Age and Gender as Determinants of Street Children's Self-Esteem and Risk Attitude

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Age and Gender as Determinants of Street Children's Self-Esteem and Risk Attitude

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the self-esteem and risk attitudes of street children in Lagos metropolis. The study examined whether there were differences in self-esteem and risk taking attitudes based on gender and age. The sample consisted of 249 street children: 132 males and 117 females. Three instruments were used to gather data: a self-esteem rating scale, risk attitude scale and measure of street child status identification scale. The data were analyzed using a t-test and one way ANOVA. The findings showed that street children had poor self esteem and inclined to risk taking attitude. There were no significant differences in self-esteem and risk-taking attitudes based on age and gender. The study concluded by emphasizing the need to incorporate street children into the normal system like school system. It recommended sports as a good avenue where these children would be able to make use of their risk- taking attitudes

Keywords: Street, Children, Family, Age, Self-Esteem

Introduction

The problem of street children is a worldwide phenomenon. Many capitals and urban centers of the world have become a haven of survival for many children in distress. In Africa, these children do not only have limited access to basic resources, but in many instances have been denied the right to childhood. Stephens (1995) contends that the dominion of childhood has been threatened, invaded and polluted by adults. Stephens further asserts that children in many instances are perceived as miniature adults and not as biologically immature human beings. Children are thus entrapped in a quagmire of social, political and cultural misunderstandings. Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) assert that children "exist in a social liminal realm, vilified as dangerous and antisocial dwarves-enemies of families and civilized society" (p.26). This situation might have affected the capacity of these children to see themselves positively. Healthy self-esteem is a child's armor against the challenges of the world. Children who feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. They tend to smile more readily and enjoy life. They are realistic and generally optimistic. In contrast, children with low self-esteem can find challenges to be sources of major anxiety and frustration. Those who think poorly of themselves have a hard time finding solutions to problems.

Children learn to recognise a risky situation based on grownups teaching them to do so and by their own everyday experiences (e.g., getting hurt, observing others get hurt). But their natural sense of danger that helps them to recognise risky situations are at play when they are not within the protection of parents. Children have a lot of energy. Importantly, play was the one context in which even parents genuinely 'expect' risk-taking behaviour and further expect that injuries are a 'natural' part of children's play. Even at that some children may sustain injuries that may be deadly not to talk of when they are on their own. The crux of this study is to determine the extent of to which age and gender can be used to determine the self-esteem and risk attitudes of street children in Lagos metropolis.

Who are Street Children?
Many social scientists have made several attempts at defining the term street children. UNICEF classified the definition of street children into three main categories; street living children; street working children and children from street families (UNICEF Report, 2003). The definition given by Inter-Non Governmental Organizations (Inter-NGOs) as "those for whom the street more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults" (Ennew, 1994, p.15). This definition is considered simplistic. Panter-Brick, (2004) argues that there should be a shift in the paradigm of analysis on the street child from the street as the primary focus to the children and their experience and views. Thus street children are not viewed in isolation from other children living in abject poverty in the urban areas. In this study however, two different categories of street children are considered. There are those who live and work on the street (children of the street) and those who work on the streets full or part time, but return to their homes each night (children in the street). The point of demarcation is often nebulous, as both categories of children meet and interact on the streets and it is often easier for children in the street to fully graduate to children of the street.
However, Nigeria street children are predominantly of "working street children" rather than of children whose sole means of subsistence and existence is the street. Although the latter are found in Nigeria, they do not form the majority of children found on the streets (Ebigbo, 2003). The past few decades have witnessed the proliferation of street children in Nigeria.

Prevalence of Street Children in Nigeria
The phenomenon of street children in the strict sense of the term has been on the increase in most major urban areas (Oloko, 1999). This is evident in the number of children seen on the street scavenging , begging, hawking and soliciting. Ahiante (2004) also expressed that street children are all over the markets, bus stops, car parks, garages, street corners, under the bridges and other public places across Nigeria's major cities. There are no official statistics for street children in Nigeria, but it is known that children of under 18 years of age made up nearly 48% of the estimated country's population of 120 million in 1996 (World Bank). This estimate increases obviously with increase in Nigeria's population.
The United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported in May 2005 that over 7.3 million Nigerian children of school age were not in schools. This ugly trend has its own social consequences, one of which is the spiralling proportion of street urchins in the major towns and cities of Nigeria. There are other factors responsible for the prevalence of street children in this country.

Causes of Menace of Street Children

Researches worldwide have shown that many of the causes that push children to the street are linked to multiple factors. Among some of the causes are poverty, underdevelopment, parental neglect, lack of support, urbanization, lack of logistics or infrastructure and no opportunities in the educational system, excessively large family size, peer pressure, adventure, lack of recreational facilities for children, breakdown of marriages and extended family systems etc.

A socio-political view expanded by Ebigbo (1989) explained Nigerian children were caught up in the struggle for survival occasioned by the dearth of technological and infrastructural development in Nigeria leading to mass urban migration with resultant emergence of the urban poor. This situation is partly enhanced by the disintegration of the extended family system which hitherto had promoted the concept of brotherhood and shared responsibility. The resultant chaos has led to the balkanisation of the sacred ethos of the value of children to the average Nigerian. This social malaise is reflected in many ways. One distinct manifestation is the "Almajiri" system in Northern Nigeria. This is a system of Islamic education that has grown to become a social problem. Young boys bearing bowls are seen in most towns and cities in northern Nigeria in tattered clothes begging from house to house in order to survive. Many of them live in slums, have little access to health facilities and are therefore vulnerable to various diseases. The Koranic form of education encourages Islamic tutors to send their pupils to the streets to beg. A few of such are found in southern cities although in a different form, usually as guides leading physically handicapped adults to beg on the streets. In Eastern Nigeria, children as young as eight or nine years are out on the streets early to trade as less premium is placed on education in this part of the country as compared to trading activities.

Other causative factors include marital problems or instability in the home, poverty, hunger, insecurity, abuse and violence from parents, displacement caused by clashes in the community, insufficient parental care, death of one or both parents, inadequate family income, unemployment of one or both parents, lack of (or limited) opportunities in education, abandonment by parents, housing difficulties, drug use by children, and peer influence. UNICEF accepted that physical abuse accounted for greater that 27% of children forced into the street, 24% by family financial problems, 8% by family misunderstandings and 5% by emotional trauma. Another growing cause that should not be discounted is the cult of child witches currently actively sponsored by so-called Christian evangelists in the South Eastern and delta regions of the country. This is a growing social cause that has recently attracted international criticism. Also, the concept of destitute families, another significant social problem representing extreme deprivation, is becoming an increasing problem.

The Plight of Street Children

Street children all around the country are vulnerable to dangerous behaviours that impair all aspects of their development and growth. They are exposed to hard drugs, smoking, armed robbery, homosexuality, prostitution, gambling, deceit and violence. At several times they are exposed to accidents, kidnapping, and ritual killing or sold into slavery, because they live in a situation of some form of abuse, where there is no protection, love supervision or expectation from responsible adults. The streets have also transformed the innocent children into abusive,

irritable, hot tempered, difficult and angry people, who are also tortured by street touts who send them on dirty errands.

It is common to see majority of the children living currently on the street either 'too old' to go to school or 'too young' to learn an apprenticeship trade. All this makes it too easy to overlook or ignore what is happening anywhere else in Africa if not the world. Street Children often spend their entire life on the street trying all means of 'survival' that could help sustain their livelihood. They are engaged in all kinds of street work (jobs). They lack access to basic necessities of life and are exposed to all kinds of dangers - health, physical and psychological.

Some of the children in the series told of escapes from unhappy homes, while others recall travelling to the city in search of adventure. They ended up selling water packaged in plastic bags (pure water) or washing the windshields of vehicles in heavy traffic. Some, apparently the most dangerous, roam the streets with the intention of stealing money or jewelleries. These are popularly called 'pick-pockets.' They told of the anguish of survival in a relentlessly merciless environment, open to the dangers of the elements and the risks occasioned by absolute lack of security or protection and also open to physical violence and sexual abuse.

Government Efforts towards Curbing Menace of Street Children

Sometimes in the mid nineties, a government approach to solving the menace of area boys in Lagos State was to lock them up at an island called Ise in Lagos State. This was the same notorious island where Chief Obafemi Awolowo was detained at the heights of political disturbances in the first republic. The area boys were kept in a specially constructed building which was surrounded by water. On the face of it, it appeared possible for the detainees to scale the fence, jump into the water and escape by swimming. The sad part was that the water was infested with crocodiles. General Ibrahim Babangida, Nigeria's military ruler from 1985 to 1993, established a People's Bank, which extended micro-credits to many street boys and girls to help them start small businesses. However, the programme suffered from insufficient funding and many of those who benefited from the handouts simply returned to the streets when the bank collapsed in the late 1990s. Ex- Governor Bola Tinubu of Lagos State, with the return of democracy in 1999, designed a scheme aimed at ridding the city of the Area Boy scourge. He set up a skills training centre at Ita Oko, a disused island prison in Lagos. The aim was to rehabilitate these street boys by teaching them artisan skills and trades. This laudable programme also went the way of previous government attempts either due to insufficient attention by the government or lack of commitment to its implementation.

Preparation process of entering into the mainstream society

However, the combination of many factors above coupled with street life experience makes this group of children quite complicated. The street to some extent hinders their preparation process of entering into the mainstream society and the effects of this are many. Some causes needs short-term solutions; whiles others need a more workable long-term strategy to arrest the situation. Solutions should target both preventive as well curative measures. Government rural development programmes that target the welfare needs of the citizens e.g. Millennium Development goals should be designed and supplied with all logistics that will allow smooth implementation at all levels. Most of its component should target the provision of the basic needs

and help empower parents or adults to take good care of children. There is the need to institute, educate and encourage family guidance & counseling at all levels in society especially among parents or 'will-be' parents especially in all churches. One interesting site in Nigeria is the number of church activities on Sundays, some churches that do not have church building resort to using school classrooms or cinema houses for their church service. What are the opportunities available for members to explore to improve their well being and the well being of society as a whole?

Family counseling should be introduced in all the schools, universities, adult associations, clubs, societies, organizations and churches. Parents should be encouraged through public awareness campaigns or forum on the need to be more involved in their children's welfare. Church, family, alumni, professional associations have a big role to play in reducing the increasing numbers.

In most cases, policies regarding specifically street children do not seem to exist and even if at all it lacks logistics that will ensure its smooth implementation. There is the need to develop (especially where there are no policies) with proper mechanism and logistics put in place to ensure effective implementation. Local and international donors or Aid agencies could consider partnering with Government education sector in collaboration with private schools to explore and discuss good practical educational policies that targets the1

Psychology of Street Children

Children are not born feeling good or bad about themselves. They learn this from what happens to them. Self-esteem is the pride that a person has in himself or herself. A person with high self-esteem feels worthwhile (good and capable). People with low self-esteem think they are not worth-while and that what they do is not important to others or to themselves. Good self-esteem helps protect children from the traps they are exposed to growing up in our modern society. Self esteem results from self respect and respect from others. Self respect includes competence, confidence, mastery, achievement, independence and freedom. Respect from others includes recognition, acceptance, status, and appreciation. Healthy self-esteem is a realistic appraisal of one's capacities and begins with deserved respect from others. When these needs are not met, a child grows up feeling discouraged, weak and inferior. He or she is then vulnerable to finding other ways of being accepted outside of the family and is then susceptible to looking for acceptance from other groups like gangs and is vulnerable to peer pressure and acquiring feelings of acceptance through sex, drugs and alcohol. Positive self-esteem means having confidence, a child knows who they are in the world and does not have to fit in to be accepted. Encourage them toward college and career. When children feel confident and capable growing up and hold a vision of a satisfying future they are less likely to get into trouble that could prevent them from reaching their goals in life or lead them to the street.

Children, who are constantly growing, developing, and maturing, are required to take some risks in order to test their strengths and recognise their limitations. The most important thing for parents of these risk-taking children to acknowledge is that they play a huge role in whether or not their child's risk taking spirals out of control later in life, or whether their risks will lead to innovative and creative productions.

Taking risks allows children to understand the concept of trial and error. Success will certainly build the child's self-esteem, and inevitable failures will not only make them acknowledge their

boundaries, it will provide them with opportunity to cope with the negative emotions that accompany failure.

The problem with children taking risks lies primarily in the fact that most children, especially younger children, are incapable of abstract thought and reasoning. For this reason, many children are unable to accurately assess the dangers associated with taking some risks. This is where parents step in. The main priority as a parent is to keep the children safe. Talk to the children about the dangers associated with any risky behaviours they may be exhibiting.

Theoretical Framework

Erikson identified developmental crises that typically developing children face as they grow emotionally and socially. According to Erikson, the socialization process consists of eight phases - the "eight stages of man." His eight stages of man were formulated, not through experimental work, but through wide - ranging experience in psychotherapy, including extensive experience with children and adolescents from low - as well as upper - and middle - social classes. Each stage is regarded by Erikson as a "psychosocial crisis," which arises and demands resolution before the next stage can be satisfactorily negotiated. These stages are conceived in an almost architectural sense: satisfactory learning and resolution of each crisis is necessary if the child is to manage the next and subsequent ones satisfactorily, just as the foundation of a house is essential to the first floor, which in turn must be structurally sound to support and the second story, and so on.

Stage four is Industry vs. Inferiority and occurs from about six to twelve years old. This is the period in which the child wants to enter the larger world of knowledge. One of the great events of this stage is entry into school. However, the learning process does not always occur in school, but also at home, over friend's houses, and on the street. Erikson says that the successful experiences give the child a sense of industry, a feeling of competence and mastery, while failures give them a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. The maladaptive tendency for stage four is narrow virtuosity. This can be seen in children who are not allowed to "be children", the ones that parents or teachers, push into one area of competence, without allowing the development of broader interests. These are the children without a life, child actors, child athletes, child musicians, child prodigies of all sorts. The malignant tendency is inertia. This includes children who suffer from "inferiority complexes". That motto is if at first you don't succeed, don't ever try again. The virtue for this stage is competency, that is most industry, with just a touch of inferiority to keep them humble.

Methods

Design

This study adopted an ex-post facto research design. This approach was employed because the researcher had no control nor intended to manipulate any of the independent variables. The study had two independent variables. They were "sex" and "age" The dependent variable were "self-esteem" and "risk taking attitude".

Sampling Procedure

A random sampling technique was used to select 249 participants from street children assembled together by a religious group to feed and cloth them during Easter celebration. These participants

were made up of 132 males and 117 females. Their ages ranged from 9-18years with standard deviation 13.4years

Instruments

Three survey instruments were adopted in this study –Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES), Domain–Specific Risk-Taking Attitude Scale (RAS) and Child Street Status Identification Scale (CSSIS) was developed by this researcher this measured the demographic variables and street status of the participants.

Measures of Risk Attitude

Risk attitude of street children, was measured by the risk behaviour scale, Domain Specific Risk Taking Scale (DOSPERT} indicating domain specificity of risk propensities. Participants were asked for their likelihood of engaging in risky activities; the risk perception scale assessed how risky they perceived these activities to be; and all judgments were made on a 4-point Likert scale, whose endpoints and midpoint were labelled: High values indicated greater likelihood of engagement in the behaviour,
Other studies using the DOSPERT scale have found that perceptions of risk, rather than benefits, are a better predictor of risky behaviours among children (Weber, 2002). This instrument like others mentioned above yielded test –retest reliability of .72 and Cronbach Alpha of 0. 87

Measures of Self-Esteem

The global self-esteem measure was used in this study, it is an abridged version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Rosenberg (SES) (Rosenberg, 1965). The 7 questions to be asked for responses to statements such as "I feel good about myself' and "I feel I am a person of worth, the equal of other people." Participants indicated their agreement with these items on a 4-point scale. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded and a self-esteem measure was computed for each participant by taking the mean of all 7 items. The measure was computed such that higher values indicated a higher level of self-esteem. In the pilot study of test-retest after one month yielded .72 and Cronbach Alpha of .79.

Measure of Street Child Status Identification Scale (SCSIS)

This 5-item questionnaire measures the status of child in the street. Four different areas were explored to tap status of child in the street (1 item), there are those who live and work on the street (children of the street) and those who work on the streets full or part time, but return to their homes each night (children in the street). (1 item), age (1 item), gender (1 item), and area of operation (1 item). Participants were asked to indicate their status from options provided. To test the reliability of the items measured, Cronbach's alpha tests were conducted on the items, the generally accepted lower limit for Cronbach's alpha of .70 was found (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998).Two-week test-retest correlations Alpha reliability scores of .62. The Child Street Status Identification Scale (CSSIS) has demonstrated high concurrent validity of .87 with other measures.

Research Procedure
The researcher personally visited the place where the participants were randomly sampled. Research assistances were used in collaboration with the researcher. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire the investigator provided a brief tutorial to research assistances on how to administer the questionnaire which contained bio-data information, self esteem scale and risk attitude scale. Four interpreters were employed to translate the questionnaire into Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and French. Most participants were helped to fill the questionnaire because of their level of education. Some participants requested for financial rewards to participate in the study. During and upon completion of the questionnaire, (non-intrusive) screenshots were taken to cross checked what was done. After this was completed, a post-check was done to ensure proper completion of the questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis
The hypotheses stated for this study were tested using independent t-test and analysis of variance.

Analysis
Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis tested in this study states that 'there is no significant difference in the self-esteem and risk taking attitude based on gender'.

Table 1: Summary of independent sample t-test

	Variations	N	df	Mean	SD	t-observed	Significant level
Self-esteem	Male	132	247	18.45	4.29	0.42**	0.05
	Female	117		17.13	6.08		
Risk attitude	Male	132	247	12.12	2.52	18.11**	0.05
	Female	117		12.14	1.66		

**not significant
The independent t-test was used to test the first hypothesis the two groups identified were male and female street children. In this study, the means show that both male and female street children have very low self esteem but that of male is higher than female in self-esteem. The participants reported propensity risk taking attitude while male is slightly higher than female. The p-value obtained from an independent sample t-test indicated no significant difference between the groups identified at t-observed=0.42 for self-esteem and 0.11 for risk taking attitude, degree of freedom=40 and 0.05 significant level. The hypothesis one is retained.

Hypothesis 2: The second hypothesis tested in this study states that 'there are no significant difference in the self-esteem and risk taking attitude based on age'.

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Variance

	Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Self-esteem	Between	192.0768	4	48.0192	0.41	0.05
	Within	28577.28	244	117.12		
	Total	28769.3568	248			
Risk taking attitude	Between	33.6128	4	8.4032		
	Within	51259.52	244	210.08	0.04	0.05
	Total	51293.1328	248			

The results of the ANOVA are presented in an ANOVA table above. This table revealed that there are no significant difference in the self-esteem and risk taking attitude based on age at $f_{(4, 244)}$ = 0.41, 0.05 significant level. This implies that there are no significant difference in the self-esteem and risk taking attitude based on age.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that street children were low in self-esteem and prone to taking risk. There are earlier findings which had found relationship between low self-esteem poor interpersonal relationship, poor academic performance, drug use and abuse, crime involvement and rape. There are findings which have equally linked aversive risk taking attitude to crime related offences.

The findings of this present study however beam a ray of hope rather than hopelessness. Strong propensity risk taking attitude has been found to have positively correlated with involvement in sports and taking part in stock market. In order to lead a healthy, balanced life, individuals are required to take risks. Risk is always involved in every aspect of our daily lives. As human beings we may have evolved into exceptionally advanced intelligence, but we are still at the mercy of much larger forces such as natural disasters, regardless of how much or how little we risk.

Growth, to some degree, involves taking risks and pushing oneself out of ones comfort zones in order to gain new experiences and perspectives, undeniably shaping individuals into a much more well-rounded person. If an individual becomes too afraid to take risks, he or she becomes stagnant within their comfort areas, denying them the many benefits of growing, regardless of the pain which may be associated with undergoing this physical, mental, and emotional change. In addition to a free, qualitative and compulsory first nine years of education in order to avoid creating a sharp divide in the society, government can encourage street children to participate in sports and possibly involve in sports as means of livelihood. The significance of economic empowerment in the concept of job creation by the central government and the creation of an enabling environment for private enterprise to flourish will also help street children.

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