



Volume 2	Issue 3	March (2023)	DOI: 10.47540/ijqr.v2i3.756	Page: 183 – 194
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## Recount and Account of Lived Experience of Children on the Street: A Phenomenology Approach

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:** Children on the Street, Lived Experience, Phenomenology Approach.

**Received** : 23 December 2022

**Revised** : 19 March 2023

**Accepted** : 20 March 2023

### ABSTRACT

Children on the street spend the daytime on street but go to their families at night. Lived experiences of these children stem from their daily activities on the street and interpersonal relations. Clarity on the lived experience of this category of street children is lacking in Nigeria. We explored lived experiences of children on the streets of Ibadan, Nigeria, sourcing information from the children and relevant adults involved with them. We conducted in-depth interviews with fifty-three participants, including children on the street, pairs of children and parental figures, street shop-owner, and child welfare officers. Framework analysis and coding with ATLAS Ti were conducted. Street Engagements, Beneficial and Challenging Experiences are the 3 thematic areas. Street Engagements included duration on the street, typical and atypical activities. Beneficial experiences included: financing family & personal needs, school co-financing, and better life opportunities. Challenging experiences included: financial crisis, school failure, prostitution, street gangs and substance use induction, thuggery, harassment, kidnapping, and ritual killing. The lived experience of street children with family ties is overwhelming with the challenging experiences subduing the perceived benefits. An appreciation of this discrepancy at the family level and target interventions can positively influence measures to curb the epidemic of children on the street.

### INTRODUCTION

Streetism strips children of humanity and subjects them to struggle for survival at a tender age amidst many experiences on the street (Alem & Laha, 2016; Arthur, 2012; Ennew, 2003). “Child-streetism” describes the presence of children below 18 years, who for various reasons are seen on the street without any adult supervision (Alem & Laha, 2016; Arthur, 2012; Ennew, 2003). Of the four categories of street children, children-on-the street is the dominant category. These children earn some sort of livelihood on the street daily and return home to their families at night (Alem & Laha, 2016; Arthur, 2012). The other categories are children on the streets with severed families link, children from street families, and children-who-absconded-from-institutional care (Alem & Laha, 2016; Arthur, 2012).

Children on the street are the vast majority of street children in urban regions of under-developed and developing African countries like Nigeria (Adewale & Afolabi, 2013; Alem & Laha, 2016; Woan et al., 2013). The lived experiences of children on the street stem from their daily activities, in terms of “work”, their use of time, social activities, interpersonal relations, survival strategies, and choices on the street (Mickelson, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2015; O’Haire, 2011; Shahan, 2021). Street children experience all forms of struggles, exploitations, insecurity, and adversities. However, these experiences are documented mostly by children on the street, who are deprived of family contact (Mickelson, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2015; O’Haire, 2011) For instance, only 2 of 108 papers in a systematic review of publications on street children from 35 Lower and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) speak to children on the street

as being less likely to encounter some of these experiences (Woan et al., 2013). Street children in general engage in begging, hawking, and helping people on the street, with these financial activities forming a major part of their experiences and the money made by street children remains a major pull for streetism (Mickelson, 2000; O'Haire, 2011).

Nigerian research articles had listed daily labor as the most common financial activity, followed by street vending and begging among street children but lacked specifics for children on the streets (Alem & Laha, 2016; Ekpiken-ekanem & Ayuk, 2014; Ikechebelu et al., 2008; Owoaje et al., 2011). The aforementioned studies published different forms of exploitation and challenges of street children but are not explicit about lived experiences of children on street. The available literature on the lived experiences of street children in Nigeria, as cited above is outdated and pertained to children on the streets with severed family links. There is a research gap on the lived experience of the children on the street who spends most of their daytime on the street but return to their families at night, on daily basis. This research investigated the children on the street, the prominent category of street children whose lived experiences have not been well documented. This study provided an updated experience of children on the street in Ibadan, the largest city in South-West Nigeria.

## **METHODS**

This research was part of larger phenomenology research on children on the streets. The study was conducted in the five urban local government areas (LGAs) of Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, and the largest city in Southwest Nigeria. One street with a known population of street children was selected from each of the five urban LGAs. The selection of each street was guided by information obtained from the directorate of Oyo State's child welfare service in each of the urban local government councils of Ibadan. The urban LGA areas are Ibadan South-West (SW), North (N), North-West (NW), North-East (NE), and Ido. These five urban LGAs form the central and cosmopolitan areas of Ibadan while six other LGAs of Ibadan are remote and rural areas in the outskirts.

### **Study Designs**

This comprised qualitative sessions with four categories of participants:

1. In-depth interviews (IDI) with Oyo State's child welfare officers in Ibadan.
2. In-depth interviews (IDI) of street shops or street business owners in Ibadan.
3. In-depth interviews with children on the street of Ibadan.
4. Paired in-depth interviews of a dyad of a parental figure and a child on the street of Ibadan.

The study participants were the children on the streets and relevant adults in their ecosystems; including the parents, street shop owners, and child welfare officers. In-depth interviews (IDI) with Oyo-state-appointed social workers designated to the directorates of child welfare services in the five urban LGAs of Ibadan were conducted. This category of participants served as key informants who provided data that guided the selection of the street in each LGA with a known population of children on the street. In addition, by virtue of their work experiences, they are expected to have detailed information on the lived experience of these children. These were child welfare officers with a minimum of six months' work experience in each urban LGAs which guaranteed the officers' familiarity with each locality. In each of the 5 Ibadan urban LGA directorates, two consenting child welfare officers and two officers working in the Oyo State central secretariat in Ibadan were purposively selected to obtain more information from the directorate at the state level. The selected officers all had a minimum of a Master's in Social Works or related courses. All were in their middle age and had at least seven years of work experience.

Street shops or business owners in the urban local government were selected for in-depth interviews. This category of participant observes and interacts with these children on daily basis and are expected to have information about the parent or guardian of these children. These were adult participants, who had been operating a shop or business on the select street for a minimum of six months. The street shop owner's observation of the children's daily lived experience is vital as they can provide more information on other aspects the children might not recognize. Being a past child on the street was a desirable selection criterion that was met by some of the selected shop owners who alluded to this. The purpose of this criterion is to

have them recount their lived experience, and contrast or corroborate the experiences of the current children on the street. Two street shops or business owners were selected from each of the five LGAs using the purposive and snowball technique. These participants served as links to the parent/guardian of the children on the street and assisted with the recruitment of children on the street.

Children on the street were initially purposively selected with the assistance of the street-shop owners and subsequently by snowball technique. A minimum of two children on the street were selected from each of the 5 urban LGAs. Inclusion criteria for selection was a child-on-the-street aged 13yrs -17yrs 11months, who return home daily and whose parent/guardian consented to the child's participation in the study. This age bracket was selected to capture children in their middle and late phase of adolescence which ascertained better cognizant responses during the interview. Because younger age children and early-aged adolescents may be less cognitively developed. In-depth interviews were conducted with the children after their assent and parental consent were obtained.

For the paired in-depth interviews, a dyad of a child on the street and a parental figure was selected in two pairs from each of the 5 urban LGAs. These were parent-child pairs who consented and assented to participate in the interview. This was another set of children on the street who were recruited as explained previously. Thereafter a parental figure for each recruited child on the street had an in-depth interview.

#### **Data collection**

The data were collected between June and September 2021. The process for in-depth interviews was observed, including explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining participants' consent and assent. Each interview session was conducted by the first author. The interview guide was available in both English and Yoruba (the predominant local language in the study sites) versions for ease of understanding and the language preference of the participants. The interviews were conducted in either English or Yoruba based on each participant's choice and the research team was able to communicate proficiently in both languages. The choice of venue and conduct of research

activities was with full consent and assents of participants and preferences were obliged. The interviews were moderated with the use of a pre-developed interview guide. The interview guide was used to explore the experiences of children on the street of Ibadan, asking the same questions which were adapted for the three categories of participants. The interview sessions were audio-recorded, using a digital recorder with the full consent and assent of all participants.

#### **Data Management**

A total of 53 interviews were conducted: eleven (11) IDIs with children on the street, twenty (20) paired IDIs with 10 parent-child pairs, ten (10) street shop owners' IDIs, and ten (10) IDIs with child-welfare officers. Direct and complete transcripts of the audio-recorded interview sessions and the field notes were typed out in Microsoft Word. The qualitative data were analyzed using the techniques and procedures of framework analysis, including five levels of systematic data processing such as familiarization, identification of thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). Emerging themes were supported by field notes and research memos. Atlas Ti version 8.4 was used for coding while coding was done deductively and inductively, with the generation of quotes specific to the variables, and the data from these four research sessions are triangulated (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

#### **Ethical considerations**

The ethical principles of autonomy, disclosure, competence, understanding, assent, voluntariness, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice were observed in this study. Ethical approval was obtained from two ethics committees, the Oyo State, Nigeria, Ministry of Health, Research Ethics Review Committee, Ethics number AD 13/479/4118<sup>A</sup> and the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical)- M210424. Universal precaution against Covid-19 was ensured for the research team and all participants.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Three thematic areas comprising Street Engagement, Beneficial, and Challenging Experiences captured the lived experience of children on the street of Ibadan. The challenging experiences underpinned by street engagement are

the biggest theme that outweighs the beneficial experiences. Quotations are labeled in brackets by respondent group and number, age (in years), and gender ((M)ale/(F)emale. The respondent groups are WO-Welfare Officer, SO-Shop Owner, PP-Paired Parent, PC-Paired Child, and C-Child.

\*SO-Shop Owner previously had a child on the street.

### Street Engagements

The subthemes explained the age at which the children are introduced to the street, the hours of the day spent on the streets, and their activities.

### Duration on the streets

Most of the children that participated in the research had spent an average of four years on the street with a range of 6 months to 10 years of being on the streets. Street shop owners who were past children on the street recounted the ages they started going to the street. Child welfare officers corroborated that many children are put on the street before their tenth birthday and they grow up imbibing the street culture. "I started going to the street, at age of 5 years, I was following my older sibling since I was five years old. I follow her around when she is hawking on the street before I started on my own back then" (\*SO4, 40, F). "I've been doing everything for myself right from when I was about age 14 years, hustling on the street". (\*SO10, 34, M). "I saw a boy hawking kolanut on the Orita-Challenge Expressway. He is a little boy. I don't think he is up to 10 years old" (WO6, 54, F).

Most of these children are found on the street from afternoon till dusk and beyond. Some children resume the street after returning from school on weekdays but earlier on weekends. Some children resume to the street very early and go back home late at night especially when school is not in session or when exams are over for the session. "When I go to school, let's say like 3 pm I come to the street. When I don't go to school, I come like 1:30 pm. I go by 9:30 pm, and even when I'm going to school the following day, I still close at the same time". (PC6, 16, M). "Back then, by 2 pm we would close from school and I would hawk nylon bagged water till night falls" (\*SO3, 35, F). "When he is not writing any school exam, he goes to the street around 3 pm, because he would go home first after school. During the holiday, he goes around noon and goes back home at night" (PP9, 40, Mother).

### Typical activities of children on the street

Many of the children on the street were engaged in hawking or vending snacks, drinks, bottled or sachet water, raw or cooked fresh farm produce, seasonal fruits or vegetables, and cooked staple food. A few were load carriers and vehicle conductors for commercial bus drivers. "They hawk and sell pure water, minerals, and all other edible stuff" (WO10, 52, M). "He helps me hawk *Ponmo* (cow-skin) to Aleshinloye. When I don't have *Ponmo*, he collects things to hawk from some distributors like cheese-balls snacks" (P10, 60, Grandma). "I only asked him to help me hawk sachet. I didn't know he is carrying loads for people on the street" (PP8, 38, Mother). "The children are working with the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) as conductors" (WO8, 43, M).

A minute proportion reportedly gambles with money, plays, and hangs out with their peers on the street. They hustle for some money alongside play or go swimming for fun and catch fish to hawk for money. "Yes, at times I just come to play. I came yesterday; I am here today and have made 200 naira carrying loads on the street" (C7, 15, M). "They are also into betting among themselves, they will say "you have five naira, let us play a game", through betting they will have little more money to take home" (WO3, 41, F).

Adult participants opined that most children on the street are usually not involved in street begging but for very few exceptional cases when they are out of cash, to procure and sell the wares they normally hawk. "Only a few of them believe in begging; rather, they try to get any small amount of money from any odd job on the street. They will rather do odd jobs like being load carriers". (WO7, 41, F). "Some are begging for money, although some of them do minor jobs maybe to help someone sell drinks on the street" (WO5, 46, F).

### Atypical activities of children on the street

Some unexpected activities were reported about these children which were events that occurred on the street in times of desperation and in other places aside from the street. For instance, children on the street reportedly leave the street to work as laborers at construction sites or look for houses to render services which purportedly fetches them more money. "I learnt he also goes to car-parts dealers stores to carry heavy metals and car parts for more money" (PP7, 42, Mother). "I saw some of

my mates that went to work in a building site and the building collapsed on them” (C7, 15, M). “Some of the boys will leave what they are hawking if the money is not enough to do house chores for a fee in other peoples’ houses. They cut bushes, wash dirty clothes, do house cleaning, or work in street food canteens” (WO10, 52, M). “The boys on the street also get engaged in hard labor like digging gutters on the street or at the quarry breaking stones”. (WO12, 51, Male).

A few of the children interviewed said sometimes, shoppers on the streets send them on errands and tip them. Instances, where children hang around the street parties hopeful for food leftovers, were cited. “Sometimes, when I am sent on errands by people (shoppers), they could give me money to take away” (PC5, 17, M). “Some you see roaming about the street, you see them at roadside parties eating and gathering leftovers” (WO7, 41, F).

An interesting report was obtained from child welfare officers working in the Oyo State central directorate regarding the financial exploitation of some children on the street with the knowledge and cooperation of their parents. “Yoruba people, usually women, are hiring Hausa children, especially female ones, all the way from the North to bring them down to the South and use them to beg for money on the street. We had a woman who was using about seven children and none of the children belongs to her. She sends them out to the streets to go beg for money. The real parents are in the North; they call them just to know the amount they will be paying them for using their children to beg and make money” (WO12, 51, M).

### **Beneficial experiences**

Participants gave accounts and shared their opinion about the benefits children derive from being on the street. The benefits are both tangible monetary gains and intangible gains.

### **Financing family and personal needs**

Many of the interviewed children on the street said they can support the family finances, particularly the mothers’ finances. “I’m helping my mother hawk her goods; so, I give all the money back to her. She will give me money when I need things” (PC5, 17, M). “Sometimes he may bring 300 hundred naira. Like yesterday, he brought 500 hundred naira but today, there is no money with him for now” (PP8, 38, Mother). “There are some times

that my mother doesn’t have enough money, I can help. In a day I can get 4,000-naira profit” (C11, 17, M).

Participants reported that the children also save up money from street activities to support their personal needs. “It’s not that I give all the money I make to my parents; I also give it to thrift collectors. I am making the daily contributions and saving to buy whatever I need” (C9, 17, M). “Sometimes I make three hundred naira or up to five hundred. I do save it. If I want to get a shoe and the money my parents gave me is not complete, I add the saved money to it” (C7, 15, M).

### **School Co-Financing**

Many of the children who hawk on the street do it to earn some money to co-fund their schooling. For instance, the children save up for basic school needs and pay for promotional school exams because the parents’ financial commitment to the children’s education is limited. “I want to further my education that’s why I’m also trying to gather money. I was the one that paid for my West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination” (C10, 17, M). “Most are going to school but the parents don’t have money for the boy to finish school. So, he goes to hawk on the street and gathers money to send himself to school” (SO5, 32, F). “He wants to further his education after secondary school but there is no money; so, he hustles on the street to have money to further his education” (SO6,30, M).

### **Better life opportunities**

Child welfare officers, shop owners, and the children themselves believe that the street avails the children the opportunity to meet NGOs, philanthropists, or ordinary people on the street who could help them and change the course of their lives for the better. These opportunities include the chance of a full school scholarship. “I can meet the person that will help me on the street. I mean a helper of my life, it does happen on this street” (C7, 15, M). “Some of them may have luck, that during the process of being a child on the street, they find someone to assist them so much so that they will not have the memory again that they have once passed through such a life. We have seen mostly NGOs take them off the street” (WO3, 41, F).

A few of the children on the street and shop owners gave examples of children who have had the chance for better profitable engagements off the street. “Shop owners looking for shop attendants

and seeing the way such child markets his goods on the streets can take such a child up and take care of him and they will start selling together in the shop. It has happened before on this street” (PC10, 13, M).

### **Challenging experiences**

This is the largest theme that addresses challenges arising from the unsupervised presence of children on the street.

### **Financial crisis**

The lack of sales and loss of money made from street activities were pressing challenges for children on the street despite monetary gain being a major benefit. A significant proportion of the children lamented about the occasional inability to sell their goods, particularly when street traffic is light or on rainy days with indebtedness to their suppliers or the parents’ suppliers. “There was a day that I didn’t make sales, there was no traffic that day, people couldn’t slow down to buy from me and I had to take it back home. It was not a good day because my mother had a daily debt to settle” (PC6, 16, M).

Many of the children on the street reported they easily misplace money made from their activities on the street which makes them incur loss and debt. Some welfare officers highlighted these financial crises as the reason children seek hard labor or paid domestic chores off the street. “I had finished selling “pure” (sachet) water in the evening, and I was about to go and give money to the person that gave me the pure water to sell so I can take my profit and go home. I don’t know if it was when I was changing money, but all the money had fallen out of my pocket. Like 1,700 naira was lost. I wanted to give the owner 850 naira and I would have kept 850 naira which was my gain for the day” (PC4, 17, M). “So, when I noticed that the tires of my fan-ice bicycle were deflated and I wanted to pay a vulcanizer to help me repair them, I found out my money was all gone. My pocket was torn and I didn’t know. I lost almost 7000 naira. All the goods were up to 12,000 naira, and my gain could have been like 4000-5000 naira that day”. (PC9, 17, M).

### **School failure**

Children on the street reported that they have challenges with their education, with limitations to studying daily after school, attending to school assigned homework or extra lessons in preparation for promotional examinations. “I was meant to write Joint University Admission Matriculation Board Exam this year. They said it was 5,000 naira. It’s not that I can’t do it, but I feel I should go for tutorials first but selling on the street takes my time” (C9, 17, M). “I don’t have time to read after school before I come to the street. If I get home early sometimes, I do read but when I get back in the night, I am usually tired. So, I would not be able to read” (C4, 17, F). “When I go to school, I come to the street by 3 pm every day and I leave by 6 pm. When there is a school holiday, I come by 1 pm every day and leave by 5 pm. I don’t have time for after-school extra-tutorial or summer holiday school” (C2, 14, M).

It was reported that some children on the street miss school frequently, suspend school, and may eventually drop out despite their ambitions due to inertia to further their schooling, the incessant struggle for money, or derailment by money made on the streets. “The family members have left the home for the boy because they can’t cope. He stopped at primary six when he was doing well in street business and didn’t further his education and now he is a trouble to the whole family” (WO9, 56, F). “Such a child may not want to go to school again because they will be distracted by the little money they are making. I do know a boy since 2012 that has been doing this street hawking and is not furthering his education” (SO6, 30, M). “I had to hawk and hustle to make money. I had to stop schooling for like three to four years and I later continued schooling in 2019” (PC7, 17, F).

Few mothers shared their frustrations regarding the insufficiency of the money made on the streets by children to support further higher education and participants opined also that few parents or guardians frustrate the children’s effort to send themselves to school. “Whether he wants to go to the university, polytechnic, or college of education, he has to do something to make extra money. If they ask us to bring money, we have no choice but to. He wants to study more but street hawking is not enough” (P9, 40, Mother). “When I was in JSS 3, I was sent to go live with my

grandma. My father came to school to give me and my cousin money for our junior WAEC and my grandma said “bring it let me keep it for you” but she spent it, despite knowing I was hustling on the street to support my schooling” (\*SO10, 34, M).

#### **Prostitution of girls on the street**

Child welfare officers across all five urban local government areas of Ibadan gave examples of how girls on the street were directly or indirectly lured into prostitution. They shared instances where they had intervened in cases reported to them by parents. The interviewed girls on the street did not give any account of being involved in such acts, but few mothers expressed their apprehension regarding the possibility of girls being lured by men on the streets. A few street shop owners gave some examples of children on the streets they witnessed being involved in prostitution. Child welfare officers reported children on the street also take sexual advantage of each other. “We had a case of a girl that was beyond control, always going out to the street and won’t repent. The parents reported and in the course of preliminary investigation, the girl confessed that she had been going to one woman at her home. We have no option but to break down the house and we took some girls out of one home around midnight where boys are trooping into to have sex with them” (WO12, 51, M). “A case like that was reported to this office, but we couldn’t probe deeper. The mother didn’t want to blow up the case. When the child was hawking, a man takes her in and slept with her severally. The girl said he gives her 500 hundred naira whenever he is interested” (WO2, 52, F). “Some of them will hawk today, they will not sell tomorrow but do prostitution and off and on. At times, they come to me and ask maybe I can patronize them”. (\*SO2, 35, M).

#### **Initiation into street gangs and substance use**

Shop owners and child welfare officers said a significant negative outcome of the exposure of children to the street is the initiation into cults and gangs. Peer pressure was said to influence the choice to join bad gangs through which they acquire the habit of causing mayhem and constituting nuisances on the streets. A few parents expressed their fears regarding this but claimed to guide against this by asking known street shop owners to keep an eye out for their children. Few street shop owners shared stories of children on the street who

had joined gangs and were caught in criminal acts. “His brother asked him what he was doing outside the home, because in this area, once they notice a child is idle and roams around the street, he can be invited to join a bad gang” (PP7, 42, Mother). “The notorious “1 million boys” gang go into the street to disturb people and the children on the street will mingle with them. They are bad gangs and they disturb people on the street and the children mingle with them at times and join in the gang activities” (WO8, 43, M). “It is easy to initiate them to a secret cult and those robbers’ gangs. They use boys on the street, they train them. They will say, “Go and observe, where did they put the key, where is this and that?” At the end of the day, they will give the children something for services rendered” (WO2, 52, F). “I witnessed two children on the street who burgled somebody’s shop at 2 am, children of like twelve years old. By the time the boys are older, they can become mature armed robbers” (\*S2,35, M).

Child welfare officers reported that children on the street use and abuse substances due to influence by gangs of children or adults smoking marijuana and other substances on the streets. Parental figures seemed to downplay their awareness despite many obvious scenes of touts smoking substances on the streets’ corners. “Those boys join bad gangs and from there, they start to smoke to the point that they won’t listen to their parent’s corrections anymore” (WO6, 54, F). “I discovered that at an early age the children get involved in some hard drugs, that end their life suddenly, and they get them from the streets, some just mix some things. Some take marijuana and even the chemicals in cough syrup and then get addicted with time” (WO12, 51, M).

#### **Thuggery**

Thuggery in the forms of rough and violent behaviors with some criminal intent was reported among children on the street. These included street fighting, pocket-picking, and stealing which may be lone incidents or part of street gangs’ misconduct. Participants said there are situations where thug groups are fighting, breaking bottles, and injuring one another during which some children get coerced to join in or sustain an injury while attempting to flee the situation. “Some people will be fighting on the street, hitting and stabbing themselves with bottles on the street. I have experienced it; we always run to save our lives because sometimes

they shot guns” (C5, 15, M) “If there is a fight in Sango-Eleyele Road among the area boys, they could break something on the child's head. If you don't run away or join them” (PC6, 16, M).

Street Shop-owners said the children on the street are easily triggered to fight one another because of fighting scenes they witness on the streets. Stealing and pocket-picking were reported as one of the vices children on the street indulge in as a result of exposure to miscreants on the streets. The interviewed children on the street also shared their personal experiences regarding this. Child welfare officers said some of the children on the street steal and pickpocket. “Some of my peers that hawk together with me on the street, steal things from each other and the person they stole from won't notice until later” (PC5, 17, M). “They have stolen his money and two phones while he was selling on the street. He wanted to go and sell, and his phone dropped and his mates they were hawking together picked it and they didn't tell him” (PP5, 30, Mother). “If they see something to steal, they will steal it just to make sure they get something to eat and they return home with something for their parents to even eat” (WO3, 41, F).

### **Harassment**

Police and task force officers reportedly exploit children on the street for their goods, chase them and throw away their goods in the process with a loss of revenue for these children. “The task force people disturb us; sometimes, they take my “egusi” soup away and sometimes they take all the food away” (PC1, 16, M). “Sometimes, police chase them away from where they are hawking on the street; they end up throwing their goods away when they are running from task force officer or police” (PP2, 40, Father).

In the same regard, adults on the street are reportedly judgmental about the characters of children on the street. Without the benefit of the doubt, they assume these children are without morals. “There are some people that perceive girl hawkers as prostitutes, bad children or children without a future” (C8, 17, F).

### **Kidnapping and ritual killing**

Children on the street are reportedly targeted by kidnappers for ransom and ritual killing. All categories of participants expressed that it is very dangerous to let children go on the street especially at odd hours because children had gone missing

after encounters with kidnappers or ritualists, particularly before dawn and late at night. “One of the dangerous dangers is that they are subjects of some predators. When I said predators, I'm talking of ritualists and kidnappers” (WO 12, 51, M). “There are people who use people for rituals and can use charms on them. That is the danger I see there, and it is not good for a child to be hawking on the streets at night” (PC3, 13, M). A personal experience by one of the recruited girls on one of the streets and an eyewitness account of a street shop owner were narrated: “I was hawking, the person said he wanted to buy my cooked corn and told me to go and collect some change for him from a story building up there. I was confused and unaware of his intention. I did not know what happened to me that day. I could not even think straight. I gave him all of my sales money” (C4, 17, F). “The *baba* (elderly man) pretends to sell calendars on the street and he will call these children and send the children on errands and they will disappear, he has been kidnapping them. He sells them for those who need babies or children for any reason” (\*SO4, 40, F).

The average age of recruited children on the street for this research is fifteen years. These children were introduced to the street around school age (six years), which had been the trend in Ibadan over time. This is evidenced by the tender age, the past children on the street in this research reported they were also introduced to the street by their parents.

The age range of children on the street in this study is similar to the ages of working street children found in Accra, Ghana, and other major cities across sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. (Mugove & Lincoln, 2015; Oppong Asante, 2016; Pinzon-Rondon et al., 2009; Ugwuadu, 2017).

The early age of introduction of children from the family to the street harms their behavioral and social development and can numb the expected positive impact of formal and informal education (Tettegah, 2012). Additionally, many of these children arrive on the street daily from around noon and stay past dusk which is not ideal because the nighttime is associated with more dangers than daylight (Mugove & Lincoln, 2015; Ugwuadu, 2017). The presence of children on the street at night will necessitate them developing survival



skills beyond their developmental stage which can have consequences in the present and future (Ugwuadu, 2017).

Expectedly, most children on the street in this study hawked edibles which have steady daily consumers. Hawking and load carrying on the street is the mainstay activity most children on the street engage with and the goods are supplied by the parent or guardians (Fiasorgbor, 2015; Ikechebelu et al., 2008). The search for higher remunerating work by children on the street in forms of hard labor including digging trenches on the street and work in the quarry as found in this study, has not been frequently published. Literature on street children related hard labor more with children on the street who have severed links to their families (Adewale & Afolabi, 2013; Loknath, 2014; Nanda, 2008; UNICEF Nigeria-Bar Human Rights Committee, 2013). The attendant risk, and danger associated with these kinds of works in other places including private homes and construction sites was evident in this study where some children on the street reportedly died working in a building that collapsed. Street begging is known to be common among children on the street as previously published and affirmed by this study (Abubakar-Abdullateef et al., 2017; Ayaya & Esamai, 2001; S. N. Cumber & Tsoka-Gwegweni, 2015). However, instances of children being given out by their Northern Nigeria parents to be used for street begging as a business venture by some Southwestern Nigeria women was a revelation in this study. This is because using children for street begging for financial gains is not a norm in Southwest Nigeria. Unlike the good document pervasive “Almajiri” culture in Northern Nigeria where parents sent children completely out of the home to survive on nomads and street begging (Abubakar-Abdullateef et al., 2017; Panterbrick, 2002; United Nations Children’s Fund, 2008). The ability of children on the street to support their family’s revenue with their earnings on the street and make money for their expenses including cofounding school needs are known as push and pull for child streetism (Faloore & Asamu, 2010; Tefera, 2015; Wargan & Dershem, 2009). The money made by many of these children mostly goes to support the mother’s finances and boost her ability to cater to her family. The fact that children on the street run into debt in form of a lack of sales and loss of money generated from street activities as

found in this study has not been highlighted as a challenging experience, while monetary gains are overhyped (Faloore & Asamu, 2010; Tefera, 2015; Tettegah, 2012; Wargan & Dershem, 2009). However, despite the benefit of being able to co-fund their schooling, children on the streets experienced school failure. The children on the street are unable to study after school, they could not attend extra tutorial classes, frequently skip or suspend school and may eventually drop out of school. Challenges with schooling have been documented for street children in general (Abdelgalil et al., 2004; Faloore & Asamu, 2010; Inyang & Ralph, 2015; Panter-Brick et al., 1996).

The perceived benefit of chance for positive life opportunities on the street as inferred in this study is astonishing, because of the obvious dangers and routine difficulties on the streets. Although it is a known fact that NGOs go out to seek and intervene in matters concerning vulnerable groups like street children, particularly in LMICs (Azuka & Patrick, 2019; UNICEF Nigeria-Bar Human Rights Committee, 2013). However it is not a routine occurrence and they can only alleviate the suffering of a very minute number of street children (Azuka & Patrick, 2019; UNICEF Nigeria-Bar Human Rights Committee, 2013). Therefore, the chance of all children on the street being helped is slim. Passersby or business owners on the street may grant temporary solutions to the needs of children on the street, but sustainable measures that can keep children off the street are rooted within the family with a constant responsible parental figure (UNICEF Nigeria-Bar Human Rights Committee, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to disabuse the mindset of the slim chance of better life opportunities as a motivation for putting children on the street.

The initiation of children on the street into gangs and cults was discovered in this research, as published by many others but most publication refers to the minor categories of children with severed family link (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012; S. Cumber et al., 2017; Onyemachi, 2010). Thuggery and cultism had been recorded as some of the challenging experiences of children on the street which when unchecked may result in the complete severance of children from the family to full-time street living (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012; Cumber et al., 2017; Onyemachi, 2010). Nigeria has

recorded a high level of civil unrest with unprovoked multiplication and surges of street thugs (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012; UNICEF Nigeria-Bar Human Rights Committee, 2013). The steady stream of these street thugs can be linked to the indoctrination of children on and of the street (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012; Onyemachi, 2010). The consequent introduction of children to substance use was as expected considering the observed high prevalence of substance use on the street coupled with peer influence as previously published (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012; Onyemachi, 2010; Oppong Asante, 2016; UNICEF Nigeria-Bar Human Rights Committee, 2013). The array of substances children on the street indulge in ranging from cough syrup to marijuana is noteworthy in this research.

The children on the street were harassed by passersby on the street and the law enforcement agents harass and exploit them unjustly in this study. Social discriminatory and oppressive actions from the general public are some of the challenges encountered by children working on the street, aligning with Oppong Asante's (2016) finding.

Children on the street are known to go into prostitution as a survival strategy on the street or as revenue-generating activity (Asanbayev et al., 2016; S. N. Cumber & Tsoka-gwegweni, 2017; Orme & Seipel, 2007). However, we found instances where children on the street were lured and co-opted into prostitution. Men reportedly take advantage of the girls who hawk on the street instead of patronage and tip excessively which keeps the girls going back. A study conducted in 2008 in Eastern Nigeria revealed more than half of girls hawking on the street were sexually harassed by male adults, with significant proportions having penetrative sexual intercourse of which few were forced, but many submitted willingly due to monetary gains (Ikechebelu et al., 2008). The study and recently, a 2019 Nigeria situational review of working children on the streets revealed many girls on street consequently had unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (Azuka & Patrick, 2019; Ikechebelu et al., 2008). Unfortunately, girls on the street are still lured or forced into prostitution, reiterating the need to discontinue streetism, particularly for children with known existing family ties. Boys on the streets are also victims of sexual exploitation as published (Azuka

& Patrick, 2019; Ikechebelu et al., 2008) and inferred in this research. The kidnapping of street children for ritual and other purposes was reported as a common incidence in one of the urban local governments in Ibadan by research published in 2017 (Ugwuadu, 2017). Similarly, our participants across the five urban LGAs of Ibadan reported cases of kidnapping occurring, particularly at night or early hours of dawn. The children on the streets reportedly are victims of hypnosis for financial exploitation and kidnapping. The manner of hypnotism included customers or adult street vendors tricking the children by engaging them in seemingly innocent street activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research revealed that children on the street encounter more challenging experiences than beneficial ones by their presence on the street which isn't an ideal microsystem for a family-connected child. Continuing research on children on the street will provide evidence that showcases the ongoing detrimental lived experiences of these majority groups of street children and harness the necessary interventions.

The findings of this research provided insights bridging some gaps in the literature on the lived experiences of children on the street. The following are recommendations arising from the results of this study: The trajectory of events that leads to eventual school drop-out among children on the street as suggested in this study needs attention from stakeholders combating child streetism. The revelation that some Northern Nigeria parents loan out their children for begging on the street while the children live with Southwestern women in their homes should be paid particular attention in the preventive strategy against children streetism in South-West Nigeria.

Campaigns against harassment and discrimination of children on the street are necessary to increase public sympathy and enhance the self-worth of these children. This will facilitate easy rehabilitation and re-integration of these children into society. The scenarios where children are hypnotized or kidnapped are beyond the control of most stakeholders fighting against the phenomenon of child streetism. However, this emphasizes the necessity to reinforce the family's

awareness and recognition of this kind of danger and encourage them to keep children off the street.

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