

THE SCOURGE OF CHILD LABOUR: THE DYNAMICS OF STREET HAWKING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The global phenomenal preponderance of child labour has become a source of great concern to nations and well-meaning individuals the world over. The increase in the incidence of child labour of street hawking in Nigeria has become an issue of great interest to all. This article examines the dynamics of street hawking in Nigeria. It argues that the problem of street hawking can be explained by Merton's anomie, and the situational constraint theories. Grinding and pervasive poverty is the greatest force impelling parents to labour (their children). Additionally, poor governance, parlous economic situation, cultural and traditional practices are among the chief catalysts of child labour of street hawking in Nigeria. The absence of a genuine commitment on the part of government to eradicate child labour has also enabled its thriving in the society. The educational, health and psychosocial implications of street hawking are highlighted. A clarion call is made to the government to legally prohibit child labour in Nigeria. The various governments, philanthropic organizations and individuals are also urged to embark on mass campaigns to conscience the people as to the evils of street hawking.

Introduction

There is the assertion that child labour is a sign of dysfunctionality of the society. When the family, a prime social institution, fails to perform its function, various social problems arise (Abboth and Wallace, 1992). In our contemporary world, child labour has become a global phenomenon ravaging the future leaders of the world. It is a complex issue with no simple solutions, massive in scale, corrosive to society and fatal in its consequences. It is cruel to children and insulting to human dignity (Awake 1999, May 22).

Nigeria presents a very pathetic portrait of the child labour problem. Children are seen selling all kinds of wares along major urban roads, car parks, fuel stations, schools and other transport terminals in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Warri, Onitsha, Port-Harcourt, Owerri, Abuja, Sokoto, Bauchi, etc. The Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour Survey (SIMPOC) found approximately 15 million (15,027,612) working children in Nigeria comprising 7,812,756 (52%) males and 7,214,856 (48%) females out of the 15 million, 6 million (6,102,856 (48%) females. Out of the 15 million, 6 million (6,102,406 or 48%) were not attending school and another 2 million were exposed to as long as 15 or more hours of work daily. Interestingly, children in labour who were not attending school comprised 3,110,033 (51%) girls and 2,992,373 (49%) boys and 2,366,499 child labourers who were exposed to 15 or more hours of work, 1,334,605 (56.4%) were attending school while 1,021,764 (43.2%) and 10,080 (0.4%) found in house keeping activity were not attending school (cited in Oloko 2003:5-6). The ILO estimate of 1998, observed that 24% of children in Nigeria between the ages of 10 and 14 were engaged in work (World Development Indicators, 2000).

It is instructive to note that neither beasts of the field nor the birds of the forest impose the burden of existence upon their young. It is man that does it. Child labour is exploitative; it limits the child's physical, mental, social and psychological development because it denies the child education and play required for balanced development.

Our endeavour here is to look into the dynamics of the child labour of street hawking in Nigeria. Arising from the above, the following questions become pertinent: What are the nature, extent and sustaining factors of child labour in Nigeria? What has been the role of the government in alleviating the problem of the child labour of street hawking in Nigeria? Based on the knowledge of 1 and 2 of the child labourer, how can we improve his conditions? For now, let us look at some critical concepts in the study.

The Concept of a Child

The concept of a child is socio-culturally determined and therefore varies from society to society. Even within the same society the socio-cultural imperatives compel variation in the concept of a child. In some societies the maximum age of the child is ten, while in others the upper limit ranges from twelve to even twenty-one. The International Labour Organization (ILO) establishes 15 years as the minimum age for one to participate in wage employment. Therefore anyone at the age of 15 is no longer a child by the ILO definition (ILO, 1996). UNICEF (2001) considers anyone who has developmental disability, regardless of age, as a child. The United States Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1994 defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 (Okafor, 2000). The Convention on The Rights of the Child endorsed by Nigeria in 1991 conceptualizes the child as; "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to child, maturity is attained earlier" The National Child Welfare Policy in Nigeria defines a child as "any person who is twenty years or below" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, (1989:20). The Labour Act states that a child is a person under the age of twelve years, while the Criminal Procedure Act assumes any person under the age of fourteen years as a child. The Constitutional Law forbids any citizen who has not attained 18 years from seeking elective position and cannot vote in any election, while the Law of Contracts in Nigeria stipulates that one cannot genuinely enter into a contract until he has attained the age of 18. (Aturu, 1999:12).

The foregoing variations impede an easy pin-pointed conceptualization of a child. In spite of this, our conceptualization of a child shall be influenced by the limit set by the compulsory school age. This is the acute socialization period of the child, and we say, for the purpose of this exercise, a child is any person below the age of 18 years. Let us now see what constitutes child labour.

What is Child Labour?

Like the concept of a child, the conceptualization of child labour is fraught with the difficulty arising from the fine line between what constitutes normal work through the socialization process and exploitation. In most societies children are seen busily assisting their parents in the performance of work in their trade or occupation. For example the child of a farmer could be helping with the carrying of harvested materials or seeds to be planted or picking weeds in the farm. Those of say supermarket operators could help with dusting the displayed goods or assisting customers in the location of their needs. These constitute genuine and acceptable socialization process provided that work for a limited number of hours, (Bennet, 1993). In some countries, teenagers work for a few hours a week to earn pocket money. The United Nations Children's Fund (1998), maintains that such work is "beneficial, promoting or enhancing a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development without interfering with schooling, recreation and rest".

From the foregoing discussion, child labour means children working for long hours either for their parents or for another person for little or no wages at all, often under conditions harmful to their health. According to the State of World Children (1997), this kind of work is destructive and exploitative. Child labour is that work that poses a great danger to health and safety of a child including street hawking that exposes a child to the hazards of the road and paedophiles.

In conclusion, child labour means children working for long hours for low wages leading to exploitation. It is work that endangers their physical and psycho-social health and denies their opportunities for education and recreation.

The Theoretical Framework

The social problem of child labour could be explained by the anomie theory of crime propounded by Merton (1938). This was built upon Durkheim's (1897) concept of anomie; a relative absence or confusion of values and a corresponding lack of clear norms guiding behaviour. Merton's model is built upon the discrepancy between aspirations and achievements in society. He argued that societies teach culturally valued goals and socially approved means of achieving them. In a situation in which not everyone has the means of achieving the valued goals strains arise.

He then developed his typology of responses to the strenuous situation. Among his typology of responses to goals and means, "the innovator accepts cultural goals such as material success and money, but they lack legitimate opportunities to attain them" (Sylvia and Hale, 1990). They are

therefore, constrained to seek alternative illicit means such as theft, cheating, or prostitution, in attaining their goals.

This is in consonance with the situational constraint theory, which perceives the poor as being constrained by the facts of their situation; low income or inequity in income level and distribution, unemployment, etc, to act the way they do. It observes that the poor share the values of society as a whole, but differ in their inability to translate many of those values into reality (Haralambos, et al 2000). So, once the constraints of poverty are removed, the poor will have no difficulty adopting mainstream behaviour patterns.

Every family is expected to be able to fend for the needs of its members and also maintain the family composition. This is culturally the role of the adult members of the family, precisely the parents or guardians. The poor in the society accept the cultural roles but lack the socially approved means of attaining the roles. They are forced by societal inequity and injustice to seek illicit means of child labour in making the ends meet.

This combination of sociological explanation forms the basis for the preponderance of the child labour of street hawking in Nigeria. Nigeria through the prolonged military rule has experienced severe institutional collapse, bastardization of its economy, culminating in pervasive poverty of its populace. Parents sought alternative means to augment the family income resulting in various vices including the child labour of street hawking.

Methodology

This study is focused on the child labour of street hawking in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Kano, Bauchi, Lagos, Enugu. These cities are commercial nerve centres located at the various geographical zones of Nigeria. They also aptly represent the diversities of cultures in Nigeria.' The study was carried out from October, 2004, through February, 2005. A total of 400 respondents with ages varying between 7 and 18 were sampled, 100 from each city. English and Hausa languages were used in the interviewing process.

A 26-item questionnaire was used to elicit answers from the respondents. The questionnaires were subjected to a split half reliability coefficient test to test the inter-item consistency. The value obtained was 0.72, which is high enough to make the test items reliable. The focus group discussion (FGD) methods were also used in data collection. There were four groups, one from each city. This enabled the generation of vital data that could not be obtained from the child hawker and from the adults. The data generated in the study were analyzed using simple percentages on a multi-dimensional scaling analysis.

Findings

The study reveals that 75 of the respondents had age range between 7 and 12 years, 230 were between 13 and 16 years while 100 were 17 - 18 years. 5 could not state their age. This is not surprising as some of the respondents had no formal education. One hundred and forty of them (35%) are males while two hundred and sixty (65%) are females. The finding exhibits regional differences in the ratio of male and female hawkers. In Bauchi, twenty-eight of the respondents (28%) are males as opposed to seventy-two (72%) females. Enugu shows fifty-five percent (55%) male respondents while forty-five (45%) are females. Thirty-five (35%) males and sixty-five (65%) females, and twenty-two (22%) males and seventy-eight (78%) female respondents are for Lagos and Kano respectively.

The levels of educational attainment of the respondents show that twenty-five percent (25%) have no formal education, thirty-five percent (35%) have primary education and forty percent (40%) have tested secondary education either completed or dropped out. The educational background of the parents of the hawkers shows that only fifty-four (18.5%) of the fathers have secondary education and above, three hundred and six (76.5%) have primary education. The mothers' educational levels reveal that most of the women were illiterates. Only forty (10%) have secondary education and above, sixty (15%), have primary education, and three hundred (75%) have no formal education.

The respondents' religion indicates that two hundred and forty-four (61%) are Moslems while one hundred and fifty-six (39%) are Christians. The reaction to that question that relates to the size of the family shows that most of the hawkers come from large families. Two hundred and sixty-four (66%) have families with between five and seven children, while one hundred and thirty-four (34%) respondents have between three and four siblings.

On the question that demands reasons for the respondents participation in street hawking; to hundred and eighty-two (70%) said that they are forced into it by poverty and the need to assist their parents as they needed money for the family's upkeep, ninety-eight (26.4%) took to street hawking to assist themselves as they had no job after their secondary education and no assistance to get into the tertiary institution, while twenty-two (5.5%) could not assign any reason for their participation in street hawking. This is normal for the Moslem girl in northern Nigeria who sees street hawking as a normal process of life. It was also found that two-hundred and ten (52.5%) of the respondents, have been hawking for the past five years, ninety (22.5%) have over a year's experience on the street hawking, and the remaining one hundred (25%) have had less than one year experience on street hawking.

The respondents variously expressed their dissatisfaction with the street hawking job advancing various arguments. Two hundred and thirty-four observe that it is stressful. Sixty (15%) observe that it brings shame, insult, mockery and affects studies. Some of the respondents (82%) would prefer any other job to street hawking because such jobs, they believe, would yield more money. Thirty percent feel that such jobs might be stress free while (22%) say that such job may circumvent the shame and mockery from friends. Some respondents would abandon street hawking, if provided with enabling condition for full time studies, as they observe that it affects their performance in school. The rate of accident has not been too high among the respondents, only sixty-four (16%) have been involved in one form of accident or the other, particularly with the motorcycle popularly known as "okada", or "achaba" in Bauchi. Among other hazards associated with street hawking are rape/sexual harassment, illness, fainting out of exhaustion, kidnapping, theft, and extortion. Of the two hundred and sixty females, seventy (26.39%) attest to rape/sexual harassment. As has been observed earlier, sixty-four (16%) have been involved in accident, three hundred (75%) have either become ill or fainted while hawking on the street. Two hundred and twenty (53%) have lost their goods to thieves or extortionists, while sixteen (2.5%) have experienced kidnapping. One hundred and seventy (42.5%) of the respondents observe that street hawking exposes them to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and that it exposes adolescents to early sexuality. The sex partners to street hawkers include "area boys" drivers, conductors, mechanics etc.

The focus group discussion (FGD) revealed that poor governance, parlous economic situation, family poverty, cultural and traditional practices rank among the chief catalysts of child labour in Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the great number of child hawkers that are propelled by poverty arising from the parlous economic situation, bad governance, cultural and traditional practices in Nigeria. These child labourers face all forms of hazards associated with street hawking. The study shows that more female child labourers are engaged in street hawking than their male counterparts. This could be explained by the practice of patriarchy that diminishes the traditional status of the female child in the family (Nnorom, 2004). The focus group discussion (FGD) revealed the tradition of early marriage of girls in northern Nigeria. These girls are engaged in street hawking to earn some money to enable the poor parents purchase for them the required marriage provisions or gifts (Bammeke, 2004).

Of great significance is the regional difference between the percentage of male and female hawkers found in Enugu and the rest of the country. The rest zones of the country show that there were more female hawkers than male hawkers, while the reverse is the case in Enugu zone. It was revealed by the focus group discussion that due to extreme discrimination and marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria since the civil war, the Igbo has been side-lined in governance and in the mainstream of the Nigerian economy. The alternative open to them has been commerce and trade. This could partly explain the involvement of more male than female street hawkers in Enugu as preparatory to their full participation in commerce and trade.

Although, most of the hawkers (75%) in the survey had some form of formal education, it is critical to note that of this, only 40% had been in the secondary school either successfully or unsuccessfully, 30% had a maximum of primary education. The question is; are these children adequately equipped educationally to function in this age of high technology and competition for

survival? Education, asserts Akpotu (2004), is the lever by which (the world's poor can be lifted out of their predicaments and societies developed and individuals lead more fulfilled lives.

The great number of child labourers in Nigeria as observed during the survey proves the existing studies right. The Child Welfare League (1996), observed that there are as many as 100,000 child hawkers in Lagos, while in 1998 the ILO estimated that 24-26 percent of children between the ages of 10-14 are involved in child labour in Nigeria (World Development Indicators, 2000). This survey shows that two hundred and sixty-four (66%) of the respondents come from poor households of between seven and nine members. This implies the gross abuse and misuse of children and the absence of basic food on the table of most families. This authenticates the argument that parents force their children into street hawking to augment the financial resources of the family to avoid malnutrition and possible death (Nnorom, 2004).

The averred distaste of street hawking by the respondents indicates its obvious abandonment on the availability of better living conditions. Poor governance has also been observed as one of the causes of child labour of street hawking. There is no gainsaying the fact (that successive governments have continued to bequeath to the child the legacy of poverty, ignorance, corruption and unemployment. The Federal Government signed the ILO memorandum of understanding to launch a programme for the elimination of child labour in August, 2000. Unfortunately this is yet to be ratified and implemented, or made a constitutional issue. The discussants at the various focus group discussions (FGD) observed that the persistent poor economic situation in Nigeria has caused pervasive family poverty that has impelled many families to adopt the child labour of street hawking as a survival strategy in recent times. In fact, Lopez-Calva and Luis (2001) argued that child labour is a phenomenon related to poverty and difficult social conditions rather than the perverse preference of the parents.

In addition, the discussants observed that many cultural, traditional and religious practices such as early marriage, polygamy, and the culture of street begging, tend to encourage child labour. Early marriage and polygamy tend to increase population and the burden of child rearing burden. These traditional practices breed poverty and parents' inability to cater adequately for their children. What implications do these hold for the child and the nation in general?

Implications

The child labour of street hawking has some inherent dire consequences both on the child and the society. First, it severely impinges on the critical period of the education and proper socialization of the child. There is either the absolute denial of schooling for the street hawker, or those enrolled dropout of school due to poor attendance and performance (Okonjo, 2000). These child labourers have no scope for education and skill training and therefore, lack possibility for better employment as adults in future. They are sentenced to continued poverty, unhealthy social life, subhuman standard of slum dwelling, generation after generation (ILO, 2000). This portends disaster and doom for the nation's socio-economic and political future development.

Secondly, the abused child hawkers suffer from various psychological problems. Street hawking is a demeaning and dehumanizing activity that leads to deviant behaviours of theft, pick pocketing, thuggery, vandalism, sex abuse and teenage pregnancy (Akpotu, 2004).

Thirdly, innocent and unprotected teenage hawkers are easy victims of sex abuse as they are the sex targets of the adult miscreants and Paedophiles. This enhances the spread of HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the country. Some, out of exhaustion due to malnutrition faint or are easily susceptible to diseases leading to permanent health injuries. The problem of the continued provision of health facilities impinges on the nation's effort for a balanced sustainable development. How are the problems of street hawking to be tackled in Nigeria?

Recommendations and Conclusion

The problem of child labour is a global phenomenon with over 300 million children worldwide engaged in labour. More than 250 millions of this come from the developing nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Approximately 15 million working children are in Nigeria. Children are seen hawking all kinds of wares along major urban roads, car parks, fuel stations, schools and transport terminals in Nigeria.

The research findings show that children between the ages of seven and twelve years form the great majority of the hawkers. Female hawkers are more with 65%. Curiously, the findings show reversed regional difference between the female and male hawkers in Enugu with more male hawkers. The educational background of the parents shows that many of the parents have had form of education, but parents are forced to labour their children to augment the family finances by grinding and pervasive poverty. Also, poor governance, parlous economic situation, cultural and traditional practices have been adduced among the chief catalysts of the child labour of street hawking : " Nigeria. That street hawking has serious negative consequences on the nation, which dird educational, health and psychosocial implications cannot be overemphasized.

In recognition of the causes and consequences of child labour in our society, the folio win: recommendations are made for its elimination. To reduce poverty in Nigeria we urge the various governments in the federation to sincerely implement the poverty alleviation policy of the Obasan : administration. This could be achieved through the provision of employment opportunities, free and compulsory primary education, sustained social amenities, improved salary structure and social welfare schemes for the poor. These would definitely reduce the burden on the poor parents.

In addition to the ratification of the international community formulation on the universal! legal standard for the protection of the child against abuse, the government should legally prohibit child labour in the country. This will help to totally eradicate child labour habits and norms deep!;-rooted in custom, traditions and institutions of the Nigerian society. Finally, our people should conscientized about the evils of child labour through enlightenment by an appropriate government | agency, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and concerned individuals.

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