



## ASSESSMENT OF ABUSE AMONG YOUNG FEMALE STREET HAWKERS IN ABAKALIKI EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The incidence of abuse among young female street hawkers in Abakaliki metropolis in Ebonyi state in Nigeria is on the increase. Due to declining economic situations of many low income earning households, young girls now find themselves contributing to the main sources of household income. This income generating activity that young girls undertake makes them vulnerable to various forms of abuse. This study was designed to examine the abuses among young female street hawkers in Abakaliki. A total of 200 young female hawkers were sampled. Questionnaire was administered to the sampled young female hawkers. The age bracket of some of the sampled young female hawkers on the streets was 10-15 years (44%), Others were (19-21), 48(24%), (15-18) years 43(21.5%) and those between (6-10) years were 21(10.5%). 112 (56.0%) out of 200 young girls sampled depend on their parents. Others were either depending on the relatives, guardians, provider or self. Findings of the study show that reasons given by the respondents for hawking were mostly for survival. Physical abuse ranked topmost on abuse experienced by the hawkers, 106(53%). Those who have hawked for more than one year were 139(69.5%), and 179(88.7%) of the hawkers were secondary school students, 136(29.4%) were in tertiary education, while 39(19.5%) were in primary education and only 3(1.5%) were not attending any school. Among the recommendations made by the authors were that government should implement the policy of "free and compulsory" education. Parents should be reoriented towards accepting their responsibilities in terms of taking care of their children. Vocational programme for the girls that hawk should be designed to increase their literacy level and as well earn a living and empowerment for self-reliance.

**KEYWORDS :** Abuse, Children, Hawking, Hawkers, Street Vocational, literacy

### 1.0 Introduction

A young person according to world health organization (WHO) is a child within the age of 0 – 19 years old. The Nigeria Labor Act defined a child as those who are 16 years of age and below, but International Labor Organization (ILO) brought it down to individuals below 15 years of age. (Ikechebulu, Udigwe, Ezechukwu, Nidinechi & Joe-Ikechebulu, 2008). This is because; the information released by One World UK (2010) revealed that the international minimum age for legal employment is 15 years old.

Abuse is the improper usage or treatment of a child...(Merriam – Webster Dictionary, 2013). Within the context of this study, abuse of a child constitutes all forms of physical and or emotional ill – treatment, exploitation and sexual abuse which result in actual or potential harm to the development or dignity, of a child, hawking on the street.

Physical abuse is taken as the form of abuse that results in actual or potential physical harm from interaction or lack of interaction, which is reasonable within the control of a person in the position of responsibility, power or trust.

Emotional abuse involves failure to provide a developmental and appropriate supportive environment so that the child can develop a stable emotional and social competence necessary to expiate her personal potential and in the context of the society in which the child dwells.

According to Ebigbo (2003), exploitation of a child is the use of a child in work or other activities for the benefit of others, e.g child labor, child prostitution among others. These activities are detrimental to a child's physical and mental health, education, spiritual or moral and social development.

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activities that she does not fully comprehend, the child is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and/or that violate the laws or social norms of a society.

Umar (2009), defined street hawking as the process whereby a child carries goods on the head by means of tray or minor forms of transportation like wheel barrow, bicycle, trolley among others moving from house to house, along the road or street, and motor parks in search of customers to buy her goods. The child usually shouts the name of the item she is selling or employs the use of bell to attract the attention of any interested customer. Therefore, a hawker is a person who offers goods for sale to the public without having a permanent

build – up structure from which to sell (Onwe 2014).

Strong relationship has been reported between parents or guardians' occupation and the child street hawking (Ekpe, 2006). He maintained that ninety nine (99%) of parents or guardians of children that hawk on the streets were either petty traders, government employed drivers, carpenters, and mechanics or were unemployed (Ekpe, 2006). Parental loss in forms of death of parent, divorce, separation or incapability also predisposes children to street hawking. This equally serves as a correlative factor of abuse to children street hawkers, because children with no parents or those with single parent spend more time hawking in order to make more money.

Negative consequences of street hawking include but not limited to accident, vagaries of weather (extremes of cold or heat), hunger and deprivation, robbery, kidnapping. In addition to the above mentioned risks, street hawking exposes children street hawkers to those home – rooted abuse as stated earlier (verbal, physical, sexual and psychological or emotional abuses). Many a time, children while hawking suddenly appear in front of car or window asking to buy their wares, often they are cursed, yelled at, rejected or denigrated in other ways (Polat, 2009; Turkis, 2009; UNCEF, 2009). Again, it is possible that majority of street hawking children have had something thrown at them in anger slapped or hit with objects, pushed or shoved, even threatened with knife or gun and inflicted on them physical harm. They can also be attacked by insane person who roam about unchecked. Their wares can as well be taken forcefully by some hungry adults (Tyler and Cauce, 2002).

This study was designed to highlight the magnitude of the problem and proffer practical solutions to the phenomenon of street hawking and abuse of children.

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

Abuse among young children street hawkers has become a universal and a major public health problem because of its awful outcomes. In this study, the outcomes and effects of abuse among street hawker children have been grouped into five overarching categories that require adequate attention, so as to save the future generations of our nation.

Effects on general health, growth and development, Education, Reproductive and sexual behavior, mental health and behavior, Impact on economic management.

Street hawking involves a lot of trekking, long stay without food,

resulting to physical exhaustion and lack of nutrient necessary for proper growth and development. Poor development and stunted growth can limit actualization of a child's potential (Kid Health, 2013) in life to certain degree. For instance a child of 18years old still looks like a 5years old child. Street hawking also gives children no time to study, hence their educational career suffers for such children, the end product is poor academic performance and subsequent withdrawal or dropping out of school. This is one way to encourage delinquent behaviors (Ekwe, 2012).

Children who are sexually abused and molested in the course of street hawking are at higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infection (STI) including gonorrhoea and human immune virus (HIV), cervical cancer in case of multiple assailants which hamper the reproductive health of the child in later life (Ebigbo, 2003). Children who are sexually abused can easily graduate into commercial prostitution or develop coital phobia and vaginismus.

Some earlier studies on this phenomenon in Nigeria, (Onwe 2014, Ekwe, 2012, Ebigbo, 2003) had concentrated generally on location, types, intensity and the level of vulnerability of victims. The present study, apart from studying some of these factors in the context of the particular area of the study, went further to examine the personal characteristics, the most common form of abuses, the psychological effects (as given by the respondents) on their lives, and correlation of street hawking and abuse of the respondents.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- What are the personal characteristic of the respondents?
- What are the common types of abuse experienced by the respondents?
- What are the reactions of the respondents to abuse?

### 1.3 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between abuse (e.g sexual harassment like touching your breasts or buttocks) and the personal characteristics of respondents while hawking by their customers.
- There is no significant relationship between abuse (e.g pregating and/or transmission of STD) and the personal characteristics of the respondents as suffered by respondents while hawking.

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Study Design

This is a descriptive study carried out among young female hawkers in Abakaliki town Ebony state. All the hawkers who were encountered on the street while hawking and agreed to offer information were administered questionnaire and interviewed during the study.

### 2.2 Area of Study

Abakaliki is the capital city and the seat of government of Ebonyi state, one of the 36 states of Nigeria. People of Ebonyi state are predominantly farmers and traders. They produce various types of tuber, cereal crops and rice. The education and health facilities of the state are located in the capital territory that is Abakaliki. The inhabitants of the city/town Abakaliki are predominantly a collection of both civil servants of all cadre, students, traders and farmers (retrieved from <http://www.Ebonyionline> on 10<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2014).

Consequently, many of the people in Abakaliki town still live below poverty border line, hence send their children to engage in such unskilled economic activity as hawking on the streets.

### 2.3 Population

The targeted population in this study was girls (below the age of 21 years) who for one reason or the other engage in street hawking in Abakaliki metropolis, Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The girls were sampled purposely from the city. Most of the girls were sampled from the environs of Educational and Health facilities located in the city. These places are their favourite hawking spots..

### 2.4 Sampling Technique

Systematic and purposeful techniques were used as strategy in selection of the street hawkers that participated in the study. A total of 200 street hawkers were used for the study.

## 2.5 Reliability of the Instrument

Fifteen street hawkers from Abakaliki, Ebonyi state were given 15 copies (one to each) and their responses were noted. Two weeks later, another group of street hawkers were given the questionnaire and their responses correlated with the responses of the first group issued the questionnaire. The correlation index was high enough to justify the use of the questionnaire in the actual study. These pilot groups were not used in the actual study.

## 2.6 Data Collection

Primary data for the study was collected over a period of 3 months on Saturdays, from September to November 2014. Structured questionnaire was used in data collection. Secondary data involved review of past studies on abuse among young girl children street hawkers. The hawkers that participated in the study were recruited into study while hawking on the streets, educational and health facilities. Questionnaire was administered directly by the researchers and research assistants in vernacular and/or English depending on the respondent's level of education. The background information on each girl was collected, also data on history and type of abuse encountered.

## 2.7 Data Analysis

The data collected were subsequently analyzed using. Statistical analytic method. Percentages was used for analysis, logistic regression was used as test of significance with p value < 0.05 regarded as significant.

## 3.0 Research Findings And Analysis

In this section, the results obtained from data analysis with their interpretation are presented. Two hundred and ten (210) copies of questionnaire were administered; out of which two hundred and five (205) were returned and two hundred (200) were found usable for statistical analysis; representing 95.2% of the total number of questionnaires. To realize the objectives set for this study, the data were analyzed item by item using frequency tables and percentages.

### 3.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Descriptive statistics involving frequencies and their percentages were used to analyze data on demographic profiles of the respondents.

**Table 1:** Demographic and personal characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics	No of respondents	percentage
Age	21	10.5%
6-10	88	44.0%
10-15	43	21.5%
15-18	48	24.0%
19-21		
Total	200	100%
Marital status	179	89.5%
Single	21	10.5%
Married		
Education qualification	39	19.5%
Primary education	179	38.7%
Secondary education	136	29.4%
Tertiary education	3	1.5%
None		
Total	200	100%
Demographic characteristic	No of respondents	percentage
Dependent on	28	14.0%
Relatives	112	56.0%
Parents	21	10.5%
Guardian	6	3.0%
Provider	33	16.5%
Self		
Total	200	100%

The result on table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the respondents. As shown in the table regarding age, majority of the girls 88 (44.0%) were between the age of 10-15yrs, while 48 (24%) and 43(21.5%) were from the age group of 19-21yrs and 15-18yrs of age respectively, while 21(10.5%) were in the 6-10yrs. The result also shows that majority of the respondents 179 (89.5%) were single, while the rest 21(10.5%) were married. On their level of education, majority of the respondents 143 (71.5%) were in the secondary school education, 39 (19.5%) were in primary school while the rest 15(7.5%) were at tertiary education level and 3 (1.5%) were not attending school. On their dependency, majority of the respondents 112 (56%) depended

on their parents, 33 (16.5%) were self-dependants, 28 (14.0%) and 21(10.5%) of the respondents were dependent on Relatives and Guardians respectively, while 6 (3.0%) were dependent on providers.

**Table 2: Common forms of abuses and reactions of respondents to abuse.**

Research questions	No of respondents	Percentage
Why are you hawking?	79	39.5%
Parent send me	48	24.0%
“Oga”(master)/madam send me	73	36.5
To help self		
Total		
Total	200	100%
How long have you hawked?	61	30.5%
Less than one year	139	69.5%
More than one year		
Total	200	100%
Have you had accident while hawking?	146	73.0%
Yes	54	27.0%
No		
Total	200	100%
Has anyone talked to you in anger or cursed you while hawking?	146	53.0%
Yes	94	47%
No		
Total	200	100%
Have you been beaten, pushed or fought be anybody while hawking?	106	53.0%
Yes	94	47%
No		
Total	200	100%
Has anyone collected your item without paying you?	116	58.0%
Yes	82	42.0%
No		
Total	200	100%
How did you feel when you were abused?	82	41%
Shame	53	26.5%
Anxious	50	25.0%
Dejected	15	7.5%
Normal feeling		
Total	200	100%
Have you been sexually harassed like touching your breast or buttocks while hawking by your customers?	77	38.5%
Yes	123	61.5%
No		
Total	200	100%
What was your reactions to that?	12	15.6%
Shout	44	57.1%
Leave that place	21	27.3%
Pick offence with that person		
Total	200	100%
Has anyone tried to have sex with you by force during hawking?	63	31.5%
Yes	137	68.5%
No		
Total	200	100%
Has anyone bought all your goods or given you extra money to have sex with you?	73	36.5%
Yes	127	63.5%
No		
Total	200	100%
Have you been pregnant or had sexual transmitted infection due to what men did to you while hawking?	95	47.5%
Yes	105	52.5%
No		
Total	200	100%

Who is the perpetrator in above questions?	25	26.3%
Agboro (touts)	12	12.6%
Drivers	27	28.4%
Familiar	31	32.6%
Don't know the person		
Total	95	100%
Have you been beaten at home for not selling enough	45	22.5%
Yes	155	77.5%
No		
Total	200	100%
Were you given specific instructions by your madam or oga (master) on the minimum you should sell?	72	36.0%
Yes	128	64.0%
No		
Total	200	100%
Reason for continued hawking?	24	12.0%
Unemployment	128	64.0%
Survival	9	4.5%
Lack of shop	9	4.5%
Quick sale	30	15.0%
My aunti(aunt)		
Total	200	100%

On why the respondents are hawking, majority of them 79(39.5%) said they were sent by their parents. 73 (36.5%) were hawking to help themselves, while 48 (24.0%) were sent by oga/madam. The result showed that majority of the respondents 139 (69.5%) were hawking for more than one year, while 61(30.5%) were hawking for less than one year. Majority of the respondents, 146 (73.0%) responded yes as against 54 (27.0%) who said no to the question if, anyone has talked to them in anger or cursed them while hawking, majority of the hawkers 106 (53%) said yes as against 94 (47.0%) said no to the question if, they have been beaten, pushed or fought by anybody while hawking. Majority of the respondents 116 (58%) had their items collected without pay, while 84 (42.0%) always received their pay when they sell. Majority of the respondents 123 (61.5%) were not sexually harassed like touching their breast or buttocks while hawking by their customers as against 77 who were sexually harassed. Majority of the 77 respondents who were harassed 44 (57.1%) just left the place, 21 (27.3%) picked offence with the person while 12 (15.6%) shouted when they were being sexually harassed while hawking. Majority of the respondents 137 (68.5%) as against 63(31.5%) were not asked for sex by force during hawking. On the other hand majority of the hawkers, 127 (63.5%) said no as against 73(36.5%) said yes to the question, if anyone bought all their goods or given them extra money to have sex them while hawking.

About 105 (52.5%) responded no while 95 (47.5%) responded yes to the question if they were pregnant or had sexual transmitted infection due to what men do to them while hawking. With respect to 95 that said yes, majority of them 31 (32.6%) did not know the person, 27 (28.4%) were familiar with the perpetrators, 25 (26.3%) were victims of Agboro 9 (touts) while 12 (6.0%) were victims of drivers made them pregnant or gave them sexually transmitted infections or both while hawking. Majority of the respondents 155 (77.5%) have not been beaten at home for not selling enough, while 45 (22.5%) were beaten for not selling enough. It follows that majority of the respondents 128 (64.0%) responded no, while 72 (56%) responded yes to the question, were you given a specific instruction by your madam or oga(master) on the minimum they should sell. On the reason why they continued hawking, majority of them 128 (64.0%) were hawking for survival, 30 (15%) were sent by their aunts, 24 (12.0%) were hawking because of unemployment, while 9 (4.5%)were because of lack of shop and quick sale.

**3.2 Testing of hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between abuse (e.g sexual harassment like touching your breast or buttocks) and the personal characteristics of respondents while hawking by their customers.

**Table 3: Relationship between abuse and personal characteristics.**

Demographic characteristics	B	S.E	Wald	df	p-value	Odd ratio
Age	0.757	0.240	9.935	1	0.002	2.133
Marital status	19.078	8704.707	0.000	1	0.998	192992911.6
Level of education	0.071	0.418	0.029	1	0.865	41
Dependent - on constant	0.726	0.193	14.11	1	0.000	1.074
	-23.647	8704.707	7	1	0.998	2.067
			0.000			0.000

In the above Table, age and dependent - on are the major factors on the sexual harassment (like touching the breasts or buttocks) by customers ( $p < 0.05$ ) while hawking.

This implies that majority of the respondents 88 (44.0%) were 10-15yrs who are considered to be under-age and 33 (16.5%) were self-dependent

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between abuse (e.g. pregnant and transmission of STD) and the personal characteristics of the respondents as suffered by respondents while hawking.

**Table 4: Relationship between abuse (pregnating and infecting with STD) and personal characteristics of respondents**

Demographic characteristics	B	S.E	Wald	df	p-value	Odd ratio
Age	1.065	0.242	19.346	1	0.000	2.900
Marital status	19.171	8550.414	0.000	1	0.998	211682573.8
Level of education	-0.693	0.401	2.984	1	0.084	39
Dependent on constant	0.518	0.190	7.443	1	0.006	0.500
	-22.041	8550.414	0.000	1	0.998	1.679
						0.000

In the Table above, age and dependent - on are the major factors to those that were pregnant or had sexually transmitted infection due to what men did to them ( $p < 0.05$ ).

This implies that majority of the respondents 88 (44.0%) were 10-15yrs who are considered to be under-age and 33 (16.5%) were self-dependent.

#### 4.0 Discussion.

The study shows that hawking for long hours on the streets exposes children to many hazards including sexual, emotional and physical abuse. They also face a high risk of injury or even death. Some are even forced into child prostitution or other criminal activities. Similar findings are shown in: ILO, (2009); Turkis, (2009); Stanhope and Lancaster, (2003); Hadi, (2000).

Majority of the children included in this study reported experiencing verbal abuse 146(73%), physical abuse 106 (53.0%), and sexual abuse 77(38%) during their hawking time (table 2). Similar findings also abound in: Gharacibeb and Hoeman, (2003); Silva, (2002).

The study of Hadi (2000), found that 2.3% of all children were physically abused, 2% were financially exploited, 1.7% were forced to work for long hours. In Kalker, Varadan, & Kumar (2007), it was reported that two of every three children studied were physically abused, while 53.2% of the children reported one or more forms of sexual abuse and half reported emotional abuse. 593 children were exposed to abuse by unfamiliar people (Kurt et al., 2005).

In our study the respondents stated they were yelled at or shouted at with the perpetrators using rude, hostile behavior and swear words along with belittlement and humiliation toward the victims. Some of the children stated they were also abused physically and attacked with sharp instruments, as well as being kicked and hit. It was found that the most common sources of verbal and physical abuse were the *Agboros* (touts) table 2.

The results also show the majority of the children exposed to abuse had feelings of being shamed 82(41%), (table 2). Responses of the children sampled, in this study about the results of abuse includes. "I feel ashamed", "I cry", "I want to hit, but I am not a strong person"

Psychological responses to abuse such as anxiety, denial, self-hypnosis, disassociation and self-mutilation are reported, coping

strategies may include being angry with perpetrator or acting as a passive victim, rescuer, dare devil or conformist. Similar findings as reported above were recorded in Valente (2005).

In table 2, the majority of abused children used different coping methods: running away, responding with the same methods, fighting, and so on. These methods were summarized in their sentences like: "I do nothing, I swear" "I verbally warn him" "I run away from that place" "I cry" "I tell it a family member" A study by Ahmadvkhaniha et al (2007) revealed that 20.90% of children sexually abused employed similar coping methods. In addition, the study showed that among the children diagnosed with depression were 3.2 times more likely to have been sexually abused than children who were not depressed, children exposed to the various types of abuse were affected negatively physiologically, psychologically and socially, social isolation and feelings of loneliness may result from traumatic childhood experiences such as abuse or other psychosocial factors that lead to feeling estranged or misunderstood by others (Silva 2002.). A follow-up study to the present one may likely show similar results.

Finally, this study found that, majority of children interviewed preferred doing nothing and leaving the place of crime when they were exposed to the experience, however, this passive reaction to abuse may only create more anger and stress within the child, ultimately affecting their physical and mental health in negative way (Valente, 2005).

#### 5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study confirmed involvement of girls in hawking in Abakaliki, Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The girls are sent out to hawk by their parents or guardians to earn money for the family so as to make ends meet. The girls hawk on the daily basis after closing from schools and on weekends; this predisposed them to dangers and risks as well as affected their schooling. More importantly, most of the respondents were variously abused in different forms. Many of these children are not in schools and even when they attend schools they have little or no time to read at home or do their assignments as a result of long hours spent on hawking. Based on the above, the researchers recommend the following: There is need for advocacy campaigns to educate parents and children. The religious and traditional leaders should be sensitized and involved in the campaign against girl child street hawking. Also, schools should make effort in the fight against street hawking. When pupils especially girl(s) are out of school or absent from school, there should be proper arrangement to monitor the child's off-school activities. Such a child should be interrogated on the activities she engages in the previous day(s). If the reason was hawking, the parents of such a child should be sensitized on the consequences of the activities on the education of the child and her future life. There is need for appropriate implementation of the government policy of free and compulsory education in the state.

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