Causal Effects of Street Children in Nigeria: Implications for Counselling

1. Professor Roibito Ekpiken-Ekanem, MCASSON, CCN., LPCN, 2. Dr. Andrew Enow Ayuk, MCASSON, CCN., LPCN AND 3. Dr. Paulinus Marcel Akwa Adadu, MCASSON, CCN., LPCN

1. Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, Faculty of Education, Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar

2. Ministry of Education, Michael Ani Secretariat, Calabar

3. Early Childhood Care Education (ECCDE) Department, School of Education, Department of Education, College of Education, Awi, Akamkpa

* E-mail of the corresponding author: roiekanem@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This study examined the causes and effects of street children in Nigerian Setting. Data were gathered from 3036 street children comprising of 2916 males and 120 females from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria using ROIANDPAUL Inventory, in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Result of data analyses using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics procedure indicated that types of parent-child-relationship, type of home and peer group influence were effective in explaining street children's practices in Nigerian setting. However, economy had the most significant influence on the Street Children's attitude. The implications of the research findings were addressed.

Keywords: Street Children, Parenting Style, Type of Home, Peer Group, Children's Practices

1. Introduction

All over Nigeria, it is a common sight to find children along the streets at all times of the day. These children sometimes engage in nefarious activities and hardly return home. The streets automatically have become an abode for such children. In the past, the presence of children on the street was very minimal but the problem of street children became aggravated after the Nigerian civil war. WIN (1992) went further to opine that the Civil War left tales of untold hardship by children who were separated through death or divorce. Many parents due to loss of the means of survival could not provide for their children who had no option but to take to the streets. Recently, with the emergence of the economic meltdown, children hawking, trading or loitering have become the order of the day. UNCEF (2006) divided these children into two co-exiting categories: Children on the Street and Children of the Street. According to UNICEF (2006) children on the Street go there to trade or hawk goods for some hours during the day either for their parents, guidance or as hired hawkers. For most of these children, they may have a home to return to at night while others simply keep some links with their families. Children of the Street on the other hand, are those who actually live and survive on the Street on their own. For this category, the Street is by all intent and purpose, a home for them. These children usually devise survival strategies which include stealing, use of violence, lying, cheating, among other anti – social activities. They loiter on the streets, motor parks and filling stations doing odd jobs, often fighting or pilfering other peoples' possessions. These Street children assume different names such as Area boys (these include girls), Almajaris and are always there to be used by Politicians, demonstrators and mischief makers.

Several Governments over the years have attempted to assist Nigerian Children in different ways to no avail. The issue of assisting children to go to school is an age long phenomenon. Panter-Brick (2002) pointed out that, the phenomenon had not only attracted public concern but has also become a matter of priority to Government as well as National and International Organisations. For instance, in the late 1950s, Chief ObafemiAwolowo introduced free education in Western Nigeria in a bid to empower the children. Again, Denga (2002) pointed out that, in 1976, the Obasanjo administration introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) to train Nigerian Children. After this, Edim and Bisong (2002) informed that, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto State on 30th September, 1999, flagged up the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and on 27th May, 2002, the various States and Local Government Heads launched the UBE all over the Federation. These lofty ideas were in a bid to pre-occupy and make every Nigerian child acquire at least basic education for future sustainability. Even with the free pre-primary education, the situation has not seen any significant change. Apart from introducing the free education, Government imposed sanctions on erring children and parents who failed to be in school or send their children to school. Such sanctions included the arrest of school age children along the street during school hours. In addition,

Government provided free text books and reading materials to students in schools.

Despite all these incentives and sanctions, the number of street children of both the poor and the rich keep increasing on daily basis. Their activities affect the Street Children, their families as well as the society. Besides, conventionally, every home is expected to be intact where parents and children are supposed to live together but a cursory look at the society shows a quantum number of children roaming the street without returning home.Some researchers opined that family poverty, deprivation, loosening tights, urban drift, unemployment and broken homes drive children into the street.

Based on the foregoing, this study is aimed at investigating the causes and effect of street children, counselling implications as well as proffering appropriate counselling interventions.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions were asked:

1. Do street children have parental socio-demographic characteristics?
2. Is there any significant relationship between parental child rearing style and street children?
3. Is there any significant relationship between type of home and street children?
4. Is there any significant relationship between peer group influence and street children?

3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were drawn up to guide the research:

1. Street children do not have parental socio-demographic characteristics.
2. There is no significant relationship between parental child rearing style and street children.
3. There is no significant relationship between type of home and street children.
4. There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and street children.

4. Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics was used to analyze the data collected for the study.

The study utilized all the 6 geopolitical Zones and used simple random sampling technique to select 2 towns from each of the 2 selected States in each of the zones. It was conducted in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria covering South South: Calabar in Cross River State and Port Harcourt in Rivers State; South East: Aba in Abia State and Enugu in Enugu State; South West: Lagos in Lagos State and Ibadan in Oyo State; North Central: Abuja in FCT and Jos in Plateau State; North West: Kaduna in Kaduna State and Kano in Kano State as well as North East: Maiduguri in Borno State and Yola in Adamawa State. Thus, the population for the study was 6006 selected street children across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The sample for this study was made up of 3036 street children comprising of 2916 males and 120 females from the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

The researchers developed ROIANDPAUL Inventory, a four - point likert scale instrument containing twenty items. The questionnaire earlier had 45 items but was face-validated by experts in the Department of Test Measurement and Evaluation who finally retained 20 items. The instrument was pilot tested to ascertain reliability using the test-retest method with a time gap of two weeks between the two tests. The reliability estimate for the variables ranged from 0.7345 to 0.825. The estimates were considered good enough for use in this study.

Other research instruments used were in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

These instruments served as guided instrument and were used by the researchers in obtaining data from the respondents. Table 1 shows the age range and number of street children who participated in the study.

Table 1

Age and number of street children who participated in the study (N = 3036)

S/N	ACTIVITY	AGE	NO	MALE	FEMALE AGE	NO	
1.	FocusGroup	12 - 17	480		11 - 17	72	
2.	Questionnaire	10 – 17	2196		10 - 17	12	
3.	Interview	13 – 17	240		13 - 15	36	
	Total		2916				120

In collaboration of the samples used for the study, the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (ICIHI) in 1986 reported that though there might not be exact number of street children in Nigeria, about 30% of the total population of children in developing countries is on the street. Of this estimation, Agnelli (1986) observed that 80% are boys. Boys, as reported by Agnelli (1986) start their street existence towards the age of eight or earlier than eight. UNFPA (2003) added that, global estimates of street children stood between 10 to 100 million and the number has been increasing since 2002.

5. Findings

The first hypothesis stated that street children do not have parental socio-demographic characteristics. The analysis of data in Table 2 explains this hypothesis.

Table 2
Parental Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 3036)

S/N	INSTITUTION	MALE	FEMALE	RANK
1.	Poverty	915	51	1ST
2.	Ill Treatment from Home	771	29	2ND
3.	Death of Parents or No Care Giver	583	18	3RD
4.	Parents Living Separately	473	17	4TH
5.	Rare Family Contact	174	5	5TH

The analyses of the data in Table 2, obtained from the respondents using ROIANDPAUL Inventory shows that, in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) indicates that 915 males and 51 females attributed their position to poverty, 771 males and 29 females said ill treatment from home, 583 males and 18 females said death of parents or no care giver, 473 males and 17 females said parents living separately while 174 males and 5 females said rare family contact are the joint factors that are responsible for the large movement of the respondents to the street.

From the analysis in Table 2, the first hypothesis which states that, street children do not have parental socio-demographic characteristics is rejected while the alternate is retained.

The second hypothesis states that, there is no significant relationship between parental child rearing style and street children. The researcher found out that there are three distinct children rearing style namely: Democratic, Autocratic and Liaise affaire. The Democratic parental child rearing style allows a child to participate in decision making that affects the family. The Autocratic parental child rearing style is when the parents are authoritative and do not give the child opportunity to express his/herself. The Liaise affaire parental Child rearing style is when the parents are unconcerned about the attitude and behaviour of a child.

Again, from the analysis in Table 2, the second hypothesis which states that, there is no significant relationship between parental child rearing style and street children is rejected while the alternate is retained due to the identified parental socio-demographic characteristics. It is evident from the responses of these children as indicated in Table 2 that, the major reason for becoming street children was mostly poverty.

Therefore, while child rearing style can contribute to street children living home for the street as well as their activities, poverty of parents or care givers contribute most to their behaviour. In confirmation, WIN (1992) reported that due to the poverty level in Nigeria, there is an increase in the number of girls taking to the streets usually in mixed gangs. In line with this opinion, Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2003) identified poverty as the root cause of street children in Nigeria.

The third hypothesis stated that, there is no significant relationship between type of home and street children. There are four identified types of home, namely: Single Parent Home, Intact Home, Divorced Home, Separated Home as well as Child Headed Home. Essideh (1995) posits that **Single Parent Home** is where either the mother or the father takes care of the child alone. This could be as result of death of one parent or a child delivered out of wedlock. The **Intact home** is where both parents and children live together in harmony. In such homes, the father assume the responsibility of being the bread winner while the wife and children pay respect; mother caters for children while children obey, imbibe and portray good ethical behaviours. The **broken Home** is made up of two types: **Separated** and **divorced** homes. The **separated home** is a situation where parents stay apart as a result of temporary family problems that may be bridged and parents come back together. The **divorced home** is a situation where parents stay permanently apart from each other. In confirmation to the issue of broken homes, Agnelli (1986) reiterate that children who live alone are deprived affection, education, help and love. They survive by expedient, theft and by violence.

On the other hand, there are those children who coalesce and re-invent a family; a structure which they have never known, a security that always elude them. These children are used most often unscrupulously by others,

mistreated, imprisoned and even eliminated (Ekpiken-Ekanem, 2000). **The Child Headed Home** refers to a situation where children are made to live alone as a result of war, pestilence or death from HIV/AIDS or nature. On the other hand, it also refers to **Street children** assuming leadership over other children on the street. Table 3 shows the types of identified home and number of street children used in this study.

Table 3
Types of Home and Street Children (N = 3036)

S/N	ITEMS	MALE	RANK	FEMALE	RANK
1.	DivorcedHome	625	1ST	21	4TH
2.	SeparatedHome	600	2ND	23	3RD
3.	SingleParentHome	588	3RD	25	2ND
4.	ChildHeadedHome	570	4TH	31	1ST
5.	IntactHome	533	5TH	20	5TH

From the analyses of data in Table 3 obtained from the respondents, using ROIANDPAUL Inventory, in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) revealed that 625 males and 21 females were from divorced home, 600 males and 23 females came from separated homes, 588 males and 25 females came from single parent home, 570 males and 31 females came from child headed home while 533 males and 20 females accepted that they were from intact home. From the ranked responses of the respondents as indicated in Table 3, it is evident that, the major type of home responsible for street children is the divorced home for the males while the child headed home is for the female street children. From the analysis in Table 3, the hypothesis which states that, there is no significant relationship between type of home and street children is rejected while the alternate is retained. Therefore, it is confirmed that children found on the streets are mostly from broken homes.

In confirmation of this result, Febara (1986) enumerated other circumstances of street children to unemployment, poverty, broken homes, parental rejection, loosening bonds of extended family ties, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, alcoholism and school failure. He went further to posit that others are victims of parental loss, disagreement in polygamous homes, re-marriages as well as violence between parents

The fourth hypothesis stated that, there is no significant relationship between peer group influence and street children. Peer Group refers to people moving together as a result of similarity of needs, challenges, probably of the same age in order to solve their problems.

Table 4
Peer Group and Street Children (N = 3036)

S/N	ITEMS	MALE	RANK	FEMALE	RANK
1.	ProtectionFrom Gang Members	900	1ST	28	3RD
2.	PeerPressure	685	2ND	21	2ND
3.	MembersOfGangsters	586	3RD	18	4TH
4.	Love	485	4TH	32	1ST
5.	Help	260	5TH	11	5TH

The data analyses in Table 4, obtained from the respondents, using ROIANDPAUL Inventory, shows that in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), indicate that 900 males and 28 females are on the street because they want protection from gang members, 685 males and 31 females find themselves on the street through peer group pressure, 586 males and 32 females are members of gangsters, 485 males and 18 females go to find love while 260 males and 11 females accepted that they were from intact home. So, it is evident from the responses of the respondents as indicated in Table 4 that, the major factor responsible for street children is to gain protection from gang members for the males while the girl take to the street in search of love.

From the analysis in Table 4, the hypothesis which states that, there is no significant relationship between peer group influence and street children is rejected while the alternate is retained. Therefore, most boys who take to the street do so as a result of taking protection from gang members for males while the females sought for love.

The problems posed by street children are many and varied and have grave implications for both man and the environment. There is no doubt that the street children are unkempt and dirty. It is common especially in Lagos, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Aba, Jos, Yola, Abuja, Ibadan, Kano, Maiduguri, Kaduna and other big city to see street children taking their bath in still pole of muddy waters. Others are seen in rags with protruding stomachs

and unkempt hairs. For most of these children, skin diseases are common sights. Many of them are malnourished.

6. Counselling Implications / Interventions

There is obvious need for counseling intervention for parents to adopt proper child rearing style.

However, it is advisable for parents to combine the three interchangeably. This is because no single parenting style exists without some weaknesses. For instance, where parents are always providing for the child without any slight realization of making such child know that life is not always easy, by the time those items are unavailable due to retirement, loss of job, death, etc., such child may resort to taking to the street as a way of compensating for this need.

In both cases, there is need for obvious counseling intervention for the sake of proper upbringing of the children.

As children grow and have good or bad friends who may also influence them positively or negatively, they tend to develop ideologies that may not be in harmony with societal values. Children tend to be loyal to their group ideology. Positive peer influence is usually an advantage to the child, peer group, family and the society while negative peer influence could be so disastrous on the future of the child, peer, family and the society. There is therefore need for counseling such children, peers and parents to avert future destruction on their personality, their economic fortune and societal crisis.

7. Recommendations

i. Parents should ensure they know their children's friends, what they do when adults are not around them

ii. The should have cordial relationship with their children, spend quality time with themand assure them at all times.

iii. When there are negative attitude and behavior should have early and prompt correction not minding the hurt.

iv. Government should intensify the clearing of the street of the Street Children.

Government should intensify care of Street Children in terms of home, nutrition and vocational needs for the Street Children.

v. To avoid educational drop out, Government should extend its benevolence of free education up to SS Three as it is implemented by the Governor, His Excellency, Rochas Okorocha in Imo State, Nigeria.

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