

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Medico-social problems of teenage hawkers in Sabon-Gari Local Government Area, Kaduna, North-West Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Teenage hawking has become a topical issue globally because of the unhealthy circumstances which these teenagers are exposed to, making them prone to various forms of abuse. This is a study of problems of teenage hawking in Sabon-Gari LGA of Kaduna State, Nigeria, to determine the cause, forms and hazards of teenage hawking.

Methodology: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted. Two hundred and seven (207) respondents were interviewed through interviewer-administered questionnaires and data was analysed using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)* software.

Results: More than half of the respondents (59.4%) were females, about one-third (33.8%) were aged 13-14years. The main reasons for hawking were parental wish (57%), desire to make extra pocket money (21.3%) and poverty (8.7%). The hazards to which the teenage hawkers were exposed include injuries (71.5%), fights (21.3%) and sexual harassments (17.4%).

Conclusion: Parental wish was the main contributing factor to teenage hawking, followed by the desire to make extra money. Enlightenment and income generating activities for the parents/guardians and the general populace were recommended.

Keywords: Female, hawking, money, parental, problems

INTRODUCTION

A teenager is a person between the ages of 13 and 19.^{1,2} According to the child rights act, children have the right to education, health, legal protection, dignity and security.³

Hawking entails the carrying of wares about for sale. It may involve the hawker offering the goods for sale by calling out aloud, or by going from door to door. This act (hawking) deprives the teenager the right to pursue

legitimate activities such as going to school full time, enjoying recreational facilities and having adequate leisure time at home for proper growth and development.

In the study area, it is not unusual to see teenagers in groups of two or more hawking food items, and other items usually worth not more than N300 (\$2) on the streets, under trees or bridges, at university campuses, in the markets; and usually under the baking heat of the sun. These teenagers stay outside of their protective homes for several hours a day hawking and they may fail to go to school during the period of selling the wares. They often get involved in road traffic accidents, or fall victim to sexual abuse, ritual killings, or may be as thugs, and of face other social hazards or combinations of these.^{4,5}

The actual number of teenagers involved in hawking in Nigeria is not known, owing to their wide dispersion in the informal sector. In one study, 48.5% of teenagers in Zaria aged 14–15 years which constituted 17% of the study population were involved in hawking.⁶ It is not unusual for parents to, sometimes, encourage street hawking ahead of school attendance.

Based on the above, if the problem is to be tackled effectively, there is need to provide adequate and accurate data. This study was undertaken with the aim of determining the medico-social problems associated with teenage hawking and identifying the various forms of teenage hawking, in order to proffer solutions to the problems associated with teenage hawking in Sabon-Gari Local Government Area (LGA), Kaduna State, North-West, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Sabon-Gari LGA is a local government in the North-West State of Kaduna, Nigeria. It lies 70 kilometers north-east of Kaduna City, the capital of Kaduna State. It has a projected population of about 350,000. It is an urban LGA consisting of a cultural mix of various ethnic groups with Hausa as the predominant

ethnic group. The local indigenes are predominantly farmers and traders while most of the settlers are public servants and students. Majority of the inhabitants were Muslims, then, Christians and followers of other beliefs. The major occupations are farming, blacksmithing and trading.

A cross-sectional descriptive study design was used to collect data. Following permission from the Sabon-Gari LGA Authority and verbal informed consent, a structured interviewer-administered questionnaire was administered to the eligible respondents after pre-testing the questionnaire. The study population was constituted by street hawkers aged 13 to 19. A minimum sample size of 207 was used based on a similar study. The prevalence of street hawking obtained at the study was 0.16 expressed as probability which was used and substituted in the formula for sample size determination in descriptive studies.

The questionnaires sought information on the demographic characteristics, parent history, reasons for hawking, and forms of hawking and hazards of street hawking. The data was computer analyzed using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0* software. Data were summarized and presented descriptively in form of tables and charts.

General physical examination consisting of general inspection of skin for bruises, rashes and ulcer was performed. Clothes and shoes were also inspected for cleanness and tear.

RESULTS

Among the 207 teenage street hawkers studied, females constituted the higher proportion of 59.4%. About one-third of the teenage hawkers (33.8%) were aged 13-14 years old with a mean age of 15.63 ± 1.89 years. Majority of them were Hausa (79.2%) and most were single (86%). Concerning the educational status of the teenage hawkers, majority (68.1%) were in school with 30.9%

currently attending primary school and 16.4% attending secondary school (Table 1).

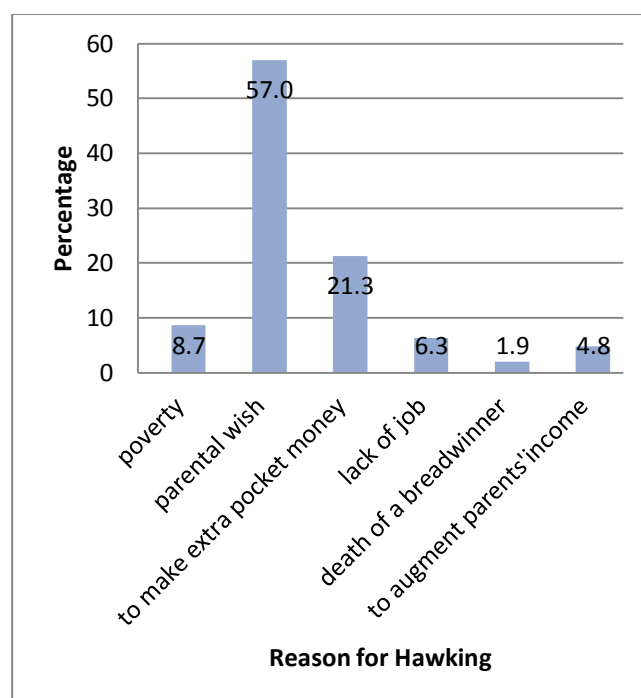
Table 1.

Socio demographic profile of respondents

Age Group of Hawker	Frequency (n=207)	%
13 - 14	70	33.8
15 - 16	67	32.4
17 - 18	52	25.1
19 - 20	18	8.7
Level of Education		
None	3	1.4
Quranic	106	51.2
Primary	64	30.9
Secondary	34	16.4
Educational Status of Fathers		
None	7	3.4
Quranic	169	81.6
Primary	31	15.0
Post-primary	0	0
Total		
Sex of Respondents		
Male	85	41
Female	122	59
Respondent's Fathers' Occupation		
Farming	67	32.4
Trading	99	47.8
Artisan	6	2.9
Civil Servant	25	12.1
Quranic Teacher	10	4.8

The contributing factors to street hawking from the study showed parental wish to be 57%, poverty 8.7%, and 1.9% due to death of breadwinner, while other reasons such as the desire to make extra pocket money were 21.3% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Reason for hawking among teenagers in Sabon-Gari LGA, North-West Nigeria



The variety of items being hawked included sachet water, which was the main item, constituting 32.7%, followed by roasted corn 10.6%, groundnuts 9.2% and others 47.5%. It was also found that 46.4% of the teenagers hawked items worth between N500 and N1999 per day. Only 1% hawked items less than N100 per day with about 32.9% of the hawkers selling goods worth more than N2000 per day.

About one third of the respondents (35.3%) made profits of N350-N499 per week (Table 2) with only 18.8% making more than N2000 profit in a week. Majority of the respondents (68.1%) combined hawking with formal education, with 57.4% attending school five times per week and 1.4% twice per week.

Table 2.

Average profit made by respondents per week

Average Profit	Frequency (n=207)	%
N350 - N499 (\$2-\$3)	73	35.3
N500 - N999 (\$3.3-\$6.6)	49	23.7
N1000 - N1499 (\$6.7-\$9.9)	22	10.6
N1500 - N1999 (\$10-\$13.3)	24	11.6
>=N2000 (>\$13.4)	39	18.8
Total	207	100

The results also showed that physical injury (71.5%) was the most common hazard that the respondents were exposed to. Others were as shown in Table 3. About 90% of the teenage hawkers were aware that hawking could predispose them to road traffic accident, injuries (84.5%) and adult molestation (52.7%).

Table 3.

Physical and social hazards associated with hawking among teenagers in Sabon-Gari

Hazard	Frequency	%
Injuries	148	71.5
Fight	44	21.3
RTA	19	9.2
Rape attempt	7	3.4
Sexual harassment	36	17.4
Cheating	125	60.4
Sexual promiscuity	4	1.9
Stealing	50	24.2
Alcohol consumption	4	1.9
Insulting others	205	99.0
Cigarette smoking	16	7.7

Only 1.9% of the respondents admitted to ingestion of alcohol and sexual promiscuity and 7.7% to cigarette smoking. About 60% admitted to cheating, 24.2% to stealing, and 99% to insulting people. The study also revealed that majority of the respondents was not happy with the job of hawking.

Examination of the physical appearance of the teenage hawkers revealed that 10.1% had rashes on their body and 13% were pale. Also, 21.3% had cut/injuries on the body, 1.9% were not wearing shoes. But, 48.8% were appropriately dressed for the weather, and 67.6% were neat and tidy.

DISCUSSION

One of the basic principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child is that every child must be protected against all forms of exploitation, indecent or degrading treatment, including child labour, abduction and sale.³ Teenage hawking remains a major source of concern in Nigeria, in spite of several legislative measures.⁷

Findings from this study revealed that females constituted a higher proportion (59.4%) of respondents. This is similar to the findings carried out in Zaria which showed a female preponderance of 74.4%.⁸ It is also similar to a UNICEF report which showed that in the northern part of Nigeria, there are more females involved in street hawking.⁸ This has a serious implication on attaining the millennium development goals (MDGs), especially numbers 2 and 3, of achieving universal basic education and gender equality and empowering of women, respectively. Girls start working at an earlier age than boys, particularly in the rural areas. They also suffer the triple burden of housework, school work and work out of home whether paid or unpaid. Girls are also open to sexual abuse in form of rape and harassments.

Another very serious consequence of street hawking is unwanted pregnancies and sexual transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Some of the female teenagers that hawk

around the motor parks have befriended some of these bad characters and engaged in indiscriminate sexual intercourse as a result of which they, sometimes, become pregnant.⁷

Concerning the educational status of the respondents, majority (68.1%) were in school with 30.9% currently attending primary school and 16.4% attending secondary school. However, findings in Kaduna metropolis indicated that only 16% were in school.⁹ The implication is that these children are deprived of the opportunity to attend and remain in school which contravenes the child rights act. Worldwide, the link between improving access to education and ending child labour are increasingly recognized.¹⁰

Parental wish was the major contributing factor to street hawking from the study contributing 57%, poverty 8.7% and 1.9% was due to death of breadwinner, while other reasons such as making extra pocket money were 21.3%. This finding was similar to that by Onuzulike in Owerri, South-East Nigeria which stated in part, that "teenagers, therefore, engage in street hawking in obedience to their parents, guardians or care takers".

A UNICEF study done in Enugu, Calabar, and Kaduna, Nigeria however, implicated poverty as the major cause of street hawking.¹¹ The fact that 57% was due to parental wish points to the fact that poverty is the underlying cause because parents that are not poor will likely send their children to school.

Also, findings by Ebigbo revealed that such parents believed they own their children and could use them any way they wished ignoring the rights and privileges of the teenager as stated in the Nigeria Labour Act.^{12,13} Also, another finding was that the teenager might have to work from an early age in solidarity with the family group so as to compensate as much as possible for the family's economic burden and to share in the maintenance of the large family.¹⁴

Most of the items hawked by respondents were inconsequential in value. The money value of the items was not commensurate with the hazards involved and would definitely not fulfil the need of the teenagers after they would have remitted nearly the entire amount to those whom they hawk for.

There was no relationship between hawker's ethnic group and combination of hawking with formal education, as majority of respondents (92.1%) would like to attend school full-time. About one-fifth (22.2%) of the respondents spent six hours hawking in a day. This was similar to the studies done in Kaduna and Calabar, which showed that most of the respondents hawked for long hours every day of the week.¹⁴ This, thus, increases the hawkers' exposure to all forms of hazards including to extreme weather conditions. They hawk their goods in the sun, in excessive heat. The study, also, showed that they were exposed to various forms of physical hazards of which injuries were the most common. A UNICEF study had shown road traffic accident to account for 40% of hazards encountered.

The preponderance of injuries, fights and sexual harassments can be explained by the fact that most of the respondents hawk on the streets and go from door to door. In addition, some of them may not be conversant with road signs. Also, why this is different from the UNICEF study may be because 68.1% of the hawkers were enrolled in school. About 90% of the teenage hawkers were aware that hawking could predispose them to RTA, injuries (84.5%) and adult molestation (52.7%). This high level of awareness may be explained by the high rate of school enrolment in which 68.1% of the hawkers were observed to have enrolled in school with majority (57.4%) of them attending school 5 days in a week. There is, however, no significant relationship between teenage hawkers whose parents have themselves hawked and knowledge of risks associated with hawking i.e. the experience and knowledge were not being shared.

Only 1.9% of the respondents admitted to ingestion of alcohol and sexual promiscuity and 7.7% to cigarette smoking. Findings from a previous study revealed that sexual harassment is more common in large cities than in smaller towns or the rural areas. More than half of the respondents (60%) admitted to cheating, one quarter (24%) to stealing and almost all the respondents (99%) insult others. This can be explained by the fact that most of the respondents spend long hours of every day hawking on the streets and are exposed to adults that indulge in bad criminal behaviours.⁷

The study also revealed that majority of the respondents were not happy that they were hawkers; 99% had admitted to insulting others and had themselves been insulted by buyers, while 92.1% wished to stop hawking and attend school full-time if their parents agreed. This is similar to previous studies which pointed out that long hours and days of uninterrupted hawking negatively affected the hawkers and crippled them emotionally.¹⁵ A study done by Bashmir amongst street children on child abuse and neglect in Kaduna metropolis showed that sometimes these hawkers were shouted on to get out of sight when they rushed to prospective customers with unwanted wares.⁹

Examinations of the physical appearance of the teenage hawkers revealed that some of them had rashes on their bodies, and others were pale. Also, some had bodily cut/injuries on their bodies, and a few did not wear shoes. Also, nearly half of them were appropriately dressed for the weather, whereas, two-thirds were neat and tidy, which is not surprising especially for the girls who were traditionally supposed to appear decent enough in order to attract suitors.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that parental wish was the main contributing factor to teenage hawking in the study area, followed by hawking to make extra money and then, poverty. The various problems found to be associated with

teenage hawking included sustaining injuries/cuts from fights, sexual harassment and RTA. These could on a short or long term basis be deleterious to the teenager's complete physical, social, mental and psychological wellbeing and to the society at large.

Effective health education campaign by Sabon-Gari LGA and the Kaduna State Government through traditional rulers, religious leaders and the mass media should be explored in curbing street hawking. Parents should be educated on the effect of street hawking on the educational, mental and physical well-being of the teenager.

Finally, economic empowerment of the people through various poverty alleviation programs will go a long way in tackling the challenge of teenage hawking.

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