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## **Socio - demographic characteristics of child street vendors in Nnewi, Nigeria**

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**Abstract Background:** Involvement of children in street trading is inimical, contrary to the Rights of the Child, and threatens holistic child development.

**Objective:** To describe the sociodemographic characteristics of child street vendors in Nnewi.

**Method:** A cross-sectional questionnaire survey of children selling wares on the streets of Nnewi, southeast Nigeria.

**Results:** 147 children (90 boys and 57 girls) aged 8 – 19 years were interviewed: 57 (38.8%) lived with their parents, 63 (42.9%) with relations and friends, while 27 (18.3%) lived alone. Also, 27 (18.4%) were Anambra state indigenes, others hailing from surrounding states. The parents of all the subjects were of low socioeconomic status.

Trading was taking place during school hours for financial gains of the family. As many as 42.9% of the subjects had completed primary education: 89 (60.5%) had completely dropped out of school for varying periods. Nine girls (6.1%) had been sexually abused and 46 children (32.7%) had at sometime lost their earnings to robbers. Majority (79.6%) aspired to higher education if given the opportunity.

**Conclusion:** Many parents in the low socioeconomic groups still keep their children out of school to work and help boost the family income. It is recommended that legislation be made against children trading during school hours.

**Key Words:** child labour, street children, child vendors, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Around the world, an estimated 215 million boys and girls aged five to seventeen years were engaged in child labour in 2008, 115 million of them in hazardous work.<sup>1</sup> Estimates suggest that tens of millions of children live or work on the streets of the world's towns and cities – and the number is rising with global population growth, migration and increasing urbanization.<sup>1</sup> Adolescents who work excessive hours or in hazardous conditions are unlikely to be able to complete their education, severely curtailing their ability to escape from poverty. Even though there has been some decline in worldwide prevalence of child labour over the years,<sup>2</sup> it still continues to blight the life chances of adolescents in much of the developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence,<sup>3</sup> ranging from 20 – 54%,<sup>4</sup> with Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Zambia being estimated at 20 – 30%. Fetuga et al<sup>5</sup> reported a rate of 64.5% in Ogun state, southwest Nigeria. Child labour is associated with poverty, inadequate educational opportunities<sup>6</sup> and fraught with health hazards such as road traffic accidents, drug, physical and sexual abuse.<sup>7</sup> Children may provide 25%

or more of a family's total income, and many traditional cultures consider child labour an integral part of the child's socialization and achievement status in the local community.<sup>8</sup> Due to unfavourable socioeconomic conditions, children are forced to contribute to the family income by hawking various commodities on the streets to passersby and to commuters in buses and cars. They are therefore, exposed to the elements, physical and sexual abuse, and road traffic accidents.

The present study was carried out to ascertain the socio-demographic characteristics of the many children roaming the market streets and motor parks, vending their wares during school hours (between 8.00am and 3.00pm).

### **Subjects and Methods**

Nnewi is the second largest city in Anambra State, southeast Nigeria. Nnewi Metropolis encompasses two

local government areas – Nnewi North and Nnewi South and is a home to nearly 2.5 million residents (as at 2005).<sup>9</sup> It spans over 2,789 square kilometers. The chief occupation of the indigenes is trading and farming, therefore they depend mainly on agriculture and commerce for their daily livelihood. The city hosts a large market (Nkwo Nnewi) for motorcycle and motor spare parts, both locally fabricated, in its numerous small-scale industries, and imported from all over the world. The high degree of commercial activity and relative cash flow, attract a lot of migrants from surrounding states.

A cross-sectional, descriptive study was designed. Data collection was done between the hours of 8.00am and 3.00pm during the months of September to November 2010. Subjects were recruited from the major streets around Nkwo market and in the adjoining motor parks. Difficulties in random sampling of street children necessitated a non-random purposive sampling strategy. As many children as gave audience to the researchers were included in the study, while those who declined being interviewed were excluded. The purpose of the survey was explained to each individual child, and verbal informed consent obtained before interview. A semi-structured questionnaire was applied to each interviewee. Information was sought on demographic parameters and social status of child and parents. One hundred and forty-seven consenting children were interviewed. All data were analyzed with SPSS Version 17 statistical software.

## Results

One hundred and forty-seven children interviewed were aged from eight to nineteen years. There were 90 boys and 57 girls giving a male: female ratio of 1.6: 1. The ages and sex distribution are outlined in Table 1. More than half of the boys were aged 16 – 19 years. The number of male hawkers was highest in the oldest age group and lowest in the youngest age group. All the girls were at least 12 years old. Three quarters of the girls were aged 12 to 15 years, and one quarter above 15 years.

**Table 1:** Age and sex distribution of the child street vendors

Age (years)	Males		Fe-males		Total	
	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*
8 – 11	15	10.2	0	0.0	15	10.2
12 – 15	27	18.4	45	30.6	72	49.0
16 – 19	48	32.7	12	8.2	60	40.8
Total	90	61.2	57	38.8	147	100.0

\*Percentages are of 147, the total number of study subjects

Table 2 shows the state of origin and educational attainment of the subjects. Out of the 147 children, 27 (18.4%) were indigenes of Anambra State, while 78 (53.1%) hailed from Ebonyi State: 21 (14.3%), 15 (10.2%), and 6 (4.1%) came from Imo, Enugu and Cross-River States respectively. Fifty-four (36.7%) children were brought to Nnewi by their parents, while 63 (42.9%) came on the auspices of relations and other adults. Peers and friends convinced 6 (4.1%) to come while 24 (16.3%) came on their own accord from their respective villages to the city. Ninety subjects (61.2%) were living with first degree relatives – 57 with parents and 33 with older siblings. Twenty-nine (19.7%) were living with both parents.

Except for three boys (2.0%), all the children had some form of education. Majority (141 or 95.9%) of the children did not have complete secondary school education. Eighty-nine (60.5%) had completely dropped out of school for varying periods, while the remaining fifty-eight (39.5%) were still in school but attending irregularly. When asked why they absented themselves from school during regular school hours, 116 (78.9%) gave lack of sponsorship and finances as the reason. Another four (2.7%) were awaiting their guardian's decision on whether or not to place them in schools, while the remaining 27 (18.4%) gave no reason.

**Table 2:** Distribution of subjects by state of origin and educational attainment

Characteristic	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%
<i>State of Origin</i>				
Anambra	27	18.4	0	0.0
Cross-River	0	0.0	6	4.0
Ebonyi	51	34.7	27	18.4
Enugu	0	0.0	15	10.2
Imo	12	8.2	9	6.1
<i>Level of Education</i>				
No formal education	3	2.0	0	0.0
Primary school uncompleted	36	24.5	27	18.4
Primary school completed	30	20.4	0	0.0
Secondary school uncompleted	15	10.2	30	20.4
Secondary school completed	6	4.1	0	0.0
<i>Duration dropped out of school</i>				
<1 year	6	4.1	6	4.1
>1 year	62	42.2	15	10.2
Still in school	21	14.3	37	25.1

Table 3 summarizes the socioeconomic characteristics of study children. Thirty-six children (24.5%) attested to having been bullied and molested by older street children and supposed clients while out on the streets vending their wares. Nine out of this number were girls (6.1%) who had been sexually abused. Forty-six (32.7%) had at one time or the other been robbed of their earnings. By virtue of being on the street all day twelve (8.2%) have also been involved in smoking mari-

juana, and 27 (18.4%) have been involved in road traffic accidents sustaining minor injuries. These resulted from collisions with commercial motorbike riders as the children traversed the roads and ran after vehicles to sell their wares to passengers.

It was noteworthy that 117 (79.6%) looked forward to obtaining a higher education if given the opportunity. Another 18 (12.2%) wanted businesses of a higher dimension, while the remaining (12 [8.2%]) had no educational or occupational vision whatsoever.

**Table 3:** Socioeconomic characteristics of street vending children in Nnewi

Characteristics	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Daily earnings (net profit)</i>				
< 160 Naira (\$1)	3	2.0	6	4.1
>160 Naira (\$1)	84	57.2	48	32.7
Not sure	3	2.0	3	2.0
Surrendered to mentor	47	32.0	41	27.9
Saved	16	10.9	12	8.1
Used for subsistence	25	17.0	6	4.1
<i>Habitation</i>				
With parent(s)	30	20.4	27	18.4
With sibling(s)	24	16.3	9	6.1
With aunt/uncle	6	4.1	6	4.1
With other adults as domestic help	3	2.0	6	4.1
With friend/peer	6	4.1	3	2.0
Lives alone	21	14.3	6	4.1
<i>Physical/Sexual molestation</i>	27	18.3	9	6.1
<i>Ever robbed of earnings</i>	27	18.3	21	14.3
<i>Smoking</i>				
Cigarettes alone	3	2.0	0	0.0
Marijuana and cigarettes	6	4.1	6	4.1
<i>Involvement in road traffic accidents</i>	21	14.3	6	4.1
<i>Life ambition</i>				
Higher education	75	51.0	42	28.0
Business of higher dimension	6	4.1	12	8.2
No vision	9	6.1	3	2.0

Table 4 shows that the parents of all the subjects were from the low socioeconomic strata of society. Thirty-seven (25.2%) of the children had lost one or both parents, while five children had separated parents.

**Table 4:** Socioeconomic characteristics of parents of the child street vendors

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
<i>Mother's occupation</i>		
Unskilled labourer	60	40.8
Petty trader	79	53.7
Junior civil servant	8	5.4
Artisan	0	0.0
<i>Father's occupation</i>		
Unskilled labourer	58	39.5
Petty trader	54	36.7
Junior civil servant	26	17.7
Artisan	9	6.1
<i>Parental status</i>		
Parents separated	5	3.4
Father dead	16	10.9
Mother dead	21	14.3
Both parents dead	14	9.5

## Discussion

Street trading is a common form of child labour in this part of the world.<sup>5, 10</sup> This is necessitated by the need for children to assist their families financially, especially where the family size is large<sup>5, 11, 16</sup> and the socioeconomic class is low.<sup>10, 17</sup> Young children are not exempt. In the current study the age bracket was eight to nineteen years, similar to the eight to seventeen years obtained in Ibadan,<sup>18</sup> but older than five to seventeen year old children in Sagamu,<sup>5</sup> both in Southwest Nigeria.

Boys outnumbered girls as was found in studies elsewhere,<sup>11-15</sup> quite unlike what prevailed in other parts of Nigeria.<sup>5, 10</sup> This is in consonance with the perennial problem in Anambra State of low male enrolment in schools because boys tend to take to apprenticeship as artisans and traders. The method of selection of study subjects may account for these differences. The Sagamu study, for instance, recruited subjects from schools and asked about work activity. The current survey recruited from the streets and asked about school activity. In this environment if the subjects were recruited from schools there would have been more girls than boys. A plausible explanation may be that boys become independent from an earlier age and girls are taught to cope with poverty while staying at home.<sup>12, 13</sup> Scanlon et al<sup>14</sup> have opined that the gender difference may be because of alternative strategies open to girls such as mothering younger siblings, domestic employment and prostitution. Traditionally, our girls tend to be involved in domestic child labour as househelps.

Just as in Southwest Nigeria,<sup>18</sup> 2% of the children had no formal education. However, even amongst those with some form of education, school drop-out rate is usually

high among children working during school hours.<sup>8,10,17-19</sup> Poverty, low socioeconomic status and the attendant necessity to raise family income may explain the lack of education and high school drop-out rate. Even though the study did not examine the educational status of parents/guardians, un- or poorly educated parents may likely not appreciate the value of education in the long term, but see schooling as reducing workforce for more earnings in the short term.

Street trading presents its peculiar hazards, which include physical, verbal and sexual abuse, as well as exposure to road traffic accidents.<sup>20</sup> The children in the current study were not exempt from these hazards. Some were physically molested and robbed of their earnings, while 6.1% of the girls had been sexually molested. This figure falls drastically short of what was reported by Ikechebelu et al<sup>20</sup> in the same vicinity. This may probably be because their study paid more attention to recruitment of girls who had been sexually abused (while trading on the streets) and their health outcome. A significantly large number of these children had been involved in road traffic accidents while vending their wares. Even children in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria<sup>21</sup> perceived this factor as deleterious.

A large proportion of study children lived with family members. This trend was also noted in Southwest Nigeria<sup>5,10</sup> where street trading children were more from those living with parents and relations than among those living with unrelated guardians. The phrase 'Child labour' makes one think of unrelated guardians maltreating their wards, but this is apparently not the case in this instance. It is worrisome that relations, supposedly with the goodwill of the children at heart, should deny them the opportunity of improving themselves and ultimately getting out of poverty and deprivation.

Being on the street all day also expose children to vices such as stealing, sexual escapades, drug abuse and smoking which they readily acquire from peers and adults.<sup>14,15,22</sup> This study also observed the practice of smoking cigarettes and marijuana among a small fraction of the subjects, inclusive of girls.

## Conclusion

Therefore, parents need to know that education of their children is more beneficial for families in the long-term than putting the children out to work. The hazards of being out in the streets all day also need to be addressed to avert physical injuries, disability, and psychosocial dysfunction which follow sexual harassment and exposure to drugs. It is imperative that family income be raised so that parents may leave their children to attend school. Political will on the part of government in implementing payment of minimum wage for civil servants; free access to family planning services to modulate child spacing and ultimate family size; provision of uninterrupted electricity to aid sustenance of small- and medium-scale industries which form the major employer of labour, will go a long way obviating child labour in augmenting family income.

It is recommended that legislation be made against children trading during school hours.

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