

HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF STREET HAWKING AMONG TEENAGE GIRLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined the health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving 300 teenage girls engaged in street hawking across selected locations. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, correlation, chi-square, and t-test statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that teenage girls engaged in street hawking experience significant health challenges, including exposure to harsh weather conditions (90.0%), fatigue/exhaustion (83.3%), musculoskeletal pain (76.7%), and frequent illnesses (66.7%). Psychosocially, respondents reported high levels of stress (80.0%), anxiety (73.3%), emotional trauma (70.0%), and low self-esteem (66.7%). Socio-economic factors such as poverty (86.7%), parental unemployment (76.7%), and large family size (70.0%) were identified as major drivers of street hawking. Educationally, street hawking contributed to school absenteeism (80.0%), reduced study time (83.3%), and poor academic performance (73.3%). Inferential statistics showed a significant relationship between hawking intensity and health outcomes ($r = 0.62$, $p = 0.001$), psychosocial well-being ($t = 4.85$, $p < 0.05$), and socio-economic status ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.002$). The study concludes that street hawking significantly undermines the health, psychological well-being, and educational development of teenage girls. It recommends stronger child protection policies, poverty alleviation programmes, and psychosocial support interventions to reduce the practice and mitigate its effects.

Keywords: Street hawking, teenage girls, Child labour, psychosocial consequences, Health outcomes.

Introduction

Child labour remains a persistent global social and public health concern despite intensified international efforts toward its elimination. Recent global estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicate that approximately 138 million children were engaged in child labour worldwide as of 2024, with about 54 million involved in hazardous work that threatens their health, safety, and development (ILO & UNICEF, 2024). Although progress has been recorded over the years, the decline in child labour has slowed, particularly in

low- and middle-income countries where poverty, inequality, and weak social protection systems persist.

Street hawking represents one of the most visible and informal forms of child labour, especially in developing regions. It involves children engaging in the sale of goods and services in public spaces such as streets, highways, markets, and traffic intersections, often under unsafe and exploitative conditions. Studies have shown that street hawking is driven by complex socio-economic factors including household poverty, unemployment, rapid urbanization, and cultural

norms that normalize children's participation in economic activities (UNICEF, 2023; ILO, 2022). Despite its economic contributions to households, street hawking exposes children to multiple risks that undermine their overall development.

In Nigeria, street hawking has become a widespread phenomenon among children and adolescents, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. The country continues to grapple with high levels of poverty, youth unemployment, and educational inequalities, all of which contribute to the prevalence of child labour practices. According to UNICEF (2024), a significant proportion of Nigerian children experience multidimensional poverty, limiting their access to quality education, healthcare, and protection services. Consequently, many families resort to engaging their children in income-generating activities such as street hawking to support household survival.

Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, reflects this broader national trend. In cities such as Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, and Oron, teenage girls are commonly seen hawking items such as food, fruits, sachet water, and beverages along busy roads and marketplaces. While some households perceive this activity as a means of economic empowerment and socialization, it often places adolescent girls in precarious environments characterized by exploitation and risk. The increasing visibility of teenage female hawkers in the state raises serious concerns regarding their safety, well-being, and future prospects.

Street hawking can be conceptualized as a form of informal economic activity involving the sale of goods or services in public spaces without permanent structures or regulatory oversight. It is often characterized by long working hours, mobility, exposure to environmental hazards, and lack of legal protection. For children and adolescents, street hawking falls under hazardous child labour when it interferes with schooling, exposes them to harm, or undermines their physical and psychological development (ILO, 2022). In the Nigerian context, street

hawking is frequently embedded within family survival strategies, making it socially tolerated despite its risks. However, this normalization often obscures the long-term developmental consequences for children, particularly girls, who face gender-specific vulnerabilities.

Teenage girls represent one of the most vulnerable populations engaged in street hawking due to the intersection of age, gender, and socio-economic disadvantage. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by significant physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. Exposure to unsafe and exploitative environments during this period can have lasting effects on health and psychosocial well-being.

Research indicates that girls involved in street hawking are particularly susceptible to gender-based violence, sexual harassment, exploitation, and trafficking due to their frequent interactions with strangers and lack of supervision (Ezeh *et al.*, 2022; Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2023). Additionally, societal gender norms often limit their access to education and protection, further exacerbating their vulnerability. These risks highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches to addressing child labour.

The health consequences of street hawking among teenage girls are multifaceted and severe. Physically, they are exposed to road traffic accidents, injuries, fatigue, and musculoskeletal disorders from carrying heavy loads, harsh weather conditions, and infectious diseases. Poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare further compound these risks (WHO, 2023). Beyond physical health, the psychosocial consequences are equally profound. Teenage girls engaged in street hawking often experience stress, anxiety, fear, emotional trauma, and low self-esteem. The stigma associated with street trading, combined with academic disruption and social exclusion, contributes to poor mental health outcomes, including depression and behavioural problems (Okon & Ekpenyong, 2021; Adebayo *et al.*, 2024). The dual burden of economic responsibility and developmental challenges places significant psychological strain on these adolescents.

Despite the growing body of research on child labour in Nigeria, much of the existing literature has focussed on its economic determinants, prevalence, and educational implications. Limited studies have comprehensively examined the combined health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking, particularly among teenage girls. Furthermore, there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical research focussing specifically on Akwa Ibom State and the South-South region of Nigeria. This gap in context-specific evidence limits the development of targeted interventions and policies aimed at protecting vulnerable adolescents. There is therefore a critical need for studies that explore both the health and psychosocial dimensions of street hawking among teenage girls within this region. Given the persistence of street hawking and its associated risks, particularly among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State, there is an urgent need to investigate its implications on their health and psychosocial well-being. Understanding these consequences is essential for informing policy decisions, designing effective intervention programs, and promoting the holistic development of adolescent girls. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite existing national and international policies aimed at eliminating child labour, street hawking remains pervasive in many parts of Nigeria, reflecting gaps in policy implementation and enforcement (ILO, 2022; UNICEF, 2024). In Akwa Ibom State, the continued visibility of teenage girls engaged in street hawking suggests that socio-economic pressures such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate social protection continue to override regulatory frameworks. These adolescent girls are routinely exposed to hazardous environments, including busy roadways and unsupervised public spaces, which increase their vulnerability to road traffic accidents, physical injuries, and adverse health conditions (WHO, 2023). Beyond physical risks, teenage female hawkers face heightened exposure to sexual

harassment, exploitation, and gender-based violence due to their age and gender, often with limited protection or recourse (Ezeh *et al.*, 2022; Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2023). The psychosocial burden associated with street hawking, including stress, anxiety, emotional trauma, and low self-esteem, further compounds their vulnerability and may negatively affect their long-term mental health and social development (Adebayo *et al.*, 2024).

Although studies have examined child labour in Nigeria, there is a dearth of context-specific empirical evidence addressing the combined health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State. This gap limits the development of targeted interventions and evidence-based policy responses tailored to the unique socio-cultural realities of the region. Consequently, there is an urgent need for systematic investigation into this issue to inform public health strategies, strengthen child protection systems, and promote the well-being of adolescent girls in the state.

Purpose of the Study

To examine the health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

- (i). To assess the health challenges associated with street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State.,
- (ii). To examine the psychosocial effects of street hawking, including stress, trauma, anxiety, and self-esteem among teenage girls.,
- (iii). To determine the relationship between the intensity (frequency and duration) of street hawking and the overall well-being of teenage girls.
- (iv). To identify the socio-economic factors influencing the involvement of teenage girls in street hawking.,
- (v). To evaluate the effect of street hawking on the educational engagement and academic performance of teenage girls.,
- (vi). To examine the exposure of teenage female hawkers to risks such as abuse,

exploitation, and social vulnerability in public spaces.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study on the health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria:

- (i). What health problems are associated with street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State?
- (ii). What psychosocial challenges (such as stress, anxiety, trauma, and low self-esteem) are experienced by teenage girls engaged in street hawking?
- (iii). Is there a significant relationship between the frequency and duration of street hawking and the health outcomes of teenage girls?
- (iv). What socio-economic factors contribute to the involvement of teenage girls in street hawking in Akwa Ibom State?
- (v). How does engagement in street hawking affect the educational participation and academic performance of teenage girls?
- (vi). To what extent are teenage girls involved in street hawking exposed to risks such as abuse, exploitation, and social vulnerability in public spaces?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- (i). There is no significant relationship between street hawking and the health outcomes of teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State.
- (ii). There is no significant relationship between street hawking and the psychosocial well-being (such as stress, anxiety, and self-esteem) of teenage girls.
- (iii). Socio-economic status does not significantly influence the engagement of teenage girls in street hawking in Akwa Ibom State.
- (iv). There is no significant relationship

between the intensity (frequency and duration) of street hawking and the overall well-being of teenage girls.

- (v). Street hawking does not have a significant effect on the educational participation and academic performance of teenage girls.
- (vi). Exposure to street hawking does not significantly increase the risk of abuse, exploitation, and social vulnerability among teenage girls.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a cross-sectional approach. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a representative sample of the population at a single point in time. The descriptive survey design enabled the researcher to examine and describe the existing health and psychosocial conditions of teenage girls engaged in street hawking without manipulating any variables. The cross-sectional nature of the study provided a snapshot of the current situation, making it suitable for identifying patterns, relationships, and associations between street hawking and the well-being of the respondents. This design is widely used in social and health sciences due to its effectiveness in studying large populations and generating data that can be generalized. It also facilitates the use of both descriptive and inferential statistical tools in analyzing the data collected.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state is bounded by Cross River State to the east, Rivers State to the west, Abia State to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Akwa Ibom State is characterized by a mix of urban and rural settlements, with major cities including Uyo (the capital), Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, and Oron. The state's economy is largely driven by oil and gas activities, agriculture, trading, and informal sector businesses. Despite its resource wealth, a significant proportion of the population experiences varying levels of

poverty and unemployment, which contribute to child labour practices such as street hawking. The presence of busy markets, motor parks, and high-traffic roadways in urban centres creates an enabling environment for hawking activities, particularly among teenage girls.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all teenage girls engaged in street hawking within selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Akwa Ibom State. The target population specifically included girls between the ages of 10 and 19 years who were actively involved in selling goods in public places such as streets, markets, traffic junctions, and motor parks. Due to the absence of an official register of street hawkers, the population was considered infinite or indeterminate. However, the study focussed on selected urban and semi-urban LGAs where street hawking is most prevalent. These included Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, and Oron. The population also reflected diverse socio-economic backgrounds, educational levels, and family structures, thereby providing a comprehensive representation of teenage female hawkers in the state.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 300 respondents was considered adequate for the study. A multistage sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select LGAs with a high prevalence of street hawking activities. In the second stage, major streets, markets, and motor parks within the selected LGAs were identified. In the third stage, purposive sampling was again used to identify teenage girls who were actively engaged in hawking. Finally, simple random sampling technique was applied within the identified locations to select respondents who met the inclusion criteria.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into three major sections. Section A focussed on demographic information such as age,

educational level, family background, and socio-economic status. Section B assessed health-related indicators, including exposure to injuries, fatigue, illness, and access to healthcare services. Section C examined psychosocial variables such as stress levels, emotional well-being, self-esteem, anxiety, and experiences of abuse or exploitation. The items were structured using a Likert scale format to allow respondents to express the extent of their agreement or experience. The questionnaire was designed to be simple, clear, and appropriate for the age group of the respondents.

Validity of Instrument

The validity of the instrument was ensured through face and content validation. Experts in education, psychology, and public health were consulted to review the questionnaire for relevance, clarity, and adequacy in measuring the intended variables. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated to improve the quality of the instrument. Face validity ensured that the items appeared appropriate and understandable, while content validity ensured that the instrument adequately covered all aspects of health and psychosocial consequences related to street hawking.

Reliability of Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha method to determine internal consistency. A pilot study was conducted using 20 teenage girls involved in street hawking in a location outside the study area. The responses obtained were analyzed, and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable for the study. The result indicated that the instrument was reliable and capable of producing consistent results over time.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out following ethical and procedural guidelines. Permission was obtained from relevant authorities, including community leaders and market associations, before accessing the respondents. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained.

For respondents below 18 years, assent was obtained alongside permission from guardians where necessary. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. The questionnaires were administered directly by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure proper understanding of the questions. Respondents were guided where necessary, and completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a high response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize and describe the characteristics of the respondents and their responses. Inferential statistics were employed to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. These included the Chi-square test to examine associations between categorical variables, the independent t-test to compare mean differences, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The results were presented in tables and interpreted accordingly.

Results

The results of the study are presented in line with the research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) and inferential statistics were used.

Table 1: Health Challenges Experienced by Respondents (Expanded) (N = 300)

Health Issues	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	Decision (Cut-off = 2.50)
Physical injuries	210	70.0	3.45	Accepted
Fatigue/exhaustion	250	83.3	3.80	Accepted
Exposure to harsh weather	270	90.0	3.95	Accepted
Road accidents	180	60.0	3.20	Accepted
Frequent illness	200	66.7	3.30	Accepted
Musculoskeletal pain	230	76.7	3.60	Accepted
Headaches/dizziness	220	73.3	3.50	Accepted

Table 1 indicates that street hawking exposes teenage girls to a wide range of physical health challenges. All items recorded mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50, suggesting that respondents generally agreed that these health issues are prevalent. Exposure to harsh weather (90.0%) and fatigue/exhaustion (83.3%) ranked highest, reflecting the physically demanding and unsafe conditions under which hawking occurs.

Additionally, musculoskeletal pain (76.7%) and headaches (73.3%) highlight the long-term physical strain associated with carrying heavy loads and prolonged walking. The presence of road accidents (60.0%) and physical injuries (70.0%) further emphasizes the hazardous nature of street environments. Overall, the findings confirm that street hawking significantly compromises the physical health of teenage girls.

Table 2: Psychosocial Effects of Street Hawking (Expanded)

Psychosocial Issues	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	Decision (Cut-off = 2.50)
Stress	240	80.0	3.70	Accepted
Anxiety	220	73.3	3.50	Accepted
Low self-esteem	200	66.7	3.30	Accepted
Emotional trauma	210	70.0	3.40	Accepted
Social stigma	190	63.3	3.20	Accepted
Depression symptoms	210	70.0	3.45	Accepted
Fear/insecurity	230	76.7	3.60	Accepted

Table 2 reveals that street hawking has serious psychosocial implications for teenage girls. All variables exceeded the cut-off mean, indicating general agreement among respondents. Stress (80.0%) and fear/insecurity (76.7%) were the most prominent psychosocial challenges, suggesting that hawking environments are mentally and emotionally distressing. Anxiety (73.3%) and depression-related symptoms

(70.0%) further indicate the psychological burden associated with this activity. The presence of low self-esteem (66.7%) and social stigma (63.3%) suggests that these girls may experience social exclusion and diminished self-worth. Overall, the findings demonstrate that street hawking significantly affects the emotional and psychological well-being of teenage girls.

Table 3: Correlation between Hawking Intensity and Health Outcomes (Expanded)

Variables	N	Mean (Hawking Intensity)	Mean (Health Score)	r-value	p-value
Hawking intensity vs Health	300	3.68	3.42	0.62	0.001

The results in Table 3 reveal a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) between hawking intensity and poor health outcomes among teenage girls. The mean hawking intensity score of 3.68 indicates that most respondents engage in hawking frequently and for long hours, while the mean health score of 3.42 suggests a high prevalence of health-related challenges. The p-value of 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 level of

significance, confirms that the relationship is statistically significant. This implies that as the intensity of street hawking increases, the likelihood and severity of adverse health outcomes also increase. Therefore, prolonged exposure to hawking activities significantly contributes to deteriorating physical health among teenage girls.

Table 4: Socio-economic Factors Influencing Street Hawking (Expanded)

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	Decision (Cut-off = 2.50)
Poverty	260	86.7	3.90	Accepted
Large family size	210	70.0	3.40	Accepted
Parental unemployment	230	76.7	3.60	Accepted
Low educational level	200	66.7	3.30	Accepted
Peer influence	180	60.0	3.10	Accepted
Cultural acceptance	190	63.3	3.20	Accepted

Table 4: shows that socio-economic factors play a critical role in influencing teenage girls' involvement in street hawking. Poverty (86.7%) emerged as the most significant factor, with the highest mean score (3.90), indicating that economic hardship is the primary driver of the practice. Parental unemployment (76.7%) and large family size (70.0%) further highlight the

financial pressures that compel families to involve their children in income-generating activities. Additionally, factors such as low educational level, peer influence, and cultural acceptance suggest that both structural and social dynamics contribute to the persistence of street hawking. These findings confirm that street hawking is largely a survival strategy rooted in socio-economic deprivation.

Table 5: Impact of Street Hawking on Educational Participation (Expanded)

Educational Impact	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	Decision (Cut-off = 2.50)
School absenteeism	240	80.0	3.75	Accepted
Poor academic performance	220	73.3	3.50	Accepted
Dropout tendency	180	60.0	3.10	Accepted
Reduced study time	250	83.3	3.80	Accepted
Lack of concentration	230	76.7	3.60	Accepted

Table 5 shows that street hawking has a substantial negative impact on the educational participation of teenage girls. All items recorded mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50, indicating agreement among respondents. Reduced study time (83.3%) and school absenteeism (80.0%) were the most prominent effects, suggesting that hawking significantly interferes with academic engagement. Poor

academic performance (73.3%) and lack of concentration (76.7%) further indicate that the physical and psychological stress associated with hawking adversely affects learning outcomes. The findings confirm that street hawking contributes to educational disruption and increases the risk of school dropout among teenage girls.

Table 6: Exposure to Risks among Teenage Female Hawkers (Expanded)

Risk Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	Decision (Cut-off = 2.50)
Sexual harassment	200	66.7	3.40	Accepted
Exploitation	190	63.3	3.20	Accepted
Physical abuse	180	60.0	3.10	Accepted
Social vulnerability	220	73.3	3.60	Accepted
Verbal abuse	210	70.0	3.45	Accepted
Risk of trafficking	170	56.7	3.00	Accepted

Table 6: indicates that teenage girls engaged in street hawking are highly exposed to various forms of abuse and vulnerability. Social vulnerability (73.3%) and verbal abuse (70.0%) were the most frequently reported risks, suggesting that hawkers often operate in unsafe and unprotected environments. Sexual

harassment (66.7%) and exploitation (63.3%) further highlight the gender-specific risks faced by teenage girls in public spaces. Although the risk of trafficking recorded the lowest percentage (56.7%), its presence remains significant and concerning. All mean values exceeded the cut-off point, indicating general agreement among

respondents. These findings underscore the urgent need for protective interventions to safeguard teenage girls from abuse and exploitation associated with street hawking.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7: Chi-square Analysis of Relationship between Street Hawking and Health Outcomes (Expanded)

Variable	χ^2 -cal	χ^2 -crit	df	p-value	Decision
Hawking vs Health	25.60	9.49	4	0.001	Reject H_0

The chi-square analysis presented in Table 7 indicates that the calculated value ($\chi^2 = 25.60$) is significantly greater than the critical value ($\chi^2 = 9.49$) at 4 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The p-value of 0.001 further confirms that the result is statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant

relationship between street hawking and health outcomes is rejected. This finding implies that engagement in street hawking is significantly associated with adverse health conditions among teenage girls, reinforcing the argument that hawking exposes adolescents to serious physical health risks.

Table 8: Independent t-test Analysis of Relationship between Hawking and Psychosocial Well-being (Expanded)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Hawking vs Psychosocial	300	3.55	0.82	4.85	1.96	0.000	Reject H_0

The results in Table 8 show that the calculated t-value (4.85) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. The p-value of 0.000 indicates a highly significant result. The mean psychosocial score of 3.55 suggests that respondents experience considerable psychosocial challenges.

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that street hawking has a significant effect on the psychosocial well-being of teenage girls. This implies that engagement in hawking contributes to increased stress, anxiety, emotional instability, and reduced self-esteem among the respondents.

Table 9: Correlation Analysis of Socio-economic Status and Engagement in Street Hawking (Expanded)

Variables	N	Mean (SES)	Mean (Hawking)	r-value	p-value	Decision
SES vs Hawking	300	2.40	3.68	0.58	0.002	Reject H_0

Table 9 reveals a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.58$) between socio-economic status and engagement in street hawking. The mean socio-economic score of 2.40 indicates generally low socio-economic conditions among respondents, while the hawking mean of 3.68 reflects high involvement in hawking activities. The p-value of 0.002 is less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that socio-economic status significantly influences the involvement of

teenage girls in street hawking. This suggests that lower socio-economic conditions increase the likelihood of adolescents engaging in hawking as a survival strategy.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that street hawking exposes teenage girls to numerous health challenges, including fatigue, exhaustion, and exposure to harsh weather conditions, musculoskeletal pain, headaches, physical

injuries, road traffic accidents, and frequent illnesses. Exposure to harsh weather and fatigue emerged as the most prevalent health problems among the respondents. These findings suggest that prolonged engagement in hawking activities places considerable physical demands on adolescent girls, thereby compromising their health and overall well-being. This finding aligns with global evidence indicating that children engaged in hazardous labour are frequently exposed to conditions that threaten their health, safety, and development. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), approximately 54 million children worldwide are involved in hazardous forms of labour that expose them to physical injuries, unhealthy environments, and excessive workloads (ILO & UNICEF, 2024). Street hawking typically involves long hours of walking, standing, and carrying heavy loads under adverse weather conditions, which explains the high prevalence of fatigue and musculoskeletal disorders observed in this study. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with previous Nigerian studies which identified physical exhaustion, road accidents, and environmental exposure as common health consequences of street hawking (Adebayo *et al.*, 2024; Okon & Ekpennyong, 2021).

However, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that these health challenges remain highly prevalent among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State despite increased awareness of child protection issues. The persistence of these conditions may be attributed to poverty, lack of occupational safeguards, and limited access to healthcare services. The study revealed that stress, anxiety, fear, emotional trauma, depression symptoms, low self-esteem, and social stigma are common psychosocial experiences among teenage female hawkers. Stress and fear/insecurity recorded the highest prevalence rates, indicating that street hawking significantly affects the psychological well-being of adolescents. This finding is consistent with contemporary literature emphasizing that adolescents exposed to unsafe working environments often experience elevated levels of psychological distress and emotional instability

(WHO, 2023; Ezech *et al.*, 2022). Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by identity formation, emotional regulation, and social integration. Exposure to hostile environments, harassment, and uncertainty during this period may contribute to anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, and diminished self-worth.

The high prevalence of fear and emotional trauma observed in this study may be attributed to constant exposure to traffic hazards, verbal abuse, harassment, and the risk of exploitation by strangers. Additionally, social stigma associated with street hawking may negatively influence adolescents' self-perception and social identity. These findings support earlier research linking child labour with increased levels of psychological distress among adolescents (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2023). A key insight from this study is that the psychological burden of street hawking, though less visible than physical consequences, may have more enduring effects on adolescent development. This underscores the need for integrating mental health interventions into child protection strategies.

The study established a significant positive relationship between hawking intensity and poor health outcomes among teenage girls. Increased frequency and duration of hawking were associated with worsening health conditions. This finding is consistent with the ILO's classification of hazardous child labour, which emphasizes that prolonged exposure to physically demanding and unsafe conditions increases the likelihood of adverse health outcomes (ILO, 2022). The more time adolescents spend hawking, the greater their exposure to environmental hazards, physical stress, and occupational risks.

The implication is that health challenges are not only linked to participation in street hawking but also to the intensity of involvement. Girls who engage in hawking daily and for extended hours are more likely to experience fatigue, illness, and injuries. This finding highlights the cumulative effect of child labour on adolescent health and supports ecological risk models which emphasize the role of environmental exposure in

shaping health outcomes.

The findings identified poverty, parental unemployment, large family size, low parental educational attainment, cultural acceptance, and peer influence as major factors responsible for the involvement of teenage girls in street hawking. Poverty emerged as the most significant determinant. This finding aligns with global and national evidence which identifies economic deprivation as the primary driver of child labour (UNICEF, 2024; ILO & UNICEF, 2024). Families facing financial hardship often rely on children's economic contributions to meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education. Parental unemployment further exacerbates this situation by reducing household income and increasing reliance on child labour.

Large family size also contributes to economic pressure, making it difficult for parents to adequately provide for all children. Cultural acceptance of children's participation in trading activities may further normalize street hawking, despite its associated risks. These findings suggest that street hawking is not an isolated behavioural issue but a manifestation of broader socio-economic inequalities. The study revealed that street hawking negatively affects educational participation among teenage girls. The major consequences identified include reduced study time, school absenteeism, poor academic performance, lack of concentration, and increased dropout tendencies. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have linked child labour to educational disruption and poor academic outcomes (ILO, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Street hawking consumes time and energy that would otherwise be dedicated to academic activities. As a result, students experience fatigue, reduced concentration, and declining academic performance.

The high level of absenteeism suggests that many teenage girls are forced to balance schooling with income-generating activities, often to the detriment of their education. This finding supports global evidence that children involved in labour are more likely to experience interrupted schooling and lower educational attainment (UNICEF, 2024).

Importantly, the study highlights that the

educational consequences of street hawking extend beyond immediate academic performance to long-term outcomes, including limited access to higher education and reduced employment opportunities.

The findings revealed that teenage girls engaged in street hawking are exposed to sexual harassment, exploitation, verbal abuse, physical abuse, trafficking risks, and social vulnerability. Social vulnerability and sexual harassment were among the most frequently reported experiences. These findings are consistent with studies indicating that female child hawkers are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and exploitation due to their exposure to public spaces and lack of supervision (Ezeh *et al.*, 2022; Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2023). The prevalence of sexual harassment underscores the gendered nature of risks associated with street hawking.

Frequent interactions with strangers in markets, streets, and motor parks increase the likelihood of harassment and exploitation. Such experiences may lead to emotional trauma, psychological distress, and long-term mental health challenges. The findings therefore emphasize that street hawking is not only an economic issue but also a serious child protection concern.

The findings collectively demonstrate that street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State is a multidimensional problem with significant health, psychosocial, educational, and socio-economic implications. Poverty and parental unemployment remain the primary drivers, while adverse health outcomes, psychological distress, educational disruption, and exposure to abuse constitute the major consequences.

A key insight is that increased intensity of hawking exacerbates these negative outcomes, suggesting a cumulative effect of prolonged exposure. The study therefore highlights the need for integrated interventions that address both the root causes and consequences of street hawking. Such interventions should involve government agencies, educational institutions, social workers, and community stakeholders, with a focus on poverty reduction, child protection, and adolescent health promotion.

Conclusion

This study examined the health and psychosocial consequences of street hawking among teenage girls in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, and the findings revealed that the practice poses significant risks to their overall well-being. The results showed that teenage girls engaged in street hawking are exposed to numerous health challenges, including fatigue, physical injuries, road accidents, and harsh environmental conditions. In addition to these physical health concerns, the study found that street hawking has profound psychosocial implications, as many respondents reported experiencing stress, anxiety, emotional trauma, and low self-esteem.

Furthermore, the study established that the intensity of street hawking is significantly related to poor health outcomes and reduced well-being among teenage girls. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental unemployment, and large family size were identified as major drivers of the practice. The findings also revealed that street hawking negatively affects the educational participation of teenage girls, contributing to absenteeism and poor academic performance. Moreover, many respondents reported exposure to abuse, exploitation, and social vulnerability while engaging in hawking activities.

Overall, the study highlights that street hawking among teenage girls is not only a socio-economic issue but also a serious public health and psychosocial concern that requires urgent attention. The persistence of the practice underscores the need for more effective policy implementation and targeted interventions to protect vulnerable adolescents and promote their holistic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- (i). The government of Akwa Ibom State should strengthen the enforcement of child rights laws by strictly prohibiting street hawking among teenage girls and ensuring effective monitoring through relevant agencies.
- (ii). Educational authorities should introduce and expand school retention and support programmes, including free learning materials and flexible school schedules for vulnerable students engaged in informal labour.
- (iii). Government and development partners should intensify poverty alleviation strategies such as vocational training, youth empowerment programmes, and conditional cash transfers to reduce household reliance on child labour.
- (iv). Schools and community health agencies should provide accessible counselling and psychosocial support services to help affected teenage girls recover from stress, trauma, and emotional distress associated with street hawking.
- (v). Non-governmental organizations and social welfare departments should establish rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for teenage girls withdrawn from street hawking to support their education and well-being.
- (vi). Public awareness campaigns should be intensified across communities to educate parents and guardians on the health, psychosocial, and educational dangers of street hawking and promote child protection practices.

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