

The Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Activities of Street Children in Maiduguri, Northeast Nigeria. Les Caractéristiques Sociodémographiques Et Les Activités Des Enfants Des Rues À Maiduguri, Dans Le Nord-Est Du Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Streetism is a growing problem in most African cities, a problematic situation affecting our society. The first step is to identify these children and understand their street activities.

Method: This study investigated the street children in Maiduguri aged 6-14 years. It was a cross-sectional and descriptive community-based study, aimed at assessing the socio-demographic characteristics of these children and examining their activities in the streets.

Result: Ninety-four percent male; with a male-to-female ratio of 16:1 indicating male preponderance. The mean age was 10.6 ± 2.36 years. Sixty percent of all children were Almajiris, while 22% attended formal education. The remaining 18% were out of school. Their activities on the streets ranged from begging for food to eat, working in restaurants, selling sachet water, and lifting goods for adults. The majority, 31%, had lost contact with family members for a long time. Parental education was strongly linked with child status on the streets. Ninety-six percent of the Almajiris were from parents who had no formal education and were primarily traders. There was a significant relationship between parents' educational status and the child's street status, $\chi^2=220$, df 8, $N=231$, and a p -value of 0.001.

Conclusion: This highlights the need for urgent action to ensure that every child has access to education, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Keywords: Street, Children, Socio-demographic, Activities, Maiduguri

ABSTRAIT

Contexte: streetisme est un croissant problème dans plupart africaines villes, une difficile situation affectant notre société. La première étape est à identifier ces enfants et à comprendre leurs activités dans les rues.

Méthode: Cette étude examina les enfants-de rue à Maiduguri âgés 6-14 ans. Il était une transversale et descriptive communautaire étude, visant à évaluer les sociodémographiques caractéristiques de ces enfants et analysant leurs activités dans les rues.

Résultats: Affichaient (96%) taux de-participation, (94%) sont masculins; avec un garçons-filles rapport de 16:1, indiquant masculin prédominance. L'âge moyen était de 10,6, la tranche modale était de 10 à 12 ans et écart-type de ($\pm 2,36$). Soixante pour cent de tous les enfants sont Almajiris, tandis que seulement (22%) fréquentent l'éducation formelle, et (18%) sont déscolarisés. Leurs activités dans la rue vont de mendier pour manger, travailler dans des restaurants, vendre eau-sachet, et porter des diverses marchandises pour adultes. La majorité (31%) a perdu définitivement le contact avec ses proches depuis longtemps. L'éducation est fortement liée au statut des enfants dans la rue. 96 % des Almajiris viennent de parents sans éducation formelle et surtout commerçants, et il existe une relation très clairement significative entre le faible niveau d'éducation des parents et le statut de rue des enfants ($\chi^2=220$, df 8, $N=231$, $p=0,001$).

Conclusion: Cela souligne nécessité d'une action urgente pour garantir à chaque enfant l'accès à l'éducation, quel que soit son milieu socio-économique.

Mots-clés: Principal, Rue, Enfants, Sociodémographiques, Activités, Maiduguri.

INTRODUCTION

Streetism and the phenomenon of street children are escalating, involving most cities (1). Though a global problem affecting both developed and developing countries, it is more prevalent in the poor nations of Latin America, Asia, and Africa (1). The term Street Children was coined by Henry Mayhew in 1851 while writing on labor and the London poor in England. Since then, the word has come to stay and is widely in use (2-4). It was subsequently adopted by the United Nations in 1979 (5,6). Poverty, family separation from ill health or death, neglect, abuse or abandonment, and social unrest are all common triggers.

Children on the street and Children on the street are the two main categories of street children identified by UNICEF. Children on the street are those who engage in economic activity, such as hawking goods or begging to fend for their families. They may be attending school and feel a sense of belonging to a family. UNICEF defines street children as boys and girls of various ages who work as vendors in the urban markets or who engage regularly in other informal economic activities such as carrying bags, guarding cars, begging, or hauling garbage in areas formally designated for public use (5).

Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC), a term coined by UNICEF, and which is now used synonymously with street children is accepted worldwide to describe a group of children who are affected by organized violence, refugees, children with disabilities, children unaccompanied by adults in disasters, and street working children (5). This distinction made by UNICEF between street children and children on and off the street was adopted from the work of Peter

Tacon (7, 8). Concerns regarding the situational analysis of child abuse and neglect in Africa were brought up by the African Network of the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) (8, 9). The African Network of the ISPCAN identified five main forms of child abuse and neglect. These include sexual abuse, child labor, street roaming, child violence, and abandonment during childhood. For the sake of health planning, it seems sensible to define abuse broadly, accounting for the various cultural, legal, social, and clinical viewpoints (9).

The Arabic term “AL-MUHAJIR,” which often denotes someone who relocated to uphold Islamic knowledge or acquire knowledge of the Qur’an, is the origin of the term “Almagiri”. Sadly, parents are entrusting Qur’anic teachers who do not have plans for long-term financial stability, with their children’s welfare (10, 11). This decreases the instructors’ livelihood and exacerbates the situation. Another group of children are those who are perpetually homeless and who pose as Qur’anic students to beg for food and money. This practice regrettably, links learning Qur’anic lessons with begging.

The Almagiri phenomena can be divided into three groups: adults, adolescents, and children. While the kids wander the streets, the grownups struggle to make ends meet by doing menial jobs and creating crafts (10 - 12).

Streetism is a delicate societal issue that is frequently disregarded by the public without any backing or intervention from relevant authorities (4). This practice, which Judith Ennew

called the “African mechanism of Streetism,” involves sending children far from home to uphold Quranic knowledge. It is not limited to the northern Nigerian state of Kano; it is also practiced throughout the country’s northern region, including Maiduguri in Borno state, Urban regions in Chad, The Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and Niger Republic (8). These children fend for themselves, spending more time begging than being in their various study areas. They are vulnerable and abuse-prone. They appear untidy, maltreated, undernourished, and neglected (8). African Muslims have a cultural practice of sending their children away from home for welfare and educational purposes (8).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) acknowledges the fundamental nature of childhood, children, and social involvement in its effort to promote children’s participation in social and cultural issues that directly affect their lives (13). Article 19 of the CRC, which guarantees protection from violence and abuse, and Article 32, which protects against economic exploitation, have been identified as the catalysts for a revolutionary shift in understanding children as human beings as opposed to human becoming. Article 32 examined the economic exploitation of children in terms of age at work, long hours of labor for inadequate pay in hazardous conditions, and under a slave-like setting (13, 14).

The projected population of Nigeria in 2020 was 204 million (15), and based on that projection, the Nigerian population was estimated at 218 million in 2022. The projected distribution was as follows: Forty-five percent under 15 years of age with 3.3% aged 65 years and above (16 - 18).

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF estimate the global number of street children to be 100 million. UNICEF 2005 estimated the number of children in the world to be 2.2 billion, the number of children living in developing countries to be 1.9 billion, and the numbers are growing. With fewer family members left to cater to these children, many of them may join the streets. In Africa, the problem is compounded by poverty, wars, and ethnic conflicts (19).

As the world's population grows, the social phenomenon of street children will increase. Six out of ten urban dwellers are expected to be less than 18 years of age (1). Africa today has more than 10.7 million children orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Street wandering is now a growing problem in most African cities and towns. The problem requires urgent attention as it threatens society.

It is important to understand these children and the factors that cause them to be on the streets.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the socio-demographic profile of street children in Maiduguri aged 6-14 years.
2. To examine the activities of these street children.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

1. To provide information regarding these street children.
2. Identifying reasons for the existence of street children is crucial in finding a permanent solution to the problem.
3. Provide modules and advocacy to improve attitudinal support from the society in provision of care for these children.

METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive study of street children aged 6-14 years in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Borno state's population is 4,151,193 according to the 2006 provisional census and is estimated to be 6,111,462 in 2022 (18). With a population density of about 60 people per square kilometer, the State experiences hot, dry weather for most of the year, with slightly warmer temperatures in the south (17).

SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION

The sample size was calculated using 65% prevalence for this environment and at a confidence interval rate of 95% (20).

$$N = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2} \text{ Where}$$

N = the desired sample size

Z = standard normal deviation set at 95% confidence interval = 1.96

p = prevalence of the disorder in the target population = 65% = 0.65

d = degree of accuracy desired, set at 5% = 0.05

$$q = 1.0 - p = 1 - (0.65) = 0.35$$

Therefore.

$$N = 0.836 / 0.0025 = 334.4$$

However, to compensate for possible non-response and to increase the precision of the estimate, an adjustment was made to the calculated sample size using the formula (21).

$$n_s = \frac{N}{ar}$$

n_s = compensated sample size

n = calculated sample size = 334

a r = anticipated response rate set at 80% = 0.8

Therefore $n_s = 334 / 0.8 = 415$ which is rounded up to 420 children.

In view of the large sample size, the study was conducted using 240 as

the sample size, half of the total sample size for convenience. A simple Random sampling method was used. The sample frame was the total number of Wards in MMC (Maiduguri Metropolitan Council). The study zone consists of fifteen political wards (22). Bolori was randomly picked for the study. Data was collected using the following instruments.

1. Socio-demographic questionnaire. Designed to obtain relevant information regarding the children, age, sex, ethnicity, religion, information about their parents, activities in the street, and contact with family members.
2. Questionnaire for street children, designed by Agnelli in her report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (23). It is a 15-item short, straightforward self-administered questionnaire that captures the street children's biodata, activities in the street, and their home environment. To avoid asking the same question multiple times, similar questions were removed.

The study was conducted in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council at Bolori one ward, following approval from the district head of the area, the local council, and the local head (the Lawan). Only consenting children were interviewed; Children aged 6-14 years were interviewed using the socio-demographic questionnaire and the street children questionnaire by the researcher and two trained research assistants. The selection was done randomly using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. All children aged six to 14 who were observed on the streets, including Almajiris and youngsters who roamed the streets met the inclusion criteria. Children who were in foster homes, those who were accompanied by adults, and those who passed by with disabilities

were excluded. Data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.

RESULTS

A total of 231 respondents were obtained out of 240. Representing a 96% response rate. This was analyzed. There were more males than females; Males were ninety-four percent (94%) i.e. two hundred and eighteen (218), while only six percent (6%) were females. The sex ratio male to female (M: F) was 16:1, with a mean age of 10.6 years and a Standard deviation of 2.36. The modal age group was 10-12 (ten to twelve) years of age, Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Most of the children, 42%, were of the Hausa tribe from neighboring states. In contrast, the Kanuri make up 17%, Shuwa Arabs 2%, and Babur/ Bura less than 1% of the population of street children. Twenty-two percent or 51 were Christians, while 78%, or hundred and seventy-nine were Muslims. 136 out of 231, or 60% of the total number of children studied, were Almajiris. The remaining 17% did not attend any form of education.

Forty-five percent (45%) of all the children on the street reported living with their guardian/Islamic teacher, and only 26% (twenty-six percent) live with their parents at home.

Sixty (60) out of the 136 Almajiris have lost contact with their family members for a long time, thirty (30) reported yearly visits, unlike those children who attended western schools, forty-six (46) out of 51 (fifty-one) have daily contact with their parents.

The children engaged in various activities in the street ranging from begging for food, working in restaurants, selling sachet water, or

Table 1

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	218	94.4	94.4	94.4
Female	13	5.6	5.6	100.0
Total	231	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Age Distribution of the Street Children with Percentage

Valid Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
5	1	.4	.4	.4
6	21	9.1	9.1	9.5
7	3	1.3	1.3	10.8
8	13	5.6	5.6	16.5
9	36	15.6	15.6	32.0
10	34	14.7	14.7	46.8
11	44	19.0	19.0	65.8
12	22	9.5	9.5	75.3
13	24	10.4	10.4	85.7
14	33	14.3	14.3	100.0
Total	231	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Description	Age Range	Minimum Age	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Age	9	5	14	10.57	2.35	5.55
N (231)	9.1	9.1	9.5			

lifting goods (loads) for adults, and others. Forty-four percent (84) reported mainly begging for food to eat, and 1/3, fifty-seven, reported working in restaurants and shops. Table 4.

The educational status of the children's parents was observed with the children's status, of those children that attended formal education, 29 of the fathers had post-primary education and 8 had Advance-levels, while the Almajiris, 116 of their parents had similar Sangaya education, 10 had primary education and none had Advance-level of education. The educational level was statistically significant at a Chi-square value of 220, df 8, and a p-value of 0.001. With regards to occupational status, of parents of children who attended formal education, 18 were

civil servants, 31 were traders, while the Almajiris parents were traders, 61, and 38 were farmers, respectively, Tables 5 and 6.

DISCUSSION

There was a male preponderance in this study contrary to the report by Ebigbo et al, who in 2003 found a gender ratio among street children in Ibadan, Nigeria to be 1:2 in favour of females. In Kaduna, 20% more girls were seen in the street than boys (24). This was similar to findings in Rwanda, where girls dominated the streets (25).

According to a survey conducted in a different region of the nation, the majority of the street children were between the ages of 15 and 17, with a male-to-female ratio of 1.5; 1 or 58.3% and 41.7%, respectively (26).

Table 4: The Children’s Activities in the Street

Activities	Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Begging for Food	84	36.4	44.0	44.0
Working in a restaurant/shops	57	24.7	29.8	73.8
Scavenging	7	3.0	3.7	77.5
Both begging & selling	21	9.1	11.0	88.5
Selling Sachet water	4	1.7	2.1	90.6
Selling soft drinks	2	.9	1.0	91.6
Selling other items	5	2.2	2.6	94.2
Laborers /lifting goods	1	.4	.5	94.8
others e. g playing	9	3.9	4.7	99.5
None	1	.4	.5	100.0
Total	191	82.7	100.0	
Missing	40	17.3		
Total	231	100.0		

It is not surprising that 2/3 of the children were Muslims, making up 78% of the population given that the inhabitants of Maiduguri town are mainly Muslims (22, 27).

These children were involved in a variety of street activities, such as begging for food from house to house, as observed by 36.4 % of the population, and 24% working in stores and restaurants to earn money that they take home to their parents at the end of the day. Some sell only sachet water or other commodities; others admitted to lifting goods for adults to receive stipends. This is in stark contrast to research conducted in Khartoum, Sudan, where most children, 44%, work to support themselves, and their families and pay for their education. On average, they make about 6900 Sudanese pounds a day, instead of begging for food (28). In Kenya, the street children are either from broken homes or are orphans, who beg for money, pickpocket, hawk, traffic drugs, scavenge, and direct cars to parking spaces. A portion of them return to their homes to live in challenging socioeconomic circumstances with their relatives.

Table 5: Father’s Educational Status versus Education of Children Cross tabulation

Fathers Educational Status	The Children’s Educational Status			Total
	Formal/ Western Education	Not Attending School	Almajiri	
A-level	8	0	0	8
Post-primary	29	8	5	42
Primary school	7	7	10	24
Islamiyah school	3	4	116	123
None	2	21	3	26
Total	49	40	134	223

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Significant (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	220.584(a)	8	0.001
Likelihood Ratio	205.695	8	0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	74.986	1	0.001
N of Valid Cases	223		

Findings in our study of a 16:1 male-to-female ratio could be explained by the fact that in Borno state, traditionally young girls are confined at home.

Three categories can be used to classify the children found on Maiduguri’s streets: Those who attended western or public schools, 22%, those who did not attend any form of education, 18%, and the Almajiris, 60%.

This is a sequel to the practice of taking children away from their homes for studies: 41% of the children were Hausas from neighboring northern Nigerian states, while the proportions of children from indigenous tribes were lower: 17% Kanuris, 1.8% Shuwa Arabs, and less than 1% were of the Babur tribe. The Kanuris people make up 53% of the town’s original tribes, followed by the Gwoza, Babur Bura, Margi, and Shuwa Arabs (22).

Out of 125 Almajiris, 60 reported a prolonged period without communication with family members, while 30 reported annual visits, and 31%, or one in every 6, had lost contact with their families for an extended period. This contrasted with the findings of children enrolled in formal educational programs, where ninety percent of the respondents reported having daily contact with their parents (46 out of 51).

Parental education is strongly linked with child status in the streets. Ninety-six percent of the Almajiri were from parents who had no formal education and were primarily traders,

while all the parents with advanced education had their children attending Western schools and slept at home under supervision. There was a significant relationship between parents' educational status and the child's street status at ($\chi^2=220$, df 8, N 231 and p-value 0.001).

CONCLUSION

The Almajiri were associated with street wandering in Maiduguri. Most of them were males and often between the ages of 10 and 12. They were primarily Hausa-speaking and came from nearby states. These children engaged in various activities on the streets, like begging for food, working in restaurants, selling sachet water, and carrying stuff for adults. Causes of this practice include a low level of parental education and poor socioeconomic status. Although many northern Nigerian cultures have long engaged in this activity, the situation is getting worse due to the rising poverty rate.

RECOMMENDATION

Public education programs through the media should contribute to the eventual realization among Nigerian parents that there is no benefit of allowing their children into the streets, rather it carries a good measure of disadvantage.

The needs of the street children should be the priority of the government. These should include feeding programs, free and compulsory formal education for all children in the country up to 18 years of age, health care provision, legal aid, adolescents' vocational education programs like life skill education (LSE), and family reunification.

The Street Child Consciousness program, which has impacted children positively, should be an adopted model. Raise public awareness of the

future of our country by introducing Street Children's Day.

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