Vol. 1(3): 11-25, August 2019

Sex in the market place: Stories and experiences of sexual abuse of child street vendors in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract
The ever-increasing visibility and labour contributions of majority of world's children towards family sustenance offer insights into their childhoods and attest to children's knowledge and awareness of their status in society. Based on original research from extensive participant observation and in-depth interviews of child street vendors in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria, this paper explores specifically the everyday lives of six young itinerant female vendors, aged 10-16, their experiences of sex and sexual abuse in marketplaces, their resilience and coping strategies, and relationships with adult members of the vending community who controlled the markets, and had oversight function for their protection and safety. Their accounts illustrate not only the risks that children and young women face, but the ordinariness of sexual harassment and taken-for-granted attitude of society towards the sexualisation of working children. Findings revealed that children were ambivalent about their experiences in the markets. However, they were aware that vending was hard, unpleasant and dangerous. There was a pervasive sense of hopelessness, fear and distrust against adults who threatened, abused, traumatised and sabotaged their efforts. This paper calls for greater surveillance and safeguards in marketplaces, provision of emotional support to children and their families, enforceable chid protection policies and increased penal sanctions against abusers.

Keywords: child street vendors, child sexual abuse (CSA), child sexual exploitation, child sexual molestation, sexual vulnerability.

Introduction

In its widely ratified provisions and extra protocols, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNCRC), stipulate that all children and young people have a right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect and right to participate in activities that will help them reach and fulfil their potential. These have been summarised in the three Ps, namely, Protection, Provision and Participation (UNCRC, 1989). In most countries of the world, children and young people are the most vulnerable and at the lowest rung of the ladder in the social strata. Reports and research on child sexual abuse (CSA) reveal that in every culture and society, relationships between children and adults are riddled with cases of abuse, harm, neglect and exploitation perpetuated by adult caregivers in positions of trust, power and influence.

Graham (2006) argues that the childhood and cultural experiences of black children

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and young people growing up in the majority world have received little attention and much of what we know and read about children and childhoods are largely Euro/American depictions of the idyllic childhood experiences of minority world children. This inadequacy and "inconsistent" empirical and theoretical documentation of CSA studies in developing societies has created a knowledge gap and underrepresentation of the sexual experiences of majority world children (Veenema et al, 2015). The World Health Organisation estimates that 150 million girls and boys below the age of 18 have experienced sexual abuse and violence in one form or another and the number has increased since then (WHO, 2008, 2006). Based on original research with itinerant child street vendors in some marketplaces in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria, this paper focuses specifically on six female vendors and their stories of sex abuse and frosty relationships with adults in the vending environment, and it is essentially their voices and experiences that are explored in this paper.

The terms, child sexual abuse (CSA), sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and sexual molestation are used interchangeably in this paper to define any form of sexual relationship, whether overt or covert, between an adult and a minor (UNCRC, 1989). Similarly, children, child street vendors, itinerant street vending children and young people here refer to the children and young people who sold wares on streets and various marketplaces in Enugu.

Child sexual abuse, molestation or exploitation of children is a significant prevalent global social problem beyond what we know and what has been written about it (Finkhelor, 1999; Wurtele, 2009; Kenny & Wurtele, 2012). It happens in every society and culture, and in all continents, and cuts across all social and economic strata (Wurtele, 2009; Veenema et al, 2015). It often happens in secret and in various settings within the home, school or workplace, including marketplaces, and is difficult to detect or define (Wurtele, 2009). The sexual abuse of children has far-reaching, damaging impact on the victims, their families, communities and society and often leads to a range of physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing issues (Finkelhor, 1999; Kenny & Wurtele, 2012; Veenema et al 2015).

CSA is prohibited in most countries of the world and the global community recognises that it is every child's fundamental right to be protected from any form of sexual maltreatment ((Levesque, 1999; UNICEF, 2016). These are strongly expressed and entrenched in International Human Rights Law in the different conventions, declarations and programs of action, notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (1989) articles 34 and 35 in particular. Consequently, different regions and countries of the world have adopted specific treaties and declarations prohibiting the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children: defining what these mean, spelling out specific acts that constitute child sexual exploitation (CSE) and CSA and stipulating various disciplinary measures and criminal penalties against offenders, including capital punishments and life imprisonment (Levesque, 1999; UNCRC 1989). In Europe, for example, there exist, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and several European Union's Directives on Child Sexual Abuse. In the United States of America, we have The Child Abuse Victims' Rights Act (passed by the US Congress in 1986) and The Child Abuse Prevention

and Treatment Act in 1974. There is also The National Abuse Coalition which was created in 1979 to put more pressure on the US Congress for more sexual abuse laws, which have led to the creation and passing of many more sexual abuse laws in the US Congress to date. In South East Asia, the Indian Parliament passed the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Bill in May 2012 which became law in November 2012. There is high incidence of CSA in Africa, (specifically, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe), which a CNN report in 2012, attributed to the "Virgin cleansing myth" - where it is believed that having sex with under-aged girls and babies would cure and cleanse HIV AIDS positive men of their ailment. In Nigeria the story is also the same though there are no specific laws and bills in Nigeria to date that are specifically targeted at child sexual abusers except those embedded in Nigeria's Child Rights Act of 2003.

Since the UNCRC and other regional treatises, there has been a growing awareness of child sexual abuse cases which have led to many civil law suits, prosecutions, and more openness about CSA. Since then, victims have been given more powers and encouragement to come forward and speak out. Up till date, individuals and organisations such as schools, churches, youth organisations and day care centres that had responsibility for supervising children had been made to face cases of CSA. Notable among these are the Catholic Church sex abuse cases involving priests and big dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church in the USA, cases against Irish nuns and religious groups who ran boarding schools in the UK, including the landmark Jimmy Savile cases since 2011, and very recently in 2019, the Pope's pronouncements and directives for action on CSA and the Catholic clergy (Terry, 2015). In Zambia, for instance, the landmark teacher-student sexual abuse case presided over by Judge Philip Musonda in June 2008 indicted the teacher and awarded a 45 million Zambian Kwachas equivalent of 13, 000 US Dollars to the student as damages (Women News Network, 2008). There have been no known landmark civil lawsuits in Nigeria but according to the *Punch Newspaper* of May 19, 2016, CSA is a rising pandemic. Being a signatory to the UNCRC, Nigeria has shown responsibility and obligation to protect her children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation by enacting the Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003. The CRA has only been ratified by a few states of the federation and its enforcement still remains a challenge for those that have done so.

There is no universally agreed definition of child sexual abuse or sexual molestation of children and young people but certain situations, practices and circumstances connote child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1999). This paper has adopted the following broad examples as enunciated by a leading UK's children's charity, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), which specifies such situations as sexual relationship between parents (guardians) and their children, caregivers and minors under their care, teacher and pupils, or the use of force and violence to perform sex acts on children. It also includes indecent exposure of the genitals or female nipples, child grooming, or using a child to produce child pornography or for sexual stimulation. Further examples by another UK's top ranking child protection organisation, CELSIS, broadens the discourse to include forcing or enticing a young person to take part in sexual activity in return for something – which could be money, gifts, accommodation, affection or status,

whether or not the child is aware of or consents to what is happening and whether or not the contact is direct or indirect, in person, online, through a proxy or a combination of these. Such factors as unsolicited and un-consensual touching, playing and enticing a child to engage in sexual acts, directly or indirectly, in return for a favour or patronage, whether or not the child is aware of the hidden intentions of the adult have also been adopted to capture some of the children's experiences.

Street vending is a common activity that children and young people growing up in Nigeria engage in. Street vending takes place in open spaces outside shops and designated locations. In major cities in Nigeria, large numbers of children and adults dash around in busy streets, motor parks, bus terminals, at traffic junctions and motor ways, and petrol stations selling wares of various sizes and shapes. Okoli and Cree (2012) argue that vending is a way of life for many children growing up in the majority world. Amongst many low-income families and households in Nigeria, children are expected and encouraged to contribute cash and labour towards their personal development and welfare of their families. Money realized from vending is handed over to their parents to fund children's education and general maintenance. The children in this study were in full time education and juggled school and vending. Many performed double vending shifts in a day – early in the morning before and after school. Both children and adults believe that their vending experiences created opportunities that affected their lives in both positive and negative ways. However, their presence and *modus operandi* within Nigeria's urban spaces have raised concerns, negative criticisms and public outcries which suggest that street vending is damaging to children and "robs them of their childhood" (UNICEF, 2005; Save the Children, 2004; Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003; Ennew, 2003; Ayisi 1997:6). They operate in very similar circumstances with adult traders, under conditions that have been said to "violate their human dignity and endanger their personal development" (Liebel, 2004: 226). The street poses a very big risk to and affects children's normal development and exposes them to being exploited as objects of sex as they face threats and dangers. (Bourdillon, 2000). Based on the above, the study posed this research question: What are the lived experiences of child street vendors concerning sexual abuse in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria

Methodology

Data were collected using a mixed qualitative ethnographic method of face - to - face in-depth interviews and participant observation of six female vendors in several marketplaces within Enugu city. Depending on their availability and willingness to participate, children were recruited randomly through snowballing process and given a consent form for parental consent, but many did not take the forms home. They said that it was unnecessary because their parents were illiterate and could not be bothered as long as they met their daily targets to sell off their entire wares at the end of the day, brought money home and did not get into trouble. Many were of the opinion that being allowed to sell wares and move about freely with their peers or on their own had imbued them with the freedom and independence to take decisions by themselves, including the decision to participate in the research or not. Some deceptively filled out the forms by themselves as though it was completed by their guardians and a few physically brought their guardians to give oral consent (Okoli, 2015).

Many parents did not want to sign the consent form but were happy to give permission orally for their children to take part in the research. Participants were encouraged to choose where they wanted to be interviewed - whether in the full view of others or in quiet stalls as arranged by the interviewers. Many preferred to be interviewed right there in the open, while others were interviewed in quiet shades to ensure confidentiality and avoid intrusion by curious passers-by. Interviews were conducted in the three major languages spoken in the research area (English, Pidgin English and Igbo), according to their preferences. The interview sessions were recorded in long notes, and with permission, audio or video recorded and children were allowed the opportunity to review the audio and video tapes and to delete responses or areas they did not want included (Bragg & Kehily, 2013). All ethical considerations to ensure informed consent, access, and confidentiality, freedom to participate or opt out were duly observed and put in place (Okoli, 2015). Data obtained was presented in case histories.

Findings

The findings of the lived experiences of the six participants are presented below:

Chinenye was a -10- year old Igbo girl who lived with her maternal aunt in Enugu urban. She sold iced sachet water, popularly called 'pure water', and often helped her aunt to sell other wares and look after her young children. Chinenye vended wares regularly on weekdays only after school between 2pm and 6pm, but started earlier on weekends and holiday periods. She was the third daughter of her parents and the fourth child in a family of seven. Her biological parents were poor subsistence farmers and lived in a nearby rural town. Her aunt, a married mother of five, lived with her husband and their young children. She was a trader and owned a shop in a nearby market. Narrating her encounter with an adult male customer who called to buy her 'pure water', Chinenye said, "he called me and told me to sell to him. When I was selling to him, he started to touch me all over my body… he bought two sachets worth twenty naira, he gave me 50 naira and told me to keep the change. I thanked him. He told me to see him after market, but I did not go."

Also narrating another experience with another adult male trader on a different occasion, she said, "he called me to buy something from me, when I was selling to him, he came close, he drew his chair nearer to me, I told him to leave me alone. He told me not to cry or shout. He started touching me... touched me here... [points to her breast]. He gave me money and told me that he will always buy my market if I behave well to him". When asked how she felt about these and whether she reported the incidents to her aunt or anybody, she said 'no' because "my aunty will beat me, she will scold me and say that I am not serious with what she asked me to sell".

Grace was a 14 year- old who sold smoked prawns (crayfish) and lived with both parents who themselves were petty traders. Her parents owned a shop inside the motor park where they jointly sold fish and seafood products and she had been hawking goods since she was eight. She recounted her experience with motor park

touts] and revenue collectors from the local authority ("ticket people"), who she constantly referred to as "evil and wicked" because they would sometimes "hold your change in their hand and raise it up and tell you to come and collect it, and when you try to collect it they... their body will touch you …and they push their smelly dead bodies onto your body….they are evil ...they by force people to sleep with them.". She further recounted how those revenue collectors would offer them discounts and "not collect money from you sometimes, and tell you not to pay if you agree to what they want, what they want you to do with them". Grace had reported her brawls with the revenue collectors to the market union on many occasions but said, "they just advised me to keep away from them and mind my business".

Eka was a sixteen-year-old girl from Akwa Ibom State (the South- South geo-political zone of the country). Her father was a police officer and her mother was a petty trader. She came from a family of eight, was number three in birth order, and lived in the nearby police barracks with her parents and siblings. Eka, who had been a food vendor for many years, explained how she and her siblings performed double vending shifts - how they sold cooked food in the morning before school and various seasonal wares like groundnuts, boiled corn and pears after school in the evening street markets. She spoke about "unusual acts of kindness" and sexual overtures by bus drivers and their assistants, many of whom posed as "nice, genuine customers". Speaking about their sexual innuendoes, Eka said, "Sometimes they touch you where you do not like"… and they target only female vendors". Speaking about their ploys, ulterior motives and fake acts of kindness towards younger female vendors, Eka further reported:

> Their eyes are always on small, small girls who they can overpower, those they can deceive easily … They buy all their market and sometimes dash them money or buy them small something (presents) but you do not understand what they have in mind… you think they are nice customers till one day he corners you and begins to touch you or tell you to do it with him… If you refuse, he will go out and start talking about you…and tell you to pay back all the money that he dashed you**.** From then on he will start looking for your trouble… just looking for ways to spoil your name, and how to catch you.

Eka did not report her encounters to anybody because "they would do nothing.., what can anybody do? Who do you report to? All of them are the same. They are known as bad people in the market and we try to avoid the areas where they stay. I do not usually sell around that their side (points to a section of the park) just to avoid their *wahala* (trouble)".

NK was another sixteen year old who had had serious arguments and brawls with bus drivers and motor park touts and the Union people popularly known as the National Union of Road Transport Workers – NURTW), who were responsible for the day-to-day operations of motor parks. She came from Ebonyi State and lived with her parents. She sold cooked local staple foods made from cooked cassava (abacha), ugba and fried fish - a local delicacy. Narrating her encounter, she said,

> Those union people are the worst of the lot. They tell you that the park belongs to them and would threaten to stop you from selling inside their

> motor park, if you refuse their advances. They call you names like baby oku (hot girl), big girl, fine baby'... just to annoy you. Some of them take your market (wares) and refuse to pay you on the day … and when you go to collect your money or tell them to pay up, then they start quarrelling with you. They tell you to come here, go there, do this and that or they will send you out of the park. Some of them will say that they have paid you, but they are telling lies, they know they have not paid for your wares which they took since. They dribble you up and down, to make you cry. Some will tell you to come and collect your money tomorrow and when you tell them that you would not accept deferred payments or credit, they will start abusing you saying that a big girl like you should not be a house girl…I hate them. They make me cry for them regularly.

Speaking further about her encounters, **NK** narrated how she was once beaten up by one of the union workers who accused her of being disrespectful, wild and stupid simply because she refused his overtures and invitation to see him at the close of business. According to her,

> He was the one who called me to come and sell to him ooo! ....and when I went in there and asked him to help me put my tray down so he could select what he wanted, he started shouting at me saying that I was not afraid, that I was disrespectful to ask him to help me put my tray down, ..whether I thought he was my boyfriend or brother. As I put my tray down by myself and I bent down to sell to him, he started touching my bottom and when I told him to stop touching me he started shouting at me...he pushed me out of the office saying that I was stupid and had no manners. He said that I should be thankful that he touched my 'smelly body' and that he had better women and more beautiful girls than me to touch and play with. Other people came around and I narrated what happened but they did not do anything, instead they ordered me out of their office and threw the money at me. The man pushed my market with his legs, spilled water on the floor and ordered me to clean their office.

Glory, a twelve-year-old girl who lived with her uncle, a police officer and his family, in a nearby police barracks, sold roasted peanuts, cashew nuts and chin-chin (pastries), popularly referred to as 'make-me-well'. She came from a family of eight and was the last child of her parents. She narrated how another police officer had been

> dashing me money, he used to buy from me every day and would sometimes give me extra money and tell me to keep the change. One day he told me that he likes the way I used to behave and sell my market, not joining other girls to look for men. He gave me a can of coke and started touching my blouse pretending to remove dirt from my body. I reported this to my uncle and his wife, but my aunty (uncle's wife) scolded me saying that I was a prostitute and that I was going to the man to drink free coke and enjoy free money. My uncle said he would beat me properly and send me back to the village if he ever heard me complain or receive gifts and drinks from anybody.

Favour was fifteen and sold old newspapers, shopping bags and waterproof bags for wrapping foods. She told stories of the way men and adult traders abused, beat up, and threatened young vendors. She spoke about the fight she had with an older trader who had been calling her names and spreading rumours about her simply because "I refused to sleep with him. He tried everything possible to get me but I refused. I reported to my aunty and she went to his shop and warned him to leave me alone."

Continuing her stories she said,

> Since that incident he started looking for my trouble everywhere, saying that I was sleeping with other traders and that I was a rotten girl. One day he called me a prostitute, I called him a thief, and woman wrapper and I told him that I would tell his wife that he has been telling me to sleep with him and chasing small girls. He started beating me and tore my clothes and we fought in full view of many people in the market. My aunty and other traders came and took me away. They reported the case to the traders' union and the police but nothing was done to him. The police continued doing come today, come tomorrow (delay tactics)…They let him go free and told me to mind my business…warning that I should be careful not to fight with anybody in the market or they would stop me from vending here.

When asked about their coping mechanism and support network, many said they relied on their vending colleagues and relatives but also said that they did not receive much help or support each time they had conflicts with adults. Speaking about children's coping mechanism and why she continued vending wares despite the unpleasant experiences female children faced in such adult-controlled environment; **Favour**'s response captured the general feeling of many. According to her, "we report to the union people and to your father and mother, or your aunty and uncle. We try to avoid them…that is why we move together in groups with your friends and people that you know very well. We help ourselves to sell our goods or face whoever looks for your trouble. If anything happens, they will help you out".

Discussions

The picture that emerges from these stories is complex, contradictory and worrisome. Children experienced support and conflict, harm and protection, abuse and patronage, bullying and false accusations and character defamation from adults that they trusted to provide protection and safety. These accounts raise many issues of emotional blackmail, forceful, non-consensual, unauthorised touching and unsolicited jokes and jibes, physical and verbal assaults, masked acts of kindness or doubtful philanthropy, and many abuses of a sexual nature. Their stories of unfriendly relationships and fierce competitions between adult traders, motor park operators and bus drivers and their conductors reveal sordid experiences of child sexual abuse and exploitation, feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, helplessness, violations, distrust, undue delays and denial of justice, lack of support and increasing vulnerability, shyness to report or speak out about their experiences for fear of being disbelieved or not taken seriously, threats of being stopped from vending or expulsion from the marketplaces and prejudice against children as the cause of their abuse and exploitation.

Children felt helpless and hopeless with inadequate support network and systems. Obviously, the markets are adult-controlled spaces within which children operate. As gatekeepers, adults have responsibility for the safety of the marketplace and market operations including the operators within it. There are the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), various traders'/markets and street associations and vigilante/security groups that are charged with safeguarding shops, streets and market operations, including children and other actors within those vicinities. The police are part of the market operatives entrusted with safeguarding lives and maintaining law and order, however, these adult gatekeepers and security agents are at the centre of the conflicts, exploitations and problems that children faced. The police were accused of delaying and not carrying out proper investigations or following up on reported cases, thereby denying them justice and making them feel helpless, hopeless, abandoned and powerless. Children felt that the police, adults, the NURTW and security operatives within the markets were biased against them, and were more favourably disposed towards the adults and did not take their reports of abuses seriously. According to the children, their reports were quickly dismissed, undocumented, not followed up nor given due attention that they expected and deserved. Many reported that they were disbelieved, blamed for not being conscientious or serious with their lives and vending and threatened with expulsion from trading within the markets while the adult offenders were left scot free.

Evidently, relationships between children and adults in the marketplaces are far from being cordial, convivial, and protective. The constant conflicts with various gatekeepers left children feeling physically, emotionally and verbally abused. Children were beaten up, and traumatised and were left to their own devices. Many lost their wares and suffered humiliations while genuinely pursuing their daily activities and trying to live up to their parents' and society's expectations to contribute to their personal survival and that of their families.

Culturally, sex is a taboo, sensitive and difficult subject to talk about (Veenema et al 2015) and children often felt reluctant to speak out. They shied away from talking about or reporting their experiences for fear that nobody would believe them, or that they would be shamed and blamed, scolded and punished (Fawole, Ajuwon and Osungbade, 2004) and accused of being prostitutes, not being careful enough, and not focused or mindful of their primary reason in the market. Most of the children took up vending to help their parents to raise more cash for their education and daily survival. For this reason, children deliberately tried to avoid any distractions or actions that could tarnish their image and that of their families, or truncate their life opportunities. The devised coping strategies and survival mechanisms. According to **Favour**, having operated within the markets for a while and being conversant with the "trouble makers, their spots and their intrigues, we have devised ways and measures to cope with them". **NK** deliberately "avoided them" and certain "notorious spots where they stay" while **Grace** would not sell to those of them that were known to "touch and spoil small, small girls" and prey on female only vendors as their primary targets, according to the 16 year-old **Eka**. And they generally moved in small groups of three or more, keeping an eye on each other and offering support to one another whenever necessary.

A culture of absolute respect and loyalty to adults contributed to children's vulnerability in enduring sexual abuse and molestation. In traditional and contemporary Nigerian society, respect for elders is paramount and children are raised and expected to respect adults even to a point of servitude and to their detriment. Such a culture would discourage children from speaking up or complaining against adult abusers. Culturally, for a child to be adjudged as good, disciplined and well behaved means that such a child should not engage in a banter, a fight, speak rudely or talk back at an adult. For this reason, children find it difficult to explain their position in a conflict with an older person and almost impossible to rebuff sexual overtures, and when they try to defend themselves, they are shouted down, labelled as wild and lacking home training. It is for the same cultural reasons that the word, 'sex' is not mentioned in conversations and children avoided discussions of a sexual content. Sex is a taboo word too heavy to pronounce or mention in local language and that is why children find it difficult to explain their experiences, and what was said to them. They often used the expressions; "sleep with", "do it", "play with" or other colloquial expressions in their interviews and conversations about their experiences of sex in the markets.

Again, in Nigeria and specifically in Igboland, children are raised to believe that playing and relating with people of the opposite sex is bad. Good grooming principles and good child rearing practices forbid and restrain female children from playing or associating with men at an early age. Therefore, any form of exposure to men or engaging in a relationship of a sexual nature, carries a certain degree of shame and stigma making it difficult for children to report their abuse experiences. Because of this, children would rather prefer to keep their abuse experiences to themselves, discuss them in their small friendship groups with their vending peers who may not offer much in terms of solutions or endure their ordeal silently rather than stand publicly to speak out or testify against abusers.

The itinerant nature of vending and the additional pressure to meet daily targets and bring money home at the end of each vending day makes children soft and easy targets. And in their bid to meet these targets children would easily fall prey to sex abuses and adult manipulations. Many were often unaware of the disguised intentions of their "nice and generous patrons" (**Favour**), who make sexual advances while offering patronage in cash and kind. Children reported that adults resorted to blackmail, stalking and threats to get them to yield to their overtures. These reports seem to support Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga and Schrader's (2000) submission that female street children tend to endure and internalise violence and are prone to continuous abuses and molestations.

Community response to children's experiences are passive and for this reason, children do not see the need to report as "nothing would be done to the adult", according to **NK**. Therefore, community passivity, fear, blame and failure to deliver justice against offending adults left children feeling disempowered and unable to report sexual abuses in the markets. Again, the poor enforceable criminal justice/penal system in Nigeria and the difficulty to investigate and prove CSA cases make it difficult for children and their guardians to obtain justice. Throughout the study, there was no mention of any formal agency or organisation where children

could be referred to for support and assistance, and where there are systems in place, enforcement of the laws are usually poor (Veenema et al 2015), and delayed (the "come today, come tomorrow" attitude of the police according to **Grace**). Delays in prosecution deter justice and would expose the female child victims and their families to undue publicity which is not in the children' best interests. This engenders an attitude of submission and tolerance of abuses and no confidence in the law enforcement and the criminal justice system in Nigeria.

Peer support and teamwork were children's strong coping strategies in such wild and busy market environment. Their respective guardians, older siblings and well meaning adults also provided security and safety nets but their vending mates provided emotional support which helped them to fight adult abuses and manipulations. Their resilience and team working strategies helped them to cope, tolerate and manoeuvre their way around the marketplace, while negotiating and making sense of the abusive and difficult circumstances they found themselves in. All of these demonstrate children's agency and helped them to make sense of their physical and social worlds (Woodhead, 1999, Punch, 2001a, 2001b, 2003). They reveal that children are not mere victims prone to abuse and needing protection nor passive recipients of socialization (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998).

Despite these challenges, children were still determined to continue with their daily vending responsibilities, and meeting their targets and helping to raise money for their upkeep and family sustenance. It may not always be the case but children (and adults) believed that these vending experiences contributed to their confidence and success at their school work and will imbue them with life skills, "vocational learning and a traditional form of education" (Togunde and Carter 2006: 76) that will prepare them for their future as they progress from childhood to adulthood.

These stories and sexual experiences left children traumatised and could lead to difficulty in future relationships and a crippling fear of men and adults. There is urgent need for professional care and timely support to child victims of sexual abuse and their families and it is the place of social workers and other helping professionals and agencies to provide trauma counselling and care to victims and their families. This paper calls for a multi-professional level intervention involving Social workers, educationists, religious and community leaders, psychologists and other helping professionals and security agencies to embark on massive sensitization campaigns in schools, marketplaces and places of worship targeted at educating parents and communities against CSA. It is often said that children are the future of society and so the culture of blaming and shaming children, discouraging them from speaking out against adults or dismissing their reports in favour of adults is not in anybody's best interests. Justice for all irrespective of who is involved should be paramount in deciding cases of CSA and children should be given a fair hearing in a confidential and supportive manner without damaging their confidence or making them feel alienated, unheard or uncared for.

Street vending children demand more understanding, support, cooperation, and protection particularly from adult traders, law enforcement agents, and the wider community. There is need for a multi-professional, inter agency approach which

includes public enlightenment campaigns in schools, marketplaces and religious houses. There is need to educate children and young people, parents, community faith-based organizations, security agencies and the general public on how to identify, report and follow up cases of CSA. Enforcement of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which promises compulsory and free education would ensure that school-aged children are not allowed to vend wares during school hours and beyond six o'clock in the evening, greater surveillance by law enforcement agents and market/traders' associations and severe penalties against child sexual abusers. Children need encouragement and support to speak out and report cases of sexual molestation in marketplaces even in schools. There is need for a review and complete overhaul of Nigeria's criminal justice system and greater need to set up confidential help lines or persons who could act as child ambassadors within the markets where children could feel free to report and receive confidential advice and referrals, when required. The Police force needs further training, monitoring and support to deal with CSA cases and the traders' associations and various security agencies within the marketplaces supported to listen to and protect children operating within their jurisdiction without bias. Rather than criminalise working children or make them feel inferior about their childhoods, governments and aid agencies should put greater safeguards in place to protect the rights of female child vendors in particular, and those of all children. We need all hands on deck to make the childhoods of street vending children positive in a way that will make them become responsible, balanced and well functional adults in the long run.

Conclusion

Child street vendors faced a wide range of complex and conflicting challenges in their daily encounters as they tried to relate with adults and negotiate access into the chaotic yet organised market environment. Those relationships created frictions and feelings of unhappiness for children who endured abuses, threats and exploitations which could shape their future and affect their quality of lives and well-being in more negative ways (Veenema et al, 2015, Woodhead, 1999). Children were aware that vending in such a fiercely competitive marketplace would help to enhance their skilfulness and inventiveness, but could also have damaging consequences. Their small friendship groups provided support and encouraged group work and team spirit, but left them feeling vulnerable, lonely and fearful. These negative experiences raise issues of distrust between children and adults, and could affect children's ability to engage in healthy marital relationships. Studies show that children who are sexually abused stand a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS (Fawole, et al, 2004) and often experience both short and long term emotional difficulties such as depression, low self esteem, and psychopathology in later life.

These stories and experiences suggest that vending exposes children to ignominious conditions and child street vendors are prone to sexual abuse and other forms of abuses by adult members of the community who should ensure their best interests and provide safety and protection. Unfortunately, female children and young vendors face sexual abuses, and are exploited and molested in various guises. CSA is a very common experience that child vendors in Nigeria face daily in the markets which they are scared and shy to speak about. Many do not report their experiences because

of fear that they would not be believed. Reported cases were not followed up or investigated properly, but were rather met with stern warnings, threats, physical violence, and expulsion from the vending arena or being sent back to the village as a form of punishment while abusers were left scot-free. Sex and sexual matters are taboo subjects which children do not feel comfortable and free to report or talk about. Many were afraid to speak out, threatened by their relations and accused of seeking and enjoying the attention, largesse and patronage from adults. Children carried on and dealt with the abuses in their own way by moving in groups, supporting and providing succour to one another and avoiding possible dangerous areas. They silently endured these humiliating experiences in order to prove their agency and ability to cope with difficult situations. They wanted to demonstrate that they were capable of withstanding harsh situations while being able to contribute to their personal and family upkeep. But basically, children had very little support system and network, no services/interventions in place for support within and outside the markets to deal with their issues. They had nobody to confide in and were left to deal with their experiences in their own ways.

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