



Social Implications and Factors Associated With Street Hawking Among Children in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author OEJ designed the study, wrote the protocol and the first draft of the manuscript, while author CAI supervised the data collection, analyzed the data and contributed to the first draft of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/BJESBS/2015/19565

Editor(s):

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Complete Peer review History: <http://sciencedomain.org/review-history/10469>

Original Research Article

Received 16th June 2015
Accepted 28th July 2015
Published 9th August 2015

ABSTRACT

Background: Street hawking is one of the commonest forms of child labor in Nigeria. This study aimed at determining the social implications and factors associated with street hawking among children in Uyo, South-South Nigeria.

Materials and Methods: This was a cross-sectional descriptive study carried out in Uyo in April, 2015. The instrument of data collection was a self designed, interviewer administered semi-structured questionnaire. All consenting children aged 5-17 years hawking along major traffic light intersections within Uyo Metropolis during the days of data collection were included in the study. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20. Level of significance was set at 0.05.

Results: A total of 225 respondents participated in the study; 119 (52.9%) were males and

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106 (47.1%) females. The mean age of respondents was 13.27 (2.52) years. Only 157 (73.03%) were presently in school, while 48 (21.3%) had dropped out and 10 (4.4%) never went to school. Up to 66 (29.3%) could not communicate fluently in English. Fifty six (35.7%) of those in school reported worsening of their grades since hawking began. A greater number, 168 (74.7%) lived with their parents. The most common singular occupation of respondents' mothers, 139 (61.8%) and fathers, 52(23.1%) respectively was trading. Up to 42 (18.7%) had lost their fathers. While hawking, 112 (49.8%) were robbed, 82 (36.4%) were involved in fights, 101 (44.9%) were physically harassed by older adults and 6 (2.7%) had been targets of attempted kidnapping. Majority, 145 (64.4%) hawked to augment family income, while 63 (28.8%) hawked to earn a living. More than half, 131 (58.2%) were unhappy with the work and desired to quit.

Conclusion: In view of the numerous negative effects of hawking on children, government should implement and enforce the legislation addressing child street hawking in Nigeria and also set up poverty alleviation programmes.

Keywords: Hawking; children; social implications; parents; Uyo; Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Street hawking is one of the commonest forms of child labor in Nigeria and indeed sub-Saharan Africa. Child hawking involves the selling of things along the road and from one place to the other by children below 18 years [1]. Street trading has been reported to have numerous negative consequences [1-3]. Children who engage in street hawking more often than not are deprived among other things of the opportunity of being in school completely or partially because of the long hours they are expected to work. According to the ILO, child labour is defined as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development" [4]. Globally, 111 million children under 15 years were reported to be in hazardous work in 2006 [5]. As at 2012, it was estimated that 168 million children were engaged in some form of child labour with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for the highest incidence worldwide [6]. This situation is a cause for concern especially considering the negative effect on the future of the child.

In Nigeria, Ebigbo identified that aside from sexual abuse and child abandonment, street hawking by children was a commonly reported form of child abuse and neglect [7]. These children engage in street trading on a regular basis with the aim of earning a livelihood for themselves or their families. Such findings have been reported in other studies [8,9].

The International Labour Organization (ILO) instituted two main conventions addressing child labour: Convention No. 138 on minimum age which sets 15 years for engagement of children

in light work as long as it doesn't threaten their health, safety and educational pursuits; and convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour which abhors hazardous work [4]. These conventions have been ratified by Nigeria.

Historically, legislation against street trading/hawking by children had been in existence and was implemented by the British colonialist since the 1950s' before Nigeria's independence [10]. Moreover, post-independence, Nigeria has enacted legislation concerning child labour within the Labour Act and has also adopted the Child Right Act (CRA) (2003). A key provision of the CRA states that using children for hawking is a punishable offence under the Act while Section 59 (b) of the Labour Act prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 years in any work which is dangerous and injurious to their health [11,12]. The prevalence of street hawking in Nigeria indicates that although Nigeria has legislation addressing child labour in the form of street hawking, implementation and enforcement are however lacking [12].

Traditional views of children as helpers for socio-economic advancement of the family are a common perception in African climes [13]. This socio-cultural disposition may be a major factor fuelling the incidence of street hawking by children.

Family-related factors and characteristics have also been found to be associated with street hawking. Studies in south-western Nigeria established an association between family size, socio-economic class and the prevalence of street hawking by children. Children from larger families and lower socio-economic class were

more likely to engage in street hawking to augment family income [12]. The nature of inter-relationship between members of the family unit or the family environment was also found to have a major influence on street hawking. Discordant family units and violence against children at home predicted violence against authority among young adolescent children who may run away from home and get involved in street hawking to earn a living. This underscores the need for efforts aimed at increasing and emphasizing family relationships and cohesiveness [14]. Child hawkers also stand the risk of becoming "street children or children of the street" who live on their own and fend for themselves on the street. This may occur when they run away from home due to parental or guardian abuse [12].

Children who are involved in street hawking have been found to be exposed to a number of associated hazards. These include being robbed of their day's cash sales, street fight incidents, physical harassment by older adults and being the targets of attempted kidnapping, poor school performance and even death.

The negative effect of street hawking on the academic performance of in-school children was demonstrated in a study in South-western Nigeria, where it was found that children who hawked were more likely to have failed their last academic term examinations [15]. The risk of dropping out of school due to poor performance as a result of street hawking could be a major threat to the achieving universal primary education as targeted by Millennium Development Goal 2.

Children form the bulk of street hawkers. In a study carried out in 2014 in Aba, Nigeria, 58.0% of the hawkers were children between the ages of 10 and 19 years [9]. The objectives of the present study were to determine the social implications and factors associated with street hawking among children in Uyo, metropolis in South-South Nigeria with the intention of making recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Area

The study was carried out in Uyo the capital of Akwa Ibom State, one of the States located in the southern part of Nigeria. The estimated population of Uyo metropolis is 413,381 [16]. Most inhabitants are civil servants and traders.

2.2 Study Design/ Population

This was a cross sectional descriptive study carried out among children aged 5-17 years involved in hawking at traffic light intersections in Uyo Metropolis in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

2.3 Sampling Size

A sample size calculation for cross sectional studies was carried out using the formula for estimating single proportion [17], with a prevalence (p) of 0.16 being the proportion of child street hawkers involved in road traffic accident from a previous Nigerian study [12], with z of 1.96, sampling error set at 5%, and 10% over estimation to accommodate for non response. A sample size of 230 was obtained.

2.4 Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interviewer administered closed ended questionnaire was used to obtain information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, school performance, work history, social hazards and reasons for hawking. Four research assistants with a minimum qualification of West African School Certificate were recruited into the study. The research assistants went through a one day training session on how to use the questionnaire in English and the local dialect after which the research instruments were pretested on some child hawkers at a traffic light to determine their comprehension and exclude any ambiguity. The questionnaire was found to be simple and well understood by the hawkers in both English and the local dialect. The children were interviewed in any language they felt comfortable using. One of the authors personally supervised the data collection process in order to ascertain reliability.

The research assistants were community health officers in training who had been involved in other researches in the past and were very familiar with use of the research tool.

2.5 Sampling Technique

All eligible consenting children hawking at major traffic light points in Uyo metropolis were interviewed over a four day period till the sample size of 230 was obtained.

2.6 Data Management

The data obtained was edited manually, entered into computer and analyzed using the Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics (Frequency, proportions, means and standard deviation to summarize variables) and Inferential statistics (chi square, to test the significance of association between two categorical variables) with level of significance set at 5%.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Health Ethical Review Committee. Verbal informed consent was obtained from each respondent after explaining the purpose of the study and what it entailed. Respondents who did not wish to participate declined being interviewed and suffered no consequence for such decision. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, serial numbers and not names were used. Data collected was kept secure and made accessible to only members of the research team.

2.8 Limitation

Many of the hawkers were not willing to spare too much time to be interviewed as they were eager to return to their sales. This may have led to the withholding of certain information in order to save time. Also, the issue of self reporting was considered a limitation as the findings of the study were entirely based on the information given by the respondents. Noise factor was not very pronounced at the traffic light intersections as the hawkers generally just showed their articles to the motorists to see if they would buy. This is different from the scenarios at the motor parks and markets, where there is a lot of noise pollution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

A total of 230 questionnaires were administered out of which 225 were completely filled, giving a response rate of 97.8%. The mean age of respondents was 13.27 (± 2.52), with 137 (60.9%) being 10 - 14 years. The hawkers were made up of 119 (52.9%) males and 106 (47.1%) females, giving a M:F ratio of 1.12:1. A total of 215 (95.6%) of the hawkers had commenced primary or secondary education. However, only 157 (73.03%) of them were presently in school, while 48 (21.3%) had dropped out of school and 10 (4.4%) never went to school at all. Up to 66

(29.3%) could not communicate fluently in English (Table 1).

A greater number, 168 (74.7%) of the respondents lived with their parents. The most common singular occupation of respondents' mothers, 139 (61.8%) and fathers, 52 (23.1%) respectively was trading. Up to 42(18.7%) of the respondents had lost their fathers. A total of 162 (72.0%) had 4 or more siblings, with 103 (45.8%) being either 1st or 2nd in birth order (Table 1).

A total of 56 (35.7%) of respondents in school reported a worsening of their grades since they began hawking (Table 2).

Up to 80 (35.6%) of the respondents had been hawking for 1 – 2 years and fruits were the most frequently hawked items (32.4%). Other common items included snacks 56 (24.9%) and water, 37 (16.4%). More than half, 131 (58.2%) of respondents were unhappy with the work and would like to quit. They made a median income of N3,000 (13.6 dollars) daily (Table 3).

During the course of their trading, 112 (49.8%) had been robbed of their day's cash sales, 82 (36.4%) had been involved in street fight incidents, 101 (44.9%) had been physically harassed by older adults and 6 (2.7%) had been the targets of attempted kidnapping. There was no statistically significant difference between males and females in the hazards experienced (Table 4).

Majority 145 (64.4%) of respondents were hawking in order to augment the family income and support their family, while 63 (28.8%) hawked to earn a living (Table 5).

3.2 Discussion

This study set out to determine the social implications and factors associated with street hawking among children in Uyo metropolis in southern Nigeria. About two thirds of the hawkers in this study were 5 - 14 years. Children are preferred to adults in hawking because they are cheap labour to the employer [18,19]. This is a cause for concern as children of this age group ought to still be under tutelage of parents and guardians and not left totally unsupervised. Children within this age group can easily succumb to negative peer pressure and acquire numerous anti-social tendencies. Hughes reported that child laborers tended to keep bad company and were negatively pressured by peers to engage in delinquent behavior [20].

Some of the behavioral problems reported by Ugodulunwa et al. [21] among hawkers included drug abuse, fighting, smoking and cheating in examination. They are also vulnerable to numerous hazards which they may be unable to cope with by reason of their young age. Similar findings were reported in a study carried out in Yenegoa, Nigeria, where 90% of hawkers interviewed were aged 6-14 years [22]. Both male and female children engage in hawking. In the present study, the ratio was approximately the same, with the males being slightly more. This is in contrast with other studies where the females have been reported to far outnumber the males [1,22].

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics N=225

Variable	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Age group (years)		
5-9	13	5.8
10-14	137	60.9
15-17	75	33.3
Mean (SD)	13.27 (2.53)	
Sex		
Male	119	52.9
Female	106	47.1
Highest educational level		
In primary	77	34.2
In secondary	138	61.3
None	10	4.4
Currently schooling		
	N=215	
Yes	157	73.03
No	58	26.97
Speaks fluent English		
Yes	159	70.7
No	66	29.3
Who do children live with		
Parents	168	74.7
Relative	32	14.2
Master/Mistress	25	11.1
Mother's occupation		
Trading	139	61.8
Farming	37	16.4
Civil servant	14	6.2
Others	20	8.9
Dead	15	6.7
Father's occupation		
Trading	52	23.1
Farming	32	14.2
Civil servant	40	17.8
Others	59	26.2
Dead	42	18.7
Number of siblings		
None	2	0.9
1-3	61	27.1
4-6	88	39.1
>6	74	32.9
Position in family		
	N=224	
1 st	60	26.8
2 nd	43	19.2
3 rd	50	22.3
4 th	48	21.4
5 th and above	23	10.3

Table 2. School performance based on those currently in school (N=157)

Variable	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Current school performance		
Poor	19	12.1
Average	59	37.6
Good	79	50.3
School performance since hawking began		
Better grades	49	31.2
Worse grades	56	35.7
No change	52	33.1

Table 3. Respondents' work history (N=225)

Variable	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Duration of hawking in years		
<1 yr	68	30.2
1-2 yrs	80	35.6
3-4 yrs	51	22.7
>4 yrs	26	11.6
Items hawked		
Fruits	73	32.4
Food	32	14.2
Snacks	56	24.9
Water	37	16.4
Others	27	12.0
Average daily sales in Naira		
Median	N3,000	
Range	N300 – N12,000	
Happy with work		
Yes	94	41.8
No	131	58.2

Table 4. Hazard indicators disaggregated by sex

	Male (N=119)	Female (N=106)	Total (N=225)	Statistical indices
Ever had a robbery/ theft incident				
Yes	63 (52.9)	49 (46.2)	112 (49.8)	$\chi^2 = 1.011$ P = 0.32
No	56 (47.1)	57 (53.8)	113 (50.2)	
Involved in a fight incident				
Yes	47 (39.5)	35 (33.0)	82 (36.4)	$\chi^2 = 1.015$ P = 0.31
No	72 (60.5)	71 (67.0)	143 (63.6)	
Ever had physical harassment				
Yes	51 (42.9)	50 (47.2)	101 (44.9)	$\chi^2 = 0.421$ P = 0.52
No	68 (57.1)	56 (52.8)	124 (55.1)	
Ever experienced an attempted kidnapping				
Yes	4 (3.4)	2 (1.9)	6 (2.7)	Fishers's test = 0.48
No	115 (96.6)	104 (98.1)	219 (97.3)	

More than a quarter of the children had either dropped out of school or never went to school at all. Similar findings were reported in a study carried out in Ibadan in which 25% drop out rate was recorded among child hawkers [23]. This poses a serious threat to the achieving basic primary education for many of these children who would probably end up growing to become

illiterate adults. The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2013 reported that 38% of women and 21% of men have no education [24]. These adults may also have had no opportunity to attend school as a result of engaging in some money making activities during school hours in their childhood years.

Table 5. Reasons for hawking

Reasons (multiple responses)	Frequency	Proportion (%)
To augment family income	145	64.4
To earn a living:	63	28.0
For school related expenses	15	6.7
Sent by mistress:	2	0.9

Street hawking also affects the academic performance of children. About a third of the hawkers currently in school in the present study admitted to worse grades since onset of hawking. This could be as a result of lack of time to study after school hours. For those who hawked in the morning before going to school, Ebigbo opined that most of them were perpetual late comers and lacked concentration in class as a result of fatigue and stress [25]. A study on the effect of street hawking on the academic performance of students in social studies in Nassarawa State, Nigeria reported that the social studies students who engaged in street hawking performed lower than their counterpart who did not [26]. Similarly, in a study carried out in Epe, Lagos among child traders, 70.9% of them admitted that street trading had a negative effect on their reading schedule, while 79.2% reported that it affected their school attendance rate [1]. Ubah and Bulus in their study reported that the students were sometimes seen in uniform hawking goods at hours when they ought to be in school [26]. It is therefore not surprising that many of them end up dropping out of school and some of them in the present study could not communicate in English. Child hawking is one of the key practices that must be tackled in order to make progress with childhood education. Worldwide, a link has been established between improving access to education and ending child labour [27].

Low wages have been reported to contribute to incidents of street trading and child labour as children attempt to help support their families [1,8,28]. Key findings of a study carried out in 2010 among 175 child hawkers in Uyo, Nigeria, were that street hawking was attributed to unemployment and poverty [10]. Similar findings were reported in a study in 2014 among 300 hawkers in Aba, Nigeria [11]. A greater number of the respondents in the present study lived with their parents whose commonest means of livelihood was small scale trading, the proceeds

of which may hardly be enough in most cases to cater for the often large family sizes. Consequently, about two thirds of the children said the reason they were hawking was to augment family income. Majority had 4 or more siblings, with them being in many instances either 1st or 2nd in birth order. They were therefore expected by their parents to assist in providing for the younger family members. Children from larger families and lower socio-economic class have been found to more likely engage in street hawking to augment family income [12]. Similar findings have been reported in several studies [1,8,9,22,23].

Moreover, close to 30% of the children in the present study reported hawking in order to earn a living. This may have been as a result being a major bread winner of their families as almost a fifth of them had lost their fathers. A relationship has also been established between parental loss and child street hawking [15]. In addition, socio-culturally, unlike in Western cultures, majority of the people in African societies view forms of child labour like street hawking as a natural growth and development process for maturity of children to be able to withstand the challenges of earning a living in adulthood [12]. This explains why the children are so readily sent out to earn a living. Children are seen in many traditional African societies as cheap workforce. This encourages large family sizes without due consideration to what it entails to care for them.

Several hazards were reported by the hawkers in this study, with over a third having hawked for 1 – 2 years. These included robbery of their day's cash sales, street fight incidents, physical harassment by older adults and a few had been targets of attempted kidnapping. Each of these hazards could lead to the premature death of these children. They could also be lured into the company of criminals while desiring for protection from harassment of other adults. These children may end up indulging in anti social habits like smoking, robbery, cultism and drug abuse. A similar study in Nnewi, Nigeria reported that 46 (32.7%) of the child hawkers had lost their earnings to robbers [29], while another study reported the kidnapping of three children who were hawking, two of whom were killed and the third had not yet been found [30].

It is worthy of note that more than half of the respondents were not happy with the job of hawking and were willing to quit. A study among 1200 female children engaging in hawking

across three States in Northern Nigeria revealed that 70% of child drop outs would quit hawking and go back to school if government and other stakeholders were to sponsor their education[30]. Similar findings were reported in a study where about 72% of the hawkers expressed willingness to quit the job [9]. It is therefore very clear that if they had alternative sources of income, there would be fewer child hawkers on the streets.

4. CONCLUSION

Child labour in the form of hawking is a common practice in Uyo metropolis. It affects the education of the children resulting in many drop outs and poor academic performance. It also exposes the children to numerous hazards and social vices. Efforts should be made by government to implement and enforce the legislation addressing child labour in the form of street hawking in Nigeria. Poverty alleviation programs should also be implemented in order to create alternative sources of income. Free basic education and improvement of workers' remuneration are measures that will likely help in the reduction of the number of child hawkers on the streets.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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