



Original Research Article

Underage Labour in Nigeria: A Study of Street Hawkers

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Abstract

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This study is an investigation into underage labour in Nigeria with specific focus on street hawkers in Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos State. The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive study in which one hundred and fifty (150) hawkers and fifteen (15) adult traders constituted the sample. The data was obtained via the use of questionnaire and in-depth interview while the data was analyzed using student 't' test statistic. The three research hypotheses that guided the study were tested at 5% level of significance and the result revealed that there is a significant relationship between poor parental economic background and involvement of underage in street hawking, parental/guardian occupation does not significantly influence the involvement of underage in street hawking and there is a significant relationship between street hawking and academic performance of the underage. The study concluded that government and Nigerians should therefore, practically demonstrate their commitment to the global fight against child labour in which street hawking amongst underage has become a social stigma to the country especially in the major towns and cities through poverty eradication to enable each household cater for their family needs contrary to the current practice where children engage in street hawking to help boost their family financial status while free compulsory basic education to all children with free meals should be introduced/provided by the government to cater for children from poor socio-economic background while public enlightenment campaign against street hawking should be vigorously pursued.

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INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a widespread phenomenon in developing countries. In recent times, the issue of child labour has continued to attract attention among policy makers and researchers. It is a persistent problem found almost in all the developing countries and to a lesser extent in the developed countries. Africa and Asia together account for over 90 percent of the total child employment and this is especially prevalent in the rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirement for schooling and farming is lacking. According to International Labour Organization (ILO, 2002), there are approximately 186 million child labourers in the World, among which about 111.3 million children work in hazardous conditions. At least, 120 million of the world's children between the ages of 5 and 12 years did full-time, paid work while

many of them worked under hazardous and unhygienic conditions and work for more than 10 hours a day.

In Nigeria, the most populous black nation with 209 million people, there exist high incidences of child labour (UN World Population Prospects, 2021). In the Nigeria context, child labour is defined as work done by children under the age of fifteen that is mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous and harmful to them. It refers to work that interferes with their schooling by depriving them the opportunity to attend school thereby obliging them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine schooling with working at times on the farm (Olujide, 2007).

As stated by Edu (1999), hawking is the selling of things (usually goods) along the roads or from one place

to another. One of the fundamental global problems facing developing countries like Nigeria today is the fact that the incidences of children who work outside the family to earn a living or to support their families are increasing. Children are known to engage in one form of work or the other especially within the family. In Nigeria, most especially in the urban areas, children between the age of five years and twelve are seen working. The situation in Nigeria according to United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), child labour report (2000), reported that 15million children under the age of 14 are working across Nigeria, the report shows that 64% of Nigerian between the age of five and fourteen are involve in street vendors.

According to Nseabasi and Oluwabamide (2010), Street hawking is a negation of the international convention on the right of the child. It is indeed inhuman for anyone to engage a child in money-making ventures; because such a child is denied basic education which is a right for every child. According to Olujide (2007), the Child Welfare League reported that in Lagos State alone there are 100,000 boys and girls living and working on the streets. In northern Nigeria, children, known as the almajirai are at times employed in private farms and in commercial farms. Some of the children are even trafficked and used as farm labourers. Robinson (2004) stated that National Child Labour Survey estimates that there are 15 million children engaged in child labour in Nigeria. These children are also vulnerable to being forced to farm work and in many instances they are being deprived of access to education. Should this ugly trend continue unabated? Should the future leaders of tomorrow who should be trained to constitute the bulk of the human capital that will transform the national economy of the country be left to suffer under the guise of hawking?

Statement of the Problem

Historically, hawking appears to be part of Nigerian culture and understandably so. Nigeria being among the poorest economies in the world with the accompanying effects of unemployment, poor infrastructural facilities and lack of human empowerment as reflected in most of her populace living in abject poverty. Because of the low socio-economic status of most families in Nigeria and the high rate of poverty, most parents cannot help but push their underage children/wards into the streets where they spend long hours, at the mercy of environmental elements, selling sachet water, fruits, confectioneries, beverages and so on so that the proceeds may contribute to family upkeep.

Although hawking amongst underage can enhance family economic power, but the risks that are attached supersede the positive economic aspect of it. Risks like motor accident, rape, kidnapping, extortion, sexual

molestation and the child involvement in robbery and other anti-social behaviours are too great to ignore. The consequences of these acts usually result in an unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and a gradual withdrawal from a healthy relationship with the opposite gender.

Although various efforts were made by federal government and non-governmental organizations to stem the trend, such as the creation of children's games village, the passage of the Child's Rights Bill in 2005 by the National Assembly and the subsequent passage by some states, not much has been achieved to curb the scourge of teenage street hawking as the trend continues unabated. Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate child labour in Nigeria with specific focus on underage in Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos State.

Research Hypotheses

In order to provide a guide for this study, three hypotheses were formulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between poor parental economic background and involvement of underage in street hawking.

H₀₂: Parental/guardian occupation does not significantly influence the involvement of underage in street hawking.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between street hawking and academic performance of the underage.

Meaning of Hawking

It also extends to be an act of canvassing for sale items carried by a hawker along the street, from house to house or in the public space (Ikechebebu, Udigwe, Ezechuku, Ndinech and Joe- Ikechebebu, 2008). Street hawking is a veritable means of socialization in the western part of Nigeria and it is widely practiced despite the attendant moral and physical dangers for children (Ebigbo 2003). Edu (1999) viewed hawking as the selling of things (usually goods) along the roads or from one place to another,

Ida (1999) defined child labour as the engagement of children below 15years of age in income generating activities such as working in construction companies, hawking of goods, working as domestic and agricultural work that is commensurate with their age within the households of their parents. He stressed that child labour is when the task performed by a child is excessive and detrimental to his development, interfere with his education and hinder his preparation for adult roles and responsibilities. The International Labour Organization (2003) identified child labour as a social problem, and defines it as work and activities that are mentally, physically and socially dangerous and harmful to

children. It involves works that enslave children separates them from their families and jeopardizes their mental, emotional and moral developments.

Causes of Street Hawking amongst Underage Children

The dramatic increase in child labour and street trading in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors. The rapid population growth of many less developed countries, high rates of unemployment, inflation, low wages and deplorable working conditions have contributed to incidents of street trading and child labour as children attempt to help and support their families. The major cause of child abuse is economic. This is associated with poverty. This hawking of wares and food product on the roads and motor parks is an economic means of making ends meet, either sponsored by parents or the child personal interest (Ebigo, 2003).

Under employment in Nigeria has made provision of social welfare services like education, healthcare, water supply and energy not only inadequate, but expensive, thereby promoting parents to resort to child labour and exploitation. Hence, some Nigerian parents and guardians abuse their children through street hawking in order to support family income and this hawking is encouraged because it is convenient for those who purchase their needs while in traffic, motor parks, offices and business centres (Oloko, 1989).

Nwabueze (1992) sees poverty and inequality as the major causes of street hawking and child labour. Nmomo, in his book interpreting social problems and public issues in Nigeria (2003), contended that while poverty is often postulated as the principal cause of forcing children into child labour, a lack of social services at home, a lack of good housing, inadequate food and health care service, combine to compel parents to sell their children into street trading and children labour.

According to Crosson (2008) there is a link between parents with marginal incomes and the imperative to push children into work so as to supplement family income. This view is supported by Bass, (2004), Binder and Sorgin (1999) who hold that children of poor families have to help generate family incomes and compensate for economic discrepancies in society, particularly as the gap between the 'have' and 'have not' has grown in recent years. In such situations, poverty breeds poverty.

A 2003 ILO survey of street hawking in Nigeria identified eight causation factors. These are cultural influence, economic problems, national debt, low education, unemployment/inability to cope, street life and single parent's families, with the last three factors exacerbating poverty (Oruwari, 1996). Hoyano and Keenan (2007) opined that people who migrate from rural areas to urban centres in search of better prospects are often ill prepared for urban life and therefore forced to

either use their children or other children to enhance their economic situation.

Effects of Hawking amongst Underage Children

Research has identified the inherent hazards and risks that children are exposed to when working in exploitative industries. The physical consequences range from malnourishment, disease, musculoskeletal disorders from heavy labour, physical and sexual abuse (Kathleen, 1988), injuries, and exposure to toxic agents (Korbin, 1983; Malinosky and Hansan, 1993). Socially, children can experience negative effects on their educational development and performance. Illiteracy, low school attendance, and low enrolment have developmental and performance implications and have been attributed to children's economic participation (Basu and Van, 1998).

The physical and health consequences of children participating in the sales and service sector have been identified in Latin America, Asia and Africa and include various diseases such as respiratory problems, injuries, rape and molestation, malnourishment, extortion of income, police harassment and participation in harmful or delinquent activities. Children engaged in the sales and service sector of the labour market also encounter problems related to their psychological well-being. Stigmatization by the press and public, feelings of disheartenment, stress and irritability, personality disorders, anti-social behaviour, alienation, and isolation from their family have all been identified (Amin, 1994). Similar to other sectors of children's employment, child hawking in less developed countries has a negative effect on the level of education attained, school attendance, grades, literacy, lecture time, and overall human capital formation (Murphy et al., 1991).

There was a belief that street hawking prepares the children for adult roles, this belief does not take cognizance of the fact that the juvenile hawkers on the street are exposed to numerous hazards ranging from physical violence to loss of wares, risk of accident, robbery, kidnapping and even murder for ritual purposes. They are exposed to vagaries of weather (extremes of cold or heat), to insects and reptiles bites, to hunger and deprivation. The most troubling, perhaps, is the fact that some are sexually exploited and forced into prostitution with the risk of unwanted pregnancies and contracting sexually transmitted infections (including HIV).

The physical and health consequences of children participating in the sales and service sector in Latin America, Asia and Africa include diseases (respiratory problems) injuries, rape and molestation, mal nourishment, extortion of income, police harassment and participation in harmful or delinquent activities. Such children may face robbery, inadequate sleep due to fatigue and long hours on the job and confinement in juvenile homes (Ross, 1996).

Street Hawking and Academic Performance

Juvenile street hawking has a negative effect on the level of education attained, school attendance, school grades, literacy, and overall human capital formation (Murphy et al., 1991). It is also found to result in low school enrolment with developmental and performance implications (Basu and Van, 1998). In a study conducted in Asia, child labour was found to negatively affect the educational outcomes of children (Charles and Charles, 2004). In Africa, and particularly in rural Nigeria, it has been observed that child labourers generally have lower school attendance (Robinson, 2004).

Danersty and Okediran (2002) stated that street hawking among school students have psychologically imposed other problems such as sex networking behaviours, juvenile delinquent behaviours which takes much of the student school time that necessitated the poor academic performance and drop out syndrome noticed among students. Nevertheless, they also lamented that the maternal and paternal deprivation of the essential needs of the young students have prompted their poor performance in public examinations such as West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO) and joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Okafor (2010) opined that when children work as wage earners to supplement the family income, it may solve some family economic problems but create new ones both for the children and the society at large. If students are taking off the street, it will enable them to focus on their study and therefore, perform better in school.

According to Onuzulike (2007), street hawking does not endanger only the lives of the hawkers, but also the food hawked and the consumer society at large. Contamination can occur from indiscriminate exposure of food items to air, dust, flies and dirt. Child street hawkers spend most of their time outside the home in a bid to sell their wares. They do not only hawk during the early mornings but at night and during harsh weather. Some of the hawkers are welcomed home with battering by their parents or caretakers when they could not make profit from their wares or when they could not finish selling their wares. Above all, hawking affects academic performance of the children. Most of the hawkers who hawk in the morning hours before going to school are perpetual latecomers to school. They lack concentration in class work due to fatigue and stress. These result to poor academic performance, delinquency and truant behaviour. They tend to show behavioural problems, low self-esteem withdrawal syndrome, oppositional behaviour and learning difficulties (Ebigbo, 1993).

Empirical Work on Street Hawking

Scanlon et al. (2002) opined that the gender difference

may be because of alternative strategies open to girls such as mothering younger siblings, domestic employment and prostitution. Traditionally, our girls tend to be involved in domestic child labour as house-helpers (service sectors) than elsewhere. According to Nseabasi and Oluwabamide (2010), street hawking is a negation of the international convention on the right of the child. It is indeed inhuman for anyone to engage a child in money-making ventures; because such a child is denied basic education which is a right for every child.

In Nigeria, there has been an increase in the number of children trading or working in the rural areas which affects their acquisition of education and this can be traced to a lot of factors which according to Poverty and illiteracy are reinforced by traditional customs such as polygamy and preference for large family size.

Child street trading is a threat to the continued survival of the society; it distorts government policies in the education of the youths. It also distorts acquisition of vocational skills and relevant education thereby destroying the economic sector (Esweren 2001). Agbo (2010) observed that in Abuja, Nigeria, street traders have always been victims of persistent raids carried out by city authorities. The reason has always been the desire to make Abuja an exceptionally neat capital city compared to modern cities anywhere in the world. In South Africa, Nesvag (2000) noted that street traders were particularly harassed by the apartheid regime as part of the strategy of preventing Africans from taking control of public space.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive study, conducted among child hawkers hawking within Kosofe Local Government area of Lagos State. Sample size estimation was carried out using formula for sample size estimation for cross-sectional studies and after adjusting for attrition, a total of one hundred and fifty (150) hawkers and fifteen (15) adult traders (from whom the underaged children get their stock, some of whom are parents of the selected/concerned children) respondents constituted the sample for the study. Line listing of the Local Government where large numbers of child hawkers were found was carried out through a quick survey conducted by the researchers and it was observed that child hawkers are mainly concentrated around major markets, major motor parks and some busy streets with traffic congestion. Data was gathered through oral interview and a self-designed questionnaire while student 't' test statistic was used to analyze the research hypotheses that guided the study.

Analysis of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship

Table 1. Student 'T' Distribution of the Relationship between Parental Economic Background and Involvement of Underage in Street Hawking.

Subject	No	Mean	σ	df	t Cal.	t Critical	Decision
Agreed	98	2.16	0.52		7.12		Reject H ₀₁
Disagreed	52	1.24	0.31	148		1.65	
Total	150						

Level of significance – 0.05 N= 150

Table 2. Student 'T' Distribution of the Relationship between Parental/Guardian Occupation and the Involvement of Underage in Street Hawking.

Subject	No	Mean	σ	Df	t Cal.	t Critical	Decision
Agreed	43	2.30	0.21		1.38		Accept H ₀₂
Disagreed	107	3.21	0.41	148		1.65	
Total	150						

Level of significance – 0.05 N= 150

Table 3. Student 'T' Distribution of the relationship between Street Hawking and Academic Performance of the Underage.

Subject	No	Mean	σ	Df	t Cal.	t Critical	Decision
Agreed	108	3.23	0.46		4.69		Reject H ₀₃
Disagreed	42	2.33	0.27	148		1.65	
Total	150						

Level of significance – 0.05 N= 150

between poor parental economic background and involvement of underage in street hawking. (Table 1)

Since 't' calculated is greater than the table/critical value (i.e. $7.12 > 1.65$), it therefore implies that there is a significant relationship between poor parental economic background and involvement of underage in street hawking. In fact, this is an affirmation of the respondents position that they engage in street hawking to complement the income of the family.

Hypothesis Two: Parental/guardian occupation does not significantly influence the involvement of underage in street hawking. (Table 2)

Since 't' calculated is less than the table/critical value (i.e. $1.38 < 1.65$), it therefore implies that there is no significant relationship between parental/guardian occupation and the involvement of underage in street hawking.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between street hawking and academic performance of the underage. (Table 3)

Since 't' calculated is greater than the table/critical value (i.e. $4.69 > 1.65$), it therefore implies that there is a significant relationship between street hawking and academic performance of the underage.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research hypothesis one states that there is no significant relationship between poor parental economic background and involvement of underage in street hawking. The testing of this research hypothesis indicated that there is a significant relationship between poor parental economic background and involvement of underage in street hawking. From the field survey carried out amongst the underage children and the adult traders from whom the underage children get their stock, it was established that these children engaged in street hawking in order to enhance the financial status of the family in order to meet the daily family needs. This finding is in tandem with the work of Crosson (2008) when he posited that there is a link between parents with marginal incomes and the imperative to push children into work so as to supplement family income. This view was also corroborated by Bass, (2004), Binder and Sorgin (1999) who opined that children of poor families have to help generate family incomes and compensate for economic discrepancies in society, particularly as the gap between the 'have' and 'have not' has grown in recent years. This can be achieved by the government through progressive

taxation, transfer payments and unemployment benefits to the poor.

Research hypothesis two states that parental/guardian occupation does not significantly influence the involvement of underage in street hawking. The result of this research hypothesis indicated that there is no significant relationship between parental/guardian occupation and the involvement of underage in street hawking. The underage children engaged in street hawking for economic reason of boosting the family income and not attributed to the occupation of their parents.

Research hypothesis three stated that there is no significant relationship between street hawking and academic performance of the underage. The result of this research revealed that there is a significant relationship between street hawking and academic performance of the underage. When these underage children engage in street hawking, they are either absent from school or get to school very late and in most cases, they do not have time to attend to assignment since they have to hawk after school hours and this take its toll on their academic performance. This finding is in conformity with the findings of Nuhu and Huhu (2010) who opined that street hawking have negative effects on children education such as high drop-out rates, absenteeism and poor school performance. In their own contribution, Uban et al (2014) stated that street hawking has negative effect on students' academic performance. They stated that if students are taking off the street, it will enable them to focus on their study and therefore, perform better in school. According to Ebigbo (1993), hawking affects academic performance of the children. Most of the underage children who hawk in the morning hours before going to school are perpetual latecomers. They lack concentration in class work due to fatigue and stress. These result to poor academic performance, delinquency and truant behaviour. They tend to show behavioural problems, low self-esteem withdrawal syndrome, oppositional behaviour and learning difficulties. Genuine resuscitation of free and compulsory education by government across all levels with necessary facilities and equipment provided as it was done in the Western Region by Chief Obafemi Awolowo is suggested to reduce incidences of street hawking by underage children from poor background which invariably affect their academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The study established that involvement of underage in street hawking influence their academic performance and that poor parental economic background has subjected many underage to street hawking in Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos State. The study, therefore, opined that a broad based approach in terms of policies

and programmes to tackle poverty amongst the populace should be embarked upon by the government. The recent policy of the federal government of given meal to children in primary school at least once a day is a step in the right direction. Besides, there should be mass education of the entire populace on the ill-effects of street hawking without sacrificing the need for legislation against child hawking in the long term to curb this menace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The three levels of government in Nigeria should tackle poverty headlong to enable each household cater for their family needs as against the current practice where children engage in street hawking to help boost their family financial status.
2. The School Management should emphasize to parents especially during the Parents-Teachers Association meetings of the need to effectively play their roles in the family and desist from shifting such responsibilities as fending for the family to their children as such act has negative consequences on the academic performance of their children.
3. Since poor parental background has been established as one of the major banes of involvement of underage in street hawking, the government at all levels should provide free compulsory basic education to all children with free meals provided to cater for children from poor socio-economic background.
4. Most of the children as well as adult traders that supply them with stock of items hawked are not aware of the Lagos State legislation against the use of underage children for hawking. Therefore, the State government, through the mass media and other public enlightenment medium, should create awareness of this law and emphasize the punishment for those who kick against the law as this will stem down the rate of street hawking among underage children.
5. Serious efforts should be made through seminars, workshops, conference and other public talks to enlighten the parents on the dangers of exposing their children to street hawking and the need for them to explore other means of sustaining the family rather than the use of their children

Suggestion for Further Research

This study is an investigation into underage Labour in Nigeria with specific focus on Street Hawkers using Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos State. Future researcher may wish to expand the scope of the study to major cities in south western Nigeria to make the result more generalizable.

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