

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF STREET HAWKING ON THE NIGERIAN CHILD, THE CASE OF ENUGU URBAN, ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This papers surveyed the psychological effects of hawking on the life of the Nigerian child as seen in Enugu State, Nigeria. Hawking in Nigeria all over has come to be a common sight to behold. Both boys and girls are involved in the act of hawking. Hawking can be defined as the kind of trading whereby goods or wares are carried about from place to place soliciting for buyers. This paper discovered series of factors which are associated with this hydra headed monster which has adverse effect on the child in Nigeria. Some of the factors are economic, cultural as well as social. Some other factors which characterize this phenomenon is the background of the family. The study suggests that children should be withdrawn from the streets and sent back to school.

Keywords: Hawking, Psychological effects and the Child.

Introduction:

Hawking is to sell goods informally in public places. It is also to sell goods especially noisily or aggressively on the street, and to clear the throat of phlegm. In the developed countries of the world, it is common site to see vendors hawking tea, watches, T. shirts, chickens and just about everything else. It is common knowledge to see both old and the young in almost all the streets in Nigeria hawking their goods which range from groundnut, pears, touch light, phone covers, chargers, oranges, egg-roll,

Biscuits and so on. People could hawk from one street to another while in others it could be from one house to another or from door to door. Yet in some situations people are seen to hawk from one motor park to another as much as others could do the same along the high ways where there is a hold up or police and Army check points. The reason for the choice of such places is where customers could be easily found and reached. We must note that this method of trading is the most common mode found in Nigeria especially in big cities like Enugu, Lagos, Umuahia, Abakaliki, Abuja etc.

It can be observed in almost all situations, that boys and girls in their teens are involved in this business. Most of these young teenagers are supposed to be found in school but the contrary is the case. Even though ANPPCAN, that is the African Network for the Protection and Prevention against Child Abuse and Neglect has variously campaigned against this trend, it is obvious that it is on the increase.

Ebigbo (1998) as in Agbafor (2014) was of the view that if this trend is not checked the social ills it will breed, will remain uncontrollable. It is also common knowledge that young men and women have fully joined in the trade.

Common factors responsible for street hawking:

Factors that are often associated with or responsible for hawking especially as it affects the small boys and girls are in some, if not in most cases economic, social and cultural in nature.

i. Economic Factor

Ezeuwa (2010) opined that hawking can be associated with lower socio-economic status and extreme poverty. It is common knowledge that a typical Nigerian is known to have many children who are illiterates, of low educational status and worse of all, of low income. In these very difficult days economic situation, parents send their children out to the wider society to win the bread for the family.

ii. Cultural Factor

Economic factors are closely related to Cultural factors. Two things call to mind, boys are often regarded as future breadwinners and as such they are exposed early enough to the trade. Girls also are seen as those who should lend a helping hand in order to make food available to the home. In some cases, there is always the idea that part of the proceed will go a long way in paying some of the family bills and even the school fees of children

The girls are equally reminded that part of the proceeds will be used to prepare them or buy goods and family items ready for their marriages.

In the Northern part of Nigeria, the practice of Pardah restricts adult woman to their homes during the day, and as such, the younger children are made to do the work the adults should be doing. Some of these children start to hawk at an age where they are too young and ignorant to even count money properly according to Ashingu (2008). This means that the trend grows unabated in spite of Government efforts to send children to school.

The case of the Almagiris in the Northern part of Nigeria is rather worrisome. Where children are born and sent to the streets to fend for themselves on daily basis is rather not good for such children.

Occupational hazards associated with hawking:

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As a matter of fact, hawking as a form of trade has its associated hazards or risks, but it will be noted that its risk elements becomes even higher when the traders are very young boys and girls. International Labour Organization(ILO 1998) suggests as follows;

- (i) It exposes these very innocent and promising children to sexual assaults and harassment, especially the girls and in some cases the boys too. This is because, the places where they go to sell their wares, such as entering the houses of people, offices, workshops, and other public places or even hidden environments make them very vulnerable to sexual abuse by their buyers or customers.
- (ii) Teenage pregnancy associated with sexual molestation and abuse, is the concomitant effect of teenage pregnancy. Most of these young girls are so immature that, exposed to the problem of pregnancy, they develop some complications such a vestico virginal fistulae (VVF) and Restico virginal Fistulae (RVF) which are complete inability to control both the bowels and the bladder. The consequences are their being throughout by either their parents or would be husbands. Today, it is common sight to see girls who themselves are mothers in their early years.
- (iii) The distance which these young boys and girls cover per day in the process of their trade is rather very long. The result is that they

come back home and very weak and tired each day and some time sick with little or no medical attention. The obvious consequence is their untimely death.

- (iv) Exposure to road accidents. Because the hawkers who are always trekking may have the need to cross the highways, especially in places where there are no pedestrian bridges, they become victims of road accidents. Some die out rightly while those who survive, have the rest of their lives to live on wheel chairs or have damages done to them which stays for the rest of their lives.
- (v) Exposure to harsh climatic conditions. In Nigeria, the excessive cold during the harmattan and the heat during the dry seasons respectively deal with these children. Some of them catch cold during the harmattan period.

In consideration of the above, one would then ask if there is really any gains at all which families derive from this trends. Can the family, society and even individuals say for sure that there is any gain in hawking.

Objective of the study

It is actually in view of the inherent risks associated with street hawking that this study is embarked upon with the objective of finding out the individual/personal experiences of the hawkers in Enugu urban of Enugu State Nigeria.

The survey tends to:

- discover personal benefits the traders derive from hawking.
- what themselves encounter in the course of their business
- also unearth what the ambitions of the young boys and girls are.
- suggest intervention strategy to be adopted to help them to improve their various situations.

The data was collected through questionnaires, oral interviews. The respondents were met in the open streets, shops, and other areas of operation; their responses were made under close observation by the researcher. The areas which formed the basis of the survey are the densely populated areas such as Uwani, Abakpa Nike, Emene, Ogbete, Coal Camp and Iva Valley.

Findings

The findings which are based on a population of 400 that is 200 for boys and 200 for girls, are highlighted below:

Age of children involved; The data revealed that the ages of these children range or fall between 7-16 years. A reasonable percentage as much show that up to 25% fall between a lower age, like 5-11 while others fall between 11-16 which denotes a great show of child labour. It is equally noted that another segment fall between or from 16-24 years.

Educationally; some of them are house helps who go out to hawk and attend afternoon school session, while others

are not enrolled at school at all. The percentage of the above is up to 51%. The problem here is that they may end up acquiring little or no education at all.

The other 49% that are enrolled fully are either at the primary or Junior Secondary School level and they combine the act of hawking and schooling.

Kinds of goods they hawk; As mentioned earlier in the work, they hawk things like groundnuts, pure water (sachet water) baked foods such as egg rolls, meat pie, pineapples etc. These goods they sell in order to supplement the family income.

Daily income; their daily income range from ₦500= to about ₦1000 depending on what they sell.

Discussion of findings

The survey has revealed that street hawking is rather a menace to the society rather than gain especially to these would be leaders of tomorrow, and the society will be at risk at the end.

In the first instance, the lives of these young people are exposed to danger. They are open to accidents which claim their lives and examples abound of such. Others are exposed to harsh climatic conditions to make them fall prey to sicknesses while yet others, especially the girls are open to unwanted pregnancies and sexual abuse.

Some boys are exposed to a gang of irresponsible boys who introduce them to the use of hard drugs such as heroine,

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cocaine, tramadol, and abuse of alcohol. Some become cultists and outright criminals at a later stage in their lives.

Secondly, most of them drop out of school. Those who are able to finish their studies become very weak academically. Those who combine hawking and schooling cannot adequately compete with their counter parts who have all the time to read, well fed and cared for. For such children, the prospect of realizing their dreams of becoming Doctors, Engineers etc is slain on the alter of hawking.

Hawking creates a very poor self image. Some of the child sees themselves as rejects and who cannot socialize with their peers. They lack self confidence. They think not positively about themselves and their future.

Some experiences traumatize them. Sometimes their goods are stolen, or spilled over or some customers refuse to pay out rightly.

Conclusion

This is an era of youth empowerment, yet the Nigerian society has not helped matters because a good number of children, boys and girls are out there in the streets, with all the attendant problems.

Suggestions

Proper Education of parents should be intensified to ensure that their children are brought out from the streets.

The Government, the NGO's, social Institutions should pull their resources together to ensure a successful transition of these young people to successful adults.

Policies and strategies must be evolved by the Government to give these children access to education.

Basic needs must be made available to these children so that they can become more useful to their families and the society at large.

Illiterate parents should be reached out to by the government with a view to educating them on the dangers of exposing these children to the streets.

The church, philanthropists and the government should build skills acquisition centres where these boys and girls will acquire skills for life.

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