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CHILD STREET TRADING AS AN ASPECT OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT OREDO MUNICIPALITY OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA AS CASE STUDY

C.I.D Clark

Senior Lecturer in the department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin,
Nigeria

Sumaina Yesufu, M.Sc.

Lecturer in the Department of Social Work, University of Benin, Nigeria

Abstract

One of the fundamental global problems facing developing countries 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. In Nigeria, most especially in the urban areas, children between the age of eight years and fifteen are seen working. The situation of most Nigerian children remains critical due to their socio-economic, cultural, and developmental circumstances. Children are compelled by circumstances beyond their control to contribute to family income. In the long run, working children are disadvantaged in several ways due to their involvement in all sorts of hazardous works which affect their health and developmental process. The objective of this study was to find out whether children engage in street trading in Oredo Municipality (Benin City Central) of Edo State, Nigeria. The results of the study showed that a greater proportion of the child street traders combined work with schooling. There was abundant evidence of Child Street trading in Oredo Municipality of Edo State, Nigeria. Allowing children to work in the streets is a negation of the rights of children as guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Keywords: Children, Child labour, Abuse, Neglect, Rights

Introduction

One of the fundamental global problems facing developing countries 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 eight years and fifteen are seen working. The situation of most Nigerian children remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances. Poor households need money which the family can earn in order to take care of the family. Children are compelled by circumstances beyond their control to contribute to family income. In the long run, working children are disadvantaged in several ways due to their involvement in all sorts of hazardous works which affect their health and development process (Yesufu,2005).

Government and Non-government agencies have shown considerable interest and concern on the problems of child labour in Nigeria and have suggested practical policies and measures to minimize this problem. Young persons of between 6 and 14years of age have been involved in one form of street trading or the other in several parts of the ancient city of Benin for a long time. Economic hardships brought about by the failed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in 1986 by the Military Government of Nigeria drastically increased the scale and tempo of street trading by minors across the whole country, including Benin City(Yesufu,2005). Parents who could no longer afford to maintain their children in school withdrew them from the education system. In an effort to help families make ends meet, some of these children were engaged as domestic servants, car washers, bus conductors and street traders (Yesufu,2005).

I.

Majority of Nigerian parents believe that children are God-sent-helpers both economically and for other purposes. It is this notion that led many families into producing many children especially in the Nigerian agrarian society. This belief has become so accepted in the thinking that few or no attempt has been made to question its validity (Vinolia and Fubara,1986).

Child labour depends on the normative attitude towards children in the society and the culturally determined roles and functions of the socialization process. This implies that the type of work children do in a given society is determined by the institutional roles and functions of children in the society (Naidu,1986).

Poverty, the intermeshing of global economy into a global network of capitalism, shifting family structures, the nature of the state and the mode of production, as well as religion have been identified as some of the causes of child labour (Ewuruigwe,1986).

There is a relationship between parents or guardian's occupation and child street trading. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the child street traders' parents or guardians were either petty traders, government employed drivers, carpenters, mechanics or were, unemployed (Ekpe,1986).

There is a link between child street trading and parental loss in Nigeria. Parental loss means death of parents, divorce, separation and incapability. Children react in different ways to parental loss. What accounts for the differential attitude of children are the age of the child before the separation and suddenness or otherwise, of the loss. Children with single parent spent more time trading to earn more money (Shindi,1986).

Child street traders could be attacked by insane persons who roam about unchecked. Hungry adults may want to take the child street traders' wares forcefully. Child street traders' educational career suffer. No time to rest and study. Many a time, the child street traders return from school, eat (if food is available), change clothes and dash into the market or streets to sell. For such children, the end product is poor academic performance and subsequent withdrawal or dropping out of school and this could encourage the development of delinquent behaviour (Ekwe,1986).

The Study did not require the Approval of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) because of the following reasons:

- (1) The Study was conducted by Mr. Sumaina Yesufu, the Second Author in 2005 as a Master of Science (M.Sc.) Dissertation in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria;
- (2) information obtained was recorded in such a manner that human subjects could be identified directly;
- (3) disclosure of human subjects' responses outside the research did not place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability and was not damaging to the subjects' financial standing or reputation ;and
- (4) confidentiality of the information was maintained through the research and thereafter.

Study sample

As a result of the non-available list of all the street traders in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State as at the time of this study, a non-probability sample of three hundred (300) street traders and the ten (10) adult traders who participated in the in-depth interviews was considered adequate.

The methods of data collection were questionnaire and in-depth interview. The questionnaire was designed to reflect the research objectives. It was divided into two parts- the demographic characteristics of respondents; and the main issues of the study. It involved classification questions, and open-ended and fixed-alternative questions. Administration of the questionnaire was done in two ways-direct administrations in which copies were given to those who could read and write; while those who were not literate enough or at all, were helped by a research assistant.

Audio tape recorder was relied upon during the in-depth interviews which lasted for about 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes for each participant. The researcher elicited information from ten participants made up of five (5) parent/guardians and five (5) children/wards. The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and urged to answer the questions truly and without any fear.

Characteristics of Respondents

The street traders were between the ages of seven (7) and sixteen (16) years. This category of persons falls within the definition of children in Nigeria. The children and young persons law of Edo State, Nigeria defines a “child” as a person under the age of fourteen (14) years and a “young person” as a person who has attained the age of fourteen (14) years and under the age of seventeen (17) years.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed by simple percentages and also used to test the research hypothesis, to find out whether there was a statistically significant association between the child labour and child abuse and neglect. The results of the interviews were presented to reflect the opinions of the respondents.

Interview 1: Child A

Child A (male) is thirteen (13) years old and a Junior Secondary School class one, Benin City. He stays with his father and mother and has two brothers and five sisters. He is of the Edo origin and born in Benin, Edo state, Nigeria. He was seen selling sachet water at a busy motor park in Benin City. In this interview, he says that his mother buys bags of sachet water on credit with the understanding to pay the supplier the next day. Excerpts:

As a student, do you think that street trading has affected your performance in school?

Yes it has. I no longer have enough time for my bookwork and I arrive home too tired to do any serious academic work.

At your age do you think that you have the stamina for this kind of economic activity?

No I don't. Street trading is too demanding for me.

I saw you running after a moving vehicle about ten minutes ago. What are the problems that you encounter during street trading?

I have been knocked down before by a reckless motor-bike rider and had to spend three days in the hospital.

Interview 2: Mother A

Mother A, forty seven (47) years old and mother of eight (8) children, she is a trader and lives in the same house with her husband and children. She is the mother of Child A and the researchers met her keeping sachets water into a cooler containing ice blocks by the road side at a motor park. In this interview, she says that street trading is a survival strategy because she does not have any money to rent a shop at the moment. Excerpts:

Madam, why do you allow your son to sell sachet water in this busy motor park?

I buy bags of sachet water on credit with the understanding to pay my supplier the next day and hawking is a market strategy to enable us sell as many sachets of water as we could within the shortest possible time.

Madam, your son is a student. Do you know whether street trading has affected his performance in school?

Not to my knowledge. My son does not sell during school hours.

At his age, do you think that he has the stamina for this kind of economic activity?

No. He lacks the required stamina at the moment but you see, I am a trader and I expect my son to assist me in my trade in whatever way he can.

Your son was running after a moving vehicle about an hour ago. What are the problems he encounters during street trading?

Street trading is a dangerous activity. No matter how careful one is, anything can happen at anytime. Some drivers and motor bike riders are very reckless and my son has spent three days in a hospital before as a result of the injuries he sustained in a motor bike accident.

Interview 3: Child B

Child B (male) is fourteen years old and a junior secondary school class two student in Benin City, Nigeria. He lives with his parents in Benin City and they are nine children in the family. He was met selling sachet water at the New Benin Market. In this interview, he says that he engages in street trading because her mother has been evicted from her shop due to arrears of rent and has no money to pay for another shop at the moment. Excerpts:

It is about 11:00 am in the morning on weekday and you said you are a student. Why are you hawking sachet (pure) water at this hour?

I did not go to school today. My mother says that the only way she can have enough money to give to me tomorrow to buy some of my books is to help her sell some sachet (pure) water today.

Does street trading affect your body and health in any way?

Yes it does. I complain of body pains and headaches sometimes to my mother and she says that it is only natural and that within a very short time I will get over them.

Interview 4: Mother B

Mother B is forty years old and a mother of nine children. She is a trader and lives in the same house with her husband and children. She is the mother of Child B and lives very close to the New Benin Market; The researchers went to her house to ask a few questions concerning her son and his involvement in street trading. In this interview, she says that street trading is only a temporary arrangement and that when she is able to rent a shop he will stop street trading.

Excerpts:

Your son was selling sachet (pure) water at about 11:00 am this morning when he is supposed to be in school. Madam, don't you think that this may affect his performance in school?

No, I don't think so. Madam, don't you think that he is too young to engage in this type of economic activity? No I don't think so because I live very close to New Benin Market and he sells sachet (pure) water in and around New Benin Market and does not have to trek for too long

Interview 5: Child C

Child C (male) is sixteen years old and a primary school drop out. He is from Nnewi, Anambra State, Nigeria. He lives with his uncle. He relocated from his home village in

Anambra to Benin after the death of his father about in year 2000. He was met in a bread stand by the side Petrol Station, New Lagos Road, Benin City. In this interview, he says that his uncle has a bakery and has instructed him to be assisting his wife to sell bread at the above-mentioned location and along the road.

Don't you think that there is no need to be selling bread by the roadside since your uncle has a bakery?

My uncle has just started his own bakery. His bakery is still very recent and selling by the roadside is only a temporary arrangement to make some money quickly to launch his bread into the market.

Staying by the roadside and running along the road to sell the bread is not a very safe way to market one's product. What kind of danger have you encountered by the roadside?

About two weeks ago, a motor bike rider lost control and crashed into this stand and I sustained minor bruises from the accident.

Interview 6: Uncle C

Uncle C is fifty-eight years old and a father of ten children. He is a baker and lives in the same house with his wife; ten children and two of his nephews. In this interview, he says that his bakery is new one and street trading is only a temporary arrangement to help to expedite launching his bread into the market. Excerpts:

Launching one's product into the market requires more than hawking and selling by the roadside. Why can't you advertise your bread in the newspapers, and television?

Great idea but the truth is that I borrowed money from a community bank to open the bakery and would like to reduce costs as much as possible.

Your nephew C says that he is a primary school drop out. Don't you think that it is your responsibility to encourage him to continue his education?

My nephew C is the first born of his mother. He has three other brothers and two sisters. His younger siblings are all in school and he says that he will go back to school again after a little while.

Interview 7: Child D

Child D (male) is fifteen years old. He completed his primary education in year 2003. He is an Igbo boy and was born in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. He relocated to Benin to stay with his uncle after his father and mother separated about four years ago. He was seen selling soft drinks by Uselu market, Benin city. In this interview, he says that his uncle is a

distributor to the Nigerian Bottling Company PLC, and that he has been directed to hawk soft drinks to boost sales. Excerpts:

You were running after a moving vehicle a while ago. Is it not dangerous for you to do that?

It is not dangerous for me because I only run after moving vehicles when there is traffic jam and at failed sections of the road to sell soft drinks to travelers basically.

What are the kinds of problems that you encounter on the streets?

I have to fight to recover my money from people who buy my soft drink and refuse to pay.

When will you stop street trading? As soon as I can get enough money to start my own business/trade.

Interview 8: Uncle D

Uncle D is fifty years old and a father of seven children. He lives in the same house with his wife, seven children and two nieces and one nephew. He was met in his shop situated directly opposite Uselu market, where his D sells drinks. In this interview, he says that hawking is a market strategy that has enabled him to stay in business over the years because soft drinks business /trade is a very competitive one. Excerpts:

Your nephew D is selling soft drinks along the Road at about 12:00 noon when he is supposed to be in school. Don't you think this may affect his performance in school?

No I don't think so because he stopped going to school even before he started staying with me.

When will your nephew stop street trading?

I have already promised my nephew that if he serves me well, I will give him money to start his own business/trade.

Interview 9: Child E

Child E (female) is ten years old and a primary five pupil in a Primary School. She is from Delta State, Nigeria. She lost her dad in year 2000 and stays with her mother. She sells met vegetables along road by Oliha market. In this interview, she says that she is helping her mother to sell by the roadside because she could not rent a shop/stall in the Market.

Do you think that it is safe for you to be hawking in the streets. What kind of problems have you encountered in the street?

Street trading is not safe for the girl child because she can be harassed anytime. Irresponsible men have amorously approached me on two occasions.

Has street trading affected your performance in school?

No it has not. I assist my mother to hawk vegetables after school hours and on Saturdays.

What are the effects of street trading on your body and health?

I trek too much when hawking and sometimes starve because I don't normally eat any food until I get home.

Interview 10: Mother E

Mother E is forty-one years old and a widow; she is a mother of four children. She relocated to Benin after the death of her husband. She was met by the side of Oliha Market attending to customers. In this interview, she says that it is not easy to take care of four children without the support of a husband and that she will have to do anything she could to ensure that her children do not starve and do not also drop out of school. Excerpts:

Madam, your daughter says that she has been romantically harassed on two occasions in the streets. What do you think that you can do to prevent a repeated occurrence?

I will do everything possible to ensure that she does not hawk alone again and that she does not take her wares to lonely corners or places.

Madam, when will she stop street trading?

Whenever I am able to secure a loan from the Government or Non-Governmental Organizational like Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) in Benin City, to start another trade/business.

Madam, your daughter says that street trading is too demanding for her. What do you have to say about that?

I agree with her. The truth is that within a very short time she will get used to it.

Conclusions

It is established that there is abundant evidence of street trading by young children of between the ages of seven and sixteen years in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. During the study, children were seen running after moving vehicles, selling wares items such as sachet water, bottles of soft drinks, bread and the like.

On the whole, therefore, the main objective this study that street trading by children in Benin City constitutes a clear form of child abuse and neglect was achieved. Street trading by young children prevented them from going to school. The work was too laborious for the young children and that it had health implications. Consequently, this study agrees with many

other similar studies in this area which have made the same connection between street trading and child abuse and neglect in different parts of the Country in particular and in different parts of the World in general.

In order to eradicate child Street trading, the following is recommended: 1. Parents should accept and rely on Family Planning Methods in the determination of Family Size. 2. Child Maintenance Allowance for the Unemployed Parents. 3. Free and Compulsory Education for all Children up to the Completion of Secondary Education. 4. Government should be alive to its responsibility in ensuring that Children get the best up bringing possible.

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