

Impact of Street Hawking on Children's Academic Wellbeing: A Critical Assessment

Uche Samuel Ugo

Department of Public Administration, Kampala International University Uganda

ABSTRACT

Child street hawking is emerging as a significant public health concern in developing countries like Nigeria, primarily driven by poverty and resulting in the continuous migration of people to urban areas in search of livelihood. Despite existing legislation addressing child labor in Nigeria, the prevalence of street hawking persists due to inadequate implementation and enforcement. Moreover, traditional beliefs regarding children as contributors to the family's socioeconomic well-being further perpetuate this practice in African societies. Family-related factors also contribute to the involvement of children in street hawking. However, child hawkers face numerous hazards, including physical violence, loss of merchandise, accidents, robbery, kidnapping, and even murder for ritualistic purposes. They are also vulnerable to extreme weather conditions, insect and reptile bites, hunger, and deprivation. Of great concern is the risk of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, leading to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. This paper examines the impact of street hawking on children's academic well-being and emphasizes the fundamental right of all children to receive basic education and quality learning opportunities. It underscores the need for legislation prohibiting street hawking by children, with legal repercussions for both parents and children involved in the practice. Prioritizing education and safeguarding children from the dangers of street hawking is essential for their holistic development and future societal contributions.

Keywords: Street Hawking, Child Labor, Academic Wellbeing, Legislation, Child Rights

INTRODUCTION

Street hawking stands out as one of the most prevalent forms of child labor in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa, involving children under 18 years selling goods along roadsides and moving from place to place [1]. This practice has been associated with various adverse effects, notably depriving children of the opportunity to attend school either partially or entirely due to the long hours spent working. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), child labor is defined as work that robs children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and is detrimental to their physical and mental development [2]. Globally, approximately 111 million children under 15 years were reported to be engaged in hazardous work in 2006. By 2012, this figure had risen to an estimated 168 million children involved in some form of child labor, with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest incidence worldwide [3]. This alarming trend has significant implications for the future well-being of affected children. In Nigeria, Ebigo highlighted street hawking as a prevalent form of child abuse and neglect, alongside sexual abuse and child

abandonment. Children engage in street trading regularly with the aim of supporting themselves or their families, as observed in various studies [4]. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has established two main conventions addressing child labor: Convention No. 138 on the minimum age, which sets the minimum age for light work at 15 years as long as it does not jeopardize their health, safety, or education, and Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor, which condemns hazardous work [2]. Nigeria has ratified these conventions. Historically, legislation against street trading/hawking by children dates back to the colonial era, with implementation by British colonial authorities since the 1950s. Post-independence, Nigeria has enacted laws addressing child labor within the Labor Act and adopted the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003. A critical provision of the CRA stipulates that the use of children for hawking is punishable under the Act, while Section 59(b) of the Labor Act prohibits the employment of children under 16 years in any hazardous work detrimental to their health [5]. Despite these legislative

measures, street hawking by children remains a pervasive issue, underscoring the need for enhanced enforcement and implementation of existing laws to protect the rights and well-being of vulnerable children.

The prevalence of street hawking in Nigeria underscores a significant gap between existing legislation addressing child labor and the lack of effective implementation and enforcement [6]. Traditional perceptions of children as contributors to the family's socioeconomic advancement, prevalent in African societies, may exacerbate the incidence of street hawking among children. Studies conducted in southwestern Nigeria have linked family size and socioeconomic status to the prevalence of street hawking, with children from larger families and lower socioeconomic classes being more likely to engage in this activity to supplement family income [6]. The family environment and dynamics also play a crucial role in determining a child's involvement in street hawking. Discordant family units and instances of violence against children at home have been identified as

predictors of defiance and rebellion among young adolescents, who may run away from home and resort to street hawking as a means of survival. Therefore, efforts aimed at fostering positive family relationships and cohesion are imperative [7]. Children engaged in street hawking face various hazards, including the risk of being robbed, involvement in street fights, physical harassment by adults, attempted kidnapping, and even death. Furthermore, the negative impact of street hawking on the academic performance of in-school children has been demonstrated in studies conducted in southwestern Nigeria, where children involved in hawking were more likely to perform poorly in their academic examinations [6]. The risk of dropping out of school due to poor academic performance resulting from street hawking poses a significant challenge to achieving universal primary education, as targeted by development goals. Given that children constitute the majority of street hawkers, understanding the impact of hawking on their academic well-being is crucial for addressing this issue effectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forced street hawking, particularly among children, constitutes a form of modern-day slavery, depriving them of their rights and impeding their future career aspirations. This dire situation contributes to the decline in Nigeria's future population of scientists and professionals. The Global Slavery Index reported 10 million children as modern-day slaves out of a total of 40.3 million in 2018, with 23% of these children engaged in domestic servitude or various forms of child labor, including street hawking.

Many impoverished families resort to compelling their children to engage in street hawking to augment their income, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Street hawking, prevalent in urban areas of Nigeria, involves children carrying heavy loads for extended hours, often 12-13 hours per day, to support their families [8]. This laborious activity takes a toll on their physical and mental health, leading to school dropout, inadequate education, and poor overall well-being [8]. Children engaged in street hawking miss out on educational opportunities and vocational training, leaving them without formal qualifications or skills for future sustenance. Many of these children learn hawking from their parents and grandparents, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and illiteracy within their families [8].

Furthermore, the excessive physical strain placed on children, who often carry loads exceeding the recommended weight limit of 10% of their body weight according to Nigeria Labour Acts (2003),

poses serious health risks [9]. This unhealthy practice, coupled with the absence of educational and vocational opportunities, hampers the academic achievement and future prospects of children forced into street hawking. In light of these challenges, it is crucial to investigate the implications of street hawking on children's academic achievement to develop targeted interventions aimed at safeguarding their rights and promoting their holistic development.

Causes of Street Hawking by Nigerian Children

Child street hawking poses a significant public health concern in developing nations like Nigeria, primarily stemming from pervasive poverty that drives families to migrate to urban centers in search of livelihood opportunities. Poverty serves as a key motivating factor for parents to compel their children to engage in street hawking, with rural areas experiencing higher prevalence due to poor living standards and rampant inflation [10]. Children often hawk goods between villages or in urban areas, with many of them being of primary or secondary school age. In the face of economic hardships, parents or guardians may withdraw their children from school to engage in street hawking as a means of augmenting family income. The physically demanding nature of hawking leaves children exhausted at the end of each day, hindering their ability to concentrate, participate in discussions, or pursue independent study [11]. Consequently, some children experience disruptions in their education, dropping out for extended

periods, which may lead to feelings of superiority or ostracism upon their return to school, impacting their social and academic well-being [12]. Overall, the economic pressures driving child street hawking underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address poverty and its associated impacts on children's education and well-being.

Effects of Street Hawking on the Well-Being of Children

The perception that hawking of wares prepares children for adult roles overlooks the harsh realities faced by juvenile hawkers on the streets, exposing them to a multitude of hazards and risks. These hazards include physical violence, loss of wares, accidents, robbery, kidnapping, and even murder for ritual purposes [2]. Moreover, child hawkers endure extreme weather conditions, insect and reptile bites, hunger, and deprivation. Disturbingly, some children are sexually exploited and coerced into prostitution, increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies and contracting sexually transmitted infections [13].

Child labor, including street hawking, inflicts negative physical consequences on children, such as malnutrition, disease, musculoskeletal disorders from heavy labor, and physical and sexual abuse [14]. Additionally, child labor exposes children to bodily injuries and toxic agents. Socially, child labor can hinder educational development and performance. Street hawking not only endangers the lives of the hawkers but also poses risks to the food they sell and the broader consumer society. Food contamination can occur due to exposure to air, dust, flies, and dirt. Child street hawkers spend considerable time outside their homes, often hawking during early mornings, nights, and harsh weather conditions. Some children face physical abuse from parents or caretakers if they fail to make a profit or complete their sales. Moreover, hawking negatively affects academic performance, as many hawkers are perpetual latecomers to school, lack concentration in class due to fatigue and stress, and consequently exhibit poor academic performance, delinquency, and truancy. These challenges may lead to behavioral problems, low self-esteem, withdrawal syndrome, oppositional behavior, and learning difficulties [5]. In severe cases, child hawkers may become street children, fleeing from parental or guardian abuse to fend for themselves [6].

Participation of children in the sales and service sector across Latin America, Asia, and Africa carries grave physical and health implications. These include respiratory problems, injuries, incidents of rape and molestation, malnutrition, extortion of income, police harassment, and involvement in harmful or delinquent activities. These vulnerable

children may also fall victim to robbery, suffer from inadequate sleep due to fatigue from long work hours, and face the prospect of being confined in juvenile homes. Furthermore, child hawkers grapple with significant psychological challenges. They often experience stigmatization by the press and public, feelings of discouragement, stress, irritability, personality disorders, antisocial behaviors, as well as alienation and isolation from their families. The negative impact extends to their education, although the overall effect on human capital formation remains difficult to quantify. Child hawkers are also susceptible to negative peer influence, leading them to keep bad company and succumb to pressure to engage in delinquent behaviors. The prevailing trend observed from the synthesis of literature underscores the detrimental effects of street hawking on the health, social, and educational well-being of children.

In a study titled "Female Youth in Street Trading: Implications for Sexual Harassment in HIV/AIDS Risky Environments," it was found that girls in the age groups of 10-14 and 15-19 years were 1.724 and 1.111 times more likely to experience harassment compared to other girls. Interestingly, self-employed girls are somewhat immune to harassment as they possess higher economic value than their counterparts engaged in paid or unpaid street trading activities.

Effects of Street Hawking on Children's Academic Performance

Nigeria, as a developing nation, requires individuals who prioritize the political, social, and economic development of the country. While Nigeria boasts citizens who are immensely wealthy, many are solely focused on building legacies for their future generations rather than actively contributing to the nation's progress. What Nigeria needs are selfless, visionary, and focused leaders who are committed to bringing about positive development in the country. To achieve this goal, it is crucial to make primary school education compulsory for all Nigerian citizens. Providing full formal education, rather than partial education that often leads to school dropout and human wastage, aligns with the national policy on education, which emphasizes greater achievement. Given the current economic challenges in Nigeria, particularly among families in low socioeconomic classes, many resort to engaging their children and wards in activities such as hawking. According to [15], the effects of hawking on children include:

- Children who engage in street hawking while also attending school often struggle with tardiness and may develop academic immaturities, including poor studying

habits, lack of skills, low self-esteem, and overall low performance in class. This can ultimately lead to failure or dropping out of school.

- Some children find it challenging to balance both schooling and street hawking, leading them to drop out of school altogether.
- Many children involved in street hawking may become underachievers or develop school phobia as a result of the stress and demands of their hawking activities.

CONCLUSION

The importance of education for children cannot be overstated, as it equips them to become successful and productive adults who can contribute to the nation's development in various ways. However, in Nigeria, many children are subjected to child labour, which disrupts their education and training. It is crucial that all children have access to basic education and quality learning opportunities, enabling them to become valuable contributors to the nation's progress. To address the issue of Child Street hawking, the government should enact laws

- Children who hawk on the streets are exposed to extremely hazardous conditions, including the risk of injury, chronic illness, kidnapping, rape, or even death. These dangers significantly disrupt their academic pursuits and hinder their ability to receive a quality education.
- Street hawking is increasingly becoming ingrained in Nigerian culture, along with associated vices. If left unchecked, these vices are likely to undermine the established standards of morality and social norms among Nigerian children [16].

prohibiting it, and both erring parents and children should be held accountable under the law. Additionally, there is a need for extensive sensitization programs targeting parents and guardians, educating them on the importance of sending their children to school rather than allowing them to engage in street hawking. These measures are essential steps towards effectively curbing street hawking among children and ensuring they have the opportunity to receive a proper education.

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