



Research Article

Female Youth in Street Trading: Implications for Sexual Harassment in HIV/AIDS Risky Environment

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Abstract

The study examined the exposure of young girls to street harassment in the urban centres of Nigeria and implications for the incidence of HIV/AIDS and economic empowerment. A 'non-participatory direct observation approach coupled with quantitative secondary data was used. Quantitative data was extracted from a national survey of street traders sponsored by Covenant University, Nigeria. The survey covered sampled street traders in four major cities in Nigeria. However, only the data relating to young girls below the age of 25 years (n = 553) were extracted and analysed for this study. The study revealed that girls in younger ages (10-14 and 15-19 years) were 1.724 and 1.111 times more likely to be harassed compared to the other girls but self-employed girls enjoy 'immunity' from harassment because they have higher economic worth than their counterparts in paid or unpaid street trading activities. The study posits that exposure of girls to harassment increases the propensity for higher HIV/AIDS incidence in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries. A proactive hawking measure should therefore be put in place to control the activities of the traders and enhance their full integration for effective economic empowerment of the girls and women in general.

Keywords: Girls, street trading, HIV/AIDS.

Introduction

Nigeria, the most populated country in sub-Saharan Africa, stands as the 9th most

populous country in the world and carries one of the globe's heaviest burden of HIV/AIDS. In terms of the structure of the population, over 60 percent of Nigerians are

youth below the age of 25 years who are characterised by massive unemployment but many of them take solace in menial and peasant jobs as a means of survival. Street trading represents one of those supplement activities and battle for survival in Nigeria like other African countries in the face of economic hardship coupled with corruption and bad leadership. The higher proportion of young girls would have been haven of hopes for the nation but could turn to grave economic burden except if their present conditions are addressed.

Young girls below 25 years constitute 62 percent (42,834,566) of the female population in Nigeria while they represent about 30.5 percent of the total population (National Population Commission (NPC), 2010). Ironically, 62 percent of the people living with HIV/AIDS annually have been young women (National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), 2012; NPC and Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), 2004; NPC and USAIDS, 2004; Population Council and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2002 and 2010; UNAIDS, 2009 and 2012). The prevalence rate of HIV is worrisome both in Nigeria and the sub-Saharan African region in general and the male-female dichotomy puts female adolescents at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts (Amoo and Adeyemi, 2010; Ashford, 2007; PRB, 2012). The first two cases of HIV were first discovered in Nigeria in 1985, and by 2009 up to 2.6 million of Nigeria's residents were living with HIV/AIDS (Adeyi, Kanki, Odutolu and Idoko, 2006; UNAIDS, 2009). The prevalence rate of HIV that was 1.8 percent in 1991 rose to 3.8 percent in 1993, 4.5 percent in 1995, about five percent in 2003 and about 5.2 percent in the year 2007 (FMOH, 2007; NACA, 2009 and 2012). However, the fact that the country has HIV prevalence of 4.6 percent coupled with over 1 percent rate in all the 36 states is not surprising but that 17 out of the 36 states have over five percent HIV prevalence rate is worrisome. According to the 2008 National HIV Sero-prevalence report, the number of new infections among children is 57,000 and up to 3.3, 4.6 and 5.6 percent among young folks in age groups 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years respectively (UNFPA, 2010).

Globally, a total of 33.4 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in 2008 (WHO, 2011) and an estimated number for women was 15.7 million while children constituted up to 2.1 million. Specifically, Africa has about 14 million AIDS orphans and women have been accounting for an average of 50 percent of all adults living with HIV worldwide. In developing and transitional countries, 9.5 million people are in immediate need of life-saving AIDS drugs out of which only 4 million (42%) are receiving the drugs. However, despite the efforts towards curbing the menace of HIV, the number of people living with HIV has risen from around 8 million in 1990 to 33 million today, and the situation is not yet abated (UNAIDS, 2002; UNAIDS 2009; WHO, 2011). Currently, permanent cure to HIV/AIDS has not been documented. In a world where there is growing proclivity towards sex and sexuality, where employment for all is a mirage, and the poor and female are bedevilled with assaults of all kinds, it is exigent to assess the exposure of youth in street trading activities to sexual hazards.

Street trading activity falls within the informal economy and participation in this activity is synonymous with impoverishment and survivalist responses of marginalised persons with no alternatives (Callaghan and Venter, 2011; Habib, 2005). While this could be true of many practitioners, it could be perpetual vocations for several individuals. The participation of girls in this sector is a contribution to economic productivity which could yield economic dividend if various hazards and consequent adverse health effects are controlled. Vagaries of hazards involved include but not limited to the following: musculoskeletal disorders, tiredness, sleep disorders, eating disturbances, mental disorders, cardiovascular diseases, occupational cancer, menopause osteoporosis including dermatitis, sexual and verbal assaults and skin infection (Abama and Kwaja, 2009; Amoo, Ola-David, Ogunrinola and Fadayomi, 2012; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2005; Lu, 2004; Olurinola, Fadayomi, Amoo and Ola-David, 2014).

The link between social and behavioural dynamics of street traders as they influence

the incidence of HIV/AIDS has long been established (Abama and Kwaja, 2009; Baylies and Bujra, 2001; Lee, 2004; Lund, 2002; Marcus, 2001; Walker and Gilbert, 2002). Experiencing any of these could be dangerous to future reproductive health. Therefore, considering their young feminine and inexperienced nature coupled with the fact that the risk of, and the vulnerability to HIV infection is particularly striking among them, their further exposure to inimical sexual behaviour demands strong attention. This study therefore examined the degree of exposure of girls to sexual assault in the study locations. It is also meant to document associated health implications of such exposure and provide plausible suggestions towards the reduction of sexual hazards and the achievement of reduction in sexually transmitted diseases.

Literature Review

The majority of women in sub-Saharan Africa belong to poor socio-economic classes and are always at the receiving end of adverse social and economic phenomena. They suffer limited access to education and generally enjoy far less employment opportunities than men in the world all over (Grieco, 2010). Thus, they are concentrated in the pursuit of 'affordable' lower cadre economic activities among which street petty trading is prominent. However, within these lower economic activities, there are variations in gender participation. The majority of these young girls are in their prime age of life with vibrant potentials but without the required economic empowerment to actualise their dreams. The labour statistics indicated that there have been consistent increases in unemployment rate between 2006 and 2011 while the employment rate is declining (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2005 and 2011). Unemployment rate increased from 12.7% in 2007 to 14.9%, 19.7%, 21.4% and 23.9% in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively (NBS, 2011). Among this group, higher proportions of females (24.3 percent) were unemployed compared to the males' figure (23.5 percent) and the burden is much more felt among the urban women dwellers (NBS, 2011).

Thus, the preponderance of women in street trading activity is neither new nor surprising. They are conspicuous and often attract the government's attention. The business of street trading carries resemblance of self-reliant occupation that requires small capital. Undoubtedly, it has constituted a significant component of the economy of many developing nations and a crucial means of livelihoods for the poor (Kyoko, 2006; Mead and Liedholm, 1998; Page and Söderbom, 2012; Rogerson, 1996). In addition, it can be regarded as an important part of the distributional structure and as the last channel in the production-distribution-consumption value chain. Despite all these acclaimed benefits, the sector has been sidelined at policy level. Without much ado about the activities of street trades in the urban sector, the stark reality has not changed and the business is still in vogue in the urban areas of Nigeria. However, the proportion of population engaging in street trading is unknown, the wares involved remain a matter of guessing, and the volume of the trade revolves around arbitrary and non-scientific calculations.

Several reasons could be adduced for the proliferation of street hawking in urban areas. Prominent among which is the young age structure of urban population in developing nations (NPC, 2010; PRB, 2012) with the absence of adequate infrastructure that creates a ground for street hawking. Examples of this include the sale of water on the street in Nigeria that was precipitated by the failure of pipe borne water services. Others include the sale of snacks or other fast foods on the road caused mainly by bad road facility and huge traffic that subject commuters to hunger, thirst and the urge to satisfy these needs. The traders, on the other hand, capitalize on these and quickly rush in to take advantage of the demand thus created. Street vending activity is also contingent upon rapid urban growth. While scanty studies existed in countries like South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Asian countries like India (Ekpenyong and Sibiri, 2011; Kyoko, 2006; Lund, 2002; Lund and Skinner, 2003; Mitullah, 2004; Nirathron, 2006; Puberdy, 2000; Skinner, 2008), there are few national and robust studies that dissected street trading activities and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

Girls in street trading are conceptualised as those below the age of twenty-five years who sell, peddle, offer or expose for sale of any article (goods or services) on the public highway. Thus, any girl whether on her own account or as an employee of a business engages in the activity of street trading is regarded as a girl in street trading. Also, exposure to sexual harassment is used to denote any actual, attempted handling or thrust for sexual purposes, including the offering of employment to girls, goods/services or exchange of assistance for sex including sexual favours or other forms of humiliation, degrading or exploitative behaviour against women or girls in street trading activities.

Street trading is an economic activity that has formed a crucial thrust of small scale enterprises which are considered as engines of growth and development in developing countries. However, the participants are beset with myriad of challenges which include, but not limited to, lack of legal status and right to vend, lack of space cum poor location, restriction on licensing, harassment, bribes, confiscation and evictions, among others (Ekpenyong and Sibiri, 2011; Mitullah, 2004). In most developing countries, categories of people involved are those with less opportunity for absorption into the formal employment and other prestigious businesses. These include, but not limited to the poor, orphans, widows and those with low level of education in cities (Aguilar and Zejan, 1994; Mead and Liedholm, 1998; Page and Söderbom, 2012; Rogerson, 1996).

The 'modus operandi' of street trading is for the girl-traders (in most cases) to carry wares on their heads and call attentions of buyers by making 'melodious noise' to woo customers to see and purchase goods being sold. Some of the traders do not only use shouting and singing melodious songs, some even use hand bells to attract the attention of the passers-by who may be interested in purchasing the products being offered for sale. This roving sales technique has made the girl-traders vulnerable to sexual harassment from men disguising as potential customers. Incomes derived from street trading are mainly used for personal upkeep, to finance one's own or children's

education, to provide start-up capital for another informal enterprise, and/or to support other families or for satisfying other social needs.

There are several reasons why young girls engage in street trading in cities. These can be categorised into 'push' and 'pull' factors. The pull factors could be a product of young girl's perception that life may be easier with fun and glamour in the city which may raise their standard of living through access to material goods or means of making a living (Mufune, 2000; Ward, Seager and Tamasane, 2007). It cannot also be ruled out that industrialisation and urbanisation may also pull people into the cities. Besides, the weakening and relaxation of the traditional extended family systems and other community structures that leave children unprotected can spur migration to the city and to the street. Also, the level of urban poverty, family violence and a host of other factors have the potential of fuelling the influx of girls to street-based commercial activities. Thus, despite the frequent laws enacted to ban the activity (Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA), 2004), girls are still seen amidst traffic jam selling wares, jostling in-between cars and competing in order to outdo each other to satisfy their customers. Several bogging questions have not been addressed: why will a young girl desire to be jostling or run helter-skelter in heavy and dangerous traffic just to sell goods for little or no profit? Why are they daring the law? Is the operation hazard free? What are the levels of assault they are exposed to and what options are available to escape these hazards?

Research Design

Both quantitative research and non-participatory direct observation approach' were used in data gathering. Data were extracted from a 2011 national survey of street traders that was funded by the Covenant University Centre for Research and Development. The survey covered sampled street traders in four major cities in Nigeria. However, only the data-set relating to young girl-traders below the age of 25 years (n = 553 out of total sample of 3,873 street traders) were extracted and

analysed in this study. From over 22 items of trade recorded, only nine categories emerged after the 'axial coding' procedure. Univariate analysis was used to profile respondents' demographics. The model formulated was used to draw inferences on various interconnections between

dependent and independent variables. Specifically, the influence of different socio-demographic factors and street trading indices on the experience of sexual assault was quantified using binary logistic regression of the following form:

$$\text{Logit}(Y) = \ln \frac{\pi}{(1 - \pi)} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n$$

Where π is the probability of experiencing sexual harassment, α is the Y-intercept, the β 's are the logistic regression coefficients of the predictor variables and X's are the set of explanatory variables. Overall, the results of the analysis are presented in tables and charts (where necessary).

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 represents the socio and demographic profile of young girls in street

trading activities in the study locations and the nature of their activities. Almost two-thirds of young girls in street trading business are in the older adolescent age-group (20-24 years). About twenty-eight percent of the responding girls are in their prime adolescent age while 3.1 percent are younger girls in age 10-14 years category. The presence of the latter group is a manifestation of problems within the family and lapses on the part of the government on childcare and economic factors which render homes less effective in providing for the children's well-being (Mufune, 2000; Ward, Seager and Tamasane, 2007).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile and Trading Activities of Young Girls Street Traders

Age Group	No	%	Employment Status	No	%
10-14 years	17	3.1	Self-employed	413	74.7
15-19 years	154	27.8	Employees	49	8.9
20-24 years	382	69.1	Others	91	16.5
Total	553	100.0	Total	553	100.0
Educational attainment			Nature of trading		
No Schooling	32	5.8	Sedentary open spaces	206	37.3
Primary Education	87	15.7	Sedentary in make-shift shop	11	2.0
Secondary Education	317	57.3	sedentary near lock-up shop	3	.5
Tertiary Education OND	117	21.2	Peddling without a shop	333	60.2
Total	553	100	Total	553	100.0
Religious affiliations			Product Sold		
Christianity	407	73.6	Snacks (cake, gala, chips etc)	151	27.3
Islam	146	26.4	Cold drinks/ juices/ice cream	11	2.0
Total	553	100.0	Clothing/Jewelleries	46	8.4
Marital Status			Bread and Confectioneries	46	8.3
Never married	487	88.1	Fresh Fruits/Vegetables	110	19.9
Married	52	9.4	Cooked Foods/Drinks	88	15.9
Separated/Divorced	14	2.5	Phone/computer Accessories	76	13.7
Total	553	100.0	Utensils/appliances, etc	25	4.5
Children Ever Born (CEB)			Total	553	100.0
Zero parity	520	94.0	Initial Capital		
1-2 children	23	4.2	Less than N20,000	489	88.4
3-4 children	10	1.8	N20,000-49,999	18	3.2
Total	553	100.0	N50,000 and above	2	0.4
Type of Accommodation			No Response	44	8.0
Self-Contained Flat	41	7.4	Total	553	100
Room and Parlour	140	25.3	Present Business Worth		
One Room Apartment	292	52.8	Less than N20,000	483	87.3
Wood/iron House	43	7.8	N20,000-49,999	23	4.2
Grass/Mud/Shift houses	34	6.2	N50,000 and above	3	0.5
No Response	3	0.5	No Response	44	8.0
Total	553	100	Total	553	100
Period of Migration			Experience of Harassment		
1980-1999	28	5.1	Harassed	291	52.6
2000 and beyond	132	23.9	Not harassed	256	46.3
Non migrants	393	71.1	No Response	6	1.1
Total	553	100.0	Total	553	100

Street Trading Survey 2011

More than half (57.3 percent) of the girls interviewed had secondary school education, about 15.7 percent had only primary education while 5.8 percent had no experience of regular schooling. The respondents cut across three popular religious affiliations in Nigeria. The

proportion that has married was only 9.4 percent, indicating that the majority were singles (88.1 percent) at the time of the survey. Notwithstanding, about 33 female youth, representing 6.0 percent, were observed to have given birth to at least a child. About 78.1 percent were living in

room and parlour type of houses and a room apartment. The room and parlour is a house that contains several single rooms with a common toilet and bath room for all the occupiers. Each occupier's jurisdiction or rights is only limited to his/her room. About 14 percent lives in wood/mud or shift houses. The data obtained depicts the low economic status of the majority of the girls and buttresses the reasons for selling on the streets.

About 22 items of trade recorded during the interview were axially recoded into nine and two categories only. The proportion that sell food-related items are 73.4 percent while 26.6 trade in other items such as household materials, phone accessories, clothing materials, and basic electronic appliances.

The initial capital as well as the current worth of businesses in the street trading micro-enterprise is below ₦20,000 for most of the traders. Those who claimed their businesses are worth more both at the beginning and at the time of the survey were only 3.6 and 4.7 percent respectively. Among the discoveries from this study is the vulnerability of the girls to assault or harassment. These range from sexual coercion and physical bullying. It also includes unwelcome or inappropriate promise of permission to trade or display wares in better conspicuous places or exemption from trade permits in exchange for sexual favours. Many indicated they have experienced verbal abuse and physical beating a number of times. The quantitative result shows that 52.6 percent have experienced one form of harassment or the other. Other forms of harassment experienced most often are seizure of wares, forceful extortions, among others. Considering the vagaries and the proportion

of victims of this menace in the midst of traffic, it is not out of place to assume the effect could be detrimental to girl's health both now and in the future.

Binary Logistic Regression Estimating the Relationship between the Selected Profile of the Respondents and the Vulnerability to Harassment

The result of the binary logistic estimation shows that all age categories, educational attainment, religious affiliations and girl's welfare condition are positively associated with vulnerability to harassment. The result specifically indicated that girls in age 10-14 and 15-19 years are 1.724 and 1.111 times more likely to be harassed compared to girls in age group 20-24 (i.e. the reference category) as shown in Table 2. The study also revealed that girls who are owners of their own businesses or self-employed are 0.977 times less likely to experience harassment while those who are employees are 1.028 times more likely to be harassed. The self-employed girls could enjoy 'immunity' from harassment because they most often have higher economic worth than their counterparts that are paid or unpaid employees. Such girls may likely have enough money to dole out to touts or public officials supervising such trading 'arena' (i.e. trading territory) and thereby commanding respect which may free them from being touched or pestered. In such situation, the economic power they possess automatically confers on them the right to be among the decision-takers in such environment. The above observation is in tandem with the assertion from Anderson (2003), that the poor are more likely to be victims of police violence than the rich and that those who are better-off can relatively protect themselves against the injury and economic loss consequent upon such abuse.

Table 2. Binary Logistic Regression Estimating the Relationship between the Selected Profile of the Respondents and the Vulnerability to Harassment

Selected Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Odd ratio
Age Group					
20-24 years	RC				
10-14 years	0.545	0.394	1.913	0.167	1.724
15-19 years	0.106	0.164	0.414	0.520	1.111
Employment Status					
Other employment status	RC				
Self-employed	-0.024	0.216	0.012	0.913	0.977
Employed	0.027	0.285	0.009	0.923	1.028
Skill/Training Acquisition					
No skill	RC				
Acquired some Skills	-0.222	0.188	1.395	0.237	0.801
Migration Status					
Others category	RC				
Natives	-1.118	0.522	4.592	0.032	0.327
Migrants	0.099	0.478	0.042	0.837	1.104
Seeking for Jobs					
Not looking for other job	RC				
Looking for other job	-0.180	0.143	1.594	0.207	0.835
Educational Attainment					
Tertiary Education	RC				
No Schooling	0.505	0.307	2.716	0.099	1.657
Primary Education	0.565	0.286	3.900	0.044	1.760
Secondary Education	0.690	0.296	5.445	0.020	1.994
Nature of Trading					
Peddling	RC				
Sedentary	-0.326	0.147	4.948	0.026	0.722
Geo-Political Zone					
Southern Zone	RC				
Northern Zone	1.702	0.334	25.957	0.000	5.484
Non- Nigeria	1.323	1.216	1.184	0.277	3.756
Traders' Welfare Condition					
Better off	RC				
Not Better off	1.331	0.207	41.227	0.000	3.786
Constant	13.462	40192.26 3	0.000	1.000	702261.8
Overall Percentage = 71%					
-2 Log likelihood =		Cox & Snell R Square = 0.270			
1347.210		Nagelkerke R Square = 0.360			

Source: Street Trading Survey 2011

Migration status manifested great influence in terms of experience of harassment. The result shows that girls that are selling within their domain (non-migrants) might be 0.327 less likely to be harassed. This

category of traders might be conversant with the environment and possibly familiar to the officials or touts who are largely to be natives of such locality. The result also revealed that the migrants from the

northern part of the country and immigrants from other countries are more likely to be harassed than their counterparts from the southern zone i.e. the reference category. Notwithstanding, all migrants exhibit the likelihood of been harassed. In the same vein, the result obtained in the analysis of those whose condition has improved through the business of street trading compared to others whose conditions has not been appreciated. Individual traders whose lot is 'better-off' can be easily 'immunized' to all pestering by satisfying the financial gratification of the 'harassers'. In terms of education, the result indicated that girls with no formal education and those who have attained primary and secondary education are 1.657, 1.760 and 1.994 times more likely to be harassed while trading on the street compared to individuals who have tertiary education. However, primary and secondary education are statistically significant (P-value = 0.044 and 0.020 respectively (see Table 2). This finding could be real due principally to the potential of education in empowering girls to know and be capable of guiding their fundamental rights against any form of harassment (UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM, 2004). Education is key to effective reduction in all forms of violence against women and even feminine diseases and infections including HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM, 2004). Besides, education can reduce the number of girls participating in street trading by making them employable in blue cola jobs when available.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The large number of girls in developing countries portends greater opportunity for enduring development but their concentration in the informal and non-gainful street trading activities signals bleak future and negative economic empowerment. This has serious policy implications for a country like Nigeria considering their position as potential mothers and their vulnerability to various degrees of harassment. This could endanger the current and future well-being of a nation. Also, in an era when issues of sexual reproductive health and rights have become

important and sometimes threatening to human existence, further exposure of girls to harassment increases the propensity for higher HIV/AIDS incidence in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries. Prominent among the reasons for selling on the street is poverty; however, the activity seems to be a major means of livelihoods and alternative to unemployment syndrome pervading the country. A proactive hawking measure should therefore be put in place in the form of street trading guideline to control the activities of the traders and enhance their full integration rather than outlawing the activity. The government should therefore schedule a comprehensive programme to assimilate the hawkers for effective implementation of the law and economic empowerment of the girls and women in general.

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