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Social networks and livelihood of street children in Ibadan, Nigeria

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In Nigeria, in spite of remarkable natural and human resources, most people have tasted the bitter pills of poverty; however, children in Nigeria experience poverty differently. This is particularly noteworthy in the way most children are deprived of nutrition, water, sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education and protection. Hence, poverty makes them unable to enjoy their rights, participate as full members of the society. Based on the foregoing, this paper presents the results of a study conducted on social networks and livelihood of street children in Ibadan, Nigeria. It investigates the causes, incidence of poverty among street children and the relevance of their social networks to their survival on the streets. Data were collected through triangulation of in-depth interviews (IDIs), case studies, structured questionnaire and focus group discussions. A sample of two hundred and seventy-five respondents was selected for the survey. The results indicate a strong relationship between poverty and living on the street. Most street children involved in different delinquent acts such as stealing, consumption of psychoactive drugs, under age drinking of alcohol, gambling etc, some were not delinquents as they positively utilized the available social network of support for upward social mobility. To address the problems of street children, it is suggested that governments should adhere strictly to Millileum Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria. Essentially, the gaps between the promises made and the actions taken should be bridged by the government (Local, State and Federal).

Key words: Street based children, delinquency, approved schools, rehabilitation, social networks, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last five decades, the phenomenon of street children has become prominent globally with serious implications for the survival of these children. The presence of streets children in major cities of the world has transcended the level where it was viewed as strictly uncommon occurrence to a worrisome global problem. Worldwide, the problem of children roaming the street endlessly is escalating and alarming (Le Roux, 1998). Global estimates of street children stood between 10 - 100 millions and the number was increasing rapidly since 2002 (UNFPA, 2003). The phenomenon has not only attracted public concern but has also become a matter of priority to governments as well as, national and international organizations (Panter-Brick, 2002).

Particularly in Africa where the problem of street children is relatively new unlike the situation in Asia, the presence of large number of children has now become a major issue (Kopoka, 2000; Mehta, 2000). Sub-Saharan Africa with less than 30% of its population residing in cities

is the least urbanized region of the developing world. Nevertheless, the region in the recent times is experiencing the highest urban growth rates in the world (Mehta, 2000). Decades ago, Africa witnessed rapid and wide ranging socioeconomic and political changes. There is rapid urbanization, run away population growth, wars, internal crises and increasing disparities in wealth. Also, the introduction of structural adjustment programme in a country like Nigeria and globalization affected the structure of African society. It is instructive to note here, that, the emergence of large numbers of children on the streets of Africa today was partly a reflection of the extreme poverty and the lack of social services that are endemic in many highly populated urban areas in Africa.

Nigeria, the largest black African country with more than 140 million people is not spared of this scourge. Although there is a considerable problem of thousands of street children in Nigeria, their precise numbers which vary from city to city and often depending on the season

of the year is not known. However, the level of technology which is presently at its lowest ebb has been given as one of the significant factors why no-one can accurately give the number of street children in Nigeria (Ebigbo, 2003).

It is noteworthy to mention at this juncture that all available figures on street children in Nigeria are often contested as extrapolates or estimates rather than actual figures derived from specific studies. In one of the few studies carried out on street children in Lagos, it was shown that although homeless street children were rare in the mid-eighties, there were an "estimated" 8000 of them by the early 1990s. But because of increasing social and economic burdens in families and communities, the population of street children is likely to be increasing in Nigerian cities. Also, studies have showed that the menace of street children was alarming in the public spheres such as markets, bus stops, car parks, garages, street corners, and under the bridges (Oloko, 1992; Okpukpara and Odurukwe 2003; Owasanoye, 2004).

In spite of dearth of data from recent empirical studies on street children in Nigeria, there is consensus in literature that various issues such as poverty, hunger, insecurity, child abuse, domestic violence, displacement caused by communal clashes, inadequate care, death of a parent (or both parents), need for income in the family, inability to continue in school, willful deviance in a few children, unemployment of one or both parents, illiteracy, housing challenges, drug use by children, and peer influence are the major factors pushing children onto the streets.

It is important to note here that various regimes in Nigeria (since independence era till now) in their bid to reduce the problem of street children to its barest minimum embarked on various crosscutting tasks. But it is sad to note that these efforts have yielded little or no significant impact on improving the lots of children on the street (UNICEF, 2001). This is largely because these measures have been more often than not politically motivated, uncoordinated, not well implemented and largely un-enforced. Corroborating this stance are studies conducted by Oloko (1990, 1992 and 1999); Imam (1998); Onuikwe (1998); UNICEF (2004) and Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2006) which are pointer to the fact that problem of street children in Nigeria are increasing in both practices and characteristics.

It is pertinent here to define and clarify the ambiguity associated with definitions of children and street children. Child is defined internationally as any person aged between 5 and 15 years while Nigeria define a child as any person between the age of 5 and 17 years. UNICEF defines street children as, "those who are of the street and on the street." In this study, the term street children refers to those children of 5 - 14 years of age who earn their living on the city streets and stay there for most, or all, of the day. They may or may not have parents or legal guardians.

There seem to be no clear definition of street children,

since it cannot be assumed that all children on the streets are homeless. The great majority-well over three-quarters and as many as 90% of the children on the streets in various developing countries work on the streets but live at home and are working to earn money for their families (Aptekar, 1994; UNICEF, 2000). According to Street Child Africa (2005), street children are some of the most vulnerable children who are separated from their families, and likely to be undernourished, stigmatized, abused, uneducated and anonymous. However, it has been noted that many of such children are not orphaned (UNICEF, 2006).

Two main kinds of street children are found in Nigeria: those who live and work on the street, (children of the street) and those who work on the streets full or part-time but who return to their homes each night (children in the street). For the purpose of this study, the definition of street children adopted by this paper is that of children under the age of eighteen who spend all their life on the streets. These are the children who live permanently on the streets. They involved in activities such as shoe-shinning, street vending, cleaning windshield, stealing, transporting, selling drugs etc.

Research aims and objectives

Though literature is awash with researches conducted on the issues of street children, child welfare and child poverty and thereby elicited much academic debates on these aforementioned issues, yet there is still much to be done in the area of social networks and survival strategies of street children in Nigeria. However, this gap in literature provided the impetus for this study.

This work attempts to understand these by:

- Investigating the incidence of street children in Ibadan and also ascertain factors that contributed to their street roaming.
- The nature of social networks existing between the children who permanently reside on the street.
- lastly to examine the various coping strategies adopted by these children in the face of acute poverty they experience on the street; even at a time when the various international organizations' policies like United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1991 and Nigerian governmental policies on child welfare as stipulated in the Child Right Bill of 2006 remain ineffective as far as the plight of street children are concerned.

To achieve these, selected children living on streets in Ibadan were used. Ibadan, a city in southwest Nigeria is the capital of Oyo state; it is 78 miles from Lagos and a prominent transit point between the coastal region and the areas to the north. It has a population of 2,550,593 and 11 local government areas (National population census, 2006). Ibadan was the centre of administration of the old western region in Nigeria since advent of the colonial

rule. The principal inhabitants of the city are the Yoruba and significant number of people from other ethnic groups within and outside Nigeria. Ibadan is known for high level of commercial activities, high population, low living costs and relative peace.

Research methodology

This study investigates the social networks and livelihood of street children in Ibadan, Nigeria. The following research instruments were employed through triangulation: in-depth interviewing, focus group discussion, structured questionnaire and case study.

Three major motor parks with high commercial activities were purposively selected due to their sizes, location and the fact that they serve as places of 'stop-over' for travelers who use the city as a transit point to other towns and cities in Nigeria.

Street children aged 10 - 17 years were considered suitable for this study. Some of these children engage in petty trade and services (e.g. selling of packaged sachet water that is referred to as "pure water" in Nigeria, selling items like handkerchiefs, face-towels, and recharge cards for mobile phones, chilled soft drinks and fast food to travelers inside traffic hold-ups. Some were found using wheel-barrow to convey loads from one point to another within the motor parks while others engage in activities such as bus-conducting, car washing and posters' pasting) at motor parks. A total number of two hundred and seventy-five street children (260 males and 15 females) who met the above criteria were selected following their agreement to participate in the study. Because of their high mobility, the participants were recruited using purposive sampling.

All ethical principles in social research were observed and followed as stipulated.

Structured questionnaire, focus group discussions (FGD), case study and in-depth interviews were used to collect data from the respondents. A total of 10 children (8 males and 2 females) of different age groups from the three motor parks where data were collected, who had also spent at least five years on the street were interviewed. The data generated through this technique were rich in information, with regard to the social networks of these street children and how these had helped in sustaining them on the streets. To ensure representativeness, selection of respondents for the interview was based on the number towns/villages of origin of the street children.

Three FGDs (2 sessions for males respondents, 1 session for Female participants) were conducted with 18 street children. Each FGD session for male comprised five participants, whereas eight participants were involved in the female FGD. The FGD covered the question of coping mechanisms of street children and their know-ledge of social networks. Discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. On the other hand, case study was conducted among for 4 street children on issues relating to com-paring their ways of life at home before they got to the street and life on the street, matters related to their daily activities and how often do they hear from home. A total of two hundred and forty-three street children were sampled in the survey, using question-naire schedule that was designed in open and close ended format. The schedule comprised 37 items that covered topics on socio-demographic characteristics, problems encountered on the streets, survival strategies, social networks, street children ambitions in life, what are the perceived solutions to their problem of street living? Here, precautions (writing their names on the questionnaire and also indicate if they had earlier filled one) were taken by the researchers to forestall a street child filling questionnaire more than once. However, from the beginning of the whole exercise, the respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable answering

Table 1. Age and number of street children who participated in the study.

	Male		**Female**	
	Age	**No**	**Age**	**No**
Focus groups	12 - 17	10	11 - 17	8
Questionnaire	10 - 17	239	10 - 17	4
Life history interviews	15 - 17	3	15	1
Interview	13 - 17	8	13 - 15	2
Total		260		15

Source: From authors survey questionnaire.

questions. Some boys refused to participate based on their earlier participation in survey before which according to them has yielded no benefit to them. The data collection was undertaken in 2008 and it lasted for 2 months (Table 1).

The three research assistants that were recruited to facilitate data collection when the survey was going on were also engaged during the processes of collecting data through FGD, case study and interview.

As the research work progressed, direct observations on the field for 3 days became necessary for the researcher to get first hand information and witness live some of what the children engage in to survive. Some of the places visited are a popular stream where younger boys have their birth in the wee hours (the older boys took their bath in the "pay and use" public toilets built by the local government at the centre). Other places visited are shops within the motor parks that serve as sleeping places for some boys, abandoned and dilapidated buildings nearby.

Analysis of qualitative data was done with the use of Z-Y index tables after the transcription of data had been completed. While the data for the questionnaire survey was computed with SPSS com-puter package. Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed by topic (Table 5).

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics.

As it appeared in the table, factors such as death of parents or no caregivers, parents living separately and poverty are the joint factors responsible for large movement of the respondents to the street. Thus far, it is evident from the responses of these children as indicated in Table 2 shows that major reasons for becoming street children were mostly economic. This finding therefore confirms the reality of other findings such as Oloko (1992), Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2003) that identified poverty as the root cause of street children in Nigeria. In all 67.3% of the respondents took to the street because of these factors. On the other hand, illiteracy and truancy are the other significant factors responsible for exodus of youth to the street. Some of the factors that led to truancy were their desire for unbridled freedom which according to them can only be got on the street and various mis-deeds like not ready to learn any trade and the likes.

As shown above, findings of this study indicate that though Nigeria is a signatory to millennium declaration

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Major Problems of street children	Sex		Total
	Boy	**Girls**	
Death of parent/s or no care giver	95 (34.5%)	10 (3.6%)	105 (38.2%)
Parents living separately	48 (17.5%)	2(0.7%)	50(18.2%)
Poverty	25 (9.1%)	5 (1.8%)	30(10.9%)
Ill-treatment from Home	5 (1.8%)	-	5(1.8%)
Illiteracy/Truancy	85 (30.9%)	-	85 (30.9%)
Classification of jobs			
Jobs with no moral condemnation	65(23.6%)	15 (5.5%)	80(29.1%)
Jobs with moral condemnation	19(6.9%)	-	19(6.9%)
Jobs with moral/ without moral condemnation	176(64. %)	-	176 (64.3%)
Family contact			
Frequent	8 (2.9%)	5(1.8%)	13(4.7%)
Rare	85(30.9%)	8(2.9%)	93(33.8%)
Never	167(60.7%)	2(0.7%)	169(61.4%)
Family Situation			
Parent/s had/are stayed in Ibadan	66 (24%)	7(2.5%)	73 (26.5%)
Parents never stayed in Ibadan	153 (55.6%)	5(1.8%)	158 (57.5%)
Don't know parent/s whereabouts	40(14.5%)	4(1.5%)	44(12.7%)

Source: From authors survey questionnaire.

that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, yet the eight MDGs break down into 21 quantifiable targets that are measured by 60 indicators which are: Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education, Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women, Goal 4: Reduce child mortality, Goal 5: Improve maternal health, Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability, Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development; have failed woefully as a country in responding to the plight of children on the street as indicated in some of the MDGs.

Many of the respondents (64.3%) were involved in activities that can be classified as activities that attract moral condemnation and ones that do not attract moral condemnation (that is legal or illegal), while 29.1% of them engaged in survival activities which will not jeopardize the rights of others that is activities that attract no moral condemnation. However, in spite of the presence of policemen in these garages, very few of them (6.9%) were still found selling Indian hemps ("*EJA*") and operate gamble joints. These boys confessed that they occasionally dispossess unsuspecting travelers and passers-by of their belongings especially in the night and early morning when people are still few people on the road.

Relationship of street children with members of their family was not cordial, majority (61.4%) had never gone back home since they joined other children on the street. Quite a number of them according to the study came from other neighbouring states and towns, while (33.8%) who rarely make contact with relatives prefer visiting such relative in their shops or other places apart from their houses. The few (4.7%) who visit frequently were those whose parent/s are still alive and still making frantic efforts to bring them back home.

In conclusion, the demographic profile of the respondents indicated that (57.5%) of the street based children actually came from adjoining towns like Ile-Ife, Osogbo, Ikirun, Iwo, Ikire and others areas and that none of their parents had ever resided in Ibadan, 26.5% of them maintained that their parent/s had stayed or is staying in Ibadan. However, the remaining 12.7% did not even know where their parents reside.

Case 1

I got to the street in 2004 when I lost my mother and my father married another woman afterwards. The new wife maltreatment and hatred for me and everything I did when I was at home forced me to follow a friend to leave my town (Edun-abon) to join other street children in Ibadan (Male, 17).

Case 2

Yet another said: My parents were too poor and they could hardly feed all the 7 children they had when I was at home. I ran away from home to free myself from various difficult tasks that all members of the family en-

Table 3. Social networks of street children.

Sources of assistance	Responses by sex		Total
	Boys	**Girls**	
Other street children	25(9.1%)	3(1.1%)	28(10.2%)
Non-relatives	260(94.5%)	15(5.5%)	275 (100%)
Relatives	17(6.2%)	3(1.1%)	20(7.3%)
Gang/Group	153(55.6%)	-	153(55.6%)
Street Gains			
Freedom/ Quick & easy money/ Assuming adult Responsibility	215(78.2%)	13(4.7%)	228(82.9%)
No gains (positive)	43(15.6%)	2(0.7%)	45(16.4%)
Help Needed			
Accommodation	260(94.5%)	15(5.5%)	275(100%)
Clothing and other materials	260(94.5%)	15(5.5%)	275(100%)
Working tools	5 (19.3%)	6(2.2%)	5(12.5%)
Education	37(13.5%)	3(1.1%)	40(14.5%)
Food and drugs	260(94.5%)	15(5.5%)	275(100%)
Money	260(94.5%)	15(5.5%)	275(100%)

Source: From authors survey questionnaire.

gaged in so as to keep body and soul together. I got to Ibadan in 2006 and since I had nobody to stay with, I joined the boys sleeping in the street (Male, 16).

Case 3

Another even recounted her experience thus: I was staying with my mother helping her to sell herbal concoction/mixture to drivers and passengers alike in the main garage (Iwo Road) before I met two other girls whose ways of live and spending attracted me to join their group and later ran away from home to sleep in the street (Female, 15).

Additional analyses from the study (not shown) revealed that some of the female street based children occasionally sleep with young men (former street boys) who have secured accommodation in the neighbourhood of the three garages where data were collected in Ibadan. These men eke out their livelihood on the street and always fraternizing with younger street boys. According to the study, many of them serve as godfathers to some of the boys and encourage them to engage in delinquent acts.

Table 3 sheds light on the networks of relationships which existed between children of the street, non-relatives, institutions and types of care and social resources available on the street. The table indicates that 10.2% of the street based children occasionally get help from other street based children, even though they have some other ways of relating with one another. All the respondents (100%) asserted that the bulk of gift items, other forms of relationships and major help they received come from other members of the society (that is non relatives, especially older men and women who sell their wares and those

who render services in these motor parks and several non-governmental organizations who visit them from time to time and donate relief materials, religious and government service agencies). 7.3% of the respondents still maintain various degrees of relationships with some of their relatives while 55.6% indicated members of their gang people they relate with despite their relationship with other people.

However, on the issue of what brought them to the street and benefits they get there, majority (82.9%) asserted that unbridled freedom on the street, opportunities to make fast money and ambitions to assume adults' roles were major reasons that pull them to the streets.

In identifying the type of action they want the government and the society to take in helping them out of their predicament all the respondents indicated accommodation, clothing materials, taking care of the health and money as major things they need in alleviating their varied problems. Nevertheless, 12.5 and 14.5% respectively of the respondents stated that education and working materials (tools) are what they needed to bail them out of their problems.

Case 4

All what I need to survive is a place to sleep at night and "Okada" (Motorcycle) for commercial purpose. I do not have money to buy one and I can not steal. How I wish the government could come to aid (Male, 17).

Another simply said: I suffer here because I do not have anybody to stand as guarantor for me in the place where I wanted to learn barbing last year (Male, 14). Table 4 below shows various survival strategies of the respondents.

Table 4. Survival strategies of the street children.

Strategies for survival	Sex		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Money making activities			
Hawking	85 (30.9%)	7 (2.5%)	92(33.5%)
Haulage/Pushing cart/Carrying loads	6 8(24.7%)	6 (2.2%)	74(26.9%)
Bus conducting	41(14.9%)	-	41(14.9%)
Selling stuff at a particular spot	21(7.6%)	2(0.7%)	23(8.4%)
Beg for Alms	29(10.5%)	3(1.1%)	32(11.6%)
Daily proceeds usage			
Feeding and general upkeep of self	260(94.5%)	15(5.5%)	275(100%)
Keeping money with individuals in the garage	229(83.3%)	12(4.4%)	241(87.6%)
Carrying it wherever one goes	31(11.3%)	3(1.1%)	32(11.6%)
How belongings were kept			
Inside dilapidated building	101(36.7%)	12(4. 4%)	113(41.1%)
Inside vehicles	58(21.1%)	-	58(21.1%)
With shop owners	52(18.9%)	3(1.1%)	55(20%)
Putting on more than one clothing items	49(17.8%)	-	49(17.8%)
Sleeping places			
Inside dilapidated/abandoned building	130(47.3%)	12(4. 4%)	142(51.6%)
Inside vehicles	68(24.7%)	-	68(24.7%)
Shops	62(22.5%)	3(1.1%)	65(23.6%)
Sanitation/Health care			
Buy drugs from peddlers in garages	255(92.7%)	15(5.5%)	270(98.1%)
Visit hospitals	33(1 2%)	6(2.2%)	39(14.2%)
Use Herbal Medicine	175(63.6%)	11(4%)	186(67.6%)
Protection from gang members	247(89.8%)	12(4.4%)	259(94.2%)

Source: From authors survey questionnaire.

All respondents worked at unskilled jobs to earn money. 33.5% were hawking, 26.9% were carrying loads for passengers at the motor parks, and 14.9% conduct in public buses while 8.4% sell different stuffs at some spots. There were also cases of 11.6% who despite their participation in some of the activities itemized above also begged for alms when there were no jobs or money to eat.

On how respondents use or spend the money made on daily basis, all of them (100%) claimed they spend larger percentage of their daily proceeds on feeding. How money is kept is diverse. While majority (87.6%) were keeping their money with some trustworthy individuals (mainly women), 11.6% claimed they always carry their money in their pockets wherever they went.

Care of belongings: Items like clothing materials, shoes etc that could be regarded as belongings of the street based children were kept in places like, dilapidated buildings by 41.1% of them, inside vehicles by 21.1%, 20% were keeping theirs with some shop owners, while 17.8% were putting on more than one clothing items because they did not want these items to be stolen by other street children whose stock in trade is stealing other boys belongings.

Sleeping places: Places such as dilapidated building, open stalls and shops and inside parked vehicle were some of the places where street based children spend their nights. 51.6% of them indicated various dilapidated and abandoned buildings as where the pass their nights, 24.7% inside parked vehicles (functional and abandoned ones) and 23.6% passed their night in open stalls and unlocked shops.

Health and sanitation: Most of the respondents (98.1%) visit individuals who sell over-the-counter drugs in the garages when they are sick.

The in-depth interview sessions also showed that majo-rity of the street based children patronize drug peddlers (orthodox and traditional) in garages for cure to all their ailments while few of them (14.2%) occasionally visit hospitals for treatment, and 67.6% of them despite patronizing drug peddlers in the garages also use traditional herbs (alternative therapy) whenever they are sick.

Table 5. Z-y Index table showing major problems of street children.

Problems	Boys	Girls
Health related issue	+ + +	+ + +
Problem with police	+	-
Big Boys (Alayes')	+ + +	-
Accommodation	+ + +	+ + +
Feeding	+ +	+ +
Ritual makers	+ +	-

Note: +++ means problem facing majority of the street children (>75%)
++ means problem faced by some reasonable number (>50%), (<65%)
+ means problem faced by few (< 20%)
Means have not experience such problem/s.

One other important factor that contributes significantly to survival (health wise) of street children is the contributions of members of gang that they belong. Members of various gangs especially the older ones play the role of parents and relatives whenever other members are in need. More often than not, they make arrangement for how ailing member/s should be taken care of. Majority of the respondents (94.2%) were of the opinion that gang members contributed significantly to their welfare and security. Each group has its own private codes and signs for communication, rules of the group are strictly adhered with commensurable punishment for erring members. The importance of group solidarity among street children cannot be overemphasized.

Some of the problems facing children of the street

Analysis of focus group discussions showed that health related issues, accommodation and the problem of "Big Boys" as shown in the table below are the major challenges facing the street based children. Other problems are (mainly affecting the boys) are issues with feeding, ritual makers and the police.

Case 4b: The Police are not our biggest threat on the street. They only apprehend those boys who were using drugs, smoke hemp and play gamble, but they always let them off their hook after collecting all their money. Another problem is that of ' ritualists' who I had witnessed on two occasions came and took some of us away where we were sleeping (Male, 16).

Case 4c: They (big boys) raid our habitation almost every night around 1 - 3 am with cudgels and knives in their hands. Though, we knew and recognized many of them but we did not have the boldness to confront them since they were armed and were doing this under the influence of drugs and drink and they could kill or maim us. Also, in the broad daylight they deny involvement in such acts

and also beat the accuser up. They collect money with impunity from street boys to gamble and buy drugs (Boys, 14 and 15).

Also the in-depth interviews sessions revealed that the majority who asserted that they were keeping their money with people were doing so because of men who always raid them in the night (when asleep) and collect money found on them. These men (whom they referred to as "ALAYE") also made demands on the boys in the broad day light and whosoever among the boys who failed to oblige were seriously dealt with. Street boys referred to the process as "JOGGIN". These men were former street boys who are still residing in areas found within the vicinity of these garages during the time of data collection (though they were out of the street unlike street children because of their claim to accommodation, yet they spend all the day-time on the street serving as godfathers to errant boys).

Conclusion

As indicated by this study, the issue of street children cannot be related to a single cause in Nigeria like what exists in some countries. In line with the findings of this study there are several causes of the problem; and this explains the complexity of the issue. The phenomenon of street children which is regarded as one of humanity's most complex and serious challenges from the point of view of this study is generally a fallout of the modern urban environment with its multiple attendant problems. This finding supports earlier ones (Campos et al., 1994; Kopoka, 2000) that located the problem of street children within the socio-political and economic development of different societies. Although rapid urbanization, economic and industrial growth are necessary for development, yet fall-outs of these growth in Nigeria have generated enormous challenges for the urban social and physical environments, particularly in terms of the widespread poverty, overcrowding, breakdown of traditional family structures and values and lack of basic infrastructural amenities. These above mentioned factors have made significant number of children in urban areas, where these problems are pronounced in a bid to escape from these appalling living conditions result to living on the street in search of opportunities.

Consequent upon the aforementioned points, this study also establishes the fact that "children of the street" live alone in streets, without proper or reliable shelter; many have lost contact with their parents and, as such, they do not enjoy parental protection, love and care. The study also reveals that majority are boys while there are very few girls and that almost all of them were from slums and squatter settlements, where poverty and precarious family situations are common, where schools are over-crowded and poor. The very few ones one who come from middle class family ran away from home.

This study also affirms that several factors could lead

youngsters to the street but the most important factor that keeps them perpetually on the street is the unbridle freedom available on the street. The fact that they can do whatever they want on the street makes them detest strongly any idea of being subjected to any control.

Finally, the results of this study present a glimpse of the endemic nature of street based children in Nigerian society. These results contribute to knowledge in the multiple causes of the problems, lackadaisical approaches and measures introduced to solve the problem, effects of the problem on individuals, nation and the future of the affected children that have been mortgaged. The understanding of the underlying causes of the problem provides a starting point for designing initiatives for countering this menace. This study, therefore, affirmed that the solution to the problem of street based children is located in the various societal structures and responsibilities (that is the family, community, policy, research, government, education and the street children).

In spite of several experiences of street based children which have forced many into delinquency as consistently indicated by literature, the findings of the study against the common assumption that all street children have no moral value and are anti-social revealed that some still show a high degree of social sensitivity and dignity.

Recommendations

In order to effectively contain the menace of street based children, the following recommendations are suggested:

- The urgent need for a fundamental change in the socioeconomic structures of the country that subordinate children and their caregivers. The government should tackle poverty which is the root cause of the problem and invest greatly in development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty and its many dimensions with basic human rights of people to health, education, shelter and education must be strongly embraced by the governments at all levels.
- The traditional approach of curbing the problem of street children through punitive measures and repression should be discouraged and discarded by the various agencies of the government responsible for this. Instead of beating and incarcerating them, approved schools and good rehabilitation centres should be built where these children can be retrained.
- Also, several aspects of culture of the people that encourage child labour and alms begging should be discouraged. According to the study, some children who were initially sent to streets to beg for alms and hawk by parents/caregivers later became street based children after discovering unfettered freedom on street.
- The children that are still educable and willing to go back to school and others that are willing to be assisted in the area of procuring tools needed to work with should

be assisted by the governments, individuals, and institutions to realize their ambitions and goals. Opportunities for formal, non-formal education and apprenticeship training which will give hope for better future should be provided.
- One of the limitations of this study is the difficulty in evaluation how representative the sample was. To this end, there is a clear need for a national survey on street children issue to enable the country to formulate policies for addressing the problem of street based children and its various manifestations.

Suggestion for further research

One of the major findings of this study is the issue of how older people who are plying their trades in the garages serve as "keepers of money" and other valuables for the street children. However, since it is out of scope of the study to probe the street children on whether these "keepers of money" and other valuables always pay/give back in full whatever they were given to keep, the researcher now suggest that this area should be explored further by other researcher who may wish to work in the area of street children.

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