

STREET HAWKING AMONG CHILDREN: A FORM OF CHILD ABUSE OFTEN OVERLOOKED

Abstract

Background: Despite efforts by the government to ensure that child labour is eradicated, children are still exposed to the menace of this abuse and other forms of abuse. This paper examined street hawking among children in Obio/Akpor L.G.A of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Methodology: This descriptive cross-sectional study used a purposive sampling method. 109 participants aged 10 - 17 years who hawked around two busy junctions in Obio/Akpor L.G.A were recruited for the study. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. Analysis was done with SPSS version 25.

Results: Participants comprised 109 child street hawkers, 67 (61.5%) female, 42 (38.5%) males. 72 (66.1%) of the participants lived with their parents, and more than half of their parents were traders. Reasons for hawking included; need to augment family income, having lost a parent, and being forced by a guardian to hawk. 104 (95.4%) of the children reported that they did not like to hawk. 33 (30.3%) of the child street hawkers were school dropouts, more females 27 (40.3 %) were school dropouts compared to their male counterparts 6 (14.3 %). This sex difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2= 8.27, p= 0.004$). Problems encountered while hawking included: accidents, loss of money and goods, exposure to harsh weather, low self-esteem and sexual advances.

Conclusion: Street hawking among children is common despite its negative effects on children. Education of the masses on the dangers of this menace is needed as well as measures to alleviate poverty among the populace.

Keywords: Street, Hawking, Children, Abuse, Child Labour, Social Paediatrics

Introduction

Street hawking is the most dominant form of child labour in Nigeria¹, it is a form of child abuse or maltreatment. The terms child abuse and child maltreatment are frequently used interchangeably. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child maltreatment as all forms of physical, emotional maltreatment, sexual abuse, negligence or exploitation that take place in the life of an individual before the age of 18 years resulting in real harm or has the tendency to cause harm to the child's health in terms of his or her chances of survival, dignity or development in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.² According to the International Labour Organization, in 2020, about 152 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 years were working and were out of school.³ This translates to 1 out of every 10 children hawking instead of attending school, and half of these children are continuously exposed to hazardous work which can affect their health.³ Most of them are exposed to working for very long hours as much as 10 hours a day. Although there has been a global decline in child labour in the last two decades, it has however remained a scourge and a wide spread phenomenon in sub-Saharan African with untoward consequences, hence the need for it to be eliminated.^{1,3}

Child labour according to International Labour Organization, is work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, dignity and that can harm the physical and mental development of the child.⁴ It is work done by children that is mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous and harmful to them. It refers to work that affects their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, forcing them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to combine education with working.⁵ Many families in Nigeria live below the poverty line hence, parents may be compelled to choose which of their children to pull out of school and engage in labours that can help augment the family income. Unfortunately, this choice often falls on the girl child.⁵

As street hawking has come to be considered a part of our culture, it is easy to forget that it is also a form of child abuse. When children are sent out into the streets to hawk, it comes with attendant negative consequences on the child. A study done in South-West Nigeria among female Adolescent Street hawkers found that 69.0% had been sexually abused and among those who experienced sexual abuse, 67.5% of them did not seek for help.⁶ These children are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and forced to drop out of school.⁶

Street hawking is commonly seen in urban areas in Nigeria. Although it can enhance the economic power of the families involved, the attendant consequences to the child cannot be overlooked. Children's involvement in street hawking has led to increased illiteracy rates, prostitution, exposure to accidents, kidnap, ritual killings, alcohol and drug addiction, and involvement in social vices, especially among male children. This study therefore examines the pattern, determinants, and effects of street hawking among children in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Methodology

Study Design:

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among adolescents aged 10-17 years over three months (July-September 2021).

Study Area

This study was carried out in the Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State, Nigeria, around two busy junctions where children hawk – Rumuokoro and Choba junctions.

Study Population

Children aged 10-17 years who hawked around the two busy junctions in Obio/Akpor L. G. A were recruited for the study.

Sample size calculation

The formula for estimating a single proportion was used⁷, with a prevalence of 84%, the proportion of juvenile street hawkers from a previous Nigeria study involving children involved in an accident while hawking,⁸ at a confidence limit of 95% and 10% accommodation for non-response. A total of 109 child hawkers participated in the study.

Sampling method: The sampling method employed for this study was a purposive sampling method with an occasional snowballing method. This was necessary to recruit only children. The inclusion criteria were adolescents aged 10-17 years who assented to the study, who were seen hawking around the junctions and who could speak and understand Pidgin English. Every

consecutive child hawker who met the inclusion criteria participated until the sample size was met.

Data collection: The interviewer-administered structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire had three sections - socio-demographic variables, history of street hawking and participant's perception of street hawking. To ensure that a participant was not repeatedly interviewed, participants were asked if the research assistants had interviewed them before administering the questionnaires. Also, their ages were obtained by asking the participants for their ages to determine if they met the inclusion criteria. The research assistants spent 1-2 hours every day, mainly in the evenings, administering the questionnaires.

Analysis was done with SPSS version 25, and descriptive statistics were done. Results were expressed in proportions, percentages, frequency tables and graphs. Chi-square was conducted to compare subgroups with a p-value set at less than 0.05.

Ethical consideration: Approval for this study was obtained from the Rivers State Ministry of Health. Permission was obtained from some participants' parents who were also hawking or selling in shops around the junctions and from adults who were also seen hawking with the children. A verbal assent was obtained from all participants.

Results

A total of 109 children participated in this study. Forty-two (38.5%) were males, while 67 (61.5%) were females, with a male to female ratio of 1: 1.6. Their ages ranged from 10 to 17 years, with a mean age of 15.62 +2.12 years. Fifty-seven (52.3%) of the study participants had attained secondary education. 72 (66.0%) lived with their parents and only 9 (8.3%) and 6 (5.5%) lived with no relatives and alone, respectively. About half of the parents of the study participants were traders themselves. (Table I)

Most 104 (95.4%) participants said they did not like to hawk on the street. The hawking was mainly to improve family income 89 (81.6%). Fifty-Eight (53.3%) had hawked for 1-3 years, while 29 (26.6%) had hawked for more than 3 years.

Regarding the frequency of hawking, 74 (67.9%) hawked at least 3 times a week, while 19 (17.4%) hawked every day. All the participants reported that they had experienced some hazards during hawking.

Multiple responses were reported concerning the perceived effect of street hawking on participants' education. Being fatigued and experiencing sleepiness in class was reported among 95 (87.2%) participants, low self-esteem among their peers 76 (69.7%), school absenteeism 70 (64.2%) and poor academic performance 67 (61.5%) (Table II).

Of the 109 participants, 33 (30.3%) were school dropouts. More females, 27 (40.3%), dropped out of school than their male counterparts, 6 (14.3%). This sex difference was statistically significant, $p= 0.004$. Fig 1. The common hazards reported included accidents, loss of their wares and money, low self-esteem, lack of leisure time and sexual advances (Table II).

Table I: Socio-demographic characteristic of participants

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Sex		
Males	42	38.5
Females	67	61.5
Age group in years		
10-12	41	37.6
13-15	48	44.0
16-17	20	18.4
Level of education		
Primary	49	45.0
Secondary	57	52.3
Tertiary	3	2.7
Whom respondent resides with		
Parents	72	66.0
Relatives	22	20.2
Non relatives	9	8.3
Alone	6	5.5
Occupation of father		
Commercial driver	7	6.4
Farmer	6	5.5
Trader	53	48.6
Civil servant	28	25.7
Artisan	15	13.8
Mothers occupation		
Civil servant	13	11.9
Trader	58	53.2
House wife	16	14.7
Farmer	22	20.2
Total	109	100.0

Table II: Hawking experience and reasons given for hawking among respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Do you like hawking		
Yes	104	95.4
No	5	4.6
Total	109	100.0
Reasons for hawking		
To support my family to pay fees	39	35.8
My parents asked me to hawk	37	33.9
Loss of parent	13	11.9
For personal upkeep	12	11.0
My guardian asked me to	8	7.3
Total	109	100.0
Problems encountered during hawking *		
Accident	105	96.3
Loss of goods and money	103	94.5
Low self esteem	102	93.6
Violent behaviour	94	86.2
Lack of leisure	93	85.3
Tiredness	93	85.3
Exposure to harsh weather	90	82.6
Sexual advances	87	79.8
Duration of hawking		
< 1 year	22	20.2
1-3 years	58	53.2
> 3 years	29	26.6
Total	109	100.0
Frequency of hawking		
Every day	19	17.4
At least 3 times a week	74	67.9
Only weekends	9	8.3
Only during holidays	7	6.4
Total	109	100.0
Effect hawking has on school*		
Makes me tired and sleepy in class	95	87.2
Low self esteem	76	69.7
I do not study well at home	74	67.9
School absenteeism	70	64.2
Poor performance in academics	67	61.5

*Multiple responses obtained

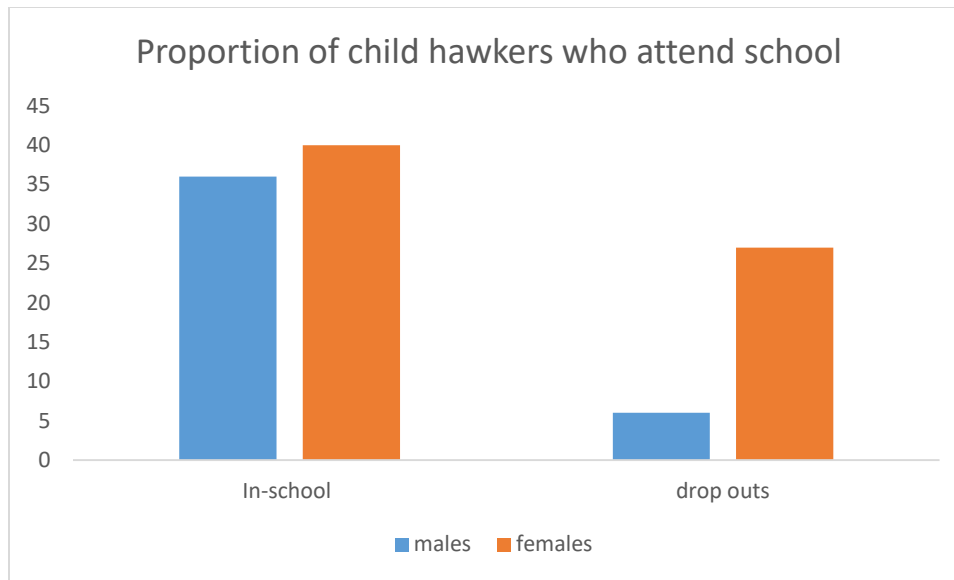


Fig. 1: Proportion of child hawkers who are out of school

$$\chi^2 = 8.27, df = 1, P = 0.004$$

Discussion

This paper examined street hawking among children in Obio/Akpor L.G.A- the demographic distribution, reasons for hawking, hazards faced while hawking and the effect hawking has on the participants schooling.

The finding of this study shows that more females compared to their male counterparts were involved in hawking. This finding is in agreement with other studies that reported that girls were used more often for street hawking.^{9,10} This finding may possibly be as a result of the culture and gender role assigned to females making them more involved in domestic activities and other forms of child labour. This however, contrasts with findings from Johnson and Ihesie³ among street hawkers in Uyo, Nigeria.¹¹

More than 80% of the participants in this study were less than 16 years of age; an age group that is vulnerable to all forms of abuses and social vices.^{11,12,13} This finding is similar with that of several other studies in Nigeria. For instance, Magaji & Sarka¹⁰ reported that 69.8% of the child hawkers were less than 16 years, while Iyela and Ikwuakam¹⁴ reported that majority of the child hawkers were below the age of 17 years. The reason for this finding may be because it is usually their parents who use them for such labour as reported in this present study or that this age group are sources of cheap labour and can be easily exploited. This is worrisome because this age group should be under the supervision of their parents or care givers as they can be negatively influenced by their peers to engage in social vices. The finding of this study however, is at variance with Alonge et al¹⁵ who opined that older adolescents were more involved in hawking in Oyo State than the younger ones.

Majority (66.0%) of the participants in this study lived with their parents and most of the parents were traders themselves and other low skilled workers with earnings that may not be sufficient for their families' upkeep. This finding is similar to other previous studies.^{11,16-18} This may explain why lots of children are used for street hawking as their parents themselves may be the ones who engage them in order to argument the family income.

Majority of the participants did not like to hawk as observed in this study; a finding that agrees with Akpotor¹⁹ in a study carried out in Delta state, Nigeria. This indicates a total neglect of the government implementation the Child's Right Act.

Assisting the family financially as seen in this study is a finding that has been reported by several other studies as reasons for juvenile street hawking.^{10,11,19} Parent may not view this as a form of abuse, instead it may be regarded as the support the children render to their family to improve their family income.

Children encounter a lot of problems while hawking. Finding from this study shows that these hazards ranges from physical assault, to accidents, to lack of leisure, to sexual advances. This is similar to finding from another study.²⁰ These hazards can lead to physical, psychological trauma or can even lead to their demise, therefore there is need to protect these children against this form of child abuse.

About (73.4%) of this study participants had hawked for less than 3 years, while (67.9%) hawked at least 3 times a week. This is similar to a report from Delta State¹⁹ and Kaduna State¹⁰ Nigeria. These children may not have leisure time, may not enjoy their childhood and are very prone to psychological disturbance which will not allow them achieve their maximum potential.

The perceived effect of child street hawking on participants education ranged from excessive sleepiness in class, low self-esteem among peers in school, school absenteeism and poor academic performance which is comparable with finding from Abdu *at al*²¹ in their study on effect of child labour on children's education in Katsina State, Nigeria. Child street hawkers are prone to dropping out of school or not furthering their education²². Hence, the finding from this present study where 30.3% of the participants were school dropouts. Similar findings were reported in Delta¹⁹ and Ibadan¹⁵ among juvenile street hawkers. Though both males and females may drop out of school due to hawking, more girls are affected compared to their male counterpart as observed in this present study. Atomatofa²³ reported similar finding among children who engaged in street hawking and observed that it had a negative effect on their educational achievements.

This implies that the education of these children will be hampered. The hope of education as a fundamental right of every child will not be achieved, therefore these children will have poor education which will lead to low productivity in future thereby continuing the cycle of poor education, low productivity and poverty.

Conclusion: Street hawking among children has a lot of negative effects on the development of the child involved, however parents themselves are the ones that involve their children in this

form of labour because of poverty. There is need for proper implementation and monitoring of the Child's Right Act to protect these children against this form of abuse.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist. The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

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