



## Mental and Physical Effects of Street Hawking among Teenage Girls in Ika North East Geopolitical Zone

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**Abstract.** This study investigated the factors influencing street hawking and its mental and physical effects on teenage girls in Ika North East, Delta State. Specifically, it examined the impact of street hawking on the physical and psychological wellbeing of teenage girls and identified the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to their involvement in this practice. The study employed a survey research design, targeting 100 respondents selected from four communities—Akumazi, Emuhu, Mbiri, and Umunede—using stratified sampling techniques. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire aligned with the research objectives and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings revealed that street hawking negatively affects the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and moral development of teenage girls. Physically, it exposes them to fatigue, illness, and injuries, while socio-emotionally, it limits recreational opportunities, peer interactions, and fosters behaviours such as early alcohol consumption, disrespect for elders, conflict, and low self-esteem. Cognitively, hawking reduces study time, academic engagement, and school attendance, resulting in poor performance and below-average grades compared to peers. Morally, it exposes girls to adult solicitation, unethical behaviours, and early moral decay. Based on these findings, the study recommended targeted advocacy campaigns to sensitize parents and guardians on the dangers of child street hawking. Law enforcement agencies should ensure compliance by prosecuting parents who send school-age children to hawk. Community and religious institutions should create awareness programs to sensitize the populace of the risks associated with street hawking, thereby protecting the wellbeing and development of teenage girls.

**Keywords:** Street, Hawking, Teenage, Girls, Mental, Physical, Wellbeing.

### 1. Introduction

Street hawking has become a pervasive yet deeply concerning feature of Nigeria's socio-economic landscape, largely driven by widespread poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and limited human empowerment. These conditions compel many households to rely on child labour as a survival strategy. Hawking generally involves moving from place to place to offer goods or services for sale. In many developing African countries, it is perceived as a means through which children support household income. Consequently, the low socio-economic status of most Nigerian families and persistent poverty leave parents with little option but to send their children to the streets, where they spend long hours exposed to harsh environmental conditions while selling items such as sachet water, fruits, snacks, and beverages (Skelton, 2007). This trend is particularly alarming in Ika North East of southern Nigeria, where street hawking increasingly represents a clear form of child labour and abuse. It poses serious risks to children's physical health, psychological wellbeing, moral development, and personal safety, while also disrupting schooling and denying them a normal childhood.

Street hawking has been described as an occupation dominated by children and young persons who sell goods in public spaces (Vally, 2019). Similarly, Wentzel (2016) defines it as canvassing items for sale along streets, from house to house, or in public places, while Young (2013) views hawkers as petty traders catering to commuters' immediate needs. Historically, child hawking in Nigeria is linked to the Structural Adjustment Programme of the late 1980s. According to Usman (2010), economic reforms such as currency

devaluation, subsidy removal, and public-sector retrenchment reduced household incomes, forced school withdrawals, and pushed many children into informal economic activities, including street hawking, to support family survival.

Street hawking constitutes a critical socio-economic problem that exposes female children to exploitation through abuse of vulnerability and economic coercion (ANPPCAN, 2010). Although often perceived as petty trading (Abisoye, 2013), the practice places teenage girls at high risk of school truancy, sexual harassment, rape, psychological trauma, sexually transmitted diseases, and teenage pregnancy. These conditions severely undermine their health, security, educational attainment, and future life chances, thereby justifying the need for focused academic investigation.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

- Examine the effect of street hawking on the mental and physical well-being of the teenage girls in Ika North East of Delta State.
- Determine the factors responsible for street hawking among teenage girls in Ika North East of Delta State.

## 2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Orientation

Child street hawking remains a pervasive form of child labour in Nigeria and represents a visible expression of widespread socio-economic deprivation. It involves children, particularly those of school age, engaging in street trading across markets, highways, and traffic corridors to augment household income. Although often perceived as a survival strategy in the context of poverty, the practice exposes children to serious dangers such as accidents, exploitation, and abuse (Omorogiuwa, 2016). Empirical studies indicate that involvement in hawking negatively affects educational outcomes, manifesting in irregular school attendance, poor academic performance, and increased dropout rates (Omorogiuwa, 2016). For teenage girls, the burden is intensified as they combine schooling with post-school hawking, leading to fatigue, stress, and reduced learning capacity (Fawole et al., 2003). Beyond education, child street hawking subjects children to multiple health and security hazards, including traffic accidents, kidnapping, malnutrition, physical abuse, and psychological distress.

Female children are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, trafficking, and domestic servitude. These conditions violate the provisions of Nigeria's Child Rights Act (2003) and undermine international

commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO, 2019). Despite awareness campaigns and policy interventions, the incidence of child street hawking remains widespread and increasing, with millions of Nigerian children, including those below ten years, actively engaged in street trading across public spaces nationwide (Ebigbo, 2003; UNICEF-Nigeria, 2007; Ugochukwu et al., 2012). Street hawking among young girls has emerged as a serious socio-economic concern in Nigeria, reflecting the broader challenge of child labour. Recent reports indicate that over 15 million Nigerian children are engaged in child labour, with a substantial proportion involved in street trading, largely driven by poverty and household survival needs (ILO, 2023; UNICEF, 2024).

Additional factors such as parental unemployment, large family sizes, rising inflation, and rural-urban migration further intensify girls' participation in hawking, often reinforced by cultural norms that normalize female economic contribution at an early age (Bage-John, 2024). These pressures undermine female human capital development, particularly in education and health (Jegade, 2023). Street hawking exposes girls to severe physical, sexual, and psychological risks. Prolonged exposure to traffic, harsh weather, and unhygienic environments results in injuries, fatigue, malnutrition, and recurrent illnesses (Obimakinde, 2023; WHO, 2024). Girls are also highly vulnerable to sexual harassment, exploitation, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections, compounded by limited access to reproductive health information and services (UNICEF, 2024).

Psychologically, constant stress, fear, and exposure to exploitation contribute to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and trauma (Ugo, 2024). Educationally, hawking disrupts school attendance, concentration, and performance, often leading to dropout when short-term economic gains are prioritized over schooling (Jegade, 2023). In the long term, these experiences reinforce social exclusion, limit life opportunities, and perpetuate intergenerational poverty, resulting in reduced lifetime earnings and diminished national development prospects (World Bank, 2023).

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory, associated with Homans, Blau, and Emerson (1958), explains social behaviour as interactions sustained by perceived rewards outweighing costs. Individuals engage in and maintain relationships that offer benefits relative to available

alternatives. Applied to child hawking, the theory interprets the practice as a form of economic socialization in which children are introduced to adult roles perceived as productive and rewarding. It frames hawking as mutual dependence between adults and children, economically beneficial to households, though potentially detrimental to children’s development and long-term advancement (Ugochukwu, 2012).

**3. Methods and Materials**

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, utilizing quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The target population comprised street

hawkers aged 9–17 years residing in Ika North East Local Government Area of Delta State. A total of 100 respondents were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique from four purposively chosen communities—Akumazi, Emuhu, Mbiri, and Umunede—based on their proximity and the concentration of street-hawking children. Data collection involved methodological triangulation, combining a semi-structured questionnaire with in-depth interview guides to enhance the robustness of findings. Quantitative data were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 24.

**4. Findings**

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	58	58%
	Female	42	42%
	Total	100	100
Age	9-11years	67	67%
	11-14 years	19	19%
	14- 16years	10	10%
	16-17 years	4	4%
	Total	100	100
Highest Level of Education	None	24	24%
	Primary	67	67%
	Secondary	9	9%
	Polytechnic	1	1%
	Total	100	100
Marital Status	Single	88	88%
	Married	12	12%
	Total	100	100
Employment Status	Students	12	12%
	Employed	1	1%
	Unemployed	81	81%
	Self-employed	6	6%
	Total	100	100

*Field Work, 2025*

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. With respect to gender, the majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 58%, while females constituted 42%, indicating a male-dominated sample. In terms of age distribution, most of the respondents fell within the 9–11 years age group (67%), showing that street hawking is more prevalent among younger children. This was followed by those aged 11–14 years (19%), while a smaller proportion were within the 14–16 years category (10%). The least represented age group was 16–17 years, accounting for only 4% of the respondents. Regarding educational attainment, the majority of respondents had primary education (67%), while 24% had no formal education. A relatively small proportion had secondary education (9%), and the least had attained polytechnic education (1%), reflecting limited educational progression among street hawkers. Concerning marital status, most respondents were single (88%), while 12% were married. Finally, in terms of employment status, the majority were unemployed (81%). Only a few were students (12%) or self-employed (6%), while the least proportion were formally employed (1%).

**Objective One:** To examine the effect of street hawking on the mental and physical wellbeing of the teenage girl child.

ITEMS	SA	A	UD	SD	D
I normally feel pains in some parts of my body after hawking	19 19(%)	51 51(%)	-	19 19(%)	11 11(%)
After hawking I feel weak	16 16(%)	53 53(53%)	9 9(9%)	18 18(18%)	10 10(10%)
I often fall sick due to hawking	5 5(%)	68 68(%)	-	12 12(%)	5 5(%)
Hawking does not allow me to play as I should	12 12(%)	48 48(%)	10 10(10%)	22 22(22%)	8 8(%)
I don't rest after school because I hawk	58 58(%)	12 12(%)	5 5(%)	10 10(%)	15 15(%)

*Field Work, 2025*

The data reveal a strong indication that street hawking has adverse physical and social effects on the respondents. Concerning bodily pains after hawking, the majority of respondents agreed (51%) or strongly agreed (19%) that they experience pains in some parts of their body, while a smaller proportion disagreed (19%) or strongly disagreed (11%). This suggests that hawking is physically strenuous for most respondents. Regarding weakness after hawking, most respondents affirmed this experience, with 53% agreeing and 16% strongly agreeing. Only a minority were undecided (9%) or disagreed (18%), while the least proportion strongly disagreed (10%). This indicates that hawking significantly contributes to fatigue among the children.

On frequent illness due to hawking, the majority agreed (68%) or strongly agreed (5%) that hawking makes them fall sick, whereas few disagreed (12%) or strongly disagreed (5%). This underscores the health risks associated with prolonged street trading. With respect to recreation, most respondents agreed (48%) or strongly agreed (12%) that hawking limits their ability to play, while a smaller group disagreed (22%) or strongly disagreed (8%). Finally, on rest after school, the majority strongly agreed (58%) that hawking deprives them of rest, though the least proportions were undecided (5%) or disagreed (10%). Overall, the findings show that hawking negatively affects respondents' health, rest, and social wellbeing.

**Objective Two:** To determine the factors responsible for street hawking among teenage girls.

ITEMS	SA	A	UD	SD	D
There is lack of relevant training skills is a major factor that promote street hawking	32 32(%)	42 42(%)	4 4(%)	18 18(%)	4 4(%)
Lack of proper education is a major factor of promote street hawking	17 17(%)	49 49(%)	5 5(%)	17 17(%)	19 19(%)
Poor economic opportunities is a major factor that promote street hawking	38 38(%)	54 54(%)	-	3 3(%)	5 5(%)
Low salaries is a major factor that promote street hawking	48 48(%)	33 33(%)	3 3(%)	5 5(%)	1 1(%)

*Field Work, 2025*

The data indicate that respondents largely perceive structural and economic factors as key drivers of street hawking. Regarding lack of relevant training skills, the majority of respondents agreed (42%) or strongly agreed (32%) that inadequate skills acquisition promotes street hawking. Only a small proportion disagreed (18%) or strongly disagreed (4%), while the least were undecided (4%). This suggests that limited vocational skills significantly contribute to children's involvement in street trading. On the role of poor education, most respondents expressed agreement, with 49% agreeing and 17% strongly agreeing that lack of proper education promotes street hawking. In contrast, a smaller proportion disagreed (17%) or strongly disagreed (19%), while the least were

undecided (5%). This reflects a strong perceived link between educational deprivation and hawking.

Concerning economic opportunities, an overwhelming majority affirmed this factor, as 54% agreed and 38% strongly agreed that poor economic opportunities encourage street hawking. Only a negligible proportion disagreed (3%) or strongly disagreed (5%), indicating near-consensus among respondents. Similarly, low salaries were identified as a major factor, with the majority strongly agreeing (48%) and agreeing (33%). The least proportions were undecided (3%) or disagreed (5%), while only 1% strongly disagreed. Overall, the findings highlight poverty, low

income, limited education, and lack of skills as dominant drivers of street hawking.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, there are indications that street hawking significantly impairs the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and moral development of teenage girls in Ika North East, Delta State. Physically, hawking exposes children to bodily pains, fatigue, illness, weight loss, injuries, road accidents, kidnapping, and sexual abuse. Socio-emotionally, it restricts recreational opportunities, peer interactions, and family engagement, while contributing to early alcohol consumption, disrespect for elders, conflicts, and low self-esteem. Cognitive development is hindered as hawking limits time for study, completion of assignments, regular school attendance, and academic performance, resulting in lower achievement relative to peers. Morally, street hawking exposes children to inappropriate adult attention, engagement in immoral behaviours, early sexual awareness, consumption of harmful media, lying, stealing, and other forms of ethical erosion. Overall, the findings underscore that child street hawking is a multidimensional threat, undermining the holistic development of female children and exposing them to physical, psychological, educational, and moral vulnerabilities that can have long-term negative implications for their growth and future well-being.

Based on the above the study advocated that:

- There should be advocacy campaigns to educate parents and guardians on the dangers of hawking to the children.
- There should be law enforcement agent to arrest parents and guardians who send out school-age children to the street to hawk goods, police could be empowered to ensure that those children are taken into custody and their parents prosecuted.
- The churches could get involved and the traditional leaders as well as to educate their churches and community members on the dangers of hawking.
- Seminars, workshop, symposiums, radio and television programmes, hand bills, bill boards are available instruments that can be used to educate people on the dangers of hawking.
- The school should get involved also to ensure that pupils, who are absent from school to hawk are punished.
- Parents/Guardians must ensure alternative sources of income rather than the continual

exposure of their children to risk through hawking, all in the name of making money.

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