describe my house so that they

can come to visit me and invite me to join them in their activities.”

As shown in Table 2, almost one quarter (24.1 percent) of children miss one day or more of school each week. On average each child misses two days of school a week, although the remaining 75 percent of children reported no absence. Moreover, 7 out of 10 of the working children attribute their poor school attendance to tiredness or sickness resulting from long distance walking due to their daily work activities, while the remaining 28 percent miss school because of their parents request that they should sell foodstuffs instead of attending school that day. Clearly, this finding demonstrates that child labor has a detrimental effect on children’s health, which invariably affects their school attendance.

When children do attend school, about half of the children are sometimes or always late to school. When asked of the reasons for their lateness to school, 52.6 percent cited child labor as the major reason for their lateness. Another

Table 2. Consequences of Child Labor As Reported by Children

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Dangers Experienced by Child at Work</i>		
Attempted kidnapping	208	13.6
Accidents (hit by car, motorcycles, etc.)	529	34.5
Rape/sexual molestation/assault	177	11.5
Robbery (losing money to thieves)	87	5.7
Keeping bad company	350	22.8
No danger	184	12.0
<i>Number of Days Child is Absent From School in a Week</i>		
1 day	211	13.7
2 days	118	7.7
3 days	41	2.7
None	1165	75.9
** average days absent per child = 1.54		
<i>Reasons Why Child is Absent From School</i>		
Tired/sick due to long distance walking as a result of work	267	72.1
Parents ask child to work	103	27.9
<i>Is The Child Late To School?</i>		
Always	55	3.6
Sometimes	690	45.0
Never	790	51.4
<i>Reasons Why Child is Late to School</i>		
Has to work before going to school in the morning	393	52.7
Too tired/not feeling well	244	32.8
Long distance walk to school	108	14.5
<i>Does Child Have Time for Schoolwork?</i>		
Yes	672	43.8
No	863	56.2
<i>Do You Have Enough Time to Play With Your Friends or Siblings?</i>		
Yes	507	33.0
No	1028	67.0

one-third mentioned tiredness or illness as reasons for the lateness, while the remaining 15 percent attributed lateness to a long distance walk to school. Again, child labor appears to have a negative impact on children's punctuality which does not bode well for effective learning and success in school.

Children were further queried regarding opportunities for doing homework after school. Just a little over 40 percent said that child labor does not hinder their time for homework. The fact that close to 6 out of 10 children feels that child labor does not afford them enough time to do their homework lends credence to the perception that child labor reduces human capital formation and development. Finally, interviews with the children reveal that two-thirds do not have time for recreation, although the remaining one-third manage to play with friends during the time they are engaged in child labor. This finding corroborates the results in the literature that child labor disturbs children's leisure time, and also hinders their optimal social development through interaction with peers (Ali et al., 2004; Binder and Scrogin, 1999; Grootaert, 1999; Makhoul et al., 2004; Verma, 1999).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to analyze the characteristics of the working children and present the health, educational, and social consequences they experience in sales and service sector economy. The goal is to contribute to the relatively few studies regarding the consequences of child labor carried out at the household level in urban Nigeria. Drawing on interviews with 1,535 children (aged 8–14 years) and their parents, this paper documents the experiences of child laborers.

The findings show that the average age of the working child is 12 years, while work could start as early as age 7. Children are engaged in sales (such as street hawking) and services (e.g. car washing). While some of the children work as much as six hours a day, the average daily hours of work is four hours. Most working children come from predominately nuclear and monogamous households, and their parents tend to have low educational, occupational, and income attainments. The low parental socio-economic status invariably creates a situation whereby most of the parents tend to rely on their

children's labor as a means to contribute to the economic survival of the family. The need to supplement the financial well-being of the family is echoed by many of the children as a major reason for their participation in economic activities at such tender ages. These findings corroborate the previous literature that found poverty to be the major cause of child labor in Africa (Aderinto, 2000; Amin, 1994; Olutayo, 1994; Togunde and Carter, 2006), Asia (Ali et al., 2004; Gill, 1994; Gulrajani, 1994), and Latin America (Binder and Scrogin, 1999; Wyr, 1986).

Substantively, this study reveals that although child labor provides significant economic assistance towards the sustenance of the family, children do experience negative health and social consequences in the process. Indeed, a considerable percentage is involved in motor accidents. Many children face attempted kidnapping, rape, and sexual molestation. Many are also invited by gangsters to join in their nefarious activities such as smoking and robbery. Yet, others suffer from physical exhaustion and pains due to frequent long walks. These health problems, created mostly by child labor also have detrimental effects on children's school attendance, punctuality, and school performance. Our interviews reveal that children engaged in child labor have little or no time to study at home or complete their homework. Evidently, as reported by children in this study, child labor does impede children's leisure time and recreational activities. But in an attempt by some children to play, many squeeze in their recreations during their hawking time period. The negative effects of child labor found in this study appear to be consistent with results found in previous studies in Nigeria (Aderinto, 2000; Anyanwu, 1993; Charles and Charles, 2004; Okeahialam, 1984; Olutayo, 1994), although our study involves a larger sample of respondents than any of these studies.

Evidently, the negative effects of child labor are disturbing. But it is difficult to advocate for its eradication right away because of its financial benefits to the household and its potential future occupational training for the child. In a rapidly growing society such as Nigeria, where poverty is widespread, child labor has become a systemic avenue for augmenting parental income. Therefore, we would recommend certain policies and enforcement of laws and programs that can reduce its incidence. Such policies and laws

include compliance with the minimum working age as well as an enforcement of the universal enrollment of Nigerian children in schools. Furthermore, policy programs such as provision of credit facilities, poverty reduction schemes through employment generation for adults, and provision of affordable medical facilities would improve the quality of lives and, consequently, reduce the need for child labor. Finally, it would be necessary to regulate and monitor the conditions and work environments where some children might be employed in the future once globalization takes a firm root in the form of industrial creations in Nigeria. But as of now, most child laborers are employed at the household level where regulations regarding street hawking have been difficult to control or monitor by the government.

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