

Menace of street urchins in Nigeria

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Abstract

Large and increasing numbers of children live in the streets and the exact numbers are never known due to their roaming lifestyle. Paradoxical developments are allowing societies to grow in extremes: the rich and the poor. Poverty leads many to the streets; however poverty alone is not responsible for children entering street life, violent, unhealthy and inhuman behaviour patterns towards children seem to be some of the major reasons. Many children facing physical abuse escape to street life. Moreover, the irresponsible and uncaring attitude of individuals and organisations aggravates the problems of children in the street. Many children are being abused and deprived of care and protection from family and society. The abuse voluminously affects their mental and physical health which

in turn affects optimum use of manpower and limits the growth of Nigeria. The Nigerian government has policies in place for its children but the lacuna in its implementation adds to the problem of physical abuse and street children. Prevention of physical abuse and curative facilities offered to the abused children can lead to their positive growth and well-being. This study proposes interventions that can assist children, accompany them from the pathetic street condition to the mainstream, sustain their healthy growth in the families and add to their human development. The government, NGOs and citizens of the society are challenged to become partners in promoting holistic development of children considering them as assets and not liabilities.

Keywords: Nigeria, street urchins, child abuse, child labour, urban space.

1. Introduction

Children are an inseparable and indispensable part of every society. Childhood is a natural and distinct phase of human life during which children learn skills, socio-cultural norms, values and attitudes (Kamp 2001). Society perceives children as dependent, immature and vulnerable, growing up to be healthy and responsible members of society. Their normal growth takes place only through the healthy process of socialisation, which can help children gradually adapt to the social and cultural roles and finally develop into normal, contributing and mature human persons (Prout, James, 1997; James et al., 1998). To achieve a healthy and balanced growth children are expected to stay in family, school or in other social institutions where they can grow up under the care and supervision of responsible adults. The vast number of street children who, alone or in a group, work and/or live mostly in streets in almost all the major cities of the world, has captured academic attention in the recent past (UNICEF 2016). In the current social scenario, children are studying in various fields, working or living in deprived and wounded situations, and a bigger group in homeless street situations. Every society has to support the rights of children and provide them necessary possibilities for growth and development (Kumar 2002).

The phenomenon of street urchins or, as commonly known, street children is usually an unfortunate one wherever it occurs. In Nigeria, the activities of street urchins constitute one of the many social ills and challenges the country is facing today (Mamman et al., 2020; Yusuf 2020). As O. Fakoya (2009) notes, the phenomenon of

street children “constitutes a leprous arm” of the alarming social ills that have degenerated into the “production of adult social delinquents”, armed robbers and the like. This phenomenon which in many ways has posed problems to business people, road users, government, indeed the civil society as a whole, seems to have defied solutions from government, NGOs, etc. There is still a high prevalence of street children and their activities in almost every major city of Nigeria. The alarming prevalence is not out of lack of efforts at finding solution but perhaps a lack of the right, sustainable and an enduring solution. It is in this regard that this paper sets out to contend that philosophers should rise to their billing as those capable of asking fundamental questions about human existence and contribute their quota towards addressing this societal nuisance.

This work explores the meaning, activities, dynamics and aetiology of the phenomenon of street urchins. This work gives a brief review of attempts by governmental and non-governmental organisations to deal with the issue and show that philosophical inquiries is important in stimulating the lopsided governance in Nigeria to better the lot of street urchins. Some suggestions are proposed in this work to reduce the problem of street urchins in Nigeria.

2. Societal malfunctions and abuse of children

Physical abuse of children is caused by multiple factors, e.g. parents, family, and community (Kolko, Swenson, 2002). However, family is the fundamental factor of the healthy growth and development of children. Any compromise with a healthy family environment can disrupt the family, inflict violence and abuse on innocent children. Societies witness every day an influx of children entering the streets due to physical and sexual abuse, indifferent attitudes of their parents, family disruption and poverty. Parents are the most appropriate persons to care for children. Parents, friends, the physical environment and the wider society can make a valuable contribution to the holistic development of children (Burfat et al., 2012). However, maltreatment, neglect, deprivation and indifferent parental behaviour towards them can cause serious and irreversible damage, forcing the children to opt the street for their survival.

Families occupy an important place in the vicious cycle of physical violence (Öncü et al., 2013). Every day in Nigeria, at least 20 children escape the abusive environment of their homes to live in the streets and become victims of exploitation and abuse (Ogunkan, Adeboyejo, 2014). A UNICEF study finds that a vast majority of children suffer physical punishment in their families and more than one-third experience severe punishment with implements. Boys are appeared to be at greater risk of physical abuse than girls (Schumacher et al., 2001). Unhealthy familial risk factors cause a greater risk for children and domestic violence harm children (Buzava 2013; Akpan, Bassey 2020). Chronic family physical violence disrupts healthy family relations, resulting in high anxiety, distrust and chaos within the family (Annoshian 2005). Divorce, separation, desertion and death of parent(s) harm children (Goode 2007). Aggressive, violent, verbally abusive behaviours and partner conflicts are common in the families of abused children (Kolko, Swenson, 2002). Violence in the family affects each child's development adversely and also increases the risk of cruelty for children in other environments. Studies reveal that violence within the household and local community is the key factor which pushes children into the streets (Conticini, Hulme, 2006). The physically abused and vulnerable children must be removed from the families for their protection, especially when the immediate protection of children is essential (Trotter 2004). Moreover, a lot of time is lost in intervening the abusive behaviours instead of nurturing members of the family (ibidem).

World declaration on children's rights focuses on the survival, protection and development of children. Along with many nations, Nigeria is a signatory to this (Ogunkan, Adeboyejo 2014). The national plans for children stress care and protection, keeping in mind the 180 mln children in the country (Okwuonu et al., 2021). The actual situation is far from what is expected. Many of the street children in Nigeria are being abused and neglected by their family members and many others are separated from their parents. Exposure to excessive physical maltreatment and emotional deprivation is common among children living in street situations, which affect their behaviour and development (Sondhi-Garg 2004). Children depend on parents for help and protection but they are hurt by their parents. Hence, they fear their parents rather than trusting them. This further teaches them that a home is an unsafe place

for learning and exploration. This adds to factors that cause the children to make the street their home. Their innocence is shattered as they are deprived of parental care and guidance in their formative years. They live in an atmosphere devoid of the affection, love, care and comfort of family life. They are denied protection, supervision or direction from any friendly or responsible adults, letting them fend for themselves and to survive in a hostile environment. They develop distorted personalities and undesirable and socially unacceptable habits of crimes and vices (Agrawal 2002). They become victims of divorce, domestic violence and other related familial and social problems (Thomas 2007). They do not go to school often because they have to work. Moreover, they do not have nutritious food or quality health care. They are at the risk of exploitation, abuse and discrimination (ibidem). The phenomenon is further worsened by the increasing number of children being forced to the streets due to the negligence of their families and communities. Consequently, the issue has become pervasive and complex (Kacker 2007).

A vital development pathway for children is formed by healthy family relationships. Relationship weakens owing to the inability of the family to satisfy the needs of its members, e.g. basic necessities, education and safety. In such families negativity of parents controls children's lives and harms their well-being. Family, school and peers are essential elements in moulding behaviour and emotional wellness of children. Power-based and authoritarian methods are harmful to relationship patterns (Wolfe 1999). Physical punishment is illegal and abhorrent. Instead of adopting the forceful method, warmth and sensitivity towards children's needs, love and logic with firmness, can help in shaping socially desired behaviours (George et al., 2014). Children suffer the rupture of a bond due to broken family ties which are expected to be a source of nurture and protection. The presence of poor family relationships and lack of support among the members of the family, limited social networks and absence of positive interactions create an unhealthy environment for children (Kolko, Swenson, 2002). Interpersonal difficulties in family, e.g. spousal disagreement, tension, abuse, verbal and physical conflict among family members, including domestic violence and isolation from friends and community, can become risk factors (Miller-Perrin, Perrin, 2013). For the maltreated children, the diversity of social situa-

tions may be restricted for several reasons, e.g. the family's reduced social circle (Luke, Banerjee, 2013). The abusive family condition of these children impairs the development of attachment, emotional self-regulation, empathy and sympathy, self-concept, and social skills (Berk 2007). The exploitative and victimising pattern within the family can have serious and cumulative developmental consequences as they enter the street environment. Such disruptions in relationship during their early years of growth can lead them to grapple with complex issues.

Poverty aggravates stress on already vulnerable families, causing some adults to exploit children (Egbeji 2019; Onyemachi 2020). It can be understood in several ways, e.g. insufficient resources, lack of transport facilities, the experience of violence and inadequate legal protection (Thomas 2007). Besides, it includes social exclusion, unemployment, homelessness and environmental poverty which seriously affect the parents (Beckett 2007). The situation of poor households and neighbourhoods, with limited access to basic services and opportunities, can offer the children a tempting illusion of freedom in the street. Good parenting involves having the required life opportunities and facilities. The lack of such life supports can prevent even the best parents to do good to their children (ibidem). A study confirms that dead-end hopeless poverty drives many children to the streets of the cities. However, a study in Tripura reveals that there is more physical violence in high-income families and their academic performance is found to be poor (Deb, Modak, 2010). Children leave home for street life because of changes in family structure within the context of poverty and a wider culture that accepts violent child-rearing practices (Thomas 2007). Poverty is an important risk factor for physical abuse. It can cause families to abandon their children. Though physical abuse exists across all socio-economic levels), an overwhelming number of physically abused children face acute poverty at home and their families expect them to earn money. Families are stressed by limited financial resources, e.g. low income, unemployment, poor housing, large family size and single parenthood (Kolko, Swenson, 2002). Such stressed situations can develop poor self-esteem, weak sense of purpose, fragile mental and physical health (Beresford et al., 1999).

Some children come from very poor households in slums headed by single mothers who cannot meet even the basic survival needs (Mercer 2009). The majority of the householders in slums are engaged in rickshaw pulling, garbage collection, begging and illegal activities. Children are pushed to the streets as they lack the guidance and support of the family (ibidem). They are illiterate and their children do not attend school (Pathak 1998) and are forced to leave school due to poor economic conditions. So, understanding their educational levels is important (Pareek 2012). Illiteracy, ignorance and struggles for survival adversely impact poor families (Deb, Modak, 2010). Illiteracy is rampant among street and working girls. They are occupied with gainful employment, e.g. rag picking, shoe polishing and begging. They do not have access to civic facilities and basic amenities (ibidem). Though not every poor family necessarily experiences all the adverse circumstances, poverty as a stressful condition can develop situations that might result in the family being identified with more risk factors for physical abuse (Miller-Perrin, Perrin, 2013).

Deprivation in the family can result in child labour, which can be categorised as, first, those who work in factories, workshops and mines; second, those working as bonded labour; third, street children who live in and off the streets and are found in urban and semi-urban centres; and some children become part of family labour (Kacker 2007). A vast majority of families of developing nations are mostly situated in villages. India is progressing but the villages are growing poorer and the cities growing richer. Family is the institution that can help children to grow and become empowered human beings. Families experience extreme poverty, which interferes with their physical and mental development (Ogunkan, Adeboyejo, 2014). Poverty denies their basic requirements, e.g. food, safe water, sanitation, housing, primary health care, basic education and protection from violence and abuse. Such deprivation damages their physical, emotional and mental growth.

3. Street urchin: meaning, modus operandi, aetiology and problems

Street urchin is a tag given to a child who spends most of his/her time in the streets; either roaming or living in the streets, or as it were surviving in the streets. N. Bernard (1915) defines street urchin as a mischievous and often poor and raggedly

clothed youngster often seen roaming and living in the slum area. In many areas, such children are often seen as devilish, rascals, rogue, etc. Meanwhile, this definition shows the negativity (in all its senses) attached to street urchins. The reason for this negativity is not farfetched. It is as a result of their predicaments which often push them into some nefarious activities undertaken for survival.

O. Fakoya (2009) distinguishes between two different categories of street urchins found in Nigerian cities. He notes that some live and work in the streets (usually tagged children of the streets) and those who work in the streets full or part-time but return to their houses each night (children in the street). Though this is actually the case, it is important to note that there is only a slight demarcation between the two categories because each interact and are bonded by their common burden of the demands of the rough street life and the woe of abandonment to struggle for survival. The street urchins are also seen by many as the rejects and outcasts of the society. A. Akpan (2015) citing the case of the street urchins in Calabar, known as the *Skolombo* boys, says that these are gangs of homeless boys and girls, bonded together by the common misery of being abandoned into the streets by their parents or guardians.

In regard to the problem and focus of this work, street urchins are referred to as those children who are below eighteen years, abandoned into the street, which they then make a living abode, and a means and avenue for survival. As a mode of operation, the street urchins are known to move mostly in groups and always hanging around street corners. Some of them are scavengers who feed on refuse dumps and bins. Those who do not have any place to return to after the day's business (children of the street) sleep in gutters, uncompleted buildings and motor parks. By living, feeding on filthy bins and sources, and working in the streets, they are exposed to hard life and are dehumanised. More so, they become toughened as they associate with bigger criminals on a daily basis. As they grow and graduate from one level to another in the street business, some of them are recruited into gangs of armed robbers and kidnappers who constitute security risk and menace to society. Some of these urchins are engaged in petty thieveries using some crude weapons. They dispose of unsuspected people of their valuables, e.g. phones, bags, money, etc, through pickpocketing (Lawal 2019). Apart from being recruited into armed robbery and kid-

napping gangs, there are shreds of evidence that some street urchins are also engaged in many ethno-religious conflicts that threaten national security. N. Nte et al. (2009) cite cases where street urchins took part in major ethno-religious conflicts, e.g. witnessed in recent times in Kano, Bauchi, Jos, Kaduna, etc. In Lagos, they note that the the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) crises between 1999 and 2001, for example, involved a lot of street urchins-recruited as foot soldiers. The same can also be said of ethnic crises in the south and eastern part of Nigeria.

Given the fact that street children constitute some security risk to the Nigerian nation, one could then ask, what factors birthed this unfortunate situation. How did Nigeria get to this level where urchins terrorize the streets and engage in social vices in a manner that sometimes threaten social security and national unity? The phenomenon of street urchins is attributable to many causes, most prominent among them being poverty, child abuse, false religion, displacement, domestic crises, peer influences and lack of sustainable policy by the government to address this problem. It is a known fact that poor families who cannot take care of their children sometimes send them out into the streets either deliberately or inadvertently. Most times, these children engage in mini-treading and hawking and are sometimes influenced by peer groups into abandoning trading to pick-pocketing, petty thievery and so on. Child abuse by parents and guardians also causes some children to abandon themselves into the street. This oftentimes is to escape from severe violence and torture against them. Many children are abandoned into the street as a result of displacement and domestic crises. The displacement could be caused by ethnic or religious crises, and such children might choose to run to cities; and with no means of livelihood, they could choose to roam the streets in search of greener pastures. There is also the case of religion as a factor. Some children have been thrown out into the streets on the pretext of false prophecy and revelation that they are witches or wizards (Harry 2017). Besides the case of false prophecy by some Christian churches, the Islamic religion sanctions a doctrine where some children known as the *almajiris* are forced to leave their houses to be under the tutelage of Islamic religious teachers (Anugwom 2018). These children are seen in groups with ragged dresses begging for alms for survival (Adibe 2019). The nuisance they constitute is, indeed palpable.

4. Urban space and the problem of street urchins

The nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution was the transition to new manufacturing processes in Europe and the United States, in the period from between 1760 to 1820 (Evans, Rydén, 2017). This era witnessed an amazing transformation in the political and economic life of Europeans and Americans alike (Bassey 2020). New methods of industrial production, new cityscapes and new techniques of government and social regulation became evident. This acceleration in the processes of technical innovation brought about an array of new tools and machines. It also involved more subtle practical improvements in various fields affecting labour, production and resource use. People in the rural areas began to migrate to the urban areas due to economic reasons.

The World and, in particular, Africa are currently witnessing rapid and wide-ranging socio-economic and political changes, due to the wake of industrialisation of the nineteenth century which began in Europe. The introduction of structural adjustment programmes and globalisation are changing the very fabric of African society. This leads to the “pull” of the excitement and glamour of living in urban areas and the hope of raising one’s standard of living. Families are therefore forced to move to urban areas in search of employment and a way out of the poverty trap. Once in the cities, many families break up with children being forced into the streets. For many families, the perceptions that larger towns offer greater economic opportunities make the street a more attractive destination compared to a poverty-stricken rural economy. However, a life waiting in the city is often difficult. The migrants often do not have the education and basic skills necessary to deal with the risk factors and cope with adversity. While all of the above are substantive factors contributing to the existence of street children, increasing mass poverty stands out as a major factor for the existence of street children. It is poverty that is breaking up homes and families, it is poverty that makes grown-ups turn children into sources of income or articles for sale, is poverty, particularly in rural areas, that are making young children from their homes and it is poverty that is turning society into a vicious and uncaring society.

In Tanzania they are known as *watoto wa mitaani*, in Kenya they are known as *chokorra* and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) they are called *moineaux* (Evans 2002). In Calabar, Cross River State of Southern Nigeria, they are called *skolombo*. By whatever name they are called, what stands out is the sad fact that in almost all urban areas in Africa, street urchins are often ignored, scorned, mistreated and misunderstood by society and by governments. J. Barrette (1995: 2) correctly observes that “yesterday, street children (street urchins) were no more than a footnote. Today, street children are a major issue. Tomorrow, if present trends continue, they could be a blight on urban civilization”. For Africa, the ‘tomorrow’ is already here. Street urchins are not only a blight on urban civilisation; they pose a serious obstacle to overall socio-economic development in Africa. The problem of street children has been growing steadily in the last two decades. In the 1980s, an estimated 10 mln children in Africa live without families, mostly in towns as ‘street children’ (UNICEF 2016). In the year 2020, R. Miamingi (2020) observed that UNICEF estimates the number of street urchins in Africa to stand at about 30 mln. It is most likely to grow in the next few years.

Some argue that the emergence of street urchins is bound up with the totality of urban problems, that the phenomenon is exclusively urban; there are no “rural street urchins”. While it is true that street children are usually found in urban areas, many of these children have rural origins. So the problem extends beyond urbanisation. Some of the children have taken refuge in the city from natural or man-made disasters. Others are the offspring of prostitutes. Handicapped street children, rejected by their families, also constitute a distinct and relatively large category. A number have been disowned by a “respectable” parent unwilling to acknowledge the embarrassing outcome of an affair. In such cases, the children do not invariably come from the poorest families. In West Africa, fieldworkers have discovered street children from various backgrounds, including a son of a taxi driver, a nephew of a dentist, even the grandson of a former minister. One main characteristic of street urchins is that they live alone in the streets, without proper or reliable shelter; they have lost contact with their parents and, as such, they do not enjoy parental protection, love and care (Usman 2009). Street urchins share the streets with millions of adults, many

of whom regard them as nuisances, if not as dangerous mini-criminals. Poverty is one of the major factors of an increasing number of street urchins in the streets. Street urchins face untold hardship and danger in the streets – the lack of food, clean water and adequate health care. Living and ‘working’ in the streets exacts a terrible toll on street urchins. They are often prey to every physical and moral danger and as they grow older they often become a danger to others. After such precarious childhoods, most of them are condemned to spend their lives excluded from mainstream society. Clearly, the increasing numbers of street children also indicate a constellation of other trends, e.g. cutbacks in government social and educational budgets, as well as the breakdown of traditional family and community structures, which leaves children unprotected.

It is argued in this paper that street children in Africa are the victims of short-sighted policies or lack of policies. They are victims of an uncaring community that is increasingly being characterised by poverty, breakdown of family life, violence and economic hardships.

5. Attempts by government and non-governmental organisations to address the menace of street urchins

Undoubtedly, there have been both government and non-governmental attempts in addressing this problem, but these attempts still leave much to be desired as there is still a high prevalence of the street urchin phenomenon in almost all cities in Nigeria. This is majorly because there is no well spelt out and systematic attempts in the form of legislation to address this problem. This is why J. Adibe (2019) notes that he is “not aware of any governmental intervention to cater specifically to the needs of the street children in Nigeria as done in other countries”. Shockingly, according to him, Nigeria does not, either, seem to recognise 12 April as the day set aside, since 2012 as the International Day for street children. This work agrees with him that this day set aside to arouse the attention of the public and government on the predicament of the street children is not usually pronounced in Nigeria. But if there is a day internationally recognised, it suggests that there ought to be well-articulated programmes aimed at acknowledging the predicament of street urchins,

at least periodically, and perhaps to address this phenomenon to a reasonable measure. Unfortunately, the Nigerian factor of treating issues of the downtrodden with levity still leaves society in this precarious situation of street urchin menace. The case of the child's right act signed into law since 2003, but not put into practice or respected by successive government is apt.

Meanwhile, whether Nigerians are aware of the International Day for street children or not, J. Adibe (2019) argues that the Nigerian "government has not done anything" to address the street urchin menace. There have been a few instances where government and even non-governmental organisations, religious bodies and the like have waded into this problem either for good or for bad. From the government angle, former military head of state, Ibrahim Babangida, established People's Bank which offered micro-credits to many *street boys* to start small businesses (Anyanwu, Uwatt, 1993). The programme suffered, however, from insufficient funding and adequate sustainability. In Lagos State, B. Tinubu as the governor of the state set up a skill training centre to rehabilitate the street boys. However the programme also collapsed as others because of lack of commitment and poor implementation. In Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, O. Imoke used government resources as the then First Lady of the State (the Governors' wife) and initiated a scheme - The Mother against Child Abandonment (MACA), which culminated in the establishment of the Destiny Child Centre in October 2009 (Adegbamigbe et al., 2020). This was a rehabilitation centre for street children. However laudable as this initiative was, it became moribund because of non-commitment by the successive government and an influx of other street urchins that the available funds could not contain with.

Recently the Lagos state government has been making frantic efforts to partner with UNICEF to rid Lagos streets of the urchins and enable them to get back to school (UNICEF 2016). But how this will pan out is something one cannot be optimistic about. This is because there have been such programmes of collaboration earlier in several other states which did not bear the expected fruit. For example, some years back, there was a five-year counterpart funded programme between the Cross River State Government and the United Nations International Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) on how to curb the phenomenon of street children, but the government

failed to keep their own side of the bargain and so the project was dead on arrival (Isine 2016).

Another form of common intervention to stop the menace of street urchins is the launching of armed operations by some government agencies. T. Harry (2017) narrates how operation *skolombo* was used brutally in Calabar, the capital of Cross River state, to either kill the street boys or dump them into some dungeons. The above is only typical example of how the Nigerian government sometimes brutally reacts towards the street urchins. There are many of such cases in other states. The problem, however, is that dumping urchins into some dungeons will only toughen them the more. Killing a few unfortunate ones caught misbehaving does not put an end to the ugly phenomenon, either. Instead, Nigerians are even witnessing an upsurge as their numbers and nefarious activities have increased. The urchins who survive such operations, instead of repenting, usually vent their anger on the common masses as they steal, vandalize, rape and commit some unprintable crimes in the society.

From the narrative above, it could be inferred that some NGOs, sociologists, psychotherapists, the clergy, economists and the like have in one way or the other contributed their quota in helping to proffer solution to this menace, yet with no remarkable and essential success to tell of.

6. Suggestion to reducing street urchins problem in Nigeria

6.1. Poverty alleviation

This work has shown that family is the fundamental risk factor for physical abuse and the children being in the street. Economic support is crucial for the children of poor families (Pillay 2018). Physical abuse occurs due to the parental stress caused by poverty. The study reveals that all the respondents are from rural areas and are affected by poverty. Consequently, children are pushed to or pulled by street factors. Poverty alleviation schemes need to be devised to assist poor families or foster parents to have better opportunities to improve their earning capacity to overcome poverty and to provide adequately for their children. Government can provide various schemes to assist single parents, especially women, to get involved in in-

come-generating activities, e.g. self-help women groups. This will enhance their income, improve their capability and will enable them to provide for their children.

6.2. Training on appropriate parenting problem

Study reveals that instability in the families develops due to parental conflict, domestic violence, broken relationship, divorce and re-marriage (Animasahun 2014). Children leave home because of their parents' inappropriate parenting. Many of them are addicted to alcohol and other substances. They are ignorant of the problems of children and are incapable of controlling their impulses, stress and depression. Consequently, children are physically abused by their parents. Many of the street children who are physically abused belong to the younger age group. The lower their age, the higher the frequency and severity of physical abuse.

Marriage preparation and family guidance are needed for young parents to understand and take up the responsibility of the family. They need techniques and self-control skills to manage heightened anxiety, anger arousal and cognitive distortions. They require training to use alternative non-physical use of punishment instead of physical discipline or harsh punishment of their children. It is suggested that government must set up *parenting schools* at the primary schools in rural areas to equip parents with useful information and skills on parenting. Positive reinforcement, e.g. appreciation, praise and reward for accomplishments are more helpful for children to become optimistic, achievement-oriented and fostering pro-social behaviour. It can be taught to potential parents and new parents for learning good child-rearing practices to reduce the physical abuse of children. It must become a way of life for parents and teachers.

Parents need to give adequate care, protection and education to children from a young age. In addition, the assistance of grandparents can play a vital role in preventing physical abuse and they can provide proper care for grandchildren. The family support programme can help families to develop resilience, healthy coping strategies and capabilities to participate in mainstream society. Consequently, children can receive better care, improve the child-parent relationship and fewer children will run away from home.

6.3. Alternative family care for children problem

This work has shown that children migrate to the streets because of the adverse circumstances of families, severe to very severe, and fatal physical violence from father, mother, brother, uncle, aunt, stepfather, stepmother and relatives. It is further aggravated by domestic violence and family conflicts. The government must provide alternative care for those who cannot obtain care from their families. Public awareness to promote people's concern for the miserable young children can encourage the culturally viable traditional role of the neighbourhood, extended family and other kin in rearing young children. The government's provision of necessary economic support to extended family, kin and to the neighbourhood will further encourage their involvement in helping these children.

6.4. Child care centres problem

This study shows that children in some families are in danger, as some parents can inflict severe physical abuse and even kill them. Normally, parents who physically abuse or abandon their children are not punished and no support services have been developed for these children. In such situations, it is recommended that children be removed from the guardianship of dangerous abusive parents and kept in alternative family care. Small child care centres in inaccessible areas or arrangements for foster care can help as alternative ways to support unfortunate children. As a result, fewer children may aimlessly migrate to the urban streets. As E. Munro (2007) suggests, children need to be removed from the home while the parents receive treatment, after which the child can be returned. Parents who have the psychotic illness are not deemed treatable and so their children will need permanent alternative care.

6.5. Outreach programme and in-street support problem

As children are deprived of basic facilities, they collect scraps, engage in begging and other unhygienic and unhealthy activities to obtain money and food. Lack of necessary provision and protection often turns street children to negative survival strategies, e.g. substance abuse and delinquent activities. Outreach Programme can target all street children wandering in the street and provide them with food, emer-

gency medical care, counselling and temporary shelter. It can help to prevent them from using negative and risky strategies for survival. Besides taking care of the immediate needs of the children, they can be significantly helped to find a more socially acceptable direction in life. This programme not only provides first aid to the street children but also serve to connect them with other service programmes, e.g. institutional care, foster care or family integration.

In-street support must be provided to children to build healthy networks, prevent physical violence and reduce exposure to physical violence in the dynamic and unprotected environments of the street. Hence, it is necessary to facilitate access to non-violent shelters and emergency and other support services. Initiating the rehabilitation process of street children at an early stage is imperative before they are trapped in substance and other abusive activities, as it can be a major impediment to their rehabilitation.

7. Conclusion

The work set out to expose the menace of street urchins in Nigeria. This phenomenon constitutes part of the social ills that the country is currently facing. It was shown that attempts by both government agencies and non-government organisations to address the problem have failed. The reason adduced is that they failed to ask fundamental and broad-based questions. The research journey with children has been very enriching and interesting. However, the shocking incidents and impact of physical abuse is challenging. The country that is hosting the larger number of children in the world is not able to cater to the development and needs of children. Hence the researcher feels strongly that a lot more time, finance and human power are to be invested to enhance the lives of millions of children. Many are involved in promoting the lives of children on a regular basis. The street children phenomenon is large and has an extensive area to explore and study. The present study reveals the experience and perception of physically abused street children in their family and in the street and the way they deal with the problem and its consequence. There is an urgent need of further in-depth studies in this area. Future research need to explore

links between children's environments and strive to understand their interconnected nature.

There is a clear gap between academic research and government policies as the schemes and policies do not reflect the knowledge acquired from the academic research (Thomas 2007). Policy makers need to fill this gap by utilising the findings from academic research while planning for the welfare of street children. Academic research is fragmented into separate disciplines and, therefore, they need to be systematised and streamlined. Research must include a wide range of relevant disciplines, which can include law, finance, economics, public policy, criminology, social policy, media studies, political science, social work, medicine and urban planning.

The policies and programmes of NGO and government in Nigeria have touched upon the areas of abused children. However, the requirement is far from desirable. Hence, enlightened public policy and the replication of high-quality publicly supported interventions are needed to successfully combat child physical abuse. Public needs to be reminded that child abuse and neglect are serious threats to children's healthy development. Physical violence toward children and a persistent lack of attention to their care, protection and supervision are unacceptable. Individuals have the ability and right to accept personal responsibility for reducing acts of child abuse and neglect by providing support and protection to all children within their family and community. The recommendation of research can help reduce the problem of street urchins in Nigeria.

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wpłynęło/received 02.07.2021; poprawiono/revised 24.09.2021