

‘TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO’ (PROVERBS 22:6) : ASSESSING THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN IN THE STREET HAWKING BUSINESS IN OBOLLO-AFOR, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Children from the Old Testament perspectives are to be trained in a moral way for a better society; however, the increasing phenomenon of children hawking in the various streets in Obollo-Afor, Nigeria, This article provides an assessment of the experiences of children who are into street hawking in Obollo-Afor and its implications for faith-based organizations. There are various studies on street hawking in Nigeria; however, Obollo-Afor, where child street hawkers have received attention from the researchers, In this study, literature was extended into discovering their experiences and the impact of their experiences on themselves, their family, and the society at large. This study utilised a qualitative approach. The subjects of this study comprised child street hawkers in Obollo, spanning the period from 2023 to 2024. A purposeful sampling method was employed, with fifteen informants (n = 15) chosen for Key Informant Interviews (KII). The research utilised a semi-structured questionnaire. The findings were analysed using content analysis. The trustworthiness criteria established by Guba and Lincoln were satisfied to evaluate the quality of the findings. Emerged themes include: a) inability to afford school fees; b) conflict in home community; c) no background in literacy; d) long-term held beliefs and customs; e) physical and mental stress; f) sexual abuse; and g) child smoking. Recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: Children, Violence, Child hawkers, Obollo-Afor, Nigeria, Faith-based organisations.

Introduction

Child abuse is a persistent feature in Nigeria, beginning from the north to the south. In southern Nigeria, there are different forms of child abuse ranging from physical to sexual abuse. However, notwithstanding the imprisonment of defaulters, the phenomenon of child abuse is still on the rise. Southern Nigeria is made up of three major regions. There is the east, west, and south. The east is majorly made up of the Igbo ethnic group, the west is made up of the Yoruba ethnic group, and the south is made up of the Urobo, Itsekiri, Efik, among others. The concern of this article is on the eastern region of southern Nigeria.

The eastern region is made up of five states, which are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States. There have been studies on child abuse in these states. In a study conducted by Kalu, Onyeonoro, Amuzie, & Nwamoh (2024), in Abia state children are abused based on their educational status, level of income, and place of residence. In another study carried out by Ajaegbu, Madubuike, Ezeonwu, Uchendu, Obidike, Agu, & Ajaegbu (2023), it was discovered that in Anambra state, most of the abuse took place in the perpetrators homes, 47 (38.8%), followed by uncompleted buildings, 14 (11.6%), and that vaginal penetration, 69 (85.2%), was the commonest form of sexual abuse seen, followed by anal penetration, 12 (14.8). In a finding by Oteh, Ogbuke, and Iheriohanma (2009), most of the children have similar features, like their parents being poor, them finding it difficult to meet their financial needs, and so they are sent out to hawk, beg, and serve as maids as their contributions to poverty alleviation in the family. They

further quipped that most of the victims of child abuse did not understand the implications or dangers they were exposed to in the process because they saw their engagements as an immediate solution to their financial predicaments. In another study carried out by Anyaoha, Ajaegbu & Emetumah (2024) in Imo State, it was discovered that a high prevalence of sexual abuse among male secondary school students in Owerri in particular and in Imo State in general was found. This is despite the prevailing notion that men cannot be victims of sexual abuse due to cultural beliefs that make men and boys delay or not disclose sexual abuse in order not to be seen as weak. However, finding a study on children in the hawking business, which is a serious form of child abuse, precisely in Obollo-Afor, Enugu State, is rare to find. Furthermore, faith-based organisations have been active in solving many challenges ranging from women's empowerment to community development in Enugu State. However, FBOs seem to have lost their relevance, especially with regard to assisting child hawkers in Enugu State, Nigeria. This is the problem this study intends to solve.

Children hawking in the street in Obollo-Afor is a phenomenon that needs to be investigated due to the anticipated long- and short-term implications. For purposes of definition, street hawking by children refers to the selling of things along the streets and in major public places like parks and hospitals, which is mostly done almost all the time by young children, both male and female (Itsegok, 2022). At Obollo-Afor, children in the morning are seen with trays on their heads hawking pure water, groundnuts, and edible and inedible products. Sometimes, they hawk with their mothers; most times, they hawk alone. The amazing thing is that some of these children in Obollo-Afor have been knocked down by running vehicles and motorcycles. Some of these children have ended up joining cult groups. For the female, some of them have been raped or psychologically coerced to accept lover overtures from the boys and even married men. These implications seem not to be deterring parents from sending their children to engage in hawking. Unfortunately, most of the parents whose children hawk in Obollo-Afor are Christians who know the several Bible admonitions for parents to take care of their children, including the popular rendition contained in Proverbs 22:6.

The biblical aphorism in Proverbs 22:6 emphasised the need for parents to train up their children in the way he should go so that he would not depart from it. Parents are encouraged to do what it takes to give their children a better life. However, it seems that this is not the situation in Obollo-Afor, as parents seem uninterested in the safety of their children. The aim of this study is to assess the experiences of children in the hawking business in Obollo-Afor, Enugu State, Nigeria, and its implications for faith-based organisations. First, this study examines the issue of child hawking in Nigeria. Second, it presents the experiences of child hawkers in Obollo-Afor. Third, it presents the implication of the experiences of child hawkers to faith-based organisations in Obollo-Afor, Enugu State.

A prognostic analysis on child street hawking in Nigeria

It is a sad development that child street hawking has been thriving in Nigeria for a long time. If you are to move from one part of Nigeria to the other—East, West, North, or South—it is observable that children who are supposed to be in school are hawking water, snacks, food, and computer accessories. According to West Africa RTC (2024), such is the state of affairs that defines the effectiveness (or not) of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other international and regional

policy documents that support the well-being of the African child. Street hawking by children has enormous consequences. However, street hawking among children is common due to mass literacy on the dangers of street hawking and other forms of child abuse. Okeke (2015) lamented that street hawking is a common sight on the streets in Nigeria's cities, with children selling products such as boiled groundnuts, fruit, and chips that they carry on trays balanced on their heads. There are several reasons adduced for this increasing phenomenon, which may include the increasing level of poverty among people in urban areas, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the lack of laws that protect the rights of children.

Notwithstanding other forms of child labour as outlined by the conventions of the United Nations Children Emergency Fund, child street hawking seems to be one of the causes of child abuse. Most of these children who engage in the street have no other option. They love to go to school but lack the financial willpower to attend school. For these children already living in difficult socio-economic conditions, access to support and social services has been further limited. Unfortunately, women and children are the most affected in issues of child hawking. This is because the boys most times engage in physical labour like farm work and working in building sites while the girls see hawking as the only way out of poverty. Itsegok (2022) asserted that much abuse happens unnoticed, behind closed doors, out of sight of teachers or social workers, as school was often providing a rare safe space. This is because the abusers are mostly at residential areas, junctions, motor parks, and markets (Taiwo, 2023), which are venues where child hawkers go so much in order to get much sales.

Train up a child in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6).

Proverbs 22:6 is one of the most cited scriptures in discussions about parenting and moral education. This verse emphasises the significant responsibility of guiding children during their formative years and the enduring impact of early instruction on their lives.

The beginning with the aphorism "Train up a child" has some key words that combine to show its importance. The Hebrew term for "train" (תָּנַח, *hānōk*) implies dedication or initiation. It suggests intentionality in teaching and guiding a child toward a specific moral or spiritual path. This concept involves more than instruction—it includes modelling behaviours, instilling values, and providing discipline (Ross, 1991). Furthermore, the second phrase, "In the way he should go," can be interpreted in various ways: There is the tailored approach and the moral and spiritual guidance. Some scholars argue it means raising the child according to their individual abilities, temperament, or "bent" (Kidner, 1964). Parents and mentors are encouraged to recognise the unique gifts and potential of each child. With regards to moral and spiritual guidance, others see it as aligning the child with God's commandments and ethical living, guiding them toward righteousness (Waltke, 2004).

The pericope further alludes to the fact that when the child grows, he will not depart from it. This is seen in the aphorism "When he is old, he will not depart from it." This portion of the verse underscores the long-term effects of early education. While not a guarantee, it suggests that moral and spiritual lessons imparted during childhood often influence decisions and behaviours in adulthood. It aligns with the principle of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7-8). First, Proverbs 22:6 calls for parenting and mentorship. Second, it calls on faith-based communities to be proactive. Third, it beckons on education systems for assistance. Proverbs 22:6 is a call for

proactive parenting, where parents play a central role in shaping a child's character, moral compass, and worldview. The verse emphasises the church's role in complementing parental guidance through programs like Sunday school and youth mentorship. It underscores the importance of integrating moral education into curricula to instill values that extend beyond academic knowledge. However, scholars like Longman (2006) admonish that caution should be taken when dealing with this kind of issue. For him, while this proverb conveys general wisdom, it should not be seen as a deterministic promise. Other factors, such as societal influences and personal choices, also play a role in a child's development. Moreover, Proverbs often present general truths rather than absolute guarantees (Longman, 2006).

Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative approach employing phenomenology to delve into the depth, complexity, intricacies, and contextual aspects of the phenomena under investigation. The qualitative method was chosen to facilitate a comprehensive understanding, with the researcher actively involved throughout the research process. The subjects of this study comprised child street hawkers in Obollo, spanning the period from 2023 to 2024. The selection criteria included experiencing a traumatic mental event, willingness to participate, and the capability to respond. Exclusion criteria involved unwillingness to participate in or leave the interview. A purposeful sampling method was employed, with fifteen informants (n = 15) chosen for Key Informant Interviews (KII). The research utilised a semi-structured questionnaire. The table below shows the social and demographic factors that influence the selection of the informants.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics

Source: Authors compilation

NB: These codes were used based on an agreement between the researcher(s) and the informants.

Informants code	Gender	State of Origin	Age	Residence	Education status
KII_1	F	Enugu	11	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_2	F	Enugu	9	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_3	F	Benue	7	Obollo Afor	Still in school
KII_4	F	Benue	12	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_5	M	Enugu	13	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_6	M	Enugu	12	Obollo Afor	Still in school
KII_7	M	Ebonyi	14	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_8	F	Ebonyi	13	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_9	F	Enugu	15	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_10	F	Enugu	15	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_11	F	Benue	16	Obollo Afor	Still in school
KII_12	F	Enugu	15	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_13	F	Enugu	14	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_14	F	Enugu	15	Obollo Afor	Drop out
KII_15	F	Enugu	14	Obollo Afor	Drop out

The findings were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is commonly described as a systematic method for condensing extensive text into fewer content categories using explicit

coding rules (Zaidman-Zait, 2014). The trustworthiness criteria established by Guba and Lincoln were satisfied to evaluate the quality of the findings.

Children in hawking business in Ibollo

1. Reasons for a child engaging in hawking business

a. Poverty

Just like any other social ills in the society, some of the informants disclosed the reasons for their engaging in the street hawking business. According to KII_10 (personal communication: 2024), *It is what I am selling that my mother gets money to feed the family. My father is not alive, so it is my mother who takes care of us.*

KII_7 (personal communication: 2024) narrated that:

My mother and I started this hawking business. But my mother is old now, and she is complaining that her leg is paining her. This is the reason I took up the business for myself.

b. Inability to Afford School Fees

KII_14 (personal communication: 2024) narrated

I was in school before now. My parents could not pay my school fees. I had to stop school and begin to hawk this pure water. I hope to gather some money and use it to continue my schooling.

In further revelation, KII_1 (personal communication: 2024) narrated that,

I join my mother at the farm. We have cashew and mango on our farm. I plug it in and take it to motor parks to sell. I make some money. When I return home, I give it to my mother, who is saving the money for me. I hope to use the money to start my secondary school

c. Conflict in home community

Conflicts have forced many parents to carry their children and run to Obollo-Afor. There is a consistent conflict in Benue State, and the state is close to Obollo-Afor. So, whenever the conflicts between the Fulani herdsmen and natives start, the natives usually run with their children to stay in Obollo-Afor, and to survive, their children begin street hawking. KII_11 (personal communication: 2024) lamented that,

I was staying in Benue State. But Fulani people killed my father. It was my mother who brought me to Obollo. We usually come here to sell cashews. I stopped school when we had that crisis. Since then, I have not returned to school.

Furthermore, KII_3 (personal communication: 2024) noted that,

It was the Fulani people that burnt our school in Benue State. They killed many of my people. I, my mother, and my father ran to Obollo. We now live here. School here is very costly. I stopped school and started this street hawking. This is what we used to feed in our house now. I do not really like it, but I must do it for survival.

d. No background in literacy

In a different dimension, KII_15 (personal communication: 2024) lamented how illiteracy has made her a street hawker in Obollor Afor. According to her,

I have never attended any school. My parents are farmers in the village. I usually come from the village to this place to sell. In the evening I will return to my village. I only know how to speak Igbo. Had it been I who went to school, I would not be doing this kind of work.

In the words of KII_12 (personal communication: 2024),

My parents did not go to school. Anytime I mention the issue of school to my parents, they tell me that I am a woman and have no business in going to school. I stopped school at primary six, and my parents said that women do not go to school.

e. Long-term-held beliefs and customs

There seem to be some held beliefs about the place of the girl child in the Obollo community. According to KII_13 (personal communication: 2024),

I finished primary school, and my parents said I should start street hawking. They told me that it is the man that will come and marry me that would train me from secondary school to university. Since then, I have been hawking, waiting for the day my husband will marry me.

Also, KII_4 (personal communication: 2024) lamented that,

My mother did not go to school. She got married to my father at the age of 15. My mother will always tell me that it was in her husband's house she went to school. She said I should not disturb her that any day I feel that I am too big to go out and hawk snacks, then I should be prepared to leave her house.

2. Experiences of children in the hawking business

Some of the informants disclosed some of their encounters during the business of street hawking. According to KII_5 (personal communication: 2024),

Anytime I return from hawking, I am usually tired. I feel worn out. I will just lie down and sleep till morning. It is really terrible.

In another revelation, KII_6 (personal communication: 2024) noted that,

I learnt how to smoke when I was hawking. A man called me that he wanted to buy cake. I went there. He said that before he buys cake, I must smoke. I had to smoke so that he could buy my cake. From that day, to be honest, I used to smoke but not always.

KII_9 (personal communication: 2024) reveals that,

It was when I was hawking in this Obollo that I met my first boyfriend. He was the one who deflowered me. Had it been, I was not hawking; I would have gotten a boyfriend at the age of 12. It pains me, but there is nothing I can do. I am used to it now.

KII_2 (personal communication: 2024) explained that,

I was nearly raped one day. There was one day one boy told me to bring the groundnut I was selling to him in his room. I took it to him. He dragged me inside because I was standing at the door. I shouted, and people came and helped me.

KII_8 (personal communication: 2024) reveals that

One evening, I was returning home when I was robbed. The whole money I sold that day was taken from me. I struggled with them, and they slapped me. The sign is still in my eye till today. It was terrible.

It could be seen that children suffer so much during their business of street hawking. They suffer from physical stress, joining of bad gangs, sexual abuse, and physical assault. This places enormous responsibilities on faith-based organisations.

Discussion

There are many reasons for the increasing number of child street hawkers on different streets in Obollo Afor, Enugu State. The study reveals that poverty encourages children to go into the street hawking business. This is consistent with the study of Anyaogu (2022) that poverty is the major factor in child street hawking, and it is a major challenge in the attainment of the educational component of SDGs in most African states, particularly Nigeria. In another study carried out by Allen, Francis, Godspower, & Thomas (2024), titled “Examining the Impact of Hawking on Personal Development: Predictors and Determinants,” it was discovered that push factors contributing to the prevalence of hawking are poverty (88.6%), underemployment (84.2%), low income (82.6%), unemployment (80.2%), food insecurity (75.6%), and broken homes (58.4%).

The findings further show that the inability to avoid school fees forces children into street hawking. In a study conducted by Senna (2022), it was discovered that schoolgirls in the age groups 16-20 and 21-25 dominated the street hawking trade, and the predisposing factors identified include the need to pay their school fees, provide for their basic needs, assist their parent in providing for the home, and parental irresponsibility. He further discovered that many female street hawkers are not able to attend school regularly as a result of their hawking activities on the street, which affects school attendance and culminates in poor academic performance. In a different study, Johnson, Motilewa, and Ekpun (2019) found that the absence of school sponsorship also leads to female hawking and that approximately 10% of respondents hawked to raise school fees because less than half of the respondents had parental sponsorship. Additionally, the impact of street hawking on children's education can result in absenteeism, subpar academic performance, and eventual school dropout.

Further findings further show conflict and crisis forces children out of school, pushing them into street hawking businesses. This is in line with the finding of Ngada & Kyari (2023) that it is due to the high death toll and bloodshed associated with war that children are most likely to lose their parents during times of conflict. They further quipped that those who look after these children may not be as careful because they perceive them as not being their own when they lose the parent who looks after them, whether via illness, an unexpected death, or a war. Since their parents are no longer able to properly love, educate, shelter, and clothe them, they are frequently forced to engage in street hawking.

Furthermore, certain long-held beliefs and customs by parents make them not send their girl child to school, pushing them into the hawking business. According to Barbara (2015), it is due to cultural and social conventions and practices that uphold negative perceptions about proper roles for women and the notion that education is "wasted" on girls, making girls be denied access to school. In the study of Ekundayo (2019), cultural beliefs and assumptions have played a major role in the setback of an African girl child's education, and one major cultural custom is early marriage. Teenage girls are being given out in marriage as soon as they enter the puberty stage. He further quipped that 12 million girls are married before the age of 18, and by 2030, if drastic measures are not taken, there will be over 150 million child brides. Moletsane (2017) mentioned that girls and young women are at risk for poor health, educational, and economic results due to harmful cultural practices that are primarily influenced by discriminatory gender standards. Girls and women are unable to negotiate and make decisions about their lives and bodies because of

the unequal gender norms that make them unequal in social and personal relationships. Their chances of finishing their education are harmed by this.

There are many experiences of child street hawkers in Obollo-Afor, Enugu State. The study reveals that child street hawkers suffer physical stress. Obimakinde and Shabir (2023) explained that poor diets high in carbohydrates, open defecation and the diseases that result from it, physical harm, and the low number of fatal traffic accidents are all notable. Substance, verbal, and sexual abuse were prevalent, but few kids developed adversity resistance. Due to their poor health-seeking conduct, the kids turned to street-side tradomedical practitioners or patent medicine traffickers. Furthermore, Udoh & Joseph (2012) noted that street hawking is considered a form of child abuse because it endangers the health (physical, spiritual, psychological, and social) and safety of the child, interferes with his/her education, and deprives him/her of the right to a normal and happy childhood.

The findings further show that children are exposed to various forms of ill behaviours during street hawking. Nyorere and James (2024) opined that street hawking in Uyo resulted in unethical behaviours, such as child street hawkers becoming armed robbers, rapists, terrorists, cultists, ritualists, and lawless individuals, making the prospect of a better, safer, more prosperous, and crime-free society continue to remain elusive. Furthermore, Busari (2016) stated that with regards to child street hawkers, the most troubling perhaps is that some are sexually exploited and forced into prostitution with the risk of unintended pregnancies and contracting sexually transmitted infections. Kaletapwa (2013) narrated that apart from the prostitution, others indulge in negative activities or criminal acts, such as armed robbery and pickpocketing, and later imprisonment or death.

Implications for faith-based organisations in Obollo-Afor

Faith-based organisations have contributed immensely to the well-being of children in different parts of Nigeria. With regards to healthcare, faith-based organisations have donated to hospitals for sick persons in different parts of Nigeria. For instance, Oloniniran (2024) noted that the Anglican Diocese of Lagos West donated hospital consumables and other equipment to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital and the Federal Medical Centre, Ebute Metta. Another FBO known as Aid to the Church in Need shelters internally displaced persons in 14 camps and 13 hosting communities displaced by the Fulani terrorist groups in Benue State (Aid to the Church in Need, 2023).

With regards to street hawkers in Obollo-Afor, FBOs have a lot to do towards stemming the increasing tide or decimating the menace. To meet the needs of street vendors, FBOs might create or fund educational initiatives. This includes giving free or heavily discounted education, scheduling lessons on the weekends or in the evenings to fit their schedules, and providing educational resources like books and uniforms. By equipping kids with knowledge and skills, education lessens the necessity for hawking as a means of subsistence.

The detrimental effects of child hawking on education, health, and prospects for the future can be brought to light by FBOs using their platforms. They can promote children's rights and persuade families to value education over child labour by holding community gatherings, workshops, and sermons. Due to budgetary limitations, many kids hawk. FBOs can help parents by providing

small business grants, microfinance options, or vocational training. Families can lessen their reliance on children hawking for household revenue by improving their financial circumstances. To help children and their families deal with the psychological and emotional effects of hawking, FBOs might offer counselling services. Additionally, mentoring programs can link kids with positive role models who can help them make better decisions in life. In order to promote stricter enforcement of child protection laws and policies that tackle the underlying causes of street hawking, such as poverty and illiteracy, faith-based organisations can work with government agencies and civil society.

Numerous FBOs are equipped to offer basic amenities, including food, medical treatment, and housing. By reducing the immediate pressures that lead kids to hawk, these programs can free them up to concentrate on their schooling and personal growth. Local communities and FBOs can collaborate to establish child protection committees that keep an eye out for and take action against child exploitation. To increase their influence, they can also collaborate with other NGOs and interested parties. Through moral and spiritual lessons, FBOs can help children develop values such as self-worth, responsibility, and hope. They may be inspired to strive for a brighter future and break free from the cycles of labour and poverty as a result.

Conclusion

The bane of development in any society is when the children are not given the needed moral, economic, and educational assistance. Right from the Old Testament, parents are called to give children adequate attention and assistance. Obollo-Afor is one of the business hubs of eastern Nigeria. You can get to any part of Nigeria from Obollo-Afor, which makes trading there a lucrative activity. Unfortunately, it is children that are used in exploiting these economic gains in Obollo-Afor. Several reasons have necessitated the increasing numbers of child street hawkers in Obollo-Afor, which include the inability of the parents to afford school fees for the child, conflict in the home community where the child was, the child having no background in a formal school environment, and long-term held beliefs and customs. Furthermore, there are so many implications of allowing the child street hawking business to thrive in Obollo-Afor. First, it increases the physical and mental stress of the child. Second, it leads to the sexual abuse of female child hawkers, and in the long run leads them into prostitution. Third, it makes room for the child to be pushed into child smoking and other behaviours inimical to the health of the Obollo-Afor community and Nigeria at large. This places enormous expectation on faith-based organisations that have been at the forefront of change in the society. To eradicate child street hawking, parents and guardians should be discouraged by faith-based organisations from engaging their children in hawking. Furthermore, faith-based organisations should start sensitisation workshops and programs (indoors and outdoors) in the various streets in Obollo-Afor. This will help to alert parents and guardians on the implications of allowing the children to engage in street hawking, especially the girl child.

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