



Full Length Research Paper

The menace of street hawking in Aba metropolis, South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Developing countries such as Nigeria are burdened with over population leading to high rates of unemployment thus contributing to the large number of people seen on the streets engaging in hawking activities. The aim of this study was to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of hawkers as well as the health and social implications of street hawking and the factors contributing to it. This was a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted among 300 hawkers who were recruited by simple random sampling from major streets, busy markets and the central motor parks in Aba, South-East Nigeria in January 2014. Data was collected through in-depth interview and observation of the participants and the use of interviewer administered questionnaires. Interviews were recorded and extracts presented in related themes. SPSS version 17 was used for analysis. Of the 300 respondents, 108 (36.0%) were males while 192 (64.0%) were females giving a male: female ratio of 0.6:1. Over half; 174 (58.0%) were children between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Fifty-two (17.3%) did not have any formal education. Major reason for engaging in hawking was to support the family income however, the majority 216 (72.0%) were willing to quit hawking if offered an alternative means of livelihood. The awareness of HIV/AIDS vulnerability and HCT services among the respondents were low but this was not statistically significantly ($X^2=0.56$; $P=0.45$ and $X^2=0.79$; $P=0.37$ respectively). This study revealed that unemployment and poverty were factors contributing to hawking activities. Street hawking poses numerous risks and hinders educational development. Policy implementation against street hawking and poverty alleviation through job creation are recommended to stop the menace of street hawking in Nigeria.

Keywords: Street hawking, risks, factors, Aba, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Street hawking or vending in developing countries is attracting a rising interest amongst researchers (Olutunde, 2013; Ugochukwu et al., 2012) due to the various health, social, and economic implications to those who engage in the trade (Amoo et al., 2012; Esin et al., 2005; Ashimolowo et al., 2010). Developing countries are faced with exponential growth giving rise to rural-urban drift in search of a better means of livelihood (Hoyamo and Keenan, 2007). This in addition, encroaches on the limited resources available in these countries. Families who cannot afford the high cost of house rent are forced to live in urban slums which further exposes them to

numerous health and environmental hazards, unemployment and poor education (Ekpenyong and Nkereuwem, 2011). The need to continually provide for the family in the midst of unfriendly conditions has led women, men, youths and children to engage in street hawking activities (Ekpenyong and Nkereuwem, 2011).

Street hawking irrespective of who (age and sex) engages in it, is associated with major hazards (Lee, 2004; Lu, 2011). This includes sexual assault which increases the vulnerability of the hawkers to diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, increased risk of unwanted pregnancies and

unsafe abortion (Lee, 2004; Lu, 2011; Kwankye et al., 2007). Other hazards include physical assaults, mobbing, involvement in road traffic accidents, kidnapping and ritual killings. Street hawking leads to increased exposure to antisocial activities like smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, cultism and crime. Hawkers are exposed to harsh weather conditions, insect and reptile bites and hunger (Ugochukwu et al., 2012; Amoo et al., 2012; Esin et al., 2005; Ashimolowo et al., 2010; Hoyamo and Keenan, 2007; Ekpenyong and Nkereuwem, 2011). When children are involved, in addition to these other risks, they are deprived of education and sound health and these constitute child abuse (Ekpenyong and Nkereuwem, 2011).

Street hawking defaces the environment from littering by people who buy the goods sold by the hawkers (Kwankye et al., 2007). This adds to environmental pollution when the available drainages are blocked leading to flooding and increased breeding of vectors especially during the rainy season. The health of residents who live around these areas is jeopardized due to the increased prevalence of communicable diseases. There is an increased risk of physical injuries sustained by the hawkers when they carry their goods on their heads or hands and run after moving vehicles in an attempt to ensure their sales are completed. This in addition contributes to the impediment in the flow of traffic as they flood these major roads and junctions (Amoo et al., 2012).

The incidence of street hawking in Nigeria, has been related to the high rates of unemployment, poverty, inflation, poor school performance, unstable families, peer group influence, large family size and poor parental care (Fawole et al., 2003). Poverty has been given as a major factor for engaging in street hawking due to the need to compensate for the family income (Onuzulike, 2007). Thus, this study was conducted among hawkers in Aba, a commercial city in South-east, Nigeria irrespective of their age and sex unlike previous studies which focused mainly on children who are involved in street trading. The objectives of this study were to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the hawkers and the health and social consequences of street hawking. The findings from the study will guide policy makers to address the problems of street hawking and possibly find ways of curbing this trend in our society.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

Aba is the most populous and largest city in Abia State, South East Nigeria with an estimated population of 750,972 (Nigeria Population Commission, Abuja. Census 2006). Aba is made up of three local government areas; Aba South, Aba North and Osisioma. It covers a total

area of 6,320km². The inhabitants of Aba are predominantly of the Igbo ethnic group and their main occupation is trading and Government employed jobs (Civil and public servants). Aba is a busy commercial city that attracts migrants into the city and serves as a central point for travelers to and from different states of Nigeria. The urban slum of the city is more populous than other parts of the town and has poor housing and drainage systems.

Study design and sampling

The study was descriptive cross-sectional in design conducted in January 2014 among hawkers in Aba, Abia State. The sample size was calculated to be 280 based on a 24% prevalence of street hawking in a Ghanaian study (Kwankye et al., 2007) with 95% CI and 5% precision. Three hundred participants were recruited from major streets, busy markets (Ariaria, Ahia-ohuu and Ngwa road), and the central motor parks. Participants were selected by simple random sampling after purchasing some of the items they sold in order to get their attention. The objectives of the study was explained to each participant and verbal consent obtained. Data was collected using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative method was by in-depth interview of the participants and participant observation. Interviewer administered semi-structured questionnaires were used for quantitative data collection. The questionnaires were administered in English, Igbo or vernacular depending on the level of understanding of the respondents. The questionnaires had been pretested in the state capital where hawking activities were seen. The data collected covered socio-demographic characteristics of hawkers, reason(s) for engaging in the trade, willingness to quit hawking if offered another job opportunity, exposure of the hawkers to various hazards and awareness and use of HIV counseling and testing services in Aba.

Data analysis

Data collected was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 17 (SPSS, 2008) statistical software for quantitative data. In-depth interviews were recorded and thereafter coded by similar themes. Frequencies and proportions were presented in tables while Chi-square (X^2) test was used to determine associations between categorical variables and $P < 0.05$ taken as statistically significant.

RESULTS

Background characteristics of respondents

A total of 300 hawkers, which consisted of 192 (64.0%)

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Male[108]	Female [192]	Total [300]	Percentage (100%)
Age (years)				
10– 14	30	36	66	22.0
15– 19	40	68	108	36.0
20– 24	27	63	90	30.0
25 and above	11	25	36	12.0
Tribe:				
Ibo	92	134	226	75.3
Yoruba	2	26	28	9.3
Efik	0	1	1	0.3
Hausa	14	31	45	15.0
Marital Status:				
Single	97	119	216	72.0
Married	11	54	65	21.7
Separated	0	19	19	6.3
Educational Attainment:				
No formal education	17	35	52	17.3
Primary	14	20	34	11.3
Junior Secondary	44	83	127	42.3
Senior Secondary	33	52	85	28.3
Tertiary	0	2	2	0.7
Persons respondents lives with:				
Alone	43	12	55	18.3
Parents	16	103	119	39.7
Friends	23	11	34	11.3
Spouse	9	27	36	12.0
Relatives	17	39	56	18.7

females and 108 (36.0%) males were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 10 to 45 years with a mean age of 27.9 years (± 7.4 SD). Over a third of them; 108 (36.0%) were between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age while the least; 36 (12.0%) were over 25 years old. Majority; 226[75.3%] were of the Ibo tribe.

Majority; 216 (72.0%) of the respondents were single followed by 65 (21.7%) who were married. Fifty-two hawkers, [17 (32.7%) males and 35 (67.3%) females] did not have any formal education. Two females (0.7%) had attained tertiary level of education.

Regarding persons the respondents live with; 119 (39.7%) lived with their parents while 55 (18.3%) lived alone. More females, 103 (86.6%) lived with their parents as compared to the males 16(13.4%). Similarly, more males, 43 (78.2%) lived alone when compared with females 12 (21.8%) (See Table 1).On In-depth interview, a male hawker said “I sleep in the packing shop because I can't pay for a house”. Another said “I can sleep

anywhere even in uncompleted buildings or mechanic workshops”.

Earnings and Expenditure

As seen in table 2, more than half of the respondents; 163 (54.3%) earned less than N2,500.00 (\$15.6) daily while the least; 29 (9.7%) earned more than N3,500.00 (\$21.9) daily. Despite this, most 193(64.3%) of the hawkers spent more than N1,500.00 (\$9.3) per day. On In-depth interview reports, some responses by the hawkers were “.....what we earn depends on the season of the year, for example more sales are made during festive celebrations such as Christmas than at other times”. Another reported thus: “I sell more ‘pure water’ (satchet water) during hot and sunny days”. “I don't make as much money as the boys because I am not as strong to run after moving vehicles. I am afraid I might be knocked down”; a female hawker reported.

Table 2. Income/ expenditure of respondents

Income/ day (naira)	Male [108]	Female [192]	Total [300]	Percentage[100%]
<2,500.00	61	102	163	54.3
2,500.00-3,000.00	26	47	73	24.3
3,100.00-3,500.00	11	24	35	11.7
>3,500.00	10	19	29	9.7
Average expenditure/ day (naira)				
<1,000.00	7	68	75	25.0
1000-1500.00	17	15	32	10.7
>1,500.00	84	109	193	64.3

Table 3. Items sold by respondents

Item sold	Frequency (%)
Pure water	39 [13.0]
Fruits	42 [14.0]
Sausage rolls	51 [17.0]
Soft drinks[minerals]	62 [20.7]
Other snacks [biscuits, meat pie etc.]	27 [9.0]
Handsets	14 [4.7]
Handset car chargers	19 [6.3]
Recharge cards	23 [7.7]
Carrots	6 [2.0]
"Kunu"	3 [1.0]
Yam	10 [3.3]
Crayfish	4 [1.3]
Total	300 [100.0]

On expenditure, one of the male hawkers said "I spend more than I earn because I have to eat well to be strong to run after moving vehicles". Another hawker added "I change my slippers at least once thrice a month or sometimes every week because in the process of running, they might be lost or damaged". A female hawker when interviewed said: "I have to send money to my parents and pay for my house, so little or nothing at times is left for me at the end of the month". "I barely have savings after each month because all the profit from this business is put into my children's school fees but I still need to continue" reported a married woman.

Items sold by the hawkers

The highest sold products were drinks of all brands; (Coca-cola, Lucozade boost, Yoghurt, Ribena etc) which constituted 62 (20.7%) of all the items. This was followed by Sausage rolls of all types (Gala, Rite, Beefie, Fill-up, Super bite etc) making up 51 (17.0%) of the items. Satchet water, commonly known as 'pure water' in Nigeria was the third commonest item sold constituting

39 (13.0%) of the items. Other goods seen with hawkers were phone chargers, fruits, a locally made drink 'kunu,' among others (see Table 3). On further queries on what informed their choice of products to sell, these responses were recorded: "I sell what people need on their journey which is also not bulky. I also sell what I can easily buy with the little capital in my hands" reported a female hawker selling water and other drinks. A male hawker said "I am always here selling phone chargers because this is a major and busy road in and out of the town and so I know people would need car chargers for their phones".

Health and social risks among respondents

A total of 214 respondents comprising 83 (38.8%) males and 131 (61.2%) females had been victims of road traffic accidents. One hundred and seventy-six (58.7%) of them had been physically molested while 91 (30.3%) had been sexually molested. Among them, more female hawkers, 67 (73.6%) had been sexually molested and this was statistically significant ($X^2 = 5.6$, $P=0.01$). However, out

Table 4. Hazards exposure among respondents (positive responses)

*Hazard	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	X ²	P
Accident	83(38.8)	131(61.2)	214(100.0)	2.58	0.2
Sexual molestation	24(26.4)	67(73.6)	91(100.0)	5.6	0.01
Physical molestation	101(57.4)	75(42.6)	176(100.0)	86.3	<0.001
Robbed	46(33.6)	91(66.4)	137(100.0)	0.58	0.5
Kidnapped	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	NA	

*multiple responses

Table 5. HIV/AIDS vulnerability and HCT services awareness among respondents

Awareness	Male [%]	Female [%]	Total [%]	X ² /P
Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS				
Yes	32[33.0]	65[67.0]	97 [100.0]	X ² =0.56
No	76[37.4]	127[62.6]	203 [100.0]	P=0.45
Total	108 [36.0]	192[64.0]	300 [100.0]	
Awareness of HCT services				
Yes	20[31.3]	44[68.7]	64 [100.0]	X ² =0.79
No	88[37.3]	148[62.7]	236 [100.0]	P=0.37
Total	108 [36.0]	192 [64.0]	300 [100.0]	

of the 108 male hawkers; nearly all; 101(93.5%) of them had been physically molested as compared with 75 females (39.1% of them) which was also statistically significant; $X^2=86.3$, $P<0.001$ No report of kidnapping was recorded (see Table 4).

Reports by the hawkers read: "Some of us have been mistakenly arrested by the police taking us to be robbers but we don't steal". Another hawker who responded to questions on the prevalence of some antisocial behaviors said: "I smoke and take little alcohol at the end of my day's sales but I do not belong to any cult, though there various cult groups among us here".

Regarding awareness of HIV/AIDS vulnerability, 97 (32.3%) hawkers, comprising of 32 (33.0%) males and 65 (67.0%) females were aware of a higher risk of acquiring HIV due to their exposure. There was however no statistical significance difference in their responses. Majority; 236 (78.6%) of the hawkers were not aware of HCT services within the locality. This was also not statistically significant (see Table 5). On in-depth interview, some hawkers told the researchers: "it is the girls that are mostly affected by this 'sex thing' from bus drivers, conductors and other men" (male hawker 23 years old). An 18 year old female hawker said ".....yes, we are disturbed by men but if you are careful of where and what time you sell your goods, you are safe. The men pretend to buy your goods or ask you to come later for your money and at such times, they can harm the girl". When asked about unwanted pregnancies

and frequency of abortion they reported: ".....yes I know one or two girls who have been pregnant but I am not sure what happened thereafter although the stress associated with this job can lead to abortion" (female hawker 22years old).

Reasons for engaging in street hawking

All the respondents gave the need to generate income to support themselves and/or their families as the reason for their engaging in the trade. On In-depth interview report, some of the hawkers said "I have completed my secondary school education but don't have the money for university education". Another male hawker told us; "I am only selling to save up money to assist my parents in paying for my schooling". A female respondent reported, "My parents said I should wait for my senior brother to complete his university education before I start so I started this business instead of doing nothing".

Willingness to quit hawking

As shown in table 6, majority; 216 (72.0%) of the respondents were willing to quit hawking if offered another means of livelihood though the females were found to be more willing than the males which was statistically significant at $P=0.003$. On In depth-interview some of them responded: "I am willing to stop this job if given a better means of livelihood because I want to go to

Table 6. Willingness to quit hawking

Willingness to quit hawking	Male[%]	Female[%]	Total
Yes	89[41.2]	127[58.8]	216[100.0]
No	19[22.6]	65[77.4]	84[100.0]
Total	108[36.0]	192[64.0]	300[100.0]

$\chi^2= 8.7$ $P=0.003$

school” reported a female hawker 18years of age. “*I have been in this business for over 15years now and the sales have helped me in training my children, I won’t be able to cope except the government takes over my children’s education*” reported a married female hawker.

Participants’ observation

Traffic congestion and hawking: Hawkers were observed to concentrate at areas on the roads or major junctions where the movement of vehicles was stagnated. If the vehicles moved suddenly, the hawkers ran behind the moving vehicles to complete the transactions that they started.

Environmental littering and hawking: There was littering of various items on the road and around the surroundings where hawking activities took place, either thrown by the hawkers or buyers.

DISCUSSION

Street hawking remains a major challenge in Nigeria (Olutunde, 2013; Ugochukwu et al., 2012; Amoo et al., 2012). In this study, over half of the hawkers were children between the ages of 10 and 19 years. The involvement of children in street hawking constitutes child labor and is a form of child abuse (Child Right Act (CRA) 2003 Section 21 – 40). The International Labor Organization has estimated that over 200 million children aged 5 to 17 years are engaged in child labor (UNICEF, 2012). Over 10 million of these children live and work on the streets and this number has increased with global population growth, urbanization and rural-urban migration (International Labour Office. The End of Child Labour, 2006). The International Convention on the Right of the Child held in 2000 which hosted all the member states of the United nations agreed that every child must be protected against all forms of exploitation, indecent or degrading treatment, including child labor, abduction and sale (UNICEF, 2000). Policies regarding child labor in Nigeria, are contained in the Child Rights Act passed by the National Assembly (Child Right Act (CRA) 2003 Section 21 – 40). The bill, in accordance with the decision made at the International Convention ensures that every child born is given the fullest opportunity for self-realization and development (Amoo et al., 2012). In spite of this law, the streets of major towns and cities in Nigeria

are flooded with children who sell various items (Olutunde, 2013; Ugochukwu et al., 2012; Ashimolowo et al., 2010; Ogundele and Ojo, 2007).

The preponderance of female hawkers has been similarly reported in other studies conducted in Nigeria (Fetuga et al., 2005; Omokhodion and Omokhodion, 2001) but differs from reports from South Africa and Brazil (Roux, 1996; Raffaelli et al., 2000). These findings are not surprising because in a typical African cultural setting, it is believed that the training of female children is not beneficial to their families. A male child usually retains the family name and possessions while the girl child is thought to be useful only to her husband. Thus, the females are less likely to attend school and are either given out in early marriage or sent to live with relatives as “house-helpers” all in a bid to assist in the family finances. The present study buttresses this fact as over 60% of the hawkers who did not have any form of formal education were female. Education is an important tool in economic development, yet it has been reported that forty percent of Nigerian children aged 6-11 years do not attend school which is in keeping with National statistics of a high rate of out of school children in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2000). For the girl-child, this is particularly burdensome owing to the numerous benefits associated in educating girls. According to the United Nations Education Fund (UNICEF), girl-education empowers girls to develop life skills, such as the ability to participate effectively in society and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and sexual exploitation (UNICEF, 2000). Educating a girl reduces the risk of maternal mortality and it is also a known fact that children of educated women are more likely to go to school, which has an exponential effect on education and poverty reduction (UNICEF, 2000).

The major reason given by all the hawkers interviewed on engaging in the trade was the need to contribute to the family income. Parental influence could have influenced their choice to engage in hawking as over 50% of them lived with either their parents or relatives. This has also been reported in other studies (Ogundele and Ojo, 2007). The involvement of married women in this trading activity was also a striking finding. These women when interviewed said that hawking was a means of generating money to assist their husbands in paying for their children’s school fees. Educating their children, a major reason given by the mothers for engaging in hawking, showed the value placed on education by some of them interviewed. While

considering the involvement of women in hawking where they compete with men for the same customers under similar harsh environmental conditions, it is undoubtedly likely that they will sustain more injuries than the men. Women are a vulnerable group who by virtue of their gender, face more workplace discrimination and stress than the males (Lee, 2004; Lu, 2005; International Labour Organization (ILO) 2014). Hawking thus exposes women to higher risks of developing musculoskeletal disorders, psychological problems, infertility, miscarriages and of being raped by men who pretend to buy the products they sell (Abama and Kwaja, 2009).

Majority of the street hawkers in the present study had been exposed to one or more hazard as a result of their engaging in the trade. Physical assaults were reported by over 50% of the hawkers in this study though males were more affected than the females. This could be due to the need to defend themselves or their female counterparts against robbers or customers who try to take advantage of them. Robbing of personal items was reported to affect the females more than the males which could be due to their smaller stature and increased vulnerability. Sexual molestation was more common among the female hawkers, a finding which conforms to reports from other parts of the country (Olutunde, 2013; Ugochukwu et al., 2012; Amoo et al., 2012). Exposure to forced unprotected sex might lead the hawkers to contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Unfortunately, majority of the respondents were unaware of their vulnerability of contracting HIV as a result of their occupation and also the availability HIV counseling and testing facilities in their locality. This poor level of sexual awareness was similarly reported in a study by Ikechebelu et al., 2008 who attributed this to the low educational status of the hawkers. In the present study, most of the hawkers had either no formal education or a low educational background. This high level of ignorance concerning sexual matters also reflects the reluctance of parents, caregivers and teachers to give proper sexual education to children especially as matters concerning sexuality are regarded as "taboo" in many cultures. Consequently, there will be a delay in diagnosis and treatment initiation for those who do contract HIV from their sexual exposure.

Road traffic accidents, as one of the commonest hazards of hawking has also been reported by other researchers (Olutunde, 2013; Esin et al., 2005; Kwankye et al., 2007). The involvement of the majority of the hawkers in road traffic accidents was not surprising as participant observation showed a clear explanation of how these hawkers can easily be knocked down by moving vehicles. Aba is a busy city with massive influx of people due to the huge commercial activities that take place there. The hawkers were seen to run after moving vehicles and sometimes need to anchor their weights on the vehicles in order to complete a transaction they started, thus exposing them to being hit by any oncoming vehicle.

When interviewed, the female hawkers were more willing to quit hawking when compared to their male counterparts, if given another means of livelihood. This finding is different from those from a study conducted in Ghana (Kwankye et al., 2007), where males were more willing to quit the streets for a better job opportunity. In the Ghanaian study however, the males were much older than the females and perhaps felt that they were old enough to leave the streets in search for other jobs. In this study the higher rate of sexual molestation among the females and other risks associated with hawking might have contributed to their willingness to quit hawking activities.

In conclusion, the findings from this study revealed that a large number of people; children, men and married women indulge in street hawking as a means of livelihood. Unemployment and poverty were identified as factors contributing to hawking activities. Street hawking poses numerous health and social risks, hinders educational development and should be discouraged. The authors therefore, recommend the strict implementation of policies against Street hawking activities. Government support in job creation and poverty alleviation would help to mitigate this trend.

Study limitations

The fact that not all respondents participated in the study, might introduce some differences between those that participated and non-participants. The use of interviewer administered questionnaires for data collection could introduce interviewer-bias into the study as the respondents might give responses they think the researchers expect from them. It is also arguable that a respondent would be interviewed more than once because of inducement in the form of purchasing their goods since there was no means of recognizing them. In spite of these limitations however, the findings of this study reflect the problems of street hawking in Nigeria though caution is needed in generalization of the findings. More studies should be conducted in other parts of the country.

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