

HEALTH CHALLENGES OF FEMALE HAWKERS IN LAFIA METROPOLIS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FEMALE YAM HAWKERS

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Abstract

This study examined health challenges of female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis, central Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to identify female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis, to determine the hazards, health and otherwise faced by the hawkers as well as to identify strategies for their social cum economic empowerment. Accidental sampling technique was used to select thirty-four female yam hawkers from unknown universe of Lafia metropolis on whom structured questionnaires were administered. Empirical data was analysed using Epi-Info software. Findings revealed that female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis who, are in their economically active years and majorly none-literate encounter serious health challenges including body pain, fatigue, fever, accidents and isolated cases of sexual assault. It was recommended, among other things therefore, that female yam hawkers in Lafia should form a cooperative so that they can access loans or aids from financial institutions, government or non-governmental organizations to expand their business in order to enable remain in a particular location in order to avoid or reduce the health challenges they do experience during hawking.

Keywords: Female hawkers, health challenges, economic empowerment, cooperative

Introduction

This study is on the health challenges of women who hawk yams on the street of Lafia town in Nigeria. Street hawking is a common and global phenomenon (Morris, 2011). In every part of the world, people hawk for a living especially in places where economic conditions are unfavourable. People of varying ages across the world are involved in this activity which has become a viable survival alternative in many homes especially in developing countries (Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Adaawen, 2011). As the most

visible segment of the urban informal economy, it is indisputable that there are thousands – and in some cases, tens or hundreds of thousands – of street hawkers in most big cities of the developing world (WIEGO, 2014). This is in spite of the fact that hawking (vending), the act of canvassing for sale of items carried by the seller along the street, house to house or in public places (Ikechebelu, Udigwe, Ezechukwu, Ndinechi & Joe-Ikechebelu, 2008) is prohibited in most countries (Okafor, 2013; Bhowmik, 2000). Scholars and researchers have identified poverty, unemployment, lack of skills and low initial capital outlay required to start the business as major drivers of the act of hawking (Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Kwankye, Adaawen, 2011; Bhowmik, 2000; Nyarko & Tagoe, 2007; Anarfi, 1997). The sources further argue that most hawkers are migrants who leave rural areas for urban centres whereupon they fail to secure paid jobs and resort to hawking as the only means of livelihood. Bhowmik (2000:3) in particular articulates this position thus:

A large section of street vendors in urban areas is those with low skills who have migrated to larger cities from rural areas or small towns in search of employment. These people take to street hawking when they do not have the means of livelihood. Though the income in this profession is low, the investment too is low and the people do not need special skills or training.

Current literature is indicative of the fact that street hawking is illegal, undesirable and a deep-seated social malaise (Okafor, 2013; Bhowmik, 2000; Anjaria, 2006). Nonetheless, the activity is widespread in most cities of the world because it is an important activity in the informal sector that serves as a source of livelihood to many people especially in the developing world (WIEGO, 2014; Adaawen, 2011). The ubiquitous nature of hawking, the economic leverage it provides as well as the challenges it poses to human wellbeing lends credence to not only the necessity but indeed urgency of this research.

In this study, attempt is made to identify and analyse the health challenges of female hawkers in Lafia metropolis. Lafia is the capital of Nasarawa state in Nigeria. Like every other city in the country, Lafia population is multi-ethnic and commercial activities are divided along ethnic lines (NPC, 2006). The ethnic groups from Southern Nigeria trade manufactured goods predominantly, while the peoples of Northern Nigeria majorly market farm produce. However, in some trades there is no clear-cut divide between the peoples of the North and South. For example, palm oil though produced in the South is marketed by peoples of various ethnic nationalities while kola nut is produced by the Yoruba of the South-West and marketed by the Yoruba and the Hausa who mainly hawk it about (Field work, 2013).

Being the capital of an agrarian state, most of the items hawked in Lafia are agricultural products, prominent among which is yam, carried about by women. A lot is unknown about these hawkers. In spite of a vast body of literature on hawking (Studymode.com, 2013; Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Adaawen, 2011), no research has been conducted to identify and document the health challenges faced by female yam hawkers either in Lafia metropolis or elsewhere. Mitullah (2003), cited in Kwankye, Nyarko and Tagoe (1997) provides a synthesis of findings from case studies of street vending in six African countries; namely: Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and South Africa. Among other things, the source found that in all the six case studies, majority of the street vendors are women made up of all marital status groups – the married, single, widowed and divorced (Kwankye, Nyarko & Tagoe, 2007). Herrena (2012), Budlender (2011) and ILO (2002) all cited in WIEGO (2014) confirmed this conclusion with the assertion that in many countries, women represent the majority of street vendors. They state further that in Africa, women constitute more than two thirds of street traders in the main cities of Benin Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Togo, and more than half in Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal and South Africa. It thus amounts to serious academic undoing that this critical segment of the hawking population (women) is not singled out for deep empirical study here in Nigeria and Lafia in particular.

Again, researchers have devoted substantial attention to the consequences and dangers inherent in hawking activities. A penetrating study on street hawking was conducted in Accra, Ghana by Studymode.com (2013). The study found that hawkers are exposed to a wide range of risks including accidents, loss of lives, abuse, crime and prostitution. The source further stated that hawking constitutes a social obstacle as it results in both human and vehicular traffic jam. An earlier related study by Ikechebelu et al (2008) with focus on juvenile hawkers in Anambra state, Nigeria had ended with largely similar finding. The source found that:

Hawkers on the street are exposed to numerous hazards ranging from physical violence to loss of wares, risk of accidents, robbery, kidnapping, and even murder for ritual purposes. They are exposed to the vagaries of weather (extremeness of cold or heat), to insects and reptiles and to hunger and deprivation. The most troubling perhaps is the fact that some are sexually exploited.

Okafor (2013) corroborated the above findings following his study of street hawkers in Abuja, the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory. He concluded that Nigerian school-aged children have continually become vulnerable to unpleasant social acts like rape, torture, forced labour, prostitution and modern-day slavery through street hawking. While these

sources have commendably shed substantial light on the possible dangers and implications of hawking, none of them in any particular way focused on the peculiar challenges faced by women generally and lactating mothers in particular who hawk with babies strapped to their backs.

Scholars have generally held the view that hawking is a business of the poor because of the low capital involved and given that majority of hawkers are the unemployed (Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Adaawen, 2011; Kwankye, Nyarko & Tagoe, 2007). The working condition of hawkers is generally very poor and most hawkers lead a hard life (Bhowmik, 2000). Worst of all, many countries have prohibited hawking and hawkers are often harassed and manhandled by civil authorities or made to give bribes to continue their business (Okafor, 2013; Adaawen, 2011; Berry, 2009; Anjaria, 2006). This means that hawkers are not happy and satisfied with the business, and will gladly abandon it for more stable and comfortable employment or more sustainable business (Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Adaawen, 2011). However, extant literature does not adequately provide alternative socio-economic empowerment options for street hawkers generally and female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis in particular.

Although Nigeria is potentially a great nation, the vast majority (70%) of her citizens are living below poverty line (Index Mundi, CIA World Factbook, 2013). Consequently, citizens may engage in some economic activities not for the joy of the occupations but out of necessity to eke out a living (Okafor, 2013; Ekeanyanwu, 2012). The focus of this research on female yam hawkers is informed by the fact that carrying of heavy loads and hawking to long distances in search of potential customers appears odd and difficult with clear health implications, representing a hard way of living (Bhowmik, 2000).

Hawking involves carrying some load and moving about sometimes to unknown destinations for sale (Studymode.com, 2013; Morris, 2011; Ikechebelu et al, 2008). The individual may exert self beyond personal capacity that could result to body pains depending on the type of ware hawked and how far potential customers could be reached. Also depending on the ware hawked, the vendor may be exposed to bacteria or viruses with health consequences including typhoid, flu, catarrh, body pain and the like (Studymode.com, 2013; Ikechebelu et al, 2008). There is also the possibility of one being knocked down by a vehicle (Okafor, 2013; Ikechebelu et al, 2008) since there are sometimes motorcycle accidents involving pedestrians. Some of the female hawkers are lactating mothers going about with babies on their backs. Thus, they may not be the only ones exposed to danger but also the lactating babies they carry. Carrying of the goods/wares alone is a big burden (Studymode.com, 2013) as some of them especially yams, are hawked in basins. The weight of these yams and basins constitute burden

that may have health implications. Although no empirical record exists that document these health challenges, casual observation suggests that some women have been involved in motor cycle accidents in the metropolis and hence the basis for this study. On the basis of the aforementioned therefore, the study shall seek to answer the following questions:

- i. Who are the female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis?
- ii. What are the health and other hazards confronting female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis?
- iii. What are the peculiar problems faced by lactating mothers who hawk yam in Lafia metropolis while carrying their babies?
- iv. Are there cases of sexual harassment of female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis?
- v. How can female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis be socially and economically empowered?

Research Objectives

- i. The research is set to achieve the following objectives:
- ii. To identify female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis.
- iii. To determine the health and other hazards to which female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis are exposed.
- iv. To identify the peculiar problems of lactating mothers who hawk yam in Lafia metropolis while carrying their babies.
- v. To determine cases of sexual harassment of female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis.
- vi. To identify workable strategies for social and economic empowerment of female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis.

Theoretical Framework

This study is built on the functionalist perspective. Functionalism is a theory of explaining social phenomena that looks at the society as a living organism (Idyorough, 2014). This theory is also known as the equilibrium model or the consensus theory of society. It looks at society in terms of a social system made up of various social institutions or subsystems (Idyorough, 2014; Alubo, 2012). Under the functionalist theory, the society is seen as a complex whole made up of parts that are stable, separate and yet inter-dependent or interlocking and are functioning for the continuity of the whole system. Under this theory, the educational, religious, familial, legal, political and economic institutions are seen as the parts that make up the whole that is the society. All these institutions make up a social system or the social structure of the state. These social institutions are seen as persistent, stable, interdependent and well-integrated elements of the state performing their respective functions for the continuity of the state

(Idyorough, 2014). The functionalists also contend that there is a consensus of values between and among the social institutions bringing about an equilibrium state of the society. There is a cobweb of relationship between and among the various social institutions that make up the system (Idyorough, 2014). Founders and contributors to the development of functionalism are August Comte (1759-1917), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Ferdinand Toennies and Walter Cannon (1871-1945) among others (Ritzer, 2011). The core postulate of the functionalist perspective is that every element in a society is important in term of its contribution (functions) to survival and stability of the entire society. Any element that becomes useless or dangerous (dysfunctional) to the survival of the society or system is eliminated through natural process of interaction (Jones, 1986, cited in Idyorough, 2014).

The functionalist theory is not only relevant but also indeed adopted for this study. Women are seen as important and critical to economic growth of the society generally and the family in particular. Street hawking as an activity is also important because it provides a means of survival to many households (Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Adaawen, 2011). It serves as a ‘refuge occupation’ where low entry barriers make it possible for many individuals to earn subsistent income (WIEGO, 2014). Women contribute a significant quota to building family income, through hawking, thereby enhancing familial and by extension, societal development. In the light of this perspective, hawking is functional, a compelling factor for its persistence in spite of policies and legislations against it (Okafor, 2013; Bhowmik, 2000; Berry, 2009).

Methodology

Survey method was adopted in this study. Accidental sampling procedure was used to draw a sample of thirty-four respondents from the unknown population of female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis. Respondents were selected from the main routes in Lafia Metropolis where the hawkers usually pass while trading, namely: Jos Road, Makurdi Road, Shendam Road and Doma Road. On each of these routes, the researchers stood by the roadside and administered questionnaires to any female yam hawker who happened to pass by until the number of respondents on that route was exhausted. The researchers also had a scale that they used in measuring the ware being hawked by each respondent and this was recorded in the questionnaire. One route was taken by the researchers as a group at a time to avoid double counting.

A combination of structured and semi-structured questionnaire was used for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data for this study.

Questions eliciting demographic information were structured for quantitative analysis while other questions were left open-ended to elicit qualitative data. The population of Lafia is put at 330, 0712 of which females account for 161,314 (NPC, 2006). Yamane (1967) provides a reliable yardstick for sample size determination. The source suggested that for a known population, the sample size should be obtained using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Universe = 161,314

1 = Constant

e = Level of significance = 0.05

n=399.010

n = 399

Using this formula therefore, we should have drawn a sample of 399 respondents. However, the actual number of women who hawk yam is not known. It is even doubtful if the number of women who hawk yams is up to 100. Using census sampling (by enumerating all female hawkers) could have been an alternative but the hawkers do not stay in one place, neither do they all come from one hamlet, village or clan. We therefore employed accidental sampling technique. The researchers personally visited the strategic locations where these women usually visited while hawking, they were met in those places, and questionnaires administered on them. Since many of them were non-literate, we had to ask them questions while we filled in their responses into the questionnaire. This was done in order to reduce non-response rate and was carried out in a period of one week and in the second week we started meeting those who had already taken part in the research. The number of new women diminished until we were not able to get new ones; at that stage, thirty-four (34) female hawkers had responded to our questionnaires. At that point, it appeared the universe from which we were drawing the sample had exhausted and we could not go any further. The sample for this study cannot be said to be truly representative of the entire population; since the entire population remains unknown. As such, findings from the study cannot be generalized but interpreted as being true characteristics of the sample alone. Quantitative data collected from the fieldwork was processed using Epi-Info software. Epi-Info software was preferred because it is the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended software for analysis of data on health studies. Data presentation was done using frequency counts and simple percentages for the structured segment of the questionnaire while the researcher utilized qualitative methods of data

analysis such as content analysis for the unstructured section. Data were analysed in relation to research objectives and research findings were presented in a narrative form.

Data Presentation

TABLE 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age

In table 1 below, we present data on the age distribution of respondents.

Age of Respondent	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
15-17	2	5.9%	5.9%
20-24	9	26.5%	32.4%
25-29	3	8.8%	41.2%
30-34	9	26.5%	67.6%
35-39	1	2.9%	70.6%
40-44	5	14.7%	85.3%
45-49	2	5.9%	91.2%
50 years and above	3	8.8%	100.0%
Total	34	100%	100%

The table above revealed that a significant number of female yam hawkers were in the age 15-44 years (85.3%, n=29). This means that these hawkers are in their economically active age. Those above economically active age of 45 years and above were 14.7% (n=5). It is an indication that hawking is a tedious business and people of older age may not want to engage in the trade. Furthermore, marital status of respondents shows that 82.4% of the women were married. This implies that they might have marital demands in addition to their personal needs to contend with which might have placed the demand for them to take to hawking yams on the street. Thus as members of the family, they had a function to play in keeping the family economy going on. We also looked at the religion of the respondents and the finding of the study indicates that all the respondents were Christians. This may not be explained away from the liberal posture of the Christian religion that allows married women to move about and to engage in any legitimate trade of their choice. In response to a question on ethnicity, it was found that all the respondents were from the Migili (also known as Koro) ethnic group of Southern Nasarawa State. Similarly, we proceeded to find out their level of education and found that 58.8%, (n=20) of the respondents were non-literate while 26.5% (n=9) had received only primary school education even though universal basic education had been implemented over the years. Being non-literate means that they could not have acquired modern skills to be employed elsewhere. It explains why they had little or no option than to engage in street hawking. We proceeded to determine the weight of load

they carried on their heads from the measurement taken using a scale and the results were recorded as indicated in the table below.

Table 2: Weight (kg)of Wares (yams) Hawked by Respondents

Weight of item in (Kg)	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
13	2	5.9%	5.9%
14	3	8.8%	14.7%
15	9	26.5%	41.2%
16	3	8.8%	50.0%
17	5	14.7%	64.7%
18	6	17.6%	82.4%
19	4	11.8%	94.1%
22	2	5.9%	100.0%
Total	34	100%	100%

The modal weight of yams carried is 15kg. Given the fact that the average weight of Nigerian woman is 60.5kg (Igiri, Ekong, Ogan & Odey 2008), it means that the women carried a quarter or more of their weight while hawking to long distances in search of their potential customers. Those that carried 15kg or more constituted 85.3% (n=29). The potential danger to which these women were exposed may include cumulative disorders and acute trauma particularly where the load is in the range of 20-25kg (FACTS, 2007) that 5.9% (n=2) of them were carrying at the time they were captured by the study. We proceeded to determine their earnings. The table below shows daily minimum sales profit made by the yam hawkers.

Table 3:Daily Minimum Sales Profit

Daily minimum sales profit Naira (Dollar)	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
100 – <200 (0.625-1.25)	10	29.4%	29.4%
200 - <300 (1.25-1.875)	8	23.5%	52.9%
300 - <400 (1.875-2.5)	6	17.7%	70.6%
400 - <500 (2.5-3.125)	5	14.7%	85.3%
500 - <1000 (3.125-6.25)	5	14.7%	100%
Total	34	100%	100%

Calculation is based on 1 dollar: 160 naira at the time of fieldwork.

The table shows that 29.4% (n=10) of the respondents earned just about \$1 a day and only 47.1% (n=16) earned \$2 and above. The figure validates the fact that the majority of the respondents subsist below the income of \$2 a day and thus live below the poverty line. The implication being that such income bracket excludes them from a capital base to engage

in self-sustaining trade and access to several social services such as education, health, quality housing, and social security.

In response to open ended questions, we found that these women do not have initial capital to start the business. All they do is to get a surety who will go and stand for them to get supply of yams worth one thousand naira (\$6.25) or more for them to go and sell and return the capital with interest to the wholesaler. We therefore proceeded to determine how many of these respondents owned houses and the following responses were obtained.

Table 4: Distribution Respondents by House Ownership

Owned a house	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Yes	29	85.3%	85.3%
No	5	14.7%	100.0%
Total	34	100%	100%

From table 4 above it can be seen that 85.3% (n=29) owned houses while only 14.7% did not own a house. Further interview revealed that the 85.3% that lived in their family houses were in fact very low cost houses made from mud-blocks and low priced corrugated iron sheet. We also wanted to know how long they had stayed in the business of hawking yams and the following responses were received.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Number of Years in Business

No. of Years	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
2	6	18.2%	18.2%
3	10	30.3%	48.5%
4	7	21.2%	69.7%
5	4	12.1%	81.8%
7	1	3.0%	84.8%
10	3	9.1%	93.9%
15	1	3.0%	97.0%
20	1	3.0%	100.0%
Total	33	100%	100%

Missing case=1

The table above shows that majority (69.7%, n=23) of the respondents were new entrants into the business and had spent less than 5 years while 30.3% (n=10) had been in the business for over 5 years. We examined the profit level of those who have been in the business for a long time to determine whether there is positive correlation between long stay in business and higher profit level and found a weak positive relationship ($r=2=0.04$).

We had anticipated that those who have stayed longer in the business would have more customers thus making more profits than new entrants to enable them stay in business but what we found was a very weak relationship. By implication, it is not the possibility of higher earnings that makes hawkers to remain longer in the business but some other factors probably the absence of other viable alternative jobs for the respondents to take. We proceeded to look at the challenges and health implication that street yam hawkers are exposed to and the following result was obtained:

Table 6: Health Problems of Female Yam Hawkers

Health problems of female hawkers	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Body pain: legs, back, neck, hands, headache, and dryness of the body	18	52.9%	52.9%%
Knocked down by vehicle	3	8.8%	61.7%
Malaria because sleeping of environment	1	2.9%	64.6%
None	6	17.7%	82.3%
Tiredness and feverish condition	6	17.7%	100%
Total	34	100%	100%

It was found that majority of the female hawkers (70.6%, n=24) complained of body pain, tiredness and feverish condition. Body pain and exhaustion are implicated in the fact that these women carry a weight that is a quarter or more of their average body mass weight of 60kg (Igiri, Ekong, Ogan, & Odey, 2008). Their bodies are able to withstand this because many of them (70.6%, n=24) are still young (15-39years) and physically strong. However, with continued exhaustion, they may suffer from other health problems such as cumulative deterioration of the musculoskeletal system including low back pain and acute trauma such as cuts or fractures as this may occur where the load is as heavy as 20-25kg (FACTS, 2007). Idyorough (2005) has pointed out sexual harassment as a gender issue in Nigeria and the system of patriarchy that gives men control over women's bodies. Since some of these respondents were still young we wanted to know how often, sexual advances were made on them while hawking and the following responses were received.

Table 7: Sexual Harassment of Respondents

Sexual harassment	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Daily	3	9.1%	9.1%
Once in a while	9	27.3%	36.4%
None at all	21	63.6%	100.0%
Total	33	100%	100%

Missing case=1

The result was that 63.6% (n=21) of the hawkers denied ever being sexually harassed or molested while hawking. Only 36.6 % (N=12) agreed or admitted that male adults had made sexual advances on them by touching their breasts or by engaging them in "serious talks". The implication of this "serious talks" could mean trying to entice or lure them into sexual activity.

Some of the lactating mothers were seen with babies on their backs, we therefore enquired from all the women the ages of their last-born children and the following result was received.

Table 8: Age of Last Born of Respondents

Age of last born in months/years	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
1 month	2	5.9%	5.9%
4 months	2	5.9%	11.8%
1year	4	11.8%	23.6%
2years	12	35.3%	58.9%
3years	5	14.7%	73.6%
4years	4	11.8%	85.4%
5years	1	2.9%	88.3%
7years	1	2.9%	91.2%
9years	1	2.9%	94.1%
10years	2	5.9%	100.0%
Total	34	100%	100%

The table shows that 23.6% (n=8) of women had lactating babies of a year old or less. Carrying these babies on their backs could therefore be an additional burden. It will also restrict such babies from playing contrary to the Child's Rights Act (2003) that stipulates that provision be made for children to play. It is very clear from the above analysis that the babies of these female hawkers were not enjoying these rights. Respondents were asked to state the problems of leaving their child at home and the following responses were received.

Table 9: Problem of Leaving Child at Home

Problems of leaving child at home	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
My child cries	1	2.9%	2.9%
Feeling of insecurity of the child	2	5.9%	8.8%
My child got hands burnt with fire since then I do not leave him at home again	1	2.9%	11.7%
No proper care/feeding of the child and he/she cries a lot.	3	8.8%	20.5%
None/Not applicable	27	79.5%	100%
Total	34	100%	100%

Majority of the respondents (73.5% N=25) stated that, they did not experience any problem leaving their babies at home while hawking. The above finding may be that most of the yam hawkers live in their family houses with trustworthy relations where the concept of collective conscience and African culture of ‘collective child socialization and where children are regarded as being for the whole community and not just for one family’ may come into play.

We wanted to know if there is any financial assistance rendered to these female yam hawkers by government but none of the respondents indicated any governmental assistance; that is to say, all the respondents (100%, n=34) indicated no assistance. The respondents were the poor of the society. We therefore wanted to find out whether they had ever received any assistance from any corporate organisations in times of need and the following responses were received.

Table 10: NGO Support

NGO Support	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Church assisted me when my husband died/they donated rice and clothes to me.	2	5.9%	5.9%
None	32	94.1%	100%
Total	34	100.0%	100.0%

Majority of the respondents (94.1%, n=32) had never received any form of assistance from any non-governmental organization but only 5.9% did receive some assistance. They were therefore, counselled to form association/cooperative society so that they can attract some grant or loan from governmental agencies or non-governmental organizations or individual donors. The respondents were asked to make some suggestions on how they could be assisted and the following suggestions were received from them.

Table 11: Suggestions Made by the Respondents on Their Empowerment

Suggestion or complaint	Frequency	Percentage	Cum Percent
Financial empowerment	14	41.17%	41.17%
Environmental sanitation job (street cleaning)	10	29.41%	70.58%
Children's school fees	5	14.71%	85.29 %
No response	5	14.71%	100 %
Total	34	100%	100%

Majority of the respondents (41.17% N=14) suggested that the government or non-governmental organizations and individuals should empower them through small-scale loan or soft loan to enable them establish and be on their own. On the other hand, 29.4% (N=10) of the respondents stated that even though they had no formal education they should be given environmental sanitation job like street cleaning to take.

Discussion

The major objective of this study was to investigate into the issue of yam hawking by women in Lafia metropolis as it affects their health and wellbeing. Empirical data revealed that 85.3% of the women were in economically active age bracket (15-44 years), 82.4% were married and 58.8% had no formal education whatsoever. The women were all from Migili (also known as Koro) ethnic nationality. This data slightly runs counter to the finding by Ekeanyanwu (2012) that with biting economic situation in the country, men and women of all ages-young, middle aged and old partake of hawking. The data on yam hawking contradicts Okafor (2013) and Ikechebelu et al (2008) who implied that majority of street hawkers are children since this aspect of hawking did not involve children. The finding nonetheless validates the conclusion of Adaawen (2011) that though people of all sexes and ages are involved in hawking, the youths are dominant. It also agrees with the view of some researchers (Bhowmik, 2000; Studymode.com, 2013) that majority of the people who hawk are non-literates and those without any skill.

Furthermore, field data revealed that majority of the women (82.3%) suffered from one health problem or the other arising from long hours and distances of hawking. The problems included general body pains, fatigue, malaria, feverish conditions and isolated incidences of being knocked down by a vehicle. This finding confirms the position of many scholars and researchers (WIEGO, 2014; Studymode.com, 2013; Okafor, 2013; Ikechebelu et al, 2008) that street hawking is strewn with several risks and hazards that render the activity unsafe. It was further found that 23.6% of the women studied were lactating mothers, who carried their babies about. They however, did not say whether they encounter peculiar problems. Indeed,

hawking with babies on their backs was normal to them. It was also found that 63.6% of the women have not been harassed sexually while 36.4% averred that men have made sexual advances on them. This data validates the conclusions by Okafor (2013), Ikechebelu et al (2008), and Kwankye, Nyarko and Tagoe (2007) that sexual harassment of street hawkers is a common phenomenon.

Results from the field indicated widely divided opinions since 41.2% of the hawkers (actually the majority) suggested that soft loans be given them to establish steady businesses while 29.4% asked to be given menial jobs because they had no formal education. Muyagu (2014) in his study of hawkers in Rwanda concluded that the best empowerment measure for street hawkers is formation of cooperatives. Citing Tuzamurane 2020 Cooperative in Remera sector in Gasabo district of Rwanda as a case study, Muyagu (2014) argued that through the Cooperative, hawkers in Gasabo were able to build a viable financial pool where members access loans and aids to establish stable businesses. Our finding is nonetheless consistent with that of Ekeanyanwu (2012) whose study of street hawkers in Abuja, Nigeria found that they (hawkers) would prefer to be gainfully employed or have decent shops than trade on the streets.

Conclusion

On the strength of our field data, we conclude that:

1. Most of the women who hawk yam in Lafia metropolis are non-literates but capable of productive economic activities.
2. Yam hawking in particular and street trading generally is hazardous business in the light of health challenges it poses.
3. Lactating mothers who hawk yam in Lafia metropolis are not particularly burdened by the babies they carry along in the course of their business.
4. Cases of sexual assault on female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis are common.
5. The best way to empower female yam hawkers in Lafia metropolis socially and economically is for them to come together and form a cooperative society through which they can be empowered.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion above, it is recommended that:

1. Female yam hawkers should form a cooperative on the strength of which they can access loans or aids from financial institutions, government or non-governmental organizations.
2. Government should build warehouses and rent out to these hawkers at subsidized rates to enable them store yams. The group could also

be given land to construct yam kiosks at strategic locations in the town. Such kiosk could be situated near government ministries and large corporations where these women usually get their customers.

3. Government should seek functional ways of implementing adult education with special attention to business/vocational training. This will not only build basic literacy in the women but most importantly, it will enable them acquire skills to succeed in yam and other businesses.
4. Scholars should undertake further research on the consequences and implications of hawking since results from this study cannot be widely generalized.

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