

## Original Research Article

# STREET CHILDREN IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS: CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND CHALLENGES THEY FACE

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Children being on the street for various reasons is a global problem affecting several countries in the world with its severity on low- and middle-income countries. Street children exist in categories known as street living children, street working children and street family children. This study sort to assess the factors and challenges associated with street children in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Method:** A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used for this study. Three hundred and twenty street children 18 years and below were recruited purposively and by snow balling. Quantitative data using a questionnaire was obtained from 320 respondents while qualitative data using an in-depth interview guide was obtained from 15 respondents from the total sample size. Analysis of collected data was done using SPSS version 23 with results displayed in frequency tables. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic process with data being coded and related themes identified.

**Results:** Findings revealed that 193(60.3%) were males while 127(39.7%) were females and 317(99.1%) were aged 9-18years. Majority 289(90.3%) were schooling while others weren't due to various reasons. Majority 316(98.7%) lived with parents/guardians. Parent(s) of 183(80.5%) street children were traders. Street children (70.8%) were on the street to support their family income. Half (51.3%) were oppressed on the street. Smoking was reported by 3(0.9%), hard drug use by 2(0.6%) and early sexual practices by 13 (4.1%). One hundred and fifty-nine (49.7%) coped by avoiding unsafe places, 22(7.0%) were employed while 298(93.0%) who were unemployed had majority 266(89.2%) selling sachet water. Many 234(73.0%) made less than ₦1000 daily. Qualitative report showed that street children were neglected and they were exposed to many dangers and coped with street life by avoiding unsafe places and selling.

**Conclusion & Recommendation:** Street children were mostly males aged 9-18 years who were on the street because they were involved in several activities aimed at supporting their family income. Some were molested and extorted while few were involved in risky behaviors. It is therefore necessary for government and other stakeholders to tackle and end the menace of street children.

**Keywords:** Street children, street working children, street family children, low- and middle-income countries and risky behavior.

### INTRODUCTION

A child can be defined biologically and psychosocially as someone in his/her beginning periods of life who is seen as a member of a generation referred to collectively by adults as children, who temporarily occupy the social space called childhood<sup>(18)</sup>. According to Cunningham "Childhood is certain ideas that surround the children due to the connection between childhood and experiences of being a child and if the ideas of being a child change, the child's encounters also changes"<sup>(7)</sup>. The International Labor Organization (ILO) during its convention on children rights stated that every child in every part of the world has the right to survival, advancement and protection<sup>(17)</sup>. The ILO added that some children indulge in child labor which includes begging, selling of food, drugs and are faced with indiscriminate sexual practices<sup>(17)</sup>. This happens when they lack adequate attention and therefore resort to livelihood on the road for survival which has several interpretations from different authors, the most common of which is the street child<sup>(17)</sup>.

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Comment [OPW(&CH2): Not data is plural.

Comment [OPW(&CH3): Consider indicating the dollar equivalent in parenthesis (for the sake of international audience)

UNICEF however classified street children into three categories, each with its distinctive definition: Street Living Children, Street Working Children, and Street Family Children <sup>(32)</sup>. Street living children are those that leave their homes and live somewhere on the street while street working children are the ones that invest much of their time on the road catering for themselves but retire home on a daily basis <sup>(32)</sup>. Street family children are those from families living on the street <sup>(32)</sup>.

Prince defined a street boy or girl as any child that works and lives on the road <sup>(26)</sup>. He added that such children are highly mobile and they can alternate between street life and living with family members <sup>(26)</sup>. They undergo activities like begging, hawking, stealing and prostitution as these activities provide money for their needs <sup>(26)</sup>. Ebigo stated that the numerous factors that drive children to street life may include marital disruptions or instability in the home, poverty, hunger, insecurity, abuse in different forms and violence from parents and guardians, displacements caused by inter/intra communal clashes, parental negligence and deceased parent(s) <sup>(10)</sup>. Others include unemployment of one parent, lack of opportunities in education, housing difficulties and peer pressure <sup>(10)</sup>. Ebigo added that these children become defenseless to many hazards on the road <sup>(10)</sup>. They are mostly faced with harsh physical conditions, violence and harassment, labor exploitation, absorption into criminal networks and denial of adequate education necessary to obtain a better life <sup>(10)</sup>.

Street children exist worldwide with the phenomenon being more prominent in highly populated urban areas of developing countries <sup>(30)</sup>. Ihejirika added that the abnormal presence of children on the road is a common eye sore in major cities of the globe though the problem is more pronounced and occurring widely in under-developed and developing nations as the challenge has slowly matched an index capable of being used to measure development level in nations of the world <sup>(16)</sup>. UNICEF reported that about 100 million children are seen working and living in urban streets of the world <sup>(28)</sup>. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in its recent report stated that there are about 150 million street children existing on the roads of cities worldwide <sup>(33)</sup>.

Prince stated that in all societies, these children inhabit an extraordinary high-risk environment with generally poor nutritional status and personal hygiene resulting in their immunity being weakened, leading to susceptibility to infections <sup>(26)</sup>. Ezeokana et al added that the problem facing street children include poverty, lack of education, large family sizes, ~~poor family functioning~~ and societal changes <sup>(12)</sup>. Similarities exist between the problems encountered by street children in Nigeria and those in other parts of the world <sup>(12)</sup>.

Okuwa explained that extreme rise in population size and backwardness in economic growth resulted in high poverty rate which makes it hard for government to provide adequate healthcare services, education and social amenities for people in Nigeria despite having abundant natural resources <sup>(24)</sup>. Akinpelu stated that a large population of Nigerians cannot afford 2 square meals a day due to unavailability of good jobs and ~~cannot~~ access quality healthcare, shelter, education and transportation and therefore suffer the difficulties accompanied by poverty <sup>(2)</sup>. Nte et al added that most children seen on the streets of Port-Harcourt are from low income earning parents or unemployed parents, children who join their relations from villages, children hired as domestic servants, destitute and abandoned children <sup>(21)</sup>.

Assessing the contributory factors and challenges related to street children in Port Harcourt metropolis was the aim of this research and the findings of this study would provide insights on contributory factors to children taking up street life and disclose the difficulties faced and strategies employed by the children to cope. ~~It is important that the study is conducted~~ This study was prompted by the risk children face on the streets at odd hours, and the attention this phenomenon has generated among social critics, lay public, including researchers. ~~because children presence on the road during odd hours is not proper and has been seen to capture attention of the general public, social critics and researchers. Their condition is horrifying and worrisome to the public and concerned individuals as~~ Street children face harsh conditions in their fight for survival and are perceived as a public nuisance. They engage in ~~because they steal,~~ theft, begging, dodge traffic and are admitted into street crime networks who make the environment unsafe for others. Therefore, findings from this study would be used to propose the way forward, for a better future of the neglected children and the society by alerting the leaders and major stakeholders of the factors leading to children's presence on the streets and the difficulties they face which would show the necessity for intervention and aid in evidence-based decisions, policy creation and programs that would help solve the issues of street children in Nigeria.

**Comment [OPW(&CH4):** dysfunctional family

**Comment [OPW(&CH5):** three

**Comment [OPW(&CH6):** poor

**Comment [OPW(&CH7):** This statement is too wordy. (A revision is suggested below)  
The study was aimed to assess the challenges faced by street children in Port Harcourt metropolis. It would provide insight on the contributing factors to children taking up street life. In addition, the study would disclose the difficulties street children face, and disclose their coping strategies.

**Comment [OPW(&CH8):** Reviewer recommends that the relevance cum justification of the research should come before the objective and not the other way round as done by the author...see sample recommendation in the main text

**Comment [OPW(&CH9):** Reviewer has suggested a revision in the example below by summarizing this paragraph in a logical sequence. Author should take note of suggestion below

This study was prompted by the risk children face on the streets at odd hours, and the attention this phenomenon has generated among social critics, lay public, including researchers. Street children face harsh conditions in their fight for survival and are perceived as a public nuisance. They engage in theft, begging, dodging traffic and are admitted into street crime networks who make the environment unsafe for others. This study would provide insight on the contributing factors to children taking up street life. In addition, it would disclose the difficulties street children face, and report their coping strategies. Furthermore, it would generate data relevant for making evidence-based decision by policy makers and program planners for timely social intervention. Therefore, this study was aimed to assess the challenges faced by street children in Port Harcourt metropolis.

**Comment [OPW(&CH10):** Notice that the reviewer has suggested a sequence of flow of thought from relevance, justification and then objective of the research.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Port Harcourt, the capital and largest city of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is located in the Niger Delta region and lies along the Bonny River <sup>(15)</sup>. It was founded in 1912 and incorporated in 1913 <sup>(15)</sup>. Port Harcourt city has a total size of 369 km<sup>2</sup> (142 sq. mi) with land size of 360 km<sup>2</sup> (140 sq. mi) and water size of 9 km<sup>2</sup> (3 sq. mi) <sup>(8)</sup>. Its urban area in 2016 had an estimated population of 1,865,000 inhabitants <sup>(9)</sup>. Port Harcourt metropolis consists of two local government areas: Port Harcourt Local Government Area and Obio/Akpor Local Government Area <sup>(23)</sup>. English Language is the official language and Ikwerre is the major local language. Port Harcourt and Obio-Akpor comprises of several communities namely; Abuloma, Amadi Ama, Borokiri, D-line, Diobu, Elekahia, GRA phases 1-5, Ogbunabali, Old GRA, Rumukalagbor, Rumuobiekwe, Rumuwoji, Rumuomasi, Elenwo, Ogbunabali, Rumuola, Rumuokoro and Trans Amadi <sup>(23)</sup>.

The various tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt are Rivers State University, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt Polytechnic, Ignatius Ajuru University and Rivers State College of Science and Technology with many primary and secondary private schools including some government schools located around the area. Different model primary healthcare centers and many private healthcare facilities are fairly distributed around the area. It has a large number of multinational firms, industries, businesses connected to the petroleum industry making it a major industrial center. It has two main oil refineries that produce about 210,000 barrels of crude oil daily, both controlled by the Port Harcourt Refinery Company making it the chief oil-refining city in Nigeria <sup>(20)</sup>. There are several organizations that offer social services for people in need like street children in Port Harcourt and its environs like the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Lifetime Caring Foundation, Oasis of Love Orphanage Home, Goodness & Mercy Orphanage Home and others.

**Comment [OPW(&CH11):** Some details are not necessary. Author has not described study area in the context of the research topic which based on street children. What are the major areas where children hang out in Port Harcourt? The study area is described like a place where there are no street children. Think of children hanging out under the bridge in Lagos. Are there no such hideouts in Port Harcourt urban center?

### Study Population

This research was carried out on male and female street children in Port Harcourt metropolis who were 18 years and below.

### Inclusion Criteria

Male and female children that were 18 years and below trading, begging and roaming on the streets of Port Harcourt metropolis.

### Exclusion Criteria

Male and female children 18 years and below with communication defects.

**Comment [OPW(&CH12):** ?? Who could not speak English or where speech impaired? **Interpreters?** Consider reviewing this exclusion criteria

### Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was applied in carrying out this study. The research adopted both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches. This combined approach was adopted to give accuracy to study findings.

### Sample Size Determination

The sample size was calculated using single population proportion formula by Bluman with the following assumptions<sup>(5)</sup>; proportion 75%, which was obtained from a study done in major towns in Sierra Leone<sup>(26)</sup>. Using 5% margin of error at 95% confidence level, the sample size was 317 after considering 10% non-response rate. The study was conducted on 320 respondents of which 15 out of the total sample size was used to obtain qualitative data for the study.

**Comment [OPW(&CH13):** Apart from the 75% proportion, what are the other assumptions?

### **Sampling Method**

Purposive and snow-balling sampling techniques were used in selecting study participants. The study participants were selected on sight and snow-balling technique was applied to get the assistance of the street children in finding more respondents.

### **Study Instrument**

Two study instruments were used to obtain data for this study. One was a semi-structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire used to obtain quantitative data while the second was an interview guide which was used to conduct in-depth interview to acquire qualitative data for this study. The questionnaire was developed and modified with reference to existing tools used in similar studies<sup>(26)</sup>. The questionnaire had 4 main sections:

Section A: This section obtained socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Section B: This section obtained information on the predisposing factors of respondents.

Section C: This section obtained data on the psycho-social problems associated with respondents.

Section D: This section obtained data on the coping strategies of respondents.

The interview guide had open-ended questions which were used for the in-depth interview about the live experiences of participants which was recorded for analysis using the thematic processes. This section provided qualitative information for this study. The questionnaire and interview guide were used to ensure that data collection was systematic and consistent.

### **Data Analysis**

The questionnaires administered to the respondents were checked for completion and data was entered into a Microsoft excel spreadsheet and moved into SPSS version 23.0 for analysis.

Quantitative data acquired was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was represented in frequency tables while chi-square test for association was done with Fischer's exact test used to check for association among variables. Results were significant with P-value < 0.05.

Qualitative data was recorded interviews which was analyzed using thematic process with data being coded and related themes identified. Concepts from different responses was then pooled together and composed into common themes. The final write-up was outlined in summaries and interpretations.

## RESULTS

**Table 4.1a: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Age (years)</b>		
≤ 8	3	0.9
9 – 13	157	49.1
14 – 18	160	50.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	193	60.3
Female	127	39.7
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Ijaw	94	29.4
Ibibio & Efik	122	38.1
Igbo	84	26.3
Yoruba	15	4.7
Hausa	5	1.6
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	300	93.8
Muslim	20	6.2

**Comment [OPW(&CH14):** Combined total for %=100.1

**Comment [OPW(&CH15):** Organize in an array

**Comment [OPW(&CH16):** Ditto

**Comment [OPW(&CH17):** Organize in an array

Table 4.1a shows that out of 320 respondents, 160 (50%) were between 14-18 years of age. One hundred and ninety-three (60.3%) were males. One hundred and twenty-two (38.1%) were of the Ibibio & Efik origin while 5 (1.6%) were of Hausa origin. Majority 300 (93.8%) were Christians while few 20 (6.3%) were Muslims by religion.

**Table 4.1b: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics cont'd**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>School Attendance</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	289	90.3
<b>No</b>	31	9.7
<b>Educational status (n=289)</b>		
Primary school	124	42.9
Junior Secondary	97	33.6
Senior Secondary	68	23.5
<b>Reasons for non-school attendance (n=31)</b>		
No school fees	29	93.5

No interest	2	6.5
<b>Duration of absence from school (n=31)</b>		
1-5 months ago	4	12.9
≥ 6 months ago	27	87.1
<b>Interest to return to school (n=31)</b>		
Yes	29	93.5
No	2	6.5
<b>Both parents educational background (n=248)</b>		
None	44	17.9
Primary	30	12.1
Secondary	97	39.1
Tertiary	47	18.8
Don't know	30	12.1

Table 4.1b shows that out of the 320 respondents, 289 (90.3%) were schooling of which 124 (42.9%) were in their primary level of education, 97 (33.6%) were in their junior secondary level of education while 68 (23.5%) were in their secondary level of education. Among those that weren't schooling 29 (93.5%) didn't have school fees while 2 (6.5%) had no interest in schooling. Twenty-seven (87.1%) stopped schooling more than 6 months before the time of research while 29 (93.5%) indicated interest in going back to school. Ninety-seven (39.1%) had parents with secondary education while 44 (17.9%) had uneducated parents.

**Table 4.1c: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics cont'd**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Fathers' occupation (n=198)</b>		
Civil servant	8	4.0
Trader	47	23.5
Unemployed	10	5.2
Artisan	133	67.3
<b>Mothers' occupation (n=238)</b>		
Civil servant	3	1.4
Trader	136	57.0
Artisan	76	31.9
Unemployed	23	9.7
<b>No. of children by parent</b>		
1 – 6	252	78.7
7 – 12	68	21.3

**Birth order**

1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup>	191	59.7
3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>	104	32.5
5 <sup>th</sup> & above	25	7.8

Table 4.1c revealed that out of 320 respondents, 133 (67.3%) had fathers that were artisans with 8 (4.0%) being civil servants. One hundred and thirty-six (57.0%) had mothers who were traders and 23 (9.7%) had unemployed mothers. Two hundred and fifty-two parents (78.7%) had 1-6 children with 191(59.7%) respondents being first and second born to their parents.

**Table 4.1d: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics cont'd**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Place of residence</b>		
At home	316	98.7
On the street	4	1.3
<b>Those lived with</b>		
Parents	215	67.3
Relations	97	30.3
Master/Mistress	4	1.3
Friends	4	1.3
<b>Parent (s) alive</b>		
Yes	308	96.3
No	12	3.8
<b>Both parents living together (n=308)</b>		
Yes	207	67.1
No	101	32.9
<b>Reason for not living together (n=101)</b>		
Deceased father	50	50.0
Deceased mother	10	9.4
Separated/divorced	41	40.4
<b>Accommodation</b>		
One room	99	30.9
Two rooms	72	22.5
Self-contain	19	5.9

Flat	47	14.7
Wooden house (Batcher)	79	24.7
Uncompleted building	4	1.3

Table 4.1d revealed that among the 320 respondents, 316 (98.7%) lived at home with parents/guardians while 4 (1.3%) lived on the street. Three hundred and eight (96.3%) had both parents alive while few 12 (3.8%) indicated otherwise. Amongst those with parents alive, 207 (67.1%) had both parents living together while 101 (32.9%) had parents not living together with 50 (50%) having a deceased dad and 41 (40.4%) having separated/divorced parents. Ninety-nine (30.9%) respondents lived in a one room apartment while 79 (24.7%) resided in a wooden house (batcher) and 4 (1.3%) lived in uncompleted buildings.

**Table 4.1e: Socio-demographic characteristics associated with street children**

Variable	Street Children			df	P-value
	Living at home	Living on street	Total (%)		
<b>Parent(s) alive</b>					
Yes	304(96.2)	4(100)	308(96.3)	1	0.858 <sup>F</sup>
No	12(3.8)	0(0)	12(3.8)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Parents living together</b>					
Yes	210(67.3)	2(50.0)	212(67.1)	1	0.601 <sup>F</sup>
No	102(32.7)	2(50.0)	104(32.9)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>312(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>316(100)</b>		
<b>Religion</b>					
Christianity	296(93.7)	4(100)	300(92.7)	1	0.999 <sup>F</sup>
Islam	20(6.3)	0(0)	20(6.3)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Educational background of both parents</b>					
Secondary school and below	209(81.0)	4(100)	213(81.2)	1	0.658 <sup>F</sup>
Tertiary	49(19.0)	0(0)	49(18.8)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>258(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>262(100)</b>		
<b>Employment status of father</b>					
Employed	4(1.3)	0(0)	4(1.3)	2	0.903 <sup>F</sup>
Self-employed	264(89.5)	2(50)	266(89.5)		
Un-employed	27(9.2)	2(50)	29(9.2)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>295(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>299(100)</b>		
<b>Employment status of mother</b>					
Employed	4(1.4)	0(0)	4(1.3)	2	0.113 <sup>F</sup>
Self-employed	264(89.5)	2(50.0)	266(89.0)		
Un-employed	27(9.2)	2(50.0)	29(9.7)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>295(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>299(100)</b>		
<b>Number of siblings</b>					
1	10(3.2)	0(0)	10(3.1)	2	0.691 <sup>F</sup>
2-6	238(75.3)	4(100)	242(75.6)		
7-11	68(21.5)	0(0)	68(21.3)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		



F= Fischer exact.

Table 4.1e shows that there is no statistically significant association observed between parent(s) being alive, parents living together, religion, parental educational background, employment status of father, employment status of mother and number of siblings and street children.

**Table 4.1f: Socio-demographic characteristics associated with street children**

Variable	Street Children			df	P-value
	Living at home	Living on street	Total (%)		
<b>School attendance</b>					
Yes	289(91.5)	0(0)	289(90.3)	1	0.000 <sup>F*</sup>
No	27(8.5)	4(100)	31(9.7)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Age</b>					
6-10	42(13.3)	0(0)	4(13.1)	2	0.000 <sup>F*</sup>
11-15	233(73.7)	0(0)	233(72.8)		
16+	41(13.0)	4(100)	45(14.1)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Accommodation</b>					
One room	98(31.0)	0(0)	98(30.8)	2	0.728 <sup>F</sup>
Two rooms	72(22.8)	0(0)	72(22.6)		
Batcher	146(46.2)	2(100)	148(46.6)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>2(100)</b>	<b>318(100)</b>		

\*= Statistically significant, F= Fischer exact.

Table 4.1f shows that there no statistically significant association observed between accommodation and street children. However, there is statistically significant association observed between school attendance, age and street children.

**Table 4.2: Respondents' predisposing factors**

Reasons for street presence	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
Supporting family	226	70.8
Personal decision	73	22.8
Conflicts with parents/guardians	15	4.7
Peer influence	6	1.9

Table 4.2 shows that out of 320 respondents, 226 (70.8%) were on the street to support their family low income, 73 (22.8%) were on the street due to personal decisions, 15 (4.7%) were on the street because of conflicts with parents at home while 6 (1.9%) were on the street due to peer influence.

**Table 4.3a: Respondents' psychosocial problems**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Poor academic performance (n=289)</b>		
Yes	110	38.0
No	176	60.9
Don't know	3	1.0
<b>Oppression</b>		
Yes	164	51.3
No	156	48.8
<b>Type of oppression (n=164)</b>		
Bullying	12	7.6
Extortion	63	38.1
Mind corruption	3	1.9
Molestation	75	45.6
Verbal abuse	11	6.9
<b>Stealing</b>		
Yes	58	18.1
No	262	81.9
<b>Regrets for street presence</b>		
Yes	197	61.6
No	123	38.4
<b>Reason for no regrets (n=123)</b>		
Freedom	6	4.8
Source of money	117	95.2

Table 4.3a reveals that among 320 respondents, 176 (60.9%) said street life didn't affect their academic performance. Over half (51.3%) were oppressed while on the street as 75 (45.6%) were usually molested and 63 (38.1%) were usually extorted. Most of respondents 262 (81.9%) said they don't steal on the street. One hundred and ninety-seven (61.6%) had regrets about street presence with 6 (4.8%) stating freedom to be their reason for embracing street presence while 117 (95.2%) said they made money while being on the street.

**Table 4.3b: Respondents' psychosocial problems cont'd**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Social relationship</b>		
Good	260	81.3
Not good	60	18.8
<b>Knowledge of street dangers</b>		
Yes	285	89.0
No	35	11.0
<b>Type of street dangers (n=285)</b>		
Accident	140	43.7
Kidnapping	106	33.1
Extortion	19	5.9
Molestation	6	1.9
Rape	7	2.2
Street gang attack	7	2.2
<b>Street danger experienced</b>		
Accident	55	17.2
Extortion	43	13.4
Molestation	13	4.1
Street gang attack	6	1.8
None	203	63.4
<b>Involvement in street fight</b>		
Yes	137	42.8
No	183	57.2

Table 4.3b shows that out of 320 respondents, 260(81.3%) had a good relationship with other people on the street. Two hundred and eighty-five (89.0%) had knowledge of existing dangers on the street with 140(43.7%) having an accident while on the street. One hundred and thirty-seven (57.2%) were involved in a street fight.

**Table 4.3c: Respondents' psychosocial problems cont'd**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Memory loss</b>		
Yes	154	48.1
No	166	51.9
<b>Suicidal thoughts</b>		
Yes	123	38.4

No	197	61.6
<b>Tobacco use</b>		
Yes	3	0.9
No	317	99.1
<b>Type of tobacco (n=3)</b>		
Cigarette	3	100
<b>Alcohol consumption</b>		
Yes	39	12.2
No	281	87.8
<b>Hard drug use</b>		
Yes	2	0.6
No	318	99.4
<b>Type of hard drug</b>		
Tramadol	2	100
<b>Sexually active</b>		
Yes	13	4.1
No	307	95.9
<b>No. of sexual partners (n=13)</b>		
One	6	46.2
Two or more	7	53.8

Table 4.3c shows that among 320 respondents, 154(48.1%) said they don't forget things easily while 197(61.6%) had suicidal thoughts. Majority of respondents 317(99.1%) were non-smokers, 281(87.8%) do not consume alcoholic beverages. Majority 318(99.4%) didn't use hard drugs with 2(100%) admitting to tramadol use. Thirteen (4.1%) were sexually active with 7(53.8%) claiming they had multiple partners.

**Table 4.3d: Association between psychosocial problems and being on the street**

Variable	Street Children			Df	P-value
	Living at home	Living on street	Total (%)		
<b>Physical Abuse</b>					
Yes	164(51.9)	0(0)	164(51.2)	1	0.055 <sup>F</sup>
No	152(48.1)	4(100)	156(48.8)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Stealing behavior</b>					
Yes	54(17.1)	4(100)	58(18.1)	1	0.001 <sup>F*</sup>
No	262(82.9)	0(0)	262(81.9)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		

**Effective Communication with others**

Yes	258(81.6)	2(50)	260(81.3)	1	0.156 <sup>F</sup>
No	58(18.4)	2(50)	60(18.8)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		

**Exhibiting violent behavior**

Yes	133(42.1)	4(100)	137(42.8)	1	0.033 <sup>F*</sup>
No	183(57.9)	0(0)	183(57.2)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		

**Experiencing Memory loss**

Yes	154(48.7)	0(0)	154(48.1)	1	0.124 <sup>F</sup>
No	162(51.3)	4(100)	166(51.9)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		

\*= Statistically significant, F= Fischer's exact

In table 4.3d, there is was statistically significant association observed between physical abuse, effective communication with others, experiencing memory loss and street children. However, a statistically significant association was observed between stealing behavior and street children ( $p=0.001$ ). Children who exhibited stealing behavior had significant higher proportion (100%) compared to those who don't possess stealing behavior (0%) among children living on the street. A statistically significant association was observed between exhibiting violent behavior and street children ( $p=0.033$ ). Children who exhibit violent behavior had significant higher proportion (100%) compared to those who don't exhibit violent behavior (0%) among children living on the street.

**Table 4.3e: Association between psychosocial problems and being on the street children cont'd**

Variable	Street Children			Df	P-value
	Living at home	Living on street	Total (%)		
<b>Experiencing suicidal thought</b>					
Yes	121(38.3)	2(50.0)	123(38.4)	1	0.640 <sup>F</sup>
No	195(61.7)	2(50.0)	197(61.6)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Tobacco use</b>					
Yes	3(0.9)	0(0)	3(0.9)	1	0.845 <sup>F</sup>
No	313(99.1)	4(100)	317(99.1)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Alcohol consumption</b>					
Yes	39(12.3)	0(0)	39(12.2)	1	0.454 <sup>F</sup>
No	277(87.7)	4(100)	281(87.8)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>		
<b>Drug use</b>					
Yes	11(3.5)	2(50.0)	13(4.1)	1	0.009 <sup>F*</sup>

No	305(96.5)	2(50.0)	307(95.9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>316(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>320(100)</b>

\*= Statistically significant, F= Fischer exact

Table 4.3e shows that there is no statistically significant association observed between experiencing suicidal thought, tobacco use, alcohol consumption and street children. However, a statistically significant association was observed between drug use and street living children ( $p=0.009$ ). Street children who take drugs had equal significant proportion (50%) with those who don't take drugs (50%) among children living on the street.

**Table 4.4a: Respondents' coping strategies**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Types of coping strategies</b>		
Avoiding bad company	39	12.2
Avoiding unsafe places	159	49.7
Making friends	122	38.1
<b>Stealing</b>		
Yes	58	18.1
No	262	81.9
<b>Employment status</b>		
Employed	22	7.0
Unemployed	298	93.0
<b>Type of employment (n=22)</b>		
Hawking of snacks	13	57.1
Food selling	3	14.3
Refuse disposal	3	14.3
Sand packing	3	14.3
<b>Activities of the unemployed (n=298)</b>		
Sachet water selling	266	89.2
Assisting guardian	10	3.3
Foodstuff selling	3	1.1
Scavenging/sales of empty containers	9	3.2
Trading	3	1.1

Table 4.4a shows that among the 320 respondents, 159 (49.7%) were safe while on the street by avoiding unsafe places, 122 (38.1%) made friends so as to cope while on the street while 39 (12.2%) avoided bad companies. Fifty-eight (18.1%) admitted to stealing. Majority 298 (93.0%) were unemployed with greater percentage 266 (89.2%) selling sachet water on the road.

**Table 4.4b: Respondents' coping strategies cont'd**

Variable	Frequency(n=320)	Percentage (100)
<b>Income per day (₦)</b>		
≤1000	234	73.0
1001 – 2000	61	19.0
2001 – 3000	22	7.0
>3000	3	1.0
Mean = ₦1109.48±807.50, median=₦1000		
<b>Access to food</b>		
Buying	115	36.0
At home	205	64.0
<b>Frequency of meals</b>		
Once	3	1.0
Twice	163	51.0
Thrice	151	47.0
Four	3	1.0
<b>Access to clothing</b>		
By buying	74	23.0
Through charity	3	1.0
Through guardians	61	19.0
Through parents	182	57.0
<b>Access to healthcare</b>		
Through guardians	74	23.0
Through parents	189	59.0
Self-care	57	18.0

Table 4.4b shows that among the 320 respondents, 234 (73.0%) earned ≤ ₦1000 daily. Over half (64.0%) eat food at home with 115 (36.0%) buying their food on the road. One hundred and sixty-three (51.0%) had two meals daily. One hundred and eighty-two (57.0%) were provided with cloths by parents with 74 (23.0%) buying their cloths themselves. One hundred and eighty-nine (59.0%) were cared for medically by parents/guardian when sick while few 57 (18.0%) accessed healthcare by themselves.

### Qualitative Data Summary

Following the qualitative data summary acquired from the in-depth interview of 15 respondents comprising of 10 boys and 5 girls aged 10-18 years. The findings were arranged into three major themes: (a) No parental care (b) Insecurity and (c) proper conduct and selling as a tool for survival.

### No parental care

Participants spoke on factors that push them to street life in search of money to provide for themselves and their families. Parental negligence was among the reasons they went to public places to labor on their own. Two sub-themes emerged from no parental care namely, parental negligence, and poverty. Some of them recounted how they were ill-treated at home.

For example, a male participant said: *We live in a wooden house and we lack food to eat sometimes as my father doesn't come home some days. My mother sells orange on the roadside and can't buy food for us sometimes. Whenever I and my siblings ask my father for anything, he chases us away saying we should go and meet our mother for our needs.* (Participant 1)

Another female respondent said: *I was brought to the city by my aunty when my mother passed away and my father was unable to provide for us in the village. When we arrived, my aunty sent me out to join others on the road and sell so I can make money that would be used to buy clothes for me or else I will be sent back to the village.* (Participant 6)

### **Insecurity**

Another pressing issue about street life was the dangers that existed on the street which created an uncomfortable environment. The respondents spoke continuously about similar dangers which created four sub-themes in this section namely, molestation, extortion, kidnapping and accidents.

A female respondent said: *I like the street because I can sell and earn money irrespective of the amount but the street has so many dangers because you cannot trust anybody here. You can be kidnapped and used for ritual or the bad boys can collect all your money. Some of the bad boys always disturb me to be their girlfriend for protection from other boys but if you refuse, they will tell me that they'll catch me one day. Another thing is that a car can knock you down when selling in traffic or by the roadside.* (Participant 5)

Another male respondent said: *I dislike the street because I should be at home like other children but if I don't come out and sell, there won't be money for my school needs. I was once knocked down by a vehicle while I was selling in traffic and since then, I have always been scared of having another accident because my money was stolen the first time. Some street boys also disturb me to join them in drinking and smoking and when I refuse, they chase me and beat me and collect my money.* (Participant 9)

### **Proper conduct**

Concerning the survival strategies employed by respondents, two sub-themes emerged which are selling and avoidance of bad company and unsafe places. Participants spoke about their survival strategies on the roads and were particular about doing something that fetched them money while they conducted themselves properly for safety.

One male participant said: *I'm here because I have to sell for my master so there would be money to complete my school fees and get me cloths. I like coming to the street so I can see my friends and also make money. I avoid bad friends and places that bad people stay. I get provoked by people here to the point of wanting to fight them but I know that fighting is not good so I ignore and tell them that God will judge them.* (Participant 11)

A female responded by saying: *Initially when I arrived the city with my aunty, I was happy because I felt I would be staying at home to assist with chores but I was unhappy when she said I have to go to the road and sell so there would be enough money for me to start school. I was scared at first because I felt they would kidnap me but when I came out, I made new friends and I like it as I'm making money out here. I always avoid selling to bad boys who are always trying to corrupt me. I also stay in places where people are plenty to avoid being kidnapped.* (Participant 12)

## **DISCUSSION**



Street children exist in every part of the world with the phenomenon being more prominent in under-developed and developing countries<sup>(30)</sup>. UNESCO in its recent report, stated that there are about 150 million street children existing on major streets of cities worldwide<sup>(33)</sup>. These children are known biologically and psychologically as people in their beginning periods of life which is called childhood<sup>(18)</sup>. Street children undergo child labor by selling of foodstuff, begging and other activities which exposes them to various hazards<sup>(17)</sup>. These children are in this situation due to poverty, instability at home, abuse by parents, displacements caused by inter/intra communal clashes, parental negligence and peer pressure<sup>(10)</sup>. ~~This study was undertaken to assess the fundamental causes of street life by children in Port Harcourt metropolis and determine the challenges they face in trying to survive.~~

### Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

The study showed that street children were mostly males 60.3% aged 9-18 years which is similar to the findings of Owoaje et al which reported 58.3% males aged 15-17 years<sup>(25)</sup> and Cumber et al which revealed that street children were mostly males 80.2% aged 9-17 years<sup>(6)</sup>. In addition, Edewor reported that street children were mostly males 83.9% aged 15-19 years<sup>(11)</sup>. The fathers of street children were mostly artisans 67.3% while Aransiola et al reported 47.4% fathers as artisans<sup>(3)</sup>. Edewor<sup>(11)</sup> reported 38.8% fathers' as artisans which is lower than this study finding. Mothers 57.0% were mostly traders which is similar to findings of Owoaje et al which showed 64.6% mothers to be traders<sup>(25)</sup>.

### Factors predisposing children to street life

Study finding showed that most of the street children 70.8% were on the street because they were carrying out activities targeted at supporting their families financially which is similar to the finding of Ihejirika which showed that 77.2% left home for the street because of financial constraints<sup>(16)</sup>. Street children who personally decided to embrace street life were 22.8% in this study which is different from finding of Ihejirika which reported 1.2% as those who decided to take up street life<sup>(16)</sup>. However, Abari et al reported that 20% of street children left their homes in search of money to support their families which is much lesser than this study finding<sup>(1)</sup>. In India, Singh et al however, reported that 15% left homes because of conflicts with parents<sup>(27)</sup> as reported by 4.7% in this study.

### Psychosocial problems associated with street children

In this study, street children 83.7% were mostly molested and extorted while being on the street which is similar to finding of Khaled et al which reported that street children 93% were harassed on the street<sup>(19)</sup>. This study revealed that 38.4% had suicidal thoughts and 18.8% had social relationship problems which is different from the finding of Asante et al that reported 68.9% to have emotional difficulties and 88.6% to have peer relationship problems<sup>(4)</sup>. Risky behavior was seen in this study as tobacco use by 0.9%, alcohol use by 12.2%, hard drug use by 0.6% and sexual practices by 4.1% which is different from the finding of Khaled et al reported drug use in 62% and sexual practices by 67%<sup>(19)</sup>. Edewor reported tobacco use by 36%, alcohol use by 38% and 60% to be sexually active<sup>(11)</sup> which is different from this study finding. There was a statistically significant association between stealing (P=0.001), violent behavior (P=0.033), hard drug use (P=0.009) and street living children.

Street children in this study narrated their life ordeals by stating that they were normally neglected which made them advance to the street for survival as similarly reported by Gaston et al that street children were normally neglected and abandoned by their parents which exposed them to street life<sup>(13)</sup>. Hills et al reported that street children were normally bullied and maltreated on the street which is also revealed in this study<sup>(14)</sup>.

### Coping strategies of respondents

Findings showed that most of the street children were sachet water hawkers who made less than or equal to ₦1000 daily who had two meals in a day at their parents or guardians' home. Abari et al reported that street children indulge in various activities for survival like selling of foodstuffs to uphold their family income<sup>(1)</sup>, while Edewor in his study reported that they coped with street life by carrying loads for money, buying/selling of foodstuffs<sup>(11)</sup>. Other studies by Owoaje et al and Ofonime et al observed that street children hawked fruits and other items to uphold their family income and their personal gains while some had nothing doing on the street<sup>(25,22)</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

**Comment [OPW(&CH18):** This information is good for background. And much of it repetition from introduction  
Reviewer recommends to author to make this section very brief if it must be included and move straight to discuss the study findings and their public health implications

**Comment [OPW(&CH19):** Author already mentioned this in the introduction.

**Comment [OPW(&CH20):** What is the implication of this? Discuss it.

Street children were males aged 9-18 years who were on the street because they carried out various activities aimed at supporting their family income. Molestation and extortion were the major challenges they experienced while avoiding unsafe practices, hawking sachet water and snacks was coping mechanism employed for survival. Therefore, the right to life, freedom and happiness of Nigerians is necessary as government needs to provide good jobs, adequate food, proper housing, adequate healthcare, education, security and a promising future for children like other people of the developed countries.

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