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# THE IMPACT OF STREET HAWKING ON THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN PORT HARCOURT LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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## ABSTRACT

*Street hawking is the most dominant form of child labour in most cities of Nigeria. This paper examines the impact of street hawking on the social and physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State. The welfare of children is an index of the social and economic development of any society. Child street hawking is a form of labour that has existed for quite some time and has continued to hamper the educational development of the children whose hope for our future generation lies on. Factors such as poverty, meeting family needs, and raising money for children's education were reasons identified as the causes of children street hawking were identified as some of the effects on the girl child. It was further visible that to most parents and guidance, street hawking is about making friends, caring for elder and younger family members and preparing them to take on the responsibilities of adulthood thereby ignoring such consequences like prostitution, rape, poor education, stealing, teenage pregnancy, high rate of STDs including HIV infection, high illiteracy, youth alcohol and drug addiction, all forms of delinquent and criminal behaviours, exposure to road accidents and moral decline on the children. The paper is anchored on Marxian political economy which is a strand of conflict perspective. In this perspective, street hawking may be attributed to factors like unemployment, low wages, poverty, inflation, massive retrenchment, poor quality of life, broken homes and adverse economic environment. On this realization, therefore, this study recommends amongst others that government should ensure that existing laws on violence against children and child labour be strengthened and made more effective to curb street hawking in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Street hawking, social wellbeing, physical wellbeing, children.

## INTRODUCTION

The future of any society depends solely on the development of children and youth. Proper development which encapsulates relevant and global education is therefore ineluctably tied to sustainable national development. There is therefore no doubt that child hawkers are most unlikely to contribute significantly to societal development because they lack education hence the interest in this subject matter. Aiyehuro (2009) defines hawking as a system of trading whereby the trader carries his wares about. Street hawking refers to a wandering-like movement in which an individual carries his or her goods with a tray on the head or uses transportation such as a wheelbarrow, bicycle or trolley in search of customers. This is usually accompanied by at least one form of advertisement - shouting the name of the item on sale, using a bell or special mannerisms to attract the attention or interest of the public (Anyanwu, 2007). It is a trading activity characterized by movement across the street in residential areas in which the hawker aims to sell his goods to any interested buyer. Ezenwa (2011) opines that an adolescent street hawker is a person under the age of 15 years who hawks goods and renders services on a commercial road or street.

In recent years, child hawkers have been faced with a lot of risks. For instance, in Port Harcourt local government area, there are several cases involving young girls as young as ten who are sexually active and who trade in sexual favours for money alongside whatever commodities they are peddling. This scourge is not limited to the female gender alone as male children also fall victim to sexual offenders as well. The consequences of these acts include unwanted pregnancies, illegal and unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted diseases and psychological trauma (Akigir, 2012). These child hawkers suffer frustration and psychosocial disorientation. The dramatic increase in child labour and street hawking in Port Harcourt local government area may be attributed to several factors. These factors include the rapid population growth of the city, high rate of unemployment, inflation low wages and deplorable working conditions which have propelled children to engage in street hawking to help support their families (Charles and Charles, 2004, Deth, 2007). Ebigbo and Abaja (2003) maintain that street hawking exposes children to sexual abuse and consequently to HIV/AIDS infections. Children who engage in street hawking may indulge in criminal acts like prostitution, armed robbery and pickpocketing (Hubert, 2009; Humphries, 2010). The problems associated with urbanization are human and environmental poverty, declining quality of life, untapped wealth and human resources.

Aderinto (2006) asserts that street trading exposes the operators to various risks and health hazards as most children end up engaging in various economic activities like bus conducting, load carrying, car washing, and hawking earlier as a means of survival. In Port Harcourt local government area, hawkers are seen on major streets of the city and the majority of them are young people mostly teenagers.

These children are usually sent out to hawk by their parents or guardians to earn money for the family. However, these child hawkers are exposed to certain dangers. In some cases, they are knocked down by reckless drivers. There are cases where some of these children are abducted and used for ritual purposes (this is very rampant and currently ongoing). Female hawkers are raped by either male customers or strangers. Many of these children do not attend school and even when they do, they have little or no time to work on after-school assignments or to rest. Due to the usual high level of trekking involved in hawking activity, risks of road traffic accidents, physical exhaustion, sexual harassment such as rape, molestation and different forms of exploitation are believed to be associated with street hawking (Okojie, 2007).

Some social and psychological problems are also associated with street hawking. For instance, it exposes the not yet fully equipped or maturing child hawker to thirst due to sweat and hunger following long trekking but more importantly to undue exposure to strangers including those with ignoble intentions (Ezenwa, 2011). Several studies have examined the physical and psychological hazards associated with adolescent street hawkers but one area which has received little attention is the social and physical health factors associated with street hawking. African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN, 1993) study on street children in Nigeria shows that hawkers mentioned the following problems like tiredness, hunger, loss of money to criminals, headaches, body pains, problems with their masters, lack of school attendance, pains in the eyes, touching of sensitive parts of their bodies especially their breasts and buttocks, heaviness of head and neck, dizziness, etc. In his contribution, Maduka (2006) identified some problems associated with street hawking including an increase in teenage pregnancy high rate of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) among teenagers, rape, high illiteracy among the youth, youth alcohol and drug addiction.

In a study carried out by Ekpenyong and Sibiri (2011) on street hawking and child labour, the findings indicate that street hawking and child labour reflect chronic urban poverty which can compel parents to send children of school age to work to boost family income for many hours each day. The study shows that 64% of the hawkers are females while 36% of them are males. The implication is that more females engage in street hawking than males. Results of the study also show that 98% of the respondents are from very poor families opening the door to survival-driven occupation. Ogbuagu (2004) carried out a study in Awka and the findings of his study show that children engage in hawking due to lack of income and education of their parents. Nsiong and Erne (2011) carried out a study on juvenile street hawkers in Uyo.

Results of the study show that juvenile street hawkers develop maladjusted patterns of behaviour which in turn may impair their academic, moral, social, physical and psychological growth and development thus affecting their future negatively. Aderinto and Okunola (1998) carried out a study in Ado-Ekiti, South Western Nigeria and they identified problems like truancy, exposure to hazards of weather, fatigue, high potential for accidents, exposure to kidnappers, rape and recruitment into hawking drugs by drug barons, early unwanted pregnancy and contraction of STDs. Ashimolowo et al. (2010) carried out a study on street trading activities and their effects on the educational attainment of its victims in the Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State. The findings show that waste is generated by street hawkers as a result of indiscriminate dumping along the streets; gutters and drainage.

Also, the study indicates that children who engage in street hawking perform badly in school to face hawking fully. These studies on street hawking have identified the various factors that influence street hawking in major cities in Nigeria. Also, the studies threw light on the social, psychological and physical problems associated with street hawking yet little is said about the government invoking the relevant portions of the law to address these prevalent circumstances not only in Port Harcourt but other cities in Nigeria. Arising from these positions, this study is aimed at unravelling the impact of street hawking on children in the Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State.

For our position to be more precise, the following questions would be answered: (a) how has street hawking affected the educational attainment of children in Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State? (b) What could be the possible approach to mitigate the problem of street hawking amongst children in Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers

State? These questions beg for answers consequent upon the fact that the improvement of the education of children cannot be overstretched because it is a vital aspect of sustainable development. Correspondingly, the specific objective of this study is to investigate how street hawking affects the well-being of children in the Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State. Our geographical and unit scope is Port Harcourt city and its environment; employing an analytical approach as its design.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Marxian Theory (a strand of the conflict theory).**

The Marxian theory, also known as Marxism, is a sociopolitical and economic theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Antonio, 2011). It provides a critical perspective on society and emphasizes the role of social class and the unequal distribution of power and resources. In the context of the paper, the Marxian theory offers valuable insights into understanding the root causes and consequences of street hawking about children's well-being. The Marxian theory analyzes society by examining the dynamics of social classes and their struggle for resources and power. It posits that capitalism, the dominant economic system, leads to the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class (Fuchs, 2021). The theory argues that capitalism is inherently marked by inequality and alienation, with the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) dominating and exploiting the proletariat (working class). These fundamental ideas from the Marxian theory can be directly correlated to the issue of street hawking and its impact on children in Port Harcourt.

Street hawking involves children engaging in informal sector activities to earn a living by selling goods or services on the streets. This phenomenon often emerges due to poverty, limited opportunities, and the exploitation of labour. The Marxian theory provides a lens to explore the underlying structural issues that contribute to street hawking and its consequences on the social and physical well-being of children. It helps to uncover the unequal power relations and exploitative dynamics that perpetuate this form of child labour. One key aspect of the Marxian theory relevant to the paper is the concept of alienation. According to Marx, capitalism alienates individuals from the products of their labour, the process of production, and from each other. This alienation is particularly pronounced in the context of child street hawking. Children engaged in street hawking often experience isolation, as they are removed from formal education, social interactions with peers, and a nurturing environment. Instead, they face daily encounters with harsh realities, including exploitation, abuse, and the risk of accidents or violence.

Another central tenet of the Marxian theory is the notion of class struggle. Marx argues that social change is driven by the tension and conflicts between different social classes. In the case of street hawking, it is essential to examine the power dynamics between the child hawkers and the larger society (Uthman, 2019). The paper can analyze the socioeconomic circumstances that push children into street hawking and the response of the dominant classes, including government policies, regulatory frameworks, and social attitudes. By doing so, the paper can shed light on the power imbalances and social inequalities that perpetuate and sustain the practice. Furthermore, the Marxian theory also emphasizes the importance of social change and revolution to address the contradictions and injustices of capitalism. The paper can explore the potential strategies and interventions informed by the Marxian theory that could alleviate the negative effects of street hawking on children's well-being. This may include proposing policies aimed at reducing child poverty, improving access to education, and providing alternative economic opportunities for vulnerable families. Importantly, the

paper should also critically assess the limitations of the Marxian theory in providing comprehensive solutions and consider the perspectives of other theories or frameworks to complement its analysis.

In conclusion, the Marxian theory provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the impact of street hawking on the social and physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt. By focusing on the dynamics of social classes, alienation, and class struggle, the theory helps uncover the underlying structural factors driving child labour in this context. Analyzing the issue through a Marxist lens allows for a critical examination of power imbalances, social inequalities, and the need for systemic change to address the negative consequences of street hawking on children.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Street Hawking**

Street hawking in its whole idea as used in this study referred to a situation where one offers goods and services for sale to the public on the streets. This also involves going around the major highways or public areas to sell goods or services. Street hawking may be stationary by occupying space on the pavement or other public or private areas or maybe mobile in the sense that they move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts, in circles or baskets on their heads or other plastic carriers. Street hawking or street selling in Nigeria and Africa at large is a unique phenomenon that arose out of the need to solve societal problems such as unemployment, poverty and consumer goods accessibility. It is a booming informal sector that has proved resilient despite various governmental efforts aimed at eradicating it.

However, the involvement of teenage girls in street hawking should be an issue of great concern to every critical stakeholder. This is because of the potential danger, challenges and vulnerabilities that always accompany it.

### **Delinquent Gang**

Delinquent gangs as used here refer to the slum areas of the city where large armies of children are crowded in small areas, due to inadequate parental care and supervision. These children join bad groups as a result of street hawking and the desire for companionship. The environment in which a person lives may influence his/her behaviour. Given this, children who live in the ghetto or slum areas of the city are more likely to engage in acts of street hawking than their counterparts who live in highbrow areas. Some social factors like broken homes, homes of little understanding, affection, stability and moral fibre may influence children's involvement in street hawking. With the growing number of informal entrepreneurs, hawking will continue to expand in size and prominence in developing economies.

### **The Child**

The child simply put in this study, refers to the teenager who is usually not more than 15 years old. Also, a child is a person who has not attended puberty age and can never handle the responsibility of mature persons. By the UN standard, it is the person that falls between the ages of 0 and 17 years old. They go to school, help with housework, work in factories, make friends, care for older and younger family members and prepare themselves to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. A child plays multiple roles in the household, society and the economy with an undeniable right. The rights of a child include non-discrimination; the right

to survival and development of potential; protection from harmful influences, abuses and exploitation; and full participation in family, cultural and social life.

### **Gang Stealing**

Gang stealing as used in this study; means crimes that involve the unauthorized taking of the property of another with the intent to deprive them of it permanently by a person or group of persons. Because street hawking children are exposed to a lot of negative things, they can form a group that goes out to steal people's property. They were always on the streets making possible efforts to make money hence lacking in morals. Out of hunger, they can make plans on how to troop into areas and steal. Most of them in the course of doing this may get shot by security men and that ends their journey in life. These children from the experience they had from stealing at a young age sometimes end up being highway armed robbers terrorizing the whole state. They become a problem to the community by robbing various government establishments, banks, markets and other places they know they will realize a good sum of money after their operations.

### **Factors Influencing Street Hawking**

Street hawking refers to the act of selling goods or services, typically of a low value, on the streets. It is a common phenomenon in many cities around the world, including Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The reasons why people engage in street hawking are diverse, and they are influenced by several factors. This essay will explore and explain in detail the main factors influencing street hawking in Port Harcourt, with a specific focus on economic factors, social factors, and regulatory factors.

**Economic Factors:** Economic factors play a significant role in influencing street hawking in Port Harcourt. One of the main reasons for engaging in street hawking is poverty. Many people who engage in street hawking come from low-income families and lack access to formal employment opportunities. They resort to hawking as a means of survival and to generate income for themselves and their families (Onodugo et al., 2020). The inability to secure formal employment due to the economic situation in Port Harcourt pushes individuals towards street hawking as a viable economic activity. Another economic factor influencing street hawking in Port Harcourt is the low start-up capital required. Unlike setting up a formal business, street hawking does not require a significant amount of capital investment. Individuals can start hawking with a small inventory of goods, and they can replenish their stock as they generate income from sales. This low barrier to entry makes street hawking an attractive economic option for individuals who lack the financial resources to start a formal business (Ebiringa & Amaefule, 2021).

Furthermore, the profitability of street hawking contributes to its popularity in Port Harcourt. Street hawkers often operate in high-traffic areas where they can target a large number of potential customers. This increased customer base allows them to generate substantial sales and make profits despite the low prices of their products or services (Olatunji & Oyelade, 2016). The potential for profitability attracts individuals to engage in street hawking as a means of economic sustenance.

**Social Factors:** Social factors also play a significant role in influencing street hawking in Port Harcourt. One such factor is the presence of cultural norms and practices that support street hawking. In some communities, street hawking is considered a legitimate and acceptable means of livelihood. The cultural acceptance of street hawking encourages individuals, particularly those from specific ethnic backgrounds, to engage in this economic

activity as a way of preserving their cultural practices and traditions (Ogba & Obilor, 2016). Moreover, the high unemployment rate in Port Harcourt contributes to the social acceptance of street hawking. With limited job opportunities available, street hawking is often viewed as a better alternative to idleness. It provides individuals with a sense of purpose, as they can actively seek out opportunities and engage in economic activities, even if it is through street hawking (Anyeh & Nkalu, 2020).

Furthermore, social networks and social capital influence the decision to engage in street hawking. Many street hawkers operate in groups or associations, which provide them with a support system and a sense of community (Chijioke, 2018). These social networks offer opportunities for knowledge sharing, shared resources, and protection against exploitation. Individuals may choose street hawking over other forms of employment due to the perceived social benefits of belonging to a group engaged in similar economic activities.

**Regulatory Factors:** Regulatory factors also play a crucial role in influencing street hawking in Port Harcourt. The absence or inadequacy of laws and regulations governing street hawking contributes to its prevalence. Without clear regulations, street hawkers can operate freely without facing legal consequences (Ebiringa & Amaefule, 2021). The lack of enforcement encourages individuals to engage in street hawking as they perceive it as a low-risk economic activity. Additionally, limited alternative employment opportunities contribute to the proliferation of street hawking. When formal employment opportunities are scarce or inaccessible, individuals are more likely to resort to street hawking as a means of survival (Onodugo et al., 2020). The lack of job opportunities creates a push factor towards street hawking, as it becomes one of the few available avenues for economic sustenance.

Furthermore, the informal nature of street hawking makes it difficult to regulate effectively. Street hawkers often operate in public spaces without proper licenses or permits, making it challenging for authorities to monitor and enforce regulations (Ogba & Obilor, 2016). This lack of regulation not only affects the economic viability of street hawking but also contributes to issues such as congestion and public health concerns. In other words, several factors influence street hawking in Port Harcourt. Economic factors such as poverty, low start-up capital requirements, and profitability contribute to its prevalence. Social factors, such as cultural acceptance, unemployment, and social networks, also play a significant role. Additionally, regulatory factors, including the absence of laws, limited alternative employment opportunities, and the informal nature of street hawking, contribute to its growth. Understanding these factors is essential for policymakers and stakeholders in developing strategies to address the challenges associated with street hawking and provide alternative economic opportunities for vulnerable individuals in Port Harcourt.

### **Impact of Street Hawking on Social and Physical Wellbeing of Children**

The impact of hawking on the social and physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt has been a matter of concern for a long time. Hawking refers to the act of selling goods on the streets or in public places by young children, who are often forced to engage in this activity due to poverty or family circumstances. This practice not only affects the children's social development but also poses risks to their physical health. This essay aims to explore the impact of hawking on the social and physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt by examining its effects on education, social interactions, and physical health. Hawking has a detrimental effect on the education of children in Port Harcourt. Children engaged in street vending are forced to forgo their schooling responsibilities, as they spend most of their time

selling goods to earn money for their families. Oshita in Akah (2021) opined that child street vendors in Port Harcourt reported insufficient time to attend school, resulting in significant disruptions to their education due to lack of education not only limits their future opportunities and career prospects but also perpetuates the cycle of poverty, as education is key to breaking this cycle.

Furthermore, hawking negatively impacts the social interactions of children in Port Harcourt. No wonder Okoro and Nzeadibe (2018) highlighted that street vending isolates children from their peers and community. By spending hours on the streets, children miss out on opportunities to engage in social activities, such as sports, games, and relationships. The authors explain that this isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and a lack of belongingness. Thus, hawking restricts children's social development and contributes to a sense of exclusion from societal norms. In addition to the social consequences, hawking has a negative impact on the physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt. The working conditions in which these children engage in street vending are often harsh and dangerous. They are exposed to various hazards, including traffic accidents, physical abuse, and exploitation by unscrupulous adults. According to a report by UNICEF Nigeria in Charity (2020), child hawkers are at a higher risk of physical injuries and even death due to their exposure to hazardous working conditions. Moreover, the long hours spent on the streets leave little time for rest, proper nutrition, and access to healthcare, resulting in compromised physical health and increased vulnerability to diseases.

To address the impact of hawking on the social and physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt, several measures should be implemented. Firstly, there is a need for policies and interventions that aim to eradicate child trafficking through the provision of social protection programs and economic empowerment for families living in poverty. By addressing the root causes of hawking, such as unemployment and poverty, children may have alternative opportunities for education and development. Secondly, community-based initiatives can play a crucial role in supporting the social integration of children engaged in hawking. Creating safe spaces, recreational activities, and mentorship programs can help combat the isolation and psychological challenges faced by these children. Such initiatives can foster a sense of belongingness and provide opportunities for positive social interactions.

Finally, efforts should be made to improve the enforcement of child protection laws and regulations. These laws should seek to provide adequate penalties for those who exploit or abuse child hawkers, ensuring that their rights are protected. Furthermore, sensitization campaigns and public awareness programs can help educate communities about the negative consequences of child hawking and encourage them to report any instances of child exploitation or abuse. In conclusion, the impact of hawking on the social and physical well-being of children in Port Harcourt is significant and problematic. It hinders their education, isolates them socially, and exposes them to physical hazards. To mitigate these negative effects, concerted efforts should be made at the policy, community, and societal levels to eradicate child hawking, provide economic empowerment, and ensure the protection and well-being of children in Port Harcourt.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Even though the government has made several attempts to curb the high rate of street hawking in Nigeria, the practice persists on the streets of Port Harcourt. Some institutions and non-governmental organizations like Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication



Foundation (WOTCLEF), African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), The Nigerian Children's Parliament (NCP), African Women Empowerment Group (AWEG), National Council of Child Right Advocates of Nigeria (NACCARAN) and National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) have been established to address the problem of street hawking but the problem seems to be unabated. Consequent to the prevalent circumstances and challenges posed by children's street hawking in Port Harcourt, this study postulates the following recommendations:

- The government should ensure that existing laws initiated by the Rivers State House of Assembly on street hawking which is a form of child labour are strengthened and made more effective with enforceable penalties to discourage parents and guardians who send their children to hawk on the road or streets. These laws should be implemented to serve as a deterrent to others rather than enacting new ones.
- Various levels of Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) should organize sensitization programmes in the form of seminars and workshops to enlighten and educate people on the problems and dangers associated with street hawking. They should be informed about the mental, physical social and psychological consequences of street hawking on children.
- Government should come up with possible and enduring measures to alleviate the stinking level of unemployment and poverty on the land which are the major factors that encourage street hawking in most families. Industries in the Trans-Amadi area of Port Harcourt should be revamped to enable individuals who are in the private sector to join hands with the government to create employment for the citizens in Rivers State. Again, the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) set up by the government should be functional and give preference to the poor individuals in society. In this way, parents will be gaining income and so will not be expecting their children to hawk and earn income for the family.
- Parents should be encouraged to engage in family planning. This will enable them to have only the number of children they can cater for. It has been observed that some parents who earn low income usually send their children out to hawk on the road to earn additional income for the financial upkeep of their families since their meagre salary cannot take care of their family's strength and needs.

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