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## Nigerian Street Children: A Reservoir for Boko Haram (Terrorism)

**Dr. Eloma Usang**

Senior Lecturer, Centre for General Studies,  
Cross River University of Technology (Crutech), Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

**Ekpo, Eno Bassey**

Assistant Lecturer, Department of Peace and Conflict Resolution,  
National Open University of Nigeria, Calabar Study Centre, Calabar Cross River State, Nigeria

**Akpan, Emmanuel Mendie**

Graduate Assistant, Centre for General Studies,  
Cross River University of Technology (Crutech), Calabar Cross River State, Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

*This study was aimed at finding out the density of street children in Nigeria, as to understand the dangers, in which street children constitute and the potential danger posed to society. The research work was carried out on five selected hang-outs of street children in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria. A survey questionnaire was administered on a sample size of twenty five selected hang-outs children camps in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. A four point Likert-like rating scale was secured as the instrument for data collection and the questionnaire was faced vetted and validated for data collection. The respondents indicated the extent of their agreement to the items based on the scale points; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The responses were weighted against the options and the mean score derived by summing the weighted scores and dividing it by total number of responses.*

**Keywords:** Children, street, family, future, society, begging

### **1. Introduction**

In Nigeria most cities are witness to great numbers of children on the streets than ever due to the poverty levels of families. Some of the children who are rejected, neglected by their families for one reason or the other such as domestic violence, disease, abusive families, stubbornness, frustration and disabilities. Most of these children run away from home in order to escape the ordeal at home and met the worse on the street. Children left their homes because of inability of the parents to supply their basic needs. In some families, most especially in the rural areas, life is unbearable for these children because of the economic condition of the families. Parents who find themselves in these conditions make life sometimes miserable for their children by imposing abnormal character and attitude on their children and families, encouraged them, most especially female children to go prostituting as to take care of themselves and the family. Some of the children become the sole bread winners of families through begging, pick-pocketing or selling scrap materials for recycling.

A good number of them who flee extreme poverty to join street life often do so under the impression that it will provide more opportunity and economic advantages than their home lives could offer. The numbers of children that are sent out of the house by parents in the name of inability to take care of them are alarming. It creates a big concern in the minds of the people when grown up children of fifteen years of age plus the younger ones roam around the streets. Unfortunately, a greater percentage of these people become so irredeemable to the point that they grow up in like manner without any proper orientation either from their parents/guardians or the society. Most of the children end up on the street, under the bridges, uncompleted buildings, hanged around public places where they operate unacceptable practices as a result of lack of care by their families.

Children on the streets, find life miserable without anywhere call their home and they are often involved in all kinds of illicit businesses to survive. Many are involved in criminal activities and are adopted by gangs, who exist without sense of belonging to recruit more children into their gangs. Most of them have become harden criminal through drug abuse in order to endure the harsh condition of the streets.

Street children are not regarded as members of the society. They have been given inhuman treatment because they lack identification documents. They are often targeted in ways that perpetuate gross abuses of human rights. Most of them are subjected to unreported police brutality which occurred in different forms.

Often time, street children are taken to youth detention centers by police officers without due process in line with international human rights standards. They engage themselves in works like child labor, slavery sex and human trafficking. In Nigeria, the prevalence of witchcraft also makes street children targets for kidnappings and child sacrifice rituals as their parents sent them out of their homes.

These children are missing without being noticed since they lack proof of identification. There is tendency of them being abducted by terrorist (Boko Haram, ISISI) because they lack proof of their existence.

Street children are deprived of basic necessities and rights by their families and society at large. More so, they grow up in unhealthy environment which constitute more problems to the society on the street. It's clearly evidence that they have determined to make their habit perpetual lifestyle on the street. Both their families and the society have abandoned them to the mercy of kidnappers without help in any form to better up their future. Most of these children have great future if they are trained and educated they can be of great value to both their families and society.

The problems faced by Nigerian society occasioned by abnormal behaviors of street children are enormous. These problems are traced to the foundation and setting of society right from the past generation. These problems take different forms and occurred at different time according to its cultural deviation. It also creates a huge negative impact on the society. \

These problems are seen as social vices because it affect more than individuals with a manifestation of different behaviors which demands change through some means of social structure and control (Marshall 1994). Usually, social vices include deviant behavior such as robbery, prostitution, drugs, crime, Juvenile delinquency, mental illness etc and social conflicts such as domestic violence, ethnic tension etc. Obioha, (2009).

Despite the popularity of Cross River State as a tourist state, the activities of the street children are ugly scene which can deter tourist from coming to the state capable of slowing down the pace business and activities in Calabar city if not checked. The numbers of street children are on the increase daily despite the fact that some of them have been returned to their families by concern individuals. They are so used to life on the street in that they can't survive under parental control any longer since they have become master and directors of their affairs. They are taken into some families as foster children who in turn are given out for some token of money as house boys in pretends that they are their relatives without the children having full knowledge of what they are in for.

Street children have been defined by different authors, Obioha, (2009) defined street children as the abandoned, unfortunate orphans, children rejected by their parents, guardians and the society who make their living on the street because of the circumstances that are somehow beyond their control.

There are two major groups of street children: They are children on the street and children in the street. Children on the street are those who come from their homes to the street and go back to their homes while children in the street are those who found their abode in the street. There is clear evidence in Calabar metropolis that numbers of street children are multiplying compare to the past few years with the increase of their havocs. Most cities in Nigeria experienced almost similar things, for instance, Kaduna has severe incidence of street children, which may be as a result of high increase of child abuse and neglect in the area Obioha, (2009). The estimate of the general view of child labor is about 8 million people in Nigeria Oloko, (1999)

### 1.1. Category of Street Children in Calabar Metropolis

In Calabar metropolis there are various groups of street children located at strategic places such as the five selected groups mentioned above as the case study. Calabar city was known as the most calmed and peaceful city in the whole country but now the story is different because of the menace of street children.

They are commonly found at places like Calabar-Calabar around about by Sport Club begging for arms, early in the morning they take their bath at eleven-eleven water fall around about and harass the people going to work. At Etim Edem Park, they work as scavengers, load carriers and be stealing peoples' valuables in disguise. They shuttle between cultural center and Bokobri. At cultural center they present themselves as horrible as they look at every function embarrassing, eating bones and left-over food as they create nuisance to both hosts and visitors.

The older boys between 16 and 19 years rape both the younger girls among them and the hawkers multiplying the problems by spreading diseases such as H. I. V and Aids, unwanted pregnancies and fear in the minds of the young ones. At Bokobri they wash plates for the Hausa women for pea-nut while their old men sleep with these young girls there by wasting their future. At Big-Qua town, street children harassed people on the street from 7.30pm coming from church, stealing things from places like mechanic workshop, welding work shop and removing peoples' clothes from lines as the owners left for their businesses.

They camp at Moore Road after looting to enjoy what they steal from the people. De Choice is a big fast food joint where they see as their show base. The girls wear shut horrible looking skirt in the evening looking for miserable men that will take them home while the boys pick pockets and steal phones from people coming to the restaurant.

Marianroad is like a home-base because there are big restaurants around there even if they did not eat at all during the day, they will return to Marian to eat left-over food from the dust bins. In Calabar South people sleep with one eye close and the other open as these children operate every night, stealing valuables stuff from people and shut at those found with nothing in their houses, they called themselves "You've never seen something yet".

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study was to find out the spread of the street children in Calabar metropolis and the danger they posed to society. *This study revealed that the street children are the available* reservoir emerging institutions for training of potential terrorism in Nigeria, if left unchecked.

### 1.3. Scope of the Study

This research was carried out on 5 selected gang-outs of street children in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The gang-outs includes:-

1. Big-Qua
2. Cultural Centre
3. Moore Road
4. De Choice
5. Marian Road

#### *1.4. Factors that Influenced Street Children in Calabar Metropolis*

The attitude of parents and guardians towards children known as “street children” is quite alarming. Parents are shy away from their primary responsibilities to their wards in that, a mere rebellious attitude by a child could be licensed for parents to send a child out of the house. A child picked five hundred naira (#500) from the father and he is labeled a thief and that alone qualified him to be sent out of the house to the street.

In another case, a strong-willed child raise resistant at times but because of the illiteracy of the parents they could not differentiate a strong-willed child from a quite child who can simply hear his parent when she says “leave that place and he leaves” immediately. Instead of the parents spending more time with a strong-willed to correct abnormalities, they prefer to drive him out to the street in order to gain freedom.

In a situation where a man travelled to the village and carried a boy as his sales boy, in the process of helping him out in his transaction, he picks some money out of the sale he made that day having missed breakfast and lunch, he buys food for himself. His master discovered the missing money and drives this this boy out of his house to the street, by the time of this discovering the boy had been on the street for six months without the boy’s parents knowing that their son is wondering on the street. The master is after his missing money than the destiny and life of the child. On the other hand, the boy had been recruited into the habits and characteristic of the street children.

The society and faith base organization like some churches label these children witches and wizards which makes it difficult for them to be reintegrated into the society because of the stigma. As they are rejected by their family, society and the government, the only option for them is to choose their permanent abode on the street, and force themselves to be accommodated into the same society that has rejected them.

The condition of the family economically also contribute to the children being on the street as most of them have become the bread winners of their family. They are also employed as cheapest form of labor in the labor market.

Apart from the above influences, peer pressure is another factor influencing the street children. Most children distaste street habit and had wanted to return to their families but their friends retain them by convincing them that they would be alone and their families may probably not accept them.

#### *1.5. Hazard of Street Children on the Children and the Society*

The dangers posed by the street children on other children and the society are alarming. It obvious that both the government and society are silence about the situation meanwhile the havoc is being spread rapidly. Their activities and effects are of increase in most cities in Nigeria like Calabar, Lagos, Kaduna, Osogbo and BauchiOloko (1986-1987). The environments where these children find themselves are not friendly at all to both the street children and those they are trying to capture into their gangs. They often riot among themselves and harm each other at a slightest provocation. The girls suffered greatly from the bigger boys among them most especially as they refused to sleep with them rather chose to follow men who come to them. The society feel irritated as these children come around them to ask for arms. The government sees them as nuisance that suppose to be wiped out in one second, there is no provision by law for them to be handled kindly. In some states where attempt is made to take care of them and relocate them properly bureaucratic process stands as a big hindrance before one notices it, children’s lives are going and destiny wasted.

These children have been exposed to beginning early in that the interests to exhibit their God-given talents and potentials are no more there. It’s agreed by scientists that early childhood experiences of a child’s life forms the foundation of adulthood. Also, a child’s temperament can be modified through close supervision of his parents at that early stage. A child left alone is headed to total destruction because he lacks basic training in many ways as growing up Freud (Adewuyi, 1999). However, the hazards of street children in Calabar and Kaduna metropolis of Nigeria are just likelystobe seen in other societies. It’s necessary to note and understand the havoc cause by the street children both now and tomorrow in most of the cities in Nigeria.

One is supposed to understand and know the dangers, in which street children in Kaduna can constitute now and in future. The whole Kaduna population is a living witness of what the street children have been doing in various streets, especially Ahmadu Bello Way and attest to the fact that further lapses can lead to a bleak future. If the growth of recruitment into street job by children is not arrested now, the Calabar, Kaduna metropolis and Nigeria in general stands to lose a lot by the destructive activities of these kids. While they pass their present teenage, they evolved into being very hardened and as such the cornerstones of confusions and problems such as vandalism of public properties, rioting and mob actions that may ponder the economy into a heavy stagnation and consciously being recruited into Boko Haram group and other terrorist gangs.

Secondly, the flocks of today street children are economic and social waste if they are to continue on the streets. Their position in the society is dysfunctional and as such pose a problem or obstacle to the responsible population. Thirdly, if care is not taken, the number of children joining the existing multitude of the street children will be on the increase if the issue is not led to rest now or minimized for good. This might continue from generation to generation involving the wastage considerable potentials of national labor resource.

S/No	Item	Male	Female	Total	%
1	Big Qua	4	1	5	0.25
2	Cultural Centre	3	2	5	0.25
3	Moore Road	5	-	5	0.25
4	De Choice	3	2	5	0.25
5	Marian Road	4	1	5	0.25
	Total	19 (0.76)	6 (0.24)	25	1.25

Table 1: Distribution of study population by gender  
Researchers Field Survey: 2015

### 1.6. Procedure for Data Collection

The researchers collected the data and organized them according to the research questions formulated for the study. The data was analyzed using the mean method after weights of 4, 3, 2 and 1, have been assigned to the options as against strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree respectively. Items that has a mean score of 3 points and above is regarded as agreed or accepted, whereas any item having a mean score below 3.00 points is considered as disagreed or rejected.

The responses are weighed against the options and the mean score is derived by summing the weighed scores and diving by total number of response.

$$\text{Mean score} = \frac{(R1 \times 4) + (R2 \times 3) + (R3 \times 2) + (R4 \times 1)}{\text{Total No of responses}}$$

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	DA	SDA	TOTAL	X	REMARKS
1	Children are on the streets because of poor parental upbringing, maltreatment, neglect and lack of basic necessities of life.	7	9	4	5	25	2.75	Disagree
2	Street children are abandoned, rejected and unfortunate orphans rejected by their parents, guardians and the society	5	6	9	5	25	2.44	Disagree
3	Lack of care make most of them to end up under bridges, public places where they operate illicit businesses and thus constituting environmental nuisances and dangers.	6	5	6	8	25	2.36	Disagree
4	A large proportion of the children who enter criminal justice systems are committed finally to correctional institutions (prisons) that are called schools, often without due process	10	9	5	1	25	3.12	Agree
5	The challenges posed by these children both to the government and the environment at large cannot be overemphasized.	12	7	4	2	25	3.16	Agree
6	Children have the right to develop in environments that allow them to strive to become better people.	15	7	1	2	25	3.4	Agree
7	It is also very common to find malnutrition amongst these children.	8	10	6	1	25	3	Agree
8	Some children also work in the streets because their earnings are needed by their families,	15	9	1	-	25	3.52	Agree
9	The children without education are without future.	10	7	6	2	25	3	Agree
10	There is an urgent need for these children to be taken off the street before Boko haram recruits them into their camp in Nigeria.	15	6	1	3	25	3.32	Agree

Table 2: Respondents view on the responsibility of the parents/government for the street children  
Researchers Field Survey: 2015

The first item in Table 2 has the mean score of 3. This shows that the respondents agree with the fact that the children are on the streets because of poor parental upbringing, maltreatment, neglect and lack of basic necessities of life. Item 2 has the mean score of 2.44, this shows that the correspondents disagree with the fact that street children are abandoned, rejected and unfortunate orphans are rejected by their parents, guardians and the society. Item 3 has the mean score of 2.36, this shows that the respondents disagree with fact that lack of care make most of the children to end up under bridges, public places where they operate illicit businesses and thus constituting environmental nuisances and dangers. Item 4 has the mean score of 3.12, this shows that the respondent agree that a large proportion of the children who enter criminal justice systems are committed finally to correctional institutions (prisons) that are called schools, often without due process. Item 5, has the mean score of 3.16, this shows that the respondents agree with the fact that the challenges posed by these children both to the government and the environment at large cannot be overemphasized. Item 6, has the mean score of 3.4, this shows that the respondents agree to the fact that children have the right to develop in the environments that allow them to strive to become better people. Item 7 has the mean score of 3, this indicate that the respondents agree with the fact that it is also very common to find malnutrition amongst these children. Item 8, has the mean score of 3.52, this shows that the respondents agree with the fact that some children also work in the streets because their earnings are needed by their families. Item 9, has the mean score of 3, this shows that the respondents agree with the fact that children without education are without future. Item 10, has the mean

score of 3.32, this shows that the respondents agree with the fact that there is an urgent need for these children to be taken off the street before Boko Haram recruit them into their camp in Nigeria.

Item	Mean Scores
1	3
2	2.44
3	2.36
4	3.12
5	3.16
6	3.4
7	3
8	3.52
9	3
10	3.32

Table 3: Derivation Responses Mean Scores  
Researchers Field Survey: 2015

## 2. Summary of Findings

Child development psychologists believed that the environment and circumstances where children grow up exert significant influence on their personality and later development in life. Precisely, their work environment would have influenced their physical, immediate health, safety, and emotional, social and other developmental aspects, which some attempts have been made to correct.

The implication of exposing children to begging is very clear. Most sociologists and social scientists agree that infancy and childhood experiences are the foundation of adulthood. Psychoanalysts even seek explanations of adult antisocial behavior in fixation during the critical transitional phases at infancy and childhood. They suggest that a child who is not successfully chaperoned through the critical stages of *Ego* and *Superego* is likely to grow up to be maladjusted, deficient in several ways as propounded by Sigmund Freud (Adewuyi 1999)

## 3. Conclusion

The flocks of today street children are economic and social waste if they are to continue being on the streets. Their position in the society is dysfunctional and as such pose a problem or obstacle to the responsible population. Thirdly, if care is not taken, the number of children joining the existing multitude of the street children will be on the increase if the issue is not led to rest now or minimized for good. This might continue from generation to generation involving the wastage considerable potentials of national labor resource. If the growth of recruitment into street job by children is not arrested now, the Calabar metropolis and Nigeria in general stand to lose a lot by the destructive activities of these kids. While they pass their present teenage, they evolved into being very hardened and as such the cornerstones of confusions and problems such as vandalism of public property, rioting and mob actions that may ponder the economy into a heavy stagnation and consciously being recruited into Boko Haram group or other terrorist gangs.

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