

# IMPACT OF STREET HAWKING ON THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING OF CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Street hawking is the most dominant form of child labour in Nigeria. This paper examines the impact of street hawking on the social and physical wellbeing of children. The paper is anchored on Marxian theory which is a strand of conflict perspective. Street hawking may be attributed to factors like unemployment, low wages, poverty, inflation, massive retrenchment, poor quality of life, broken homes, death of parents and adverse economic environment. Some social and physical problems are associated with street hawking and they include increase in teenage pregnancy, high rate of STDs including HIV infection, rape, high illiteracy, youth alcohol and drug addiction, prostitution, all forms of delinquent and criminal behaviours and exposure to road accidents. Therefore, the paper recommends that government should ensure that existing laws on violence against children and child labour be strengthened and made more effective in order to curb street hawking in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Street hawking, social wellbeing, physical wellbeing, children.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The future of any society depends squarely on the development of the children and youth. Proper development which encapsulates relevant and global education is therefore ineluctably tied to sustainable national development. It is therefore unequivocal that child hawkers are most unlikely to contribute significantly to societal development because they lack education hence the interest in this subject matter.

Aiyehuro (2009) defines hawking as a system of trading whereby the trader carries his wares about. Street hawking refers to a wandering like movement in which an individual carries his or her goods with a tray on the head or by means of transportation such as wheel barrow, bicycle or trolley in search of customers. This is usually accompanied by at least one form of advertisement – shouting the name of the item on sale, using bell or special mannerism to attract the attention or interest of the public (Anyanwu, 2007). It is a trading activity

characterized by movement across street in residential areas in which the hawker aims at selling his goods to any interested buyer. Ezenwa (2011) opines that an adolescent street hawker is a person under the age of 15 years who hawks goods and renders services on the commercial road or street.

In modern day Nigeria, child hawkers are faced with a lot of risks. For instance, there are several cases involving young girls as young as ten who are sexually active and who trade in sexual favours for money along side whatever commodities they are peddling. This scourge is not limited to the female gender alone as male children also fall victims to sexual offenders as well. The consequences of these acts include unwanted pregnancies, illegal and unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted diseases and psychological trauma. (Akigir, 2012). These child hawkers suffer frustration and psycho-social disorientation.

The dramatic increase in child labour and street hawking in Nigeria may be attributed to several factors. These factors include the rapid population growth of many less developed countries, high rate of unemployment, inflation low wages and deplorable working condition which have propelled children to engage in street hawking in order to help support their families (Charles and Charles, 2004, Deth, 2007). Ebigbo and Abaja (2003) maintain that street hawking exposes children to sexual abuse and consequently to HIV/AIDS infections. Children who engage in street hawking may indulge in criminal acts like prostitution, armed robbery and pick pocketing (Hubert, 2009; Humphries, 2010). The problems associated with urbanization are human and environmental poverty, declining quality of life, untapped wealth and human resources.

Aderinto (2006) asserts that street trading exposes the operators to various risks and health hazards as most children end up engaging in various economic activities like bus conducting, load carrying, car washing, hawking earlier as a means of survival. In Nigeria, hawkers are seen on the streets of major cities and majority of them are young people mostly teenagers. These children are usually sent out to hawk by their parents or guardians in order to earn money for the family. However, these child hawkers are exposed to certain dangers. In some cases, they are knocked down by reckless drivers. There are cases where some of these children are abducted and used for ritual purposes. Female hawkers are raped by either male customers or strangers. Many of these children do not attend school and even when they do, they have little or no time to work on after school assignment or to rest.

Due to the usual high level of trekking involved in hawking activity, risks of road traffic accident, physical exhaustion, sexual harassments such as rape, molestation and different forms of exploitation are believed to be associated with street hawking (Okojie, 2007). Some social and psychological problems are also associated with street hawking. For

instance, it exposes the not yet-fully equipped or maturing child hawker to thirst due to sweat and hunger following long trekking but more importantly to undue exposure to strangers including those with ignoble intention (Ezenwa, 2011).

Several studies have examined the physical and psychological hazards associated with adolescent street hawkers but one area which has received little attention is the social and physical health factors associated with street hawking. African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN, 1993) study on street children in Nigeria shows that hawkers mentioned the following problems like tiredness, hunger, loss of money to criminals, headache, body pains, problems with their masters, lack of school attendance, pains in the eyes, touching of sensitive parts of their bodied especially their breasts and buttocks, heaviness of head and neck, dizziness, etc. In his own contribution, Maduka (2006) identified some problems associated with street hawking to include increase in teenage pregnancy high rate of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) among teenagers, rape, high illiteracy among the youth, youth alcohol and drug addiction.

In a study carried out by Ekpenyong and Sibiri (2011) on street hawking and child labour, the findings indicate that street hawking and child labour reflect chronic urban poverty which can compel parents to send children of school age to work to boost family income for many hours each day. The study shows that 64% of the hawkers are females while 36% of them are males. The implication is that more females engage in street hawking than males. Results of the study also show that 98% of the respondents are from very poor families opening the door to survival driven occupation. Ogbuagu (2004) carried out a study in Awka and the findings of his study show that children engage in hawking due to lack of income and education of their parents.

Nsisong and Eme (2011) carried out a study on juvenile street hawkers in Uyo. Results of the study show that juvenile street hawkers develop maladjusted patterns of behaviour which in turn may impair their academic, moral, social, physical and psychological growth and development thus affecting their future negatively. Aderinto and Okunola (1998) carried out a study in Ado-Ekiti, South Western Nigeria and they identified problems like truancy, exposure to hazards of weather, fatigue, high potential for accidents, exposure to kidnappers, rape and recruitment into hawking drugs by drug barons, early unwanted pregnancy and contraction of STDs. Ashimolowo, Aromoran and Inegbedion (2010) carried out a study on street trading activities and its effects on the educational attainment of its victims in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State. The findings show that waste is generated by street hawkers as a result of indiscriminate dumping along the streets; gutters and drainage. Also, the study indicates that children who engage in street hawking perform badly in school in order to face hawking fully. These studies on street hawking have identified the various

factors that influence street hawking in major cities in Nigeria. Also, the studies threw light on the social, psychological and physical problems associated with street hawking.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The paper is anchored on Marxian theory. The proponent of this theory is Karl Marx. According to Marx (1963), the change in the society results from the economic base and super structural institutions and reflection of the changes in the economic base. The concrete form of this base is the production of man's subsistence needs, the production process itself is understandable as a human social activity in terms of social relationship that exists between these various individuals and groups involved in the process. Karl Marx posits that all through history when we consider those social relationships that make the production process a social phenomenon, two major classes or group of people are identifiable at all times. They are few individuals who own and control the means of production and the majority of people who do not own the means of production but who do the actual production by using their natural human labour power. Marx opines that a class struggle always emerges between the ruling class and the working class as a result of the unequal distribution of societal resources. Scholars have criticized Marxian conflict theory because of his overemphasis on the economy as the major source of conflict in the society. Marx failed to identify other non-economic variables like bad governance which may create extremes of wealth and poverty in the same society. In spite of the shortcomings and deficiencies of Marxian theory, it seems to be the most relevant and suitable theory for this study. In relating the theory to street hawking, it should be observed that unequal allocation of resources and inequality encourage poverty among members of the society. High level of poverty influences parents to engage their children in street hawking which also is associated with some social and physical problems. Marxian theory best explains the phenomenon at hand.

### **Factors Influencing Street Hawking**

Appel (2009) asserts that structural inequality is a major factor that influences street trading. Nwabueze (1992) attributes street hawking to poverty and inequality. Other factors that influence street hawking are adverse economic environment, unemployment, massive retrenchment, underemployment and poor quality of life (Okojie, 2007). All these factors are features of Nigerian society. Nnom (2003) posits that while poverty is often regarded as the principal cause of forcing children into child labour, a lack of social service at home, lack of good housing, inadequate food and healthcare services combine to compel parents to sent their children into street hawking. It then implies that the less privileged including children without homes are the most vulnerable to these social ills. The economic constraints also force parents to look for wealth at all cost to the detriment of their children.

Crosson (2008) posits that there is a link between parents with marginal income and the imperative to push children into work so as to supplement family income. Children of poor

families have to help generate family income and compensate for discrepancies in the society, particularly as the gap between the haves and have nots has grown in recent years, such situation breeds poverty (Bass, 2004; Binder and Sorgin, 2009). Low family income carries with it high risk of illness, limitations on mobility and limited access to education, thus the legacy of poverty is passed from parents to children (UNICEF, 2003). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its debut Human development report ranked Nigeria 137<sup>th</sup> out of 184 nations in terms of human development. In Nigeria, poverty encourages prostitution, corruption, armed robbery, street life, increased unemployment, poor living conditions, high mortality, acute malnutrition, short life expectancy and human deprivation (UBA monthly digest, March/April 2006).

William (2008) opines that such factors as broken homes, unemployment and death of parents can also make or lead a child to be a hawker. According to him, these victims of broken homes are normally compelled to hawk or engage in jobs in order to cater for themselves since their parents cannot do so. In some cases, some children hawk because of peer pressure. Oloko (1998) posits that some young street hawkers are from relatively affluent families who engage in hawking business for excitement and pocket money. The implication is that youthful exuberance can lead some children to engage in economic activities and they indulge in it out of the desire for adventure without identifying the adverse effect it will have on their studies. Hayano and Keenan (2007) argue that street hawking may be attributed to urban organization and modernization. These scholars assert that people who migrate from rural areas to urban centers 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. Cultural and economic factors interact in complex ways to encourage child hawking in most African urban centers. Street hawking flourishes because people patronize these hawkers by buying from them.

### **Impact of street hawking on social and physical wellbeing of adolescents**

Some of the physical consequences of street hawking include malnourishment, disease, muscular skeletal disorders from heavy labour, physical and sexual abuse, injuries and exposure to toxic agents (Kathleen, 1988). Street hawking has a negative impact on the mental health of the hawker. It has been observed that children who engage in street hawking suffer verbal abuse from their parents or guardians, consistent fear of punishment, low self esteem and a loss of imagination and future direction in life (Bakand and Robinson, 2000). Hawkers also experience poor academic performance, illiteracy, low school attendance and low enrolment which have adverse effect on their educational development. The menace of street hawking includes degrading the environment by littering the road with dirt and impeding movement on pedestrian bridge. This practice of hawking items on the road undermines the beautification and landscaping of cities in Nigeria.

Studies in Latin America, Asia and Africa have shown that street hawking has a lot of

physical and health consequences on children. Various problems such as respiratory problems, injuries, malnourishment, extortion of income, police harassment are associated with this form of child labour. Child labourers face robbery, inadequate sleep due to fatigue and long hours on the job and confinement in juvenile home (Ross, 1996). Amin (1994) asserts that street hawkers also encounter problems related to their psychological well-being. For instance, they experience stigmatization by the press and public, feeling of disheartenment, stress and irritability, personality disorder, anti social behaviour, alienation and isolation from their families. Eventually many grow up with deformed personality, maladjusted behaviour patterns and psychopathology.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In spite of the fact that the government has made several attempts to curb the high rate of street hawking in Nigeria, the practice still persists in most urban areas in the country. Some institutions and non-governmental organizations like Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), The Nigerian Children's Parliament (NCP), African Women Empowerment Group (AWEG), National Council of Child Right Advocates of Nigeria (NACCRAN) and National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) have been established to address the problem of street hawking but the problem seems to be unabated. Therefore, the paper recommends that:

- Government should ensure that existing laws on street hawking which is a form of child labour are strengthened and made more effective in order to discourage parents and guardians who send their children to hawk on the road or streets. These laws should be implemented rather than enacting new ones.
- Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) should organize sensitization programmes in form of seminars and workshops to enlighten and educate people on the problems and dangers associated with street hawking. They should be informed about the mental, physical social and psychological consequences of street hawking on children.
- Government should try as much as possible to alleviate unemployment and poverty which are the major factors that encourage street hawking. Individuals who are in the private sector should join hands with government in order to create employment for the citizens. The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) set up by the government should be functional and give preference to the poor in the society. In this way, parents will be gaining income and so will not be expecting their children to hawk and earn income for the family.
- Parents should be encouraged to engage in family planning. This will enable them to

have only the number of children they can cater for. It has been observed that some parents who earn low income usually send their children out to hawk on the road in order to earn money for the financial upkeep of their families since their meagre salary cannot take care of their family needs.

- Street hawking encourages, promotes and generates other social problems like teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, prostitution, armed robbery, pick pocketing. With this at the back of our minds, families, schools, government and non-governmental organizations should join hands to ensure that this social ill is alleviated in the society.
- Government at federal, state and local levels should embark on revival of universal Basic Education (UBE) programme launched in 1999 which has been ineffective since its inception. This will go a long way to ensure that education from primary to junior secondary school level is compulsory and free. Children who are future leaders should have free access to basic education

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