Street Children in Port Harcourt Metropolis: Contributory Factors and Challenges They Face

Randy Andy Nsasak[1*], Eme Asuquo[1] and Ibidabo, David Alabere[1]

[1]Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, Faculty of Clinical Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Background: Children being on the street for various reasons is a worldwide problem with the phenomenon being more prominent in low- and middle-income countries. Street children exist in categories known as street living children, street working children and street family children.
Objective: This study aims to assess factors and challenges associated with street children in Port Harcourt metropolis (Nigeria).
Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used for this study. Three hundred and twenty street children aged less than 18 years were recruited purposively using the snow balling technique. Quantitative data using a questionnaire was obtained from 320 respondents while qualitative data using an in-depth interview guide was obtained from 15 respondents from the total sample size. Analysis of collected data was done using SPSS version 23 with results displayed in frequency tables. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic process with data being coded and related themes identified.
Results: Findings revealed that street children (70.8%) were on the street to support their family income. Half (51.3%) were oppressed on the street. Smoking was reported by 3(0.9%), hard drug use by 2(0.6%) and early sexual practices by 13(4.1%). One hundred and fifty-nine (49.7%) coped by avoiding unsafe places, 22(7.0%) were employed while 298(93.0%) who were unemployed had

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Corresponding author: E-mail: randy.nsasak@gmail.com;

majority 266(89.2%) selling sachet water. Many 234(73.0%) made less than ₦1,000 ($2.74) daily. Qualitative report showed that street children were neglected and they were exposed to many dangers and coped with street life by avoiding unsafe places and selling.

Conclusion & Recommendation: Street children were mainly on the street engaging themselves in activities aimed at supporting their family low income. They were exposed to numerous dangers like accidents, rape, abuse, admission into street criminal networks and others. Street children exhibited violent and risky behaviors which had a negative influence on their existence. They strived to survive by hawking snacks, sachet drinking water and avoiding unsafe places. It is therefore necessary for Government and other major stakeholders to provide public programs like fee basic education, feeding programs and vocational centers for neglected and vulnerable children in the society. Government and Non-Governmental Organizations need to establish homes for neglected and abandoned children so they can have shelter and access other programs aimed at making them attain their full potentials in life.

1. INTRODUCTION

A child is someone in his/her beginning periods of life who is seen as a member of a generation referred to collectively by adults as children, who temporarily occupy the social space called childhood [1]. According to Cunningham "Childhood is certain ideas that surround the children due to the connection between childhood and experiences of being a child and if the ideas of being a child change, the child's encounters also changes" [2]. The International Labor Organization (ILO) stated that every child has the right to survival, advancement and protection [3]. The ILO added that some children indulge in child labor which includes begging, selling of food, drugs and are faced with indiscriminate sexual practices [3]. This happens when they lack adequate attention and therefore resort to livelihood on the road for survival which has several interpretations from different authors, the most common of which is the street child [3].

UNICEF however classified street children into three categories, each with its distinctive definition: Street Living Children, Street Working Children, and Street Family Children [4]. Street living children are those that leave their homes and live somewhere on the street while street working children are the ones that invest much of their time on the road catering for themselves but retire home on a daily basis [4]. Street family children are those from families living on the street [4].

Prince defined a street boy or girl as any child that works and lives on the road (5). He added that such children are highly mobile and they can alternate between street life and living with family members [5]. They undergo activities like begging, hawking, stealing and prostitution as these activities provide money for their needs [5]. Ebigbo stated that the numerous factors that drive children to street life may include marital disruptions or instability in the home, poverty, hunger, insecurity, abuse in different forms and violence from parents and guardians, displacements caused by inter/intra communal clashes, parental negligence and deceased parent(s) [6]. Others include unemployment of one parent, lack of opportunities in education, housing difficulties and peer pressure [6]. Ebigbo added that these children become defenseless to many hazards on the road [6]. They are mostly faced with harsh physical conditions, violence and harassment, labor exploitation, absorption into criminal networks and denial of adequate education necessary to obtain a better life [6].

Street children exist worldwide with the phenomenon being more prominent in highly populated urban areas of developing countries [7]. Ihejirika added that the abnormal presence of children on the road is a common eye sore in major cities of the globe though the problem is more pronounced and occurring widely in under-developed and developing nations as the challenge has slowly matched an index capable of being used to measure development level in nations of the world [8]. UNICEF reported that about 100 million children are seen working and living in urban streets of the world [9]. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in its recent report stated that there are about 150 million street children existing on the roads of cities worldwide [10].

Prince stated that in all societies, these children inhabit an extraordinary high-risk environment with generally poor nutritional status and personal hygiene resulting in their immunity being weakened, leading to susceptibility to infections [5]. Ezeokana et al added that the problem facing street children include poverty, lack of education, large family sizes, dysfunctional family and societal changes [11]. Similarities exist between the problems encountered by street children in Nigeria and those in other parts of the world [11].

Okuwa explained that extreme rise in population size and backwardness in economic growth resulted in high poverty rate which makes it hard for government to provide adequate healthcare services, education and social amenities for people in Nigeria despite having abundant natural resources [12]. Akinpelu stated that a large population of Nigerians cannot afford 3 square meals a day due to unavailability of good jobs and poor access to quality healthcare, shelter, education and transportation and therefore suffer the difficulties accompanied by poverty [13]. Nte et al added that most children seen on the streets of Port-Harcourt are from low income earning parents or unemployed parents, children who join their relations from villages, children hired as domestic servants, destitute and abandoned children [14].

This study was prompted by the risk children face on the streets at odd hours and the attention this phenomenon has generated among social critics, lay public and researchers. Street children face harsh conditions in their fight for survival and are perceived as a public nuisance as they engage in theft, begging, dodging traffic and are admitted into street crime networks who make the environment unsafe for others. This study would provide insight on the contributing factors to children taking up street life. In addition, it would disclose the difficulties street children face, and report their coping strategies. Furthermore, it would generate data relevant for making evidence-based decision by policy makers and program planners for timely social intervention. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the challenges faced by street children in Port Harcourt metropolis.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Port Harcourt, the capital and largest city of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is located in the Niger Delta region and lies along the Bonny River [15]. It was founded in 1912 and incorporated in 1913 [15]. Port Harcourt city has a total size of 369 km2 (142 sq. mi) with land size of 360 km2 (140 sq. mi) and water size of 9 km2 (3 sq. mi) [16]. Its urban area in 2016 had an estimated population of 1,865,000 inhabitants [17]. Port Harcourt metropolis consists of two local government areas: Port Harcourt Local Government Area and Obio/Akpor Local Government Area [18]. English Language is the official language and Ikwerre is the major local language. Port Harcourt and Obio-Akpor comprises of several communities namely; Abuloma, Amadi Ama, Borokiri, D-line, Diobu, Elekahia, GRA phases 1-5, Ogbunabali, Old GRA, Rumukalagbor, Rumuobiekwe, Rumuwoji, Rumuomasi, Elelenwo, Ogbunabali, Rumuola, Rumuokoro and Trans Amadi [18].

Participants were chosen on site upon consent to participate in the study in major congested locations in Port Harcourt city namely: Waterlines junction, Rumuola junction around the bridge, Garrison junction where there is a large gadget market known as Ogbunabali, Rumuokoro junction, Mile 1 flyover under the bridge, Borokiri area and Choba junction.

2.1 Study Population

This research was carried out on male and female street children in Port Harcourt metropolis who were aged less than 18 years.

Inclusion Criteria: Male and female children that were aged less than 18 years seen roaming the streets of Port Harcourt metropolis.

Exclusion Criteria: Male and female children 18 years and below with speech impairment.

2.2 Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was applied in carrying out this study. The research adopted both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches.

2.3 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was calculated using single population proportion formula by Bluman with the following assumptions [19]; proportion 75%, which was obtained from a study done in major towns in Sierra Leone [5]. Using 5% margin of error at 95% confidence level, the sample size was 317 after considering 10% non-response

rate. The study was conducted on 320 respondents of which 15 out of the total sample size was used to obtain qualitative data for the study.

2.4 Sampling Method

Purposive and snow-balling sampling techniques were used in selecting study participants. The study participants were selected on sight and snow-balling technique was applied to get the assistance of the street children in finding more respondents.

2.5 Study Instrument

Two study instruments were used to obtain data for this study. One was a semi-structured interviewer-administered questionnaire used to obtain quantitative data while the second was an interview guide which was used to conduct in-depth interview to acquire qualitative data for this study. The questionnaire was developed and modified with reference to existing tools used in similar studies [20]. The questionnaire had 4 main sections:

Section A: This section obtained socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.
Section B: This section obtained information on the predisposing factors of respondents.
Section C: This section obtained data on the psycho-social problems associated with respondents.
Section D: This section obtained data on the coping strategies of respondents.

The interview guide had open-ended questions which were used for the in-depth interview about the live experiences of participants which was recorded for analysis using the thematic processes. This section provided qualitative information for this study. The questionnaire and interview guide were used to ensure that data collection was systematic and consistent.

2.6 Data Management

The questionnaires administered to the respondents were checked for completion and data was entered into a Microsoft excel spreadsheet and moved into SPSS version 23.0 for analysis.

Quantitative data acquired was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was represented in frequency tables while chi-square test for association was done with Fischer's exact test used to check for association among variables. Results were significant with P-value < 0.05.

Qualitative data was recorded interviews which was analyzed using thematic process with data being coded and related themes identified. Concepts from different responses was then pooled together and composed into common themes. The final write-up was outlined in summaries and interpretations.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows that out of 320 respondents, 160 (50%) were between 14-18 years of age. One hundred and ninety-three (60.3%) were males. One hundred and twenty-two (38.1%) were of the Ibibio & Efik origin while 5 (1.6%) were of Hausa origin. Majority 300 (93.8%) were Christians while few 20 (6.3%) were Muslims by religion. Among respondents, 289 (90.3%) were schooling of which 124 (42.9%) were in their primary level of education, 97 (33.6%) were in their junior secondary level of education while 68 (23.5%) were in their secondary level of education. Among those that weren't schooling 29 (93.5%) didn't have school fees while 2 (6.5%) had no interest in schooling. Twenty-seven (87.1%) stopped schooling more than 6 months before the time of research while 29 (93.5%) indicated interest in going back to school. Ninety-seven (39.1%) had parents with secondary education while 44 (17.9%) had uneducated parents.

Table 1a revealed that out of 320 respondents, 133 (67.3%) had fathers that were artisans with 8 (4.0%) being civil servants. One hundred and thirty-six (57.0%) had mothers who were traders and 23 (9.7%) had unemployed mothers. Two hundred and fifty-two parents (78.7%) had 1-6 children with 191(59.7%) respondents being first and second born to their parents. Among the 320 respondents, 316 (98.7%) lived at home with parents/guardians while 4 (1.3%) lived on the street. Three hundred and eight (96.3%) had both parents alive while few 12 (3.8%) indicated otherwise. Amongst those with parents alive, 207 (67.1%) had both parents living together while 101 (32.9%) had parents not living together with 50 (50%) having a deceased dad and 41 (40.4%) having separated/divorced parents. Ninety-nine (30.9%) respondents lived in a one room apartment while 79 (24.7%) resided in a wooden

house (batcher) and 4 (1.3%) lived in uncompleted buildings.

Table 1b shows that there is no statistically significant association observed between parent(s) being alive, parents living together, religion, parental educational background, employment status of father, employment status of mother and number of siblings and street children. There is no statistically significant association observed between accommodation and street children. However, there is statistically significant association observed between school attendance, age and street children.

Table 2 shows that out of 320 respondents, 226 (70.8%) were on the street to support their family low income, 73 (22.8%) were on the street due to personal decisions, 15 (4.7%) were on the street because of conflicts with parents at home while 6 (1.9%) were on the street due to peer influence.

Table 1. Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n=320)	Percentage (100)
Age (years)		
≤ 8	3	0.9
9 – 13	157	49.1
14 – 18	160	50.0
Sex		
Male	193	60.3
Female	127	39.7
Ethnicity		
Ibibio & Efik	122	38.1
Ijaw	94	29.4
Igbo	84	26.3
Yoruba	15	4.7
Hausa	5	1.5
Religion		
Christian	300	93.8
Muslim	20	6.2
School Attendance		
Yes	289	90.3
No	31	9.7
Educational status (n=289)		
Primary school	124	42.9
Junior Secondary	97	33.6
Senior Secondary	68	23.5
Reasons for non-school attendance (n=31)		
No school fees	29	93.5
No interest	2	6.5
Duration of absence from school (n=31)		
1-5 months ago	4	12.9
≥ 6 months ago	27	87.1
Interest to return to school (n=31)		
Yes	29	93.5
No	2	6.5
Both parents educational background (n=248)		
None	44	17.9
Primary	30	12.1
Secondary	97	39.1
Tertiary	47	18.8
Don't know	30	12.1

Table 1a. Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics cont'd

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
Fathers' occupation (n=198)		
Civil servant	8	4.0
Trader	47	23.5
Unemployed	10	5.2
Artisan	133	67.3
Mothers' occupation (n=238)		
Civil servant	3	1.4
Trader	136	57.0
Artisan	76	31.9
Unemployed	23	9.7
No. of children by parent		
1 – 6	252	78.7
7 – 12	68	21.3
Birth order		
1st & 2nd	191	59.7
3rd & 4th	104	32.5
5th & above	25	7.8
Place of residence		
At home	316	98.7
On the street	4	1.3
Those lived with		
Parents	215	67.3
Relations	97	30.3
Master/Mistress	4	1.3
Friends	4	1.3
Parent (s) alive		
Yes	308	96.3
No	12	3.8
Both parents living together (n=308)		
Yes	207	67.1
No	101	32.9
Reason for not living together (n=101)		
Deceased father	50	50.0
Deceased mother	10	9.4
Separated/divorced	41	40.4
Accommodation		
One room	99	30.9
Two rooms	72	22.5
Self-contain	19	5.9
Flat	47	14.7
Wooden house (Batcher)	79	24.7
Uncompleted building	4	1.3

Table 1b. Socio-demographic characteristics associated with street children

Variable	Street children		Total (%)	df	P-value
	Living at home	Living on the street			
Parent(s) alive					
Yes	304(96.2)	4(100)	308(96.3)	1	0.858^F
No	12(3.8)	0(0)	12(3.8)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Parents living together					
Yes	210(67.3)	2(50.0)	212(67.1)	1	0.601^F
No	102(32.7)	2(50.0)	104(32.9)		

Variable	Street children		Total (%)	df	P-value
	Living at home	**Living on the street**			
Total	**312(100)**	**4(100)**	**316(100)**		
Religion					
Christianity	296(93.7)	4(100)	300(92.7)	1	0.999^F
Islam	20(6.3)	0(0)	20(6.3)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Educational background of both parents					
Secondary school and below	209(81.0)	4(100)	213(81.2)	1	0.658^F
Tertiary	49(19.0)	0(0)	49(18.8)		
Total	**258(100)**	**4(100)**	**262(100)**		
Employment status of father					
Employed	4(1.3)	0(0)	4(1.3)	2	0.903^F
Self-employed	264(89.5)	2(50)	266(89.5)		
Un-employed	27(9.2)	2(50)	29(9.2)		
Total	**295(100)**	**4(100)**	**299(100)**		
Employment status of mother					
Employed	4(1.4)	0(0)	4(1.3)	2	0.113^F
Self-employed	264(89.5)	2(50.0)	266(89.0)		
Un-employed	27(9.2)	2(50.0)	29(9.7)		
Total	**295(100)**	**4(100)**	**299(100)**		
Number of siblings					
1	10(3.2)	0(0)	10(3.1)	2	0.691^F
2-6	238(75.3)	4(100)	242(75.6)		
7-11	68(21.5)	0(0)	68(21.3)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
School attendance					
Yes	289(91.5)	0(0)	289(90.3)	1	0.000^{F*}
No	27(8.5)	4(100)	31(9.7)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Age					
6-10	42(13.3)	0(0)	4(13.1)	2	0.000^{F*}
11-15	233(73.7)	0(0)	233(72.8)		
16+	41(13.0)	4(100)	45(14.1)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Accommodation					
One room	98(31.0)	0(0)	98(30.8)	2	0.728^F
Two rooms	72(22.8)	0(0)	72(22.6)		
Batcher	146(46.2)	2(100)	148(46.6)		
Total	**316(100)**	**2(100)**	**318(100)**		

= Statistically significant, F= Fischer exact.

Table 3 reveals that among 320 respondents, 176 (60.9%) said street life didn't affect their academic performance. Over half (51.3%) were oppressed while on the street as 75 (45.6%) were usually molested and 63 (38.1%) were usually extorted. Most of respondents 262 (81.9%) said they don't steal on the street. One hundred and ninety-seven (61.6%) had regrets about street presence with 6 (4.8%) stating freedom to be their reason for embracing street presence while 117 (95.2%) said they made money while being on the street. Out of 320 respondents, 260(81.3%) had a good relationship with other people on the street. Two hundred and eighty-five (89.0%) had knowledge of existing dangers on the street with 140(43.7%) having an accident while on the street. One hundred and thirty-seven (57.2%) were involved in a street fight.

Table 2. Respondents' predisposing factors

Reasons for street presence	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
Supporting family	226	70.8
Personal decision	73	22.8
Conflicts with parents/guardians	15	4.7
Peer influence	6	1.9

Table 3. Respondents' psychosocial problems

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
Poor academic performance (n=289)		
Yes	110	38.0
No	176	60.9
Don't know	3	1.0
Oppression		
Yes	164	51.3
No	156	48.8
Type of oppression (n=164)		
Bullying	12	7.6
Extortion	63	38.1
Mind corruption	3	1.9
Molestation	75	45.6
Verbal abuse	11	6.9
Stealing		
Yes	58	18.1
No	262	81.9
Regrets for street presence		
Yes	197	61.6
No	123	38.4
Reason for no regrets (n=123)		
Freedom	6	4.8
Source of money	117	95.2
Social relationship		
Good	260	81.3
Not good	60	18.8
Knowledge of street dangers		
Yes	285	89.0
No	35	11.0
Type of street dangers (n=285)		
Accident	140	43.7
Kidnapping	106	33.1
Extortion	19	5.9
Molestation	6	1.9
Rape	7	2.2
Street gang attack	7	2.2
Street danger experienced		
Accident	55	17.2
Extortion	43	13.4
Molestation	13	4.1
Street gang attack	6	1.8
None	203	63.4
Involvement in street fight		
Yes	137	42.8
No	183	57.2

Table 3a. Respondents' psychosocial problems cont'd

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
Memory loss		
Yes	154	48.1
No	166	51.9
Suicidal thoughts		
Yes	123	38.4
No	197	61.6
Tobacco use		
Yes	3	0.9
No	317	99.1
Type of tobacco (n=3)		
Cigarette	3	100
Alcohol consumption		
Yes	39	12.2
No	281	87.8
Hard drug use		
Yes	2	0.6
No	318	99.4
Type of hard drug		
Tramadol	2	100
Sexually active		
Yes	13	4.1
No	307	95.9
No. of sexual partners (n=13)		
One	6	46.2
Two or more	7	53.8

Table 3b. Association between psychosocial problems and being on the street

Variable	Street children		Total (%)	Df	P-value
	Living at home	Living on the street			
Physical Abuse					
Yes	164(51.9)	0(0)	164(51.2)	1	0.055[F]
No	152(48.1)	4(100)	156(48.8)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Stealing behavior					
Yes	54(17.1)	4(100)	58(18.1)	1	0.001[F]*
No	262(82.9)	0(0)	262(81.9)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Effective Communication with others					
Yes	258(81.6)	2(50)	260(81.3)	1	0.156[F]
No	58(18.4)	2(50)	60(18.8)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Exhibiting violent behavior					
Yes	133(42.1)	4(100)	137(42.8)	1	0.033[F]*
No	183(57.9)	0(0)	183(57.2)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Experiencing Memory loss					
Yes	154(48.7)	0(0)	154(48.1)	1	0.124[F]
No	162(51.3)	4(100)	166(51.9)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Experiencing suicidal thought					
Yes	121(38.3)	2(50.0)	123(38.4)	1	0.640[F]
No	195(61.7)	2(50.0)	197(61.6)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		

Variable	Street children		Total (%)	Df	P-value
	Living at home	**Living on the street**			
Tobacco use					
Yes	3(0.9)	0(0)	3(0.9)	1	0.845[F]
No	313(99.1)	4(100)	317(99.1)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Alcohol consumption					
Yes	39(12.3)	0(0)	39(12.2)	1	0.454[F]
No	277(87.7)	4(100)	281(87.8)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		
Drug use					
Yes	11(3.5)	2(50.0)	13(4.1)	1	0.009[F]*
No	305(96.5)	2(50.0)	307(95.9)		
Total	**316(100)**	**4(100)**	**320(100)**		

*= Statistically significant, F= Fischer's exact

Table 3a shows that among 320 respondents, 154(48.1%) said they don't forget things easily while 197(61.6%) had suicidal thoughts. Majority of respondents 317(99.1%) were non-smokers, 281(87.8%) do not consume alcoholic beverages. Majority 318(99.4%) didn't use hard drugs with 2(100%) admitting to tramadol use. Thirteen (4.1%) were sexually active with 7(53.8%) claiming they had multiple partners.

In Table 3b, there is no statistically significant association observed between physical abuse, effective communication with others, experiencing memory loss and street children. However, a statistically significant association was observed between stealing behavior and street children (p=0.001). Children who exhibited stealing behavior had significant higher proportion (100%) compared to those who don't possess stealing behavior (0%) among children living on the street. A statistically significant association was observed between exhibiting violent behavior and street children (p=0.033). Children who exhibit violent behavior had significant higher proportion (100%) compared to those who don't exhibit violent behavior (0%) among children living on the street. There is no statistically significant association observed between experiencing suicidal thought, tobacco use, alcohol consumption and street children. However, a statistically significant association was observed between drug use and street living children (p=0.009). Street children who take drugs had equal significant proportion (50%) with those who don't take drugs (50%) among children living on the street.

Table 4 shows that among the 320 respondents, 159 (49.7%) were safe while on the street by avoiding unsafe places, 122 (38.1%) made friends so as to cope while on the street while 39 (12.2%) avoided bad companies. Fifty-eight (18.1%) admitted to stealing. Majority 298 (93.0%) were unemployed with greater percentage 266 (89.2%) selling sachet water on the road. Among the 320 respondents, 234 (73.0%) earned ≤ ₦1000 daily. Over half (64.0%) eat food at home with 115 (36.0%) buying their food on the road. One hundred and sixty-three (51.0%) had two meals daily. One hundred and eighty-two (57.0%) were provided with cloths by parents with 74 (23.0%) buying their cloths themselves. One hundred and eighty-nine (59.0%) were cared for medically by parents/guardian when sick while few 57 (18.0%) accessed healthcare by themselves.

3.1 Qualitative Data Summary

Following the qualitative data summary acquired from the in-depth interview of 15 respondents comprising of 10 boys and 5 girls aged 10-18 years. The findings were arranged into three major themes: (a) No parental care (b) Insecurity and (c) proper conduct and selling as a tool for survival.

3.2 No Parental Care

Participants spoke on factors that push them to street life in search of money to provide for themselves and their families. Parental negligence was among the reasons they went to public places to labor on their own. Two sub-themes emerged from no parental care namely, parental negligence, and poverty. Some of them recounted how they were ill-treated at home.

Table 4. Respondents' coping strategies

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
Types of coping strategies		
Avoiding bad company	39	12.2
Avoiding unsafe places	159	49.7
Making friends	122	38.1
Stealing		
Yes	58	18.1
No	262	81.9
Employment status		
Employed	22	7.0
Unemployed	298	93.0
Type of employment (n=22)		
Hawking of snacks	13	57.1
Food selling	3	14.3
Refuse disposal	3	14.3
Sand packing	3	14.3
Activities of the unemployed (n=298)		
Sachet water selling	266	89.2
Assisting guardian	10	3.3
Foodstuff selling	3	1.1
Scavenging/sales of empty containers	9	3.2
Trading	3	1.1
Income per day (₦)		
≤1000	234	73.0
1001 – 2000	61	19.0
2001 – 3000	22	7.0
>3000	3	1.0
Mean =₦1109.48±807.50, median=₦1000 ($2.74)		
Access to food		
Buying	115	36.0
At home	205	64.0
Frequency of meals		
Once	3	1.0
Twice	163	51.0
Thrice	151	47.0
Four	3	1.0
Access to clothing		
By buying	74	23.0
Through charity	3	1.0
Through guardians	61	19.0
Through parents	182	57.0
Access to healthcare		
Through guardians	74	23.0
Through parents	189	59.0
Self-care	57	18.0

For example, a male participant said: *We live in a wooden house and we lack food to eat sometimes as my father doesn't come home some days. My mother sells orange on the roadside and can't buy food for us sometimes. Whenever I and my siblings ask my father for anything, he chases us away saying we should go and meet our mother for our needs.* (Participant 1)

Another female respondent said: *I was brought to the city by my aunty when my mother passed away and my father was unable to provide for us in the village. When we arrived, my aunty sent*

me out to join others on the road and sell so I can make money that would be used to buy clothes for me or else I will be sent back to the village. (Participant 6)

3.3 Insecurity

Another pressing issue about street life was the dangers that existed on the street which created an uncomfortable environment. The respondents spoke continuously about similar dangers which created four sub-themes in this section namely, molestation, extortion, kidnapping and accidents.

A female respondent said: *I like the street because I can sell and earn money irrespective of the amount but the street has so many dangers because you cannot trust anybody here. You can be kidnapped and used for ritual or the bad boys can collect all your money. Some of the bad boys always disturb me to be their girlfriend for protection from other boys but if you refuse, they will tell me that they'll catch me one day. Another thing is that a car can knock you down when selling in traffic or by the roadside.* (Participant 5)

Another male respondent said: *I dislike the street because I should be at home like other children but if I don't come out and sell, there won't be money for my school needs. I was once knocked down by a vehicle while I was selling in traffic and since then, I have always been scared of having another accident because my money was stolen the first time. Some street boys also disturb me to join them in drinking and smoking and when I refuse, they chase me and beat me and collect my money.* (Participant 9)

3.4 Proper Conduct

Concerning the survival strategies employed by respondents, two sub-themes emerged which are selling and avoidance of bad company and unsafe places. Participants spoke about their survival strategies on the roads and were particular about doing something that fetched them money while they conducted themselves properly for safety.

One male participant said: *I'm here because I have to sell for my master so there would be money to complete my school fees and get me cloths. I like coming to the street so I can see my friends and also make money. I avoid bad friends*

and places that bad people stay. I get provoked by people here to the point of wanting to fight them but I know that fighting is not good so I ignore and tell them that God will judge them. (Participant 11)

A female responded by saying: *Initially when I arrived the city with my aunty, I was happy because I felt I would be staying at home to assist with chores but I was unhappy when she said I have to go to the road and sell so there would be enough money for me to start school. I was scared at first because I felt they would kidnap me but when I came out, I made new friends and I like it as I'm making money out here. I always avoid selling to bad boys who are always trying to corrupt me. I also stay in places where people are plenty to avoid being kidnapped.* (Participant 12)

4. DISCUSSION

Street children exist in every part of the world with the phenomenon being more prominent in under-developed and developing countries [7]. UNESCO in its recent report, stated that there are about 150 million street children existing on major streets of cities worldwide [10].

4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study showed that street children were mostly males 60.3% aged 9-18 years which is similar to the findings of Owoaje et al which reported 58.3% males aged 15-17 years [21] and Cumber et al which revealed that street children were mostly males 80.2% aged 9-17 years [22]. In addition, Edewor reported that street children were mostly males 83.9% aged 15-19 years [23]. The fathers of street children were mostly artisans 67.3% while Aransiola et al reported 47.4% fathers as artisans [24]. Edewor [11] reported 38.8% fathers' as artisans which is lower than this study finding. Mothers 57.0% were mostly traders which is similar to findings of Owoaje et al which showed 64.6% mothers to be traders [21].

In relation to public health, this study finding shows that many young children are neglected by their parent(s) which deprives them of care and adequate support. Basic needs like food, clean water, education and shelter are necessities for children to attain their full potentials in life and therefore should be provided

adequately by provision of jobs for parents, feeding programs for children in school, public programs that will enable children have interest in learning.

4.2 Factors Predisposing Children to Street Life

Study finding showed that most of the street children 70.8% were on the street because they were carrying out activities targeted at supporting their families financially which is similar to the finding of Ihejirika which showed that 77.2% left home for the street because of financial constraints [8]. Street children who personally decided to embrace street life were 22.8% in this study which is different from finding of Ihejirika which reported 1.2% as those who decided to take up street life [8]. However, Abari et al reported that 20% of street children left their homes in search of money to support their families which is much lesser than this study finding [25]. In India, Singh et al however, reported that 15% left homes because of conflicts with parents [26] as reported by 4.7% in this study.

The factors that are seen in this study finding to predispose children to street life like supporting their family low income shows that poverty is still a major problem in the society. When parents cannot provide the basic needs of their children, some send their children to the street to make money and support the family which exposes the children to various harms which is dangerous to their health. There is need for public policies to be enacted by Government and other stakeholders to cater for neglected children, orphans and the disabled in the society.

4.3 Psychosocial Problems Associated with Street Children

In this study, street children 83.7% were mostly maltreated and extorted while being on the street which is similar to finding of Khaled et al which reported that street children 93% were harassed on the street [27]. This study revealed that 38.4% had suicidal thoughts and 18.8% had social relationship problems which is different from the finding of Asante et al that reported 68.9% to have emotional difficulties and 88.6% to have peer relationship problems [28]. Risky behavior was seen in this study as tobacco use by 0.9%, alcohol use by 12.2%, hard drug use by 0.6% and sexual practices by 4.1% which is different

from the finding of Khaled et al reported drug use in 62% and sexual practices by 67% [27]. Edewor reported tobacco use by 36%, alcohol use by 38% and 60% to be sexually active [23] which is different from this study finding. There was a statistically significant association between stealing (P=0.001), violent behavior (P=0.033), hard drug use (P=0.009) and street living children. Street children in this study narrated their life ordeals by stating that they were normally neglected which made them advance to the street for survival as similarly reported by Gaston et al that street children were normally neglected and abandoned by their parents which exposed them to street life [20]. Hills et al reported that street children were normally bullied and maltreated on the street which is also revealed in this study [29].

This study finding showed that street children are normally exposed to a lot of dangers while on the street which threatens their existence. They are regularly maltreated by older street children and members of the public as they were seen as nuisances in the eyes of many. Some of them that were schooling had bad academic performance while others had emotional instabilities which exposed them to suicidal thoughts, violent behaviors, and risky behaviors like hard drug use, early sexual practices which reduces their life expectancy greatly. There is need for Government and Non-Governmental Organizations to establish homes, day care centers, vocational centers and affordable education for neglected children so that they can have a bright future.

4.4 Coping Strategies of Respondents

Findings showed that most of the street children were sachet water hawkers who made less than or equal to ₦1000 ($2.74) daily who had two meals in a day at their parents or guardians' home. Abari et al reported that street children indulge in various activities for survival like selling of foodstuffs to uphold their family income [25], while Edewor in his study reported that they coped with street life by carrying loads for money, buying/selling of foodstuffs [23]. Other studies by Owoaje et al and Ofonime et al observed that street children hawked fruits and other items to uphold their family income and their personal gains while some had nothing doing on the street [21,30].

The finding of this study shows how children carry out a lot of activities in order to make

money at their young age. Being on the street has a negative influence on the lives of children. At their age, these children should be catered for by their parents or Government and Non-Governmental organizations in the case of orphans and abandoned children.

5. CONCLUSION

Street children were mostly males aged 9-18 years who were on the street because they carried out various activities aimed at supporting their family low income. Challenges faced were unsafe environments, exposure to violent and risky behaviors while avoiding unsafe places, hawking sachet water and snacks was coping mechanism employed for survival.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should provide good jobs, adequate food, proper housing, adequate healthcare, education, security for its people so that the standard of living can be improved.
2. Government and Non-Governmental Organizations should establish public programs like feeding programs, free education and vocational centers that would cater for the needs of all children in the society especially the vulnerable ones like orphans, neglected children, disabled children and others.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, participant's written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

It is not applicable.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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