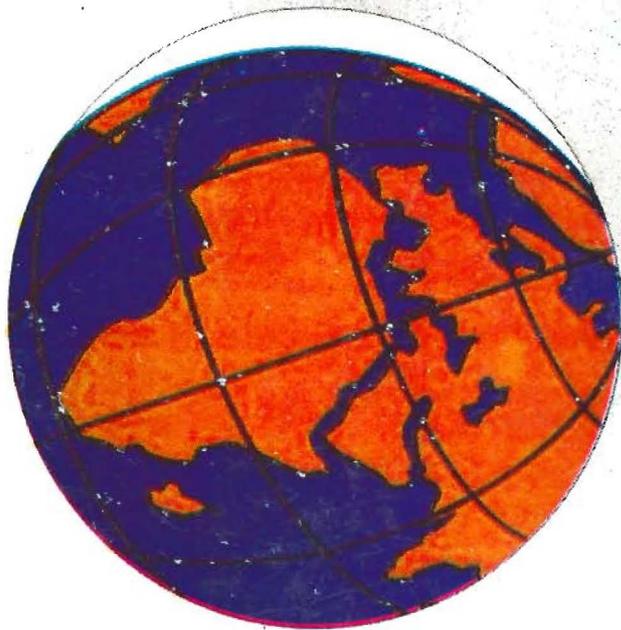


International
Journal of
Social Sciences
And
Humanities
Review



PSYCHOSOCIAL PREDICTORS OF STREET CHILDREN: A STUDY OF LAGOS STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the psychosocial predictors of street children. Three objectives were raised for this study. It attempts to examine the problem of parental inadequacies and its effects later on child, to ascertain if economic status of parent has the tendency to push children to the streets, it also attempts to explain if educational level of parent has a positive correlation with the prevalence of street children. The study adopted survey design with the use of structured questionnaires that was administered in Lagos State. The respondents were 150 street children which were purposively selected. It was noted that certain factors such as parental separation, parent's low socio economic status and their level of education are the predisposing factors to living on the street. The study recommends the following: there should be an early attachment between parent and child for proper socialization, the home front should be one free of marital strife and contention.

Key Words: Psychosocial, Predictors, Street children, Parent, Inadequacies.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of 'street children' in the strict sense of the term implies children who live and sleep on the streets. This has been on the increase in most major urban areas in Nigeria especially in Lagos metropolis (Oloko, 1992). The problem of squatters and vagabonds had attracted the attention of the colonial lords before the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914. In 1900, the colonial governor of Lagos was overwhelmed by the increase of street children and demonstrated vehemently over the presence of large number of the 'sickly and the poor population in Lagos which was estimated to be around 4,000 to 5,000' (Loretta, 1994). This led to the Lunatic Removal Proclamation throughout the protectorate of southern Nigeria in 1904 this empowered the government to remove, for custody, anyone found on the street. According to Loreta (1994), the phenomenon of street children started to take the dimension of social problem in the nineteen seventies reaching its discomfoting height in the eighties. One of the outcomes of the increasing urbanization has been the proliferation of blighted slums and squatter areas, which was precipitated by the influx of an average of 250,000 persons per year from the outlying districts.

Most of these children come from poor families with one or no parent, with little or no education and with poor sources of livelihood (Adesuwa, 1998). Townsend (1962) and Rein (1970) saw economic hardship, economic status and deprivation in relative terms that is, that one needs to understand the life style of the rich, and the attendant implication of this poor and the generation of inequalities across social classes. Oloko (1993) further stated that street children survive by engaging in menial activities such as head loading of goods in markets, scavenging inorganic waste for middle men who supply recycling firms, shoe shining, car guarding, being vendors or hawkers, beggars, car washers and watchers, and bus conductors. Many street children also result to drug use.

To cope with such a harsh life style, street children live in small groups, which provide mutual support and protection to their members and a strong sense of companionship. Due to their living in public places, they are an easy target for drug pushers, and some live in locations controlled by drug peddlers. Just like other urban centers in Nigeria, the number of unaccompanied street children in Lagos is growing very fast, children as young as seven years are seen roaming about, engaged in various kinds of activities and survival strategies. Street children are viewed as poor and deprived, and lacking care of parents. Hence, they desperately need persons to help them and spare them from the bad socialization of the streets that may lead them into vagrancy and criminal activities. Some of the key factors that push these children onto the streets include marital problems or instability in the home, poverty, hunger, insecurity, abuse and violence from parents, displacement caused by clashes in the community, insufficient parental care, death of one or both parents, inadequate family income, unemployment of one or both parents, housing difficulties, drug use by children, their social background and peer influence (Oloko, 1992).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Adesanmi (1997) "street children" have become an international phenomenon and their numbers are growing at an alarming pace, comparable to overall population growth in the countries concerned. So many factors have been responsible for the prevalence of street children, the consequent result have led to negative effects on the life of the children who are either abandoned or roam on the street. Majority of street children fall between the ages 7-19 years. The family background of children on the streets gives an insight into likely factors which might send children to the streets Maduwei (1990).

Luster and Okagaki (1993), reiterates based on reports from surveys, family no longer performs tasks once entrusted to production, education, and protection etc. They maintain that it is within the family that the child is first socialized before he moves into the society. The family is seen as significantly important in that it is the only social institution other than religion that is formally developed in all societies.

Ainsworth (1978) further observed that children reared in happy homes are more likely to grow up happy and psychologically healthy while those reared in "empty shell" homes will grow up unhappy and psychologically imbalanced and unhealthy. This is because members of the family fail in their emotional obligation to one another. Child development analysts have argued that warmth, nurturance and love are necessary for adequate socialization.

Bowlby (1969) affirms that strained and weakened parent child relationship and absence of family cohesions are responsible for the development of delinquent behaviour which can force children to take to the street. The itemization of the parent-child relationship is a developmental process which begins very early and continues as experience and subsequent identifications with the real or imagined parent becomes part of the child's sense of self Blehar & Walters (1978).

Abdelgalil et al (2004) states that children remaining in high conflict environment generally exhibit lower levels of well being than children who have experienced high levels of parental conflict. This results support the possibility that marital disruption, following high conflict, may actually improve the emotional well being of children relative to a high conflict family status. For examples children are much more likely to be misused as sexual objects by step fathers than by genetic fathers, Daly & Wilson (1985), and such sexual exploitation is a potent reason for taking to the streets.

Some scholars have also pointed out the consequences of divorce for the children. Marital conflict leads to loss of affection and an ineffective communication (Amato & Keith, 1991). The phenomenon of street children is intricately linked with child labour. In most cases, these children engage in one form of work or the other; simple or hazardous, legitimate or illegitimate (Oloko, 1992).

Research Hypotheses

Three research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no relationship between street children and parental separation.
2. There is no relationship between street children and their family's economic background.
3. There is no relationship between parental educational level and the prevalence of street children.

The study population for this research work is based on a sample of 150 street children that were purposefully selected, taking into consideration their haphazard distribution. The street children were generally interviewed in the market and places where they are mostly found.

Sample

Street children in Oshodi area of Lagos constituted the target population for this study. A total number of 150 respondents were used. The sampling technique employed in this research was simple random sampling technique which involved giving an equal non – zero chance of being selected to every element of the study population.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Questionnaires that contained non – structured questions and not pre arranged in any particular order were administered to respondents, to elicit responses from the sample population. Interview schedule was conducted on the respondents who could not write and this was done by asking them the questions on the questionnaire one after the other and then filling their response.

Research Design

Responses to the items in the questionnaire were coded. The data were analyzed using the correlation method.

PRESENTATION OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

TABLE 1 Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Male	79	52.7
Female	71	47.3
Total	150	100

The percentage of males is 52.7%, while that of female is 47.3%. This implies that we have more male street children than female street children.

TABLE 2 Distribution of Respondents by Age.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
5-10	5	3.3
11-15	47	31.3
16-20	59	39.3
21-25	39	26.0
Total	150	100

Children within the age bracket of 5-10 years are 3.3%, while those within the age of 11-15 are 31.3%, those within the age of 16-20 are 39.3%, while those within the age of 21-25% are 26.0%.

TABLE 3 Distribution of Respondent by Nationality.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Nigerian	104	69.3
Non-Nigerian	46	30.7
Total	150	100

The percentage of Nigerian street children is 69.3%, while the Non- Nigerian street children are 30.7%.

TABLE 4 Distribution of respondents by their Educational Background.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Primary	67	44.7
Secondary	44	29.3
Tertiary	11	7.3
Others	28	18.7
Total	150	100

Those who attended primary school are 44.7%, those who stopped at secondary school are 29.3%, while those who have passed the tertiary level and bagged higher degrees are 7.3%. The total therefore is 100%.

TABLE 5. Respondents view on if their parents are living together.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	74	49.3
No	76	50.7
Total	150	100

49.3% said yes, while 50.7% said no, giving the total as 100%.

TABLE 6. Respondents view on if yes, are they based in Lagos.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	45	34.6
No	62	47.7
Other	23	17.7
Total	130	100

34.6% said yes, while 47.7% said no, while

TABLE 7. Respondents view by their father's educational background.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Educated	46	30.7
Non- Educated	104	69.3
Total	150	100

30.7% of the respondents fathers are educated,

TABLE 8. Respondents view by their mother's educational background

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Educated	35	23.3
Non- Educated	115	76.7
Total	150	100

TABLE 9. Respondents view by what led to their embarking on the street

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Peer Pressure	47	31.3
Frustration	37	24.7
Family's economic background	19	12.7
Parents wish	19	12.7
Death of one or both parents	28	18.7
Total	150	100

TABLE 10. Respondent view on how many wives their father has.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
1-2	97	64.7
4-6	52	34.7
7-above	1	.7
Total	150	100

TABLE 11. Respondents view by whether their parental educational background is the cause of his problem.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	88	59.1
No	61	40.9
Total	149	100

59.1% of the respondents view is yes, while 40.9% of the respondents view is no, giving the total as 100.

TABLE 12. Respondents view on whether he or she usually has problems with their parents or guardians.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	96	64.0
No	53	35.3
Others	1	.7
Total	150	100

64.0% of the respondents view was yes, 35.3% was no, while .7% of the respondents view falls under the category of others, giving the total as 100.

TABLE 13. Respondents view on whether he or she enjoys being on the street in company of his or her friends.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	59	39.3
No	91	60.7
Total	150	100

TABLE 14. Respondents view on if given an opportunity if he or she would love to leave the street or not.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	107	71.3
No	43	28.7
Total	150	100

HYPOTHESES TESTING

Hypothesis One: There is no relationship between street children and parental separation.

Table Mean Standard Deviation, correlation coefficient

Variations	N	Df	Mean	Std. Deviation	R	Sig. Level
Street children	150	149	2.6267	1.49965	.171*	0.05
			1.5067	0.50163		
Parental separation						

* Correlation is Significant at the 0.05 level (2- tailed)

Hypothesis Two: There is no relationship between street children and their family's economic background

Table Mean Standard Deviation, correlation coefficient

Variations	N	Df	Mean	Std. Deviation	R	Sig.
Street children	150	149	2.6267	1.49965	-.112	0.05
			2.4933	1.28881		
Family Economic Background						

* Significant at 0.05

Hypothesis Three: There is no relationship between parental educational level and the prevalence of street children

Table Mean Standard Deviation, correlation coefficient

Variations	N	Df	Mean	Std. Deviation	R	Sig. Level

Street children	150	149	2.6267	1.49965	-.179*	0.05
Parental educational level			1.7667	0.42437		

* Significant at 0.05

Discussion

Oloko (1992) asserted that many of these children are found on the streets because of parental separation, child abuse, drug addiction, socio economic reasons and other factors. The result reveals ($r = .171$, $n = 150$, $p = 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected this implies that there is a relationship between street children and parental separation

In this study, it was discovered that there is a significant relationship between parental separation and the prevalence of street children. This is contrary to the findings of Oloko & Kisseka (1989) which states that there is a correlation between family size and the predisposition of children to take to the streets as 70.2% of their sample size in their study came from families which had up to five or more, 13.3% had ten or more children. However, the result of this research indicates that the prevalence of street children can be relative in nature to their parental separation but the prevalence of street children does not really have anything to do with their family size.

Hypothesis two, result reveals ($r = -.112$, $n = 150$, $p = 0.05$) the null hypothesis is retained. However, the negative relationship indicates that the higher the socio-economic status the lower the probability of street children. In the study it was also found that there is no significant relationship between the socio economic statuses of the parent and the prevalence of street children.

This is contrary to the findings of Adesuwa (1998), Townsend (1962) and Rein (1970), who stated that economic hardship, economic status and deprivation in relative terms can lead to the prevalence of street children. However the result of this study indicates that the economic status of the parents does not in all cases result in the prevalence of street children but this happens in rear cases and not in all cases.

Findings in hypothesis three reveals ($r = -.179$, $n = 150$, $p = 0.05$ significant level). The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a relationship between street children and parental educational level. Also the finding in this research states that there is a significant relationship between parental educational level and the prevalence of street children.

Conclusion and Recommendation

1. There should be early attachment and effective socialization process from the family which is seen as the first agent of socialization.
2. Parent education in the form of making information available regarding the needs of children and the responsibility of parents must be stepped up. Many poorly educated parents are truly ignorant and are eager to be informed. Law courts must find effective means of forcing parents especially fathers to take responsibility for their families, when things become too bad economically, to avoid abandoning their family.
3. Media could be used as an invaluable weapon against any group that has anything to do with policy making or implementation. Media must be won over as a friend and advocate for the cause of street children.

4. Ultimate responsibility for the well being of citizens especially young and immature ones rests with government, so federal government is being called upon to evolve a policy against living on the street.

Using the data from the result, this study demonstrates that certain factors such as parental separation and parental educational level are the major predictors of street children in Nigeria.

The family which is seen as the first agent of socialization has a role to play in the formation of a child's behavioral pattern. In addition, the poor economic background, the poor educational level of the parents and constant marital strife and parental separation are all very unstable and unsatisfactory conditions that if not properly handled will cause a lot of chaotic situations.

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