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STREET CHILDREN LIFESTYLE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY, CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

The main trust of this study was to investigate Street Children lifestyle and Urban Development in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The survey research design was adopted for the study. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select 150 respondents for the study. The questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection. Chi-square statistical to was used to analyze the stated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. From the findings of the study, it was revealed that there exists a significant relationship between the provision of formal education, provision of family-like environment/skill acquisition programmes and rehabilitation of street children in Calabar Municipal. Finally, it was further recommended amongst other things that: government needs to ensure that the rights of all the children are protected under the law by devising a mechanism to oversee that those rights are implemented.

Keywords: Formal education, family-like environment/skill acquisition programmes, street children, lifestyle, Urban Development

1.0 Introduction

One major challenge facing many third world nations is the lack of a thriving, youthful population empowered to contribute to the growth and development of their economies. Scholars and non-governmental organizations attribute this to lack of proper training, requisite education and guidance in the formative years of children. According to a report published by UNICEF in 2018, about 10.5 million Nigerian children between the ages of 5 and 18 are not in school with 60% of this number from the Northern part and part of Southern Nigeria. The societal consequence of this report is the astronomical rate of illiteracy, the current rise in violent crimes committed by children across the Nigerian states, and the considerable cost associated with prosecuting or reforming these juveniles (UNICEF, 2018). Many of these out of school children fall into the category of what is referred to as "Street children". These are children that have been abandoned, rejected and ostracized by

parents, guardians and the society in general and are found roaming the streets as a result of circumstances beyond their comprehension and control (Usang, Okpechi, & Ekpo, 2016).

All over Nigeria and Calabar Municipal in particular, these children paint a picture of hopelessness and helplessness as they have been cut-off from all family and societal ties. Having been abandoned by family, the government, and society in general, these children had all but lost hope for survival. They roam the streets night and day seeking for their next meal and are willing to do anything that guarantees their daily survival on the streets. They make the bridges, motor parks, refuse dumps and the most dangerous parts of the city their home and retire to these places at night after a day of foraging for food all over the city. To survive, they engage in street begging, manual labour, and petty crimes on a day-to-day basis and sometimes search for crumbs from domestic waste bins and refuse dumps. The older ones among them find it hard to adjust to this lack of individuality and belongingness while the younger ones crave for parental love and care. This leads to extreme depression and suicidal tendencies, which leaves an indelible scar in their persona for as long as they survive the streets. The girls among them are subjected to all sorts of sexual abuse and most times end up as prostitutes. The increasing number of these children on the streets of Calabar Municipal is a source of concern not only to the government but also to the entire state. With more children being abandoned and neglected, the end to this phenomenon cannot be said to be in sight.

One of such groups of street children in Calabar Municipal is the "Skolombo Children" in Calabar Municipal, a city in the South-South region of Nigeria. The name skolombo originated from a Jamaican slang "Skolo" which means "to obtain" (Ibanga, 2016, cited in Nnana, Ugal, Omini & Nsan, 2024). The group comprises children and teenagers of between 5 and 18 years old. Numbering in their hundreds, these children take refuge in the marketplaces, motor parks, unoccupied public buildings and uncompleted buildings. The girls among them were called "Lacassera Girls" after a favourite soft drink in Nigeria on the understanding that all it takes for the girls to engage in a sexual act is just one bottle of this soft drink (PIND, 2017). To survive, these children engage in all sorts of criminal activities: pickpocketing, burglary, prostitution, armed robbery, and murder. Their presence in the streets has been attributed to many factors.

As a result of the rejection by the society, abuse, and the lack of parental care and love, these children become psychologically traumatized and end up becoming prone to negative influences on the streets (PIND, 2017). Thus, these children become ready recruits for armed robbery gangs, prostitution rings and child trafficking syndicates. They metamorphose into deadly gangs used by corrupt politicians to harass the electorates and rig results. They also constitute terror elements in tribal and religious conflicts (Owolabi, 2017). One significant attribute of these children is the exhibition of a high sense of communality as they are ever ready to defend and fend for each other from intruders-and in some cases from members of other unfriendly street children. This communal feeling emerges out

of their realization that they have been betrayed and abandoned by the society. In response to this feeling, they strive so hard to hit back at the society through diverse criminal means.

More importantly and in the context of the challenges of street children lifestyle (Skolombo children) in Calabar Municipal, this paper seeks to examine street children lifestyle and urban development in Calabar Municipal, Cross River State.

1.1 Statement of the problem

It is imperative to assert here that the emergence of street children (Skolombo children) cannot be evidential without mentioning the failure or collapse of the destiny child centre in Calabar, which was run by Mrs. Obioma Liyel-Imoke and the said collapse was sourced to the influx of abandoned children into Calabar from neighbouring states and countries; which resulted in paucity of resources for their maintenance and secondly, funds from international donors had reduced drastically street children in Calabar, who later metamorphosed today as "Skolombo", have been mere for years. Initially they were harmless, but later grew to be known as Isakaba' in 2007 and 2008, at which period they had become a menace. The major cause origin of Skolombo could be traced to the family and the church (Anietie, 2015 cited in Nnana, Okafor & Lilian, 2024).

Chief among these factors is witchcraft (Akpan, 2015 cited in Nnana, Abonor, Tangban, Tiku & Rita, 2024). That some families in :he South-South city of Calabar still believe firmly in witchcraft is as indication of the low level of education and enlightenment. For reasons as shocking as poverty in the family, some of these children were branded witches (Snow, 2017), accused of being responsible for the sufferings in their respective families, and chased out of their home as early as five years after failed attempts to kill or maim them. Some of these children found themselves on the streets because of lack of care (Umukoro. 2016), provision of sell their children to make money. There is a total breakdown in the family system. He argued that the government is not helping matters, as jobs are not there. The most notorious of street children according to Mr. Ekpe are the said 'Skolombo boys and lacasera girls'. These children are found clustering around major streets like IBB, Ekong Ita, Murtala Mohammed Highway by flour mills, Marian, Calabar road and others. They are within the ages of 8 and 15 years, and just loiter the streets, fending for themselves in tattered clothes. Often, they hang beside vehicles in traffic, begging for alms and some of them even engage in petty stealing and robbery. In most cases, these skolombo children move in groups. Initially, they operated like reggars, hanging around street corners, but later, they started carrying guns and getting dangerous as they grew bigger and matured with street life (Anietie, 2015). They operate with different kinds of crude weapons, collecting phones, money and other valuables from people. There have also been reports of robberies carried out by this group of street children. Some months back, a gang of daredevil robbers; who operated in a commando-like style, engaged the police in gun battle, held the city hostage for about three hours. They were suspected to be 'Skolombo boys'. In light of the above, the

main problem of this study is to ascertain street children lifestyle and urban development in Calabar Municipal, Cross River State, Nigeria.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Street children in Calabar Municipal

Street children according to UNICEF (2018) are often homeless and have no access to basic needs such as shelter, food, healthcare, education, and protection. They are exposed to various forms of abuse and exploitation such as child labor, child trafficking, and sexual abuse. The issue of street children is a global problem that affects millions of children worldwide. The issue of street children is complex and multifaceted, and there are several factors that contribute to it. Poverty is one of the major causes of street children. In many developing countries, poverty is widespread, and families struggle to provide for their basic needs. As a result, children are often sent to the streets to work and earn a living. In some cases, children are abandoned by their families due to poverty, and they end up on the streets. Family problems such as domestic violence, alcoholism, and drug abuse can also lead to children running away from home and ending up on the streets. Children who are victims of abuse and neglect may also choose to run away from home and live on the streets. In some cases, children are lured away from their homes by traffickers who promise them a better life but end up exploiting them on the streets (WHO, 2018).

In Calabar Municipal, street children are often called "Skolombo Children". The name Skolombo originated from a Jamaican slang "Skolo" which means "to obtain" (Ibanga, 2016). The group comprises children and teenagers of between 5 and 18 years old. Numbering in their hundreds, these children take refuge in the marketplaces, motor parks, unoccupied public buildings and uncompleted buildings. The girls among them were called "Lacassera Girls" after a favourite soft drink in Nigeria on the understanding that all it takes for the girls to engage in a sexual act is just one bottle of this soft drink (PIND, 2017). To survive, these children engage in all sorts of criminal activities: pickpocketing, burglary, prostitution, armed robbery, and murder. Their presence in the streets has been attributed to many factors.

A key criminal manifestation of the challenge of street children in the state is the emergence of gangs known as 'Skolombo Boys and Lacasera Girls'. These are children who took to a life of crime and violence after years of living on the streets. The oldest among them are teenagers, and they move in large numbers with guns, knives, machetes, and other crude weapons with which they use to attack and rob residents. They have also been linked with incidents of kidnapping, rape, cult clashes, and political violence during the 2015 general elections in the state. In recent times Calabar, the Cross River State capital has been faced with rising insecurity as a result of violence and criminality attributed to street children locally called 'Skolombo Boys' and 'Lacasera Girls'. These homeless children beg for alms and scavenge for recyclable materials on the street, and have become a problem to residents of the state.

From roaming the street for survival in bands, some have formed into criminal gangs. They have been associated with incidents of robbery, kidnapping, rape, pickpocketing, and drug abuse (Kacker, et. al., 2007).

The 'Skolombo' phenomenon reportedly started in 2013 when some of the street children formed into gangs of criminals and cultists. It is largely one of the fallouts from rival cult wars which were frequently fought on the streets. As clashes among rival campus-based cults spilled into the streets, cult groups started establishing street wings and enlisting street children as foot soldiers in their supremacy battles for relevance and territorial expansion. These set of street children became known as the 'Skolombo Boys.,' which is reportedly a derivative of the phrase 'Obtain by Force' in local slang. As cult gangs increasingly relied on these children, the street life has become a gateway to membership of such fraternities as Mafias, Vikings, and Black Axe as each group established their own street wings as junior members - Junior Black Axe, Blackskins, Skyloo, and others. The situation "however reportedly degenerated during the build-up to the 2015 general elections, as cult groups recruited more street children to intimidate or attack opponents of their political patrons. In the aftermath of the elections, the 'Skolombo boys' became deeply involved in other criminal activities including robbery, kidnapping, drug abuse, and sexual violence (Schimmel, 2018).

The most sexually active among the female street kids are locally referred to as 'Lacasera Girls'; named after a popular soft drink. They are reportedly so-called because it is generally believed that all it will cost a man to have his way with these girls is to offer them a bottle or money to buy one. The girls are engaged in prostitution and drug abuse. The demand for street girls is reportedly high among pimps, brothel owners, child traffickers and drug dealers in the state. Some of the girls are reported to have been raped by male street kids and older men who attack them on the street at night. They are at a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and getting pregnant. Often, babies from such pregnancies are abandoned or sold to child traffickers. Some of the 'Lacasera girls' are reportedly involved in child trafficking as they are contracted by operators of 'Baby Factories' to get pregnant and produce babies for sale to clients. The issue of street children has implications for the socio-economic development and security in the state. It is a social problem that has progressively become a security challenge (Schimmel, 2018).

According to Priya (2019 cited in Nnana, Isaac & Blessing, 2023), the stigmatization and negative perception of the children by society, as well as the harassment they face in their daily life inclines them towards anti-social behaviour including involvement in criminality and violence. They are reportedly subjected to physical abuse by law enforcement agents and criminal gangs. They are frequently detained by the police who arrest them on such offences as homelessness, loitering, or petty theft. Many of these children have been drawn into criminality by circumstances beyond their control. They may be orphaned or otherwise unattended to by parents and guardians. They may be working in menial jobs under dangerous conditions, which adversely affect their health and social development. As children without formal education or socialization at the family level, they are likely to face an unstable future, and end up as outcasts. Those who are able to

survive through childhood into adulthood become traumatized and criminalized. Then they, in turn, oppress and victimize other children, creating a vicious cycle of child abuse, violence and criminality.

2.2 **Causes of street children (Skolombo children) in Calabar Municipal**

The phenomenon of street children is connected to factors as beliefs in child witches, dysfunctional homes, child trafficking, urbanization, and forced migration. Misfortunes in families may be superstitiously blamed on children, especially those with disabilities or other unusual characteristics. In such cases they can be taken to churches and traditional healing homes where they are often branded as witches and wizards, then mistreated and abandoned on the street. A number of the children are products of broken families and dysfunctional homes where their parents or guardians either cannot or will not care for them. Others are either orphaned or run away from home to escape violence and abuse. Some of them were trafficked from rural communities to cities by relatives and child trafficking syndicates for child labour and commercial sex. Traffickers often coerce children away from parents in rural communities with the promise of paid services or apprenticeship in the cities.

According to Usang, Okpechi, and Ekpo (2016), street children in Calabar, who later metamorphosed today as Skolombo, have been there for years. Initially, they were harmless, but later grew to be known as Tsakaba' in 2007 and 2008 at which period they had become a menace. The major cause or origin of Skolombo could be traced to :he family and the church. In the family, some children are branded witches and wizards through the spiritual pronouncement of some churches. As a result, some parents throw such children into the street, where they grow up and learn the street life. Some street children are of single parenthood, whereby, the mother is not capable of taking care; hence the child ends up in the streets doing all sorts of criminal adventures. Further, the increase in the number of street children and their involvement in criminality is also connected to urbanization, as well as internal displacement resulting from recent communal conflicts, particularly in Odukpani, Abi, and Yakurr LGAs. The annual Calabar carnival has also been identified as a factor. The demand for child labour including teenage sex workers is reportedly in high demand by pimps, drug dealers and brothel owners during the annual festival. Such children may eventually end up on the street where they fend for themselves and gain a sense of belonging by bonding with other children. Some of them have been reportedly involved in gambling, drug abuse, robbery, kidnapping, and sexual violence (Usang, Okpechi, & Ekpo, 2016).

In recent times Calabar, the Cross River State capital has been faced with rising insecurity as a result of violence and criminality attributed to street children locally called 'Skolombo Boys' and 'Lacasera Girls.' These homeless children beg for alms and scavenge for recyclable materials on the street, and have become a problem to residents of the state. From roaming the street for survival in bands, some have formed into criminal gangs. They have been associated with incidents of robbery, kidnapping, rape, pick-pocketing, and drug abuse. The problem of 'Skolombo Boys' began around 2013 and seems to have gathered steam in recent times, following a rise in violence and criminality

associated with gangs of children in the state. In 2015, the state government inaugurated a special security task force code-named 'Operation Skolombo' to address the menace of street children in the state capital. This initiative however, has not been able to effectively address the problem as violence and criminality associated with street children is still prevalent, particularly in Calabar (Stephen & Udisi, 2016)

Kalu (2016) asserted that the phenomenon of street children is connected to factors as beliefs in child witches, dysfunctional homes, child trafficking, urbanization, and forced migration. Misfortunes in families may be superstitiously blamed on children, especially those with disabilities or other unusual characteristics. In such cases they can be taken to churches and traditional healing homes where they are often branded as witches and wizards, then mistreated and abandoned on the street. A number of the children are products of broken families and dysfunctional homes where their parents or guardians either cannot or will not care for them. Others are either orphaned or run away from home to escape violence and abuse.

Recounting their experience with The Guardian Newspaper, 2016, some of them claim they were abandoned by their parents and do not have anywhere to go, while some others were accused to be witches and wizards. "For me, I don't have anywhere to go. For 10 years, I have been on the streets fending for myself. I live a street life and I don't know my father and mother," so declared one of the boys who simply gave his name as Edet. Another boy, who gave his name as Gideon Okon, aged 13, said, "for the past three years, I have lived in the park (Etim Edem Motor Park) and I earn my living by loading passenger buses and running errands. On a good day I make N200 to N400 a day. We live and rise up with the big boys, thieves, but I don't steal. When they ask us to go for robbery, they will beat us when we resist. My father is sick and diabetic and my mother has since ran away. I now fend for my father and myself. In most cases, I go to places of ceremonies to get remnants of food, especially at the Cultural Centre and the State Library Complex. Occasionally, I sleep in the park." Obioikot Ita, 10 years; Effiong Victor Okon, also 10 and Ubong Asuquo Nyong are from Akpabuyo Council of Cross River State. They suffer similar fate. For close to three years, they have lived in the park and sometimes join the big boys to steal. The street is their life. In most cases these Skolombo children move in groups. Initially, they operated like beggars, hanging around street corners, but later they started carrying guns and getting dangerous as they grew bigger and matured with street life. They operate with different kinds of crude weapons, collecting phones, money and other valuables from people. There have also been reports of robberies carried out by this group of street children.

Lawal (2015), noted that a gang of daredevil robbers, who operated in a commando-like style, engaged the police in gun battle, held the city hostage for about three hours. They were suspected to be Skolombo boys. Worried by this menace, which poses a threat to the peace of the state and its development; the State Governor, Senator Ben Ayade has put in place a security task force codenamed "Operation Skolombo," to rid the state of criminals. This

was in addition to an already existing Quick Intervention Squad and Rapid Response Squad in the state. Brig. General Mannix Nyiam (rtd.) was appointed Chairman of the taskforce alongside four others, Mr Lawrence Alobi, a retired police Commissioner, Colonel Ekanem Ikpeme, a retired Deputy Police Commissioner, Bassey Inyang and Inyang Yibala, a Security Consultant, to tackle the Skolombo threat. While inaugurating the team the governor said, "You are aware that we have great ideas in key signature projects. The intention is that those projects will create a new economy that can sustain our people and give us independence. All of those things in our plan, political and economic, would amount to nothing if we don't have the right security in place."

Anietie (2015) stated that since the taskforce was put in place, and to a very large extent, the activities of the boys have reduced, though pockets of them, especially the younger ones, are still to be found in areas like the Murtala Mohammed highway and Marian Road, loitering around. It is on record that Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and domesticated it in 2003 as the Child Rights Act. Since then, 23 of Nigeria's 36 states have adopted the law to protect children. The law specifies the rights and responsibilities of children and the duties and obligations of government, families and the authorities to uphold children's rights. Some of them were trafficked from rural communities to cities by relatives and child trafficking syndicates for child labour and commercial sex. Traffickers often coerce children away from parents in rural communities with the promise of paid services or apprenticeship in the cities. Further, the increase in the number of street children and their involvement in criminality is also connected to urbanization, as well as internal displacement resulting from recent communal conflicts, particularly in Odukpani, Abi, and Yakurr LGAs. The annual Calabar carnival has also been identified as a factor. The demand for child labour including teenage sex workers is reportedly in high demand by pimps, drug dealers and brothel owners during the annual festival. Such children may eventually end up on the street where they fend for themselves and gain a sense of belonging by bonding with other children. Some of them have been reportedly involved in gambling, drug abuse, robbery, kidnapping, and sexual violence.

The religious setting also needs a reorientation. There are lots of churches and so called prayer houses in the communities. Some pastors/prophets brand innocent children as witches, especially if that family is facing any kind of hardship, terminal diseases, death, HIV/AIDS, cancer; all of these are attributed to witches." Umem noted that while the Child Rights law, passed in 2009, and free education in the state have reduced the prevalence rate, the underlying root causes - such as cultural beliefs, superstition, ignorance, illiteracy and poverty - were still there.

Lawal (2015) studied the factors that affect homelessness in Khartoum State on 300 street children. It was found out that most of the street children were born in this State but the origins of the majority of them are the western and southern Sudan. Factor analysis was used and showed that there are seven factors which could be labeled city life, risky behavior, economic reasons, natural and environmental, family disruption, observation, and family abuse. The study

recommended to locate perspective programs in areas where most street children families live in at present; intervening at home to prevent children from coming to streets; reduce school fees; create opportunities to increase income of vulnerable families specially those affected by war and drought; build trust with street children to convince them return home; provide safe night shelters for street children to protect them; help addicted children to overcome their addiction; reform and improve legislations and laws to protect children.

2.3 The plight of street children in Calabar Municipal

Information from organizations working with children living on the streets indicate that the majority of the visible children living on the streets are boys aged 5 to years, but the number of girls appears to be increasing as well (Anietie, 2015). Day-to-day survival is the primary objective of these children and almost all activities on the streets are in one way or another considered illegal, particularly by law enforcers. Nearly all children living on the streets worldwide, including those in Kenya, beg, scavenge or work in order to earn an income. Work includes guarding parked cars, washing cars, selling plastic bags, working in market stalls, fetching water, carrying luggage, shining shoes, selling sweets and flowers, pick pocketing, robbing stores, selling drugs or prostitution.

According to Kaime et al (2008), while the streets present opportunities for work and freedom, they also violate a child's dignity and adversely affect their physical, mental, emotional and overall well-being. This is particularly true for those children, to whom the street is their home as they encounter conditions of great difficulty, including unemployment, poverty, hunger and lack of shelter. Many live in slums and makeshifts camps or hovels. Others sleep on shop verandas, street pavements, dark alleys and dumpsites. They face difficulties of providing themselves with good source of food, clean drinking water, health care services, toilets and bath facilities and adequate shelter. This compelled them to form membership in groups or gangs that provided companionship and protection from other street gangs, the police or the general public. This contact with their peers is positive for the child and acts as a substitute for the adult care, protection and affection that these groups of children lack. However, it can also mean strengthening of harmful habits, such as smoking, drug use, gambling, sniffing glue and prostitution. Combination of drug use and unsafe practice among the children living on the streets make HIV/AIDS infection a major concern since most street girls on drugs carry out prostitution as a major source of income. He added that children living on the streets have sexual intercourse with peers and adults from within and outside their social circle for money in order to buy food and clothes and for shelter.

Usang, Okpechi, and Ekpo (2016), noted that many children living on the streets have their first sexual experience within the peer group for entertainment, comfort and to exert power and establish dominance. Sex is often unprotected and consequently, the children are at an increased risk of contracting STIs, including HIV, thus prone

to the suffering from the stigma. They further noted that girls face an added risk of becoming pregnant and some proceed to deliver their infants and undergo the associated problems of early childbearing and motherhood and the cycle of street life and poverty continues. Others may resort to unsafe abortion with little medical care afterwards. These children are difficult to reach with services due to their mobile life and when they seek care, they are reluctant to give detailed information.

According to Ibanga (2016), street children with families may return home to sleep, but home is often cramped and within dangerous areas offering minimal opportunities for social development. Such adverse circumstances in themselves can compel these children to engage in prostitution or commit crime. This is due to the fact that, many children living on the streets come from troubled backgrounds characterized by poverty and unsupportive home lives involving various forms of abuse, neglect, and conflict. They also suffer from absence of parental protection and security due to the missing connection with their families. In addition, there is lack of any kind of emotional support. Once they are outside the homes, the challenges for these children tend to continue and broaden. They are at risk of making unhealthy choices, such as substance abuse, being sexually exploited and abused by others, and thereby becoming further outcasts from society.

While some children become initiated into these habits early, others gradually become involved. To begin their life on the street, they beg, guard cars, shine shoes, scavenge, sell sweets and flowers or work in other informal jobs for low pay and in frequently dangerous conditions. As the rigors of street life slowly harden them, they progress to pick-pocketing wallets, robbing stores, selling drugs or prostituting themselves. Their primary concern is how to survive from day to day. At a tender age, street children learn to avoid bullies and policemen. The communities in which children living on the streets live and operate does not readily accept them because of their naughty and criminal minded behavior, bad language, poor self-image and sometimes violent reactions to situations. Generally, people fear and mistreat them. Children living on the streets are constantly evicted from the streets in some countries. For instance, in India children living on the streets were badly treated when Bombay had an operation that targeted and arrested street children and took them to indebted solitude (UNICEF, 2018). In Nairobi children living on the streets are usually forcibly was sheltered in a privately run children's orphanage in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, after she was tortured and driven away from home by her parents. A few months after her arrival in the centre, she became pregnant allegedly for the owner of the centre. About 15 years old, she is now a mother to a two-year-old. Although the case is presently in court, Sunday Punch gathered that the alleged father is yet to face any trial.

2.4 Provision of education by government and street children lifestyle

According to Priya (2019), good programs should incorporate development-oriented activities through integration into the family, school, and labor market as well as basic assistance to children living on the streets. By contrast, development-oriented practices actively promote links between

children and social institutions. They teach their participants a wide array of practical and emotional skills (from communication to money management) that will enable them to function in different social contexts. Schimmel (2018) observed that, good programs should look into employment creation and small enterprise development in the pursuit of affordable shelter, nutrition and health. The objectives of the programs should be to rehabilitate, educate and train children under rehabilitation within the framework of a wide range of community development to improve the conduct and prospect of all the children under rehabilitation programs whose future appears uncertain. In addition, the programs should promote the healthy growth and development of individual street children, as required by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of programs increases in proportion to the extent that funding is continuous over a defined period of time. Better quality in turn enables NGOs to raise public support and become sustainable. Donors should not only contribute financial support but also provide guidelines or conduct external evaluations. Further, donors should facilitate and support the establishment of municipal, multiagency development programs with children living on the streets as one of their components (WHO, 2018).

2.5 A review of the Child Right Act

Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and made its own version of the Child Rights Act in 2003. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria provides that the child rights come under state responsibility and for it to become operational, a state must pass it into law. With more and more children being thrown out of homes and sometimes branded witches and wizards in Calabar, the state government took a decision to address the crisis when it passed into law, the Child Rights Act on May 26, 2009, a day to Nigeria's Children's Day celebrations. Cross River thus became the 23rd out of Nigeria's 36 states to domesticate the law which specifies the responsibilities of children and the duties and obligations of the government, families and the authorities to uphold the rights of children. After Mr. Imoke gave assent to the bill, the then Head of UNICEF in Nigeria, Suomi Saakai, wrote to congratulate the state and Mrs. Endeley, who was then commissioner for social welfare said UNICEF declared the state safe for children.

Ironically, while the world body celebrated the state, its capital, Calabar, was at the time, far from being a haven for children. The wife of the governor at the time, Mrs. Imoke, inspected the locations the children lived, and later initiated an arrangement where food was cooked and delivered to the children in their various hideouts. "The initiative of the then first lady was largely to complement the effort of the state government to indeed make Cross River, a state fit for the child".

3.0 Theoretical framework

i) Structural empowerment theory

The study was premised on structural empowerment theory by Kanter (1993). Empowerment theory postulates that empowerment is promoted in various environments that provide people with access to information, resources, support and opportunity to learn and develop. The theory

further states that, empowerment occurs when an organization sincerely engages people and progressively responds to this engagement with mutual interest and intention to promote growth factors that correspond to expected effectiveness of rehabilitation programs.

While advancing the theory, Kanter (1993) observes that, empowerment develops over time as people gain greater control over their lives and increasingly taking part in the decisions which affect them. As quoted by Skelton (2007) children should be allowed to participate in decisions making in matters that affect their lives for the success of the programs a factor that is relevant in rehabilitation homes of children living on the streets. Principles associated with empowerment theory relevant to this study includes; equity, partnership and accountability. Equity is defined as integration of rules to achieve common goals and willingness of each member to contribute collectively towards common goal a factor that is required in a rehabilitation home where children must work together and contribute for the wellbeing of the others. Partnership, defined as development of relationship to promote mutual respect, enhanced communication and collaboration to achieve organizational objectives.

This principle is important to the study as it emphasizes on team work where the children and their care givers must work together as quoted by Dybicz, (2005). Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is success. The children and rehabilitation staff should work together for the success of the programs, since both parties need to work at it. Accountability defined as willingness to invest in decision making and sharing a sense of responsibility for individual and collective outcomes. This principle is applicable in this study in the sense that when children are subjected to authority and denied opportunities to establish rules through relationships of mutual respect, they fail to develop into responsible adults and contributors to the common good for effective rehabilitation. When principles related to this theory are incorporated into individual (children under rehabilitation) and the organization (rehabilitation centers) the programs becomes effective and the intended objectives are achieved.

(ii) Social Network Theory (SNT)

The theory was developed by (Barnes, 1950). Sometimes this theory is known as network theory or network analysis theory. It studies how social structure of relationship around a person, group or organization affects beliefs or behaviors. The theory relies on the assumption that every network approach should be primarily conceived and investigated from the view of the properties of relations between and within units instead of properties of these units themselves. Social network theory views social relationships in terms of nodes and ties. Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes. In its most simple form, a social network is a map of all of the relevant ties between the nodes being studied. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors.

Therefore, street children are children who lack good social relationship with others actors (parents, guardians, community and religious affiliation) and they have less ties

with other actors within the network. Sucharitkul (2007) argues that, people with low Social Economic Status, that mean low level of education, occupation or income level have smaller networks with a large proportion of kin relationship

4.0 Methodology

The research area is Calabar Municipal in Cross River State Nigeria. Calabar Municipal is located on the bank of the Calabar river and is watered by the Calabar and great Qua rivers and Creeks of the Cross River from its inland Delta. The indigenes are the Efik people known for artistic skills, rich foods, culture and traditions. It is made of seven (7) clans (Essien Efik Itiaba) namely: Adiabo, Creek Town, Ikoneto, Ikot offiong old town, Duke Town and Henshaw Town. Apart from Calabar being divided into clans, it is also divided into houses such as; Duke house, Eyamba house and Eyo Ita house. The house is headed by Obong. The Calabar people engage in various economic activities, some are farmers which grow vegetables like, water leafs, pumpkin etc. some are traders who deal in foodstuffs, fish and vegetables and some are traders who deal in foodstuffs, fish and vegetables and some are into fishing. Due to industrialization and modernization, some have taken to civil service job. Religious affiliations of Calabar people have undergone changes. The Calabar people are polytheist. This is because apart from their belief in "Abasi Ibom", they also believe in deities. However, due to modernization, many are Christians. According to National Population Census, Calabar population is 279,800. The population of this study is mainly made up of parents, guardians, staffs from NGOs and street children in Calabar Municipal. The study employed the purposive sampling technique in determining the sample size. A sample size of 150 respondents from the agencies were selected for the study. The primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for this study. The primary data was gotten from field work with the use of a questionnaire. Tables and simple percentage was used to present the data while the chi-square statistical tool was used to analyze the tested hypotheses. Chi-square (x^2) is represented as;

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

X^2 = Chi square

Z = Summation

O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

4.1 Findings

This is concerned with the presentation of data gotten from the field. Simple percentage will be used to present the demographic data and chi-square statistical tool for testing the hypotheses.

Table 1: Demographic distribution of respondents

Options	No of Respondents	Percentage %
Sex		
Males	70	47%
Females	80	53%
Total	150	100
Age Group		
15-20	18	12%
21 -26	45	30%
26-32	39	26%
33-38	23	15%
39 and above	25	17%
Total	150	100%
Occupation		
Trader 30	20%	
Student	22	15%
Civil servant	15	10%
Unemployed	68	45%
Teachers	15	10%
Total	150	100%
Marital Status		
Single	45	30%
Married	45	30%
Divorced	30	20%
Level of Education		
Primary	15	10%
Secondary	60	40%
Tertiary	75	50%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field survey (2024)

The first item on the table shows that out of 150 respondents, 70 (47%) were males while 80 (53%) were females. Thus, female respondents dominated the study populations. The second item on the table indicated that out of 150 respondents, 18 (12%) respondents are 15 - 20 years, 45 (30%) respondents are 21 - 26 years, 39 (26%) respondents are 27 - 32 years, 23 (15%) respondents are 33-38 years, 25 (17%)

respondents are 39 years and above. The age group of 21-26 was more in the study because they granted more audience in the course of the study.

The table above shows that out of 150 respondents, 30 (20%) are traders 22 (15%) are students, 15 (10%) are civil servants, 68 (45%) are unemployed, while 15 (10%) fall under teachers. Unemployed youths are more in the study due to the fact that they understood the problem under study more effectively.

On the item on marital status of respondent, the table shows that out of 150 respondents, 45 (30%) are single, 45 (30%) are married, 30 (20%) had divorced, 15 (10 %) are widows while 15(10%) are widowers. Single and married persons are more in the study as a result of the proper understanding which they have on the subject matter.

Lastly on the demographic information of respondents, it showed that out of 120 respondents, 15 (10%) have primary education, 60 (40%) have secondary education while 75 (50%) have tertiary education. Persons with tertiary education are more in the study because they are well exposed to the subject under study.

Table 2: Respondents view on provision of formal education by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

Responses	Males	Females	Total	Percentage %
Yes	**50**	**49**	**99**	**66%**
No	**10**	**20**	**30**	**20%**
Don't know	**10**	**11**	**21**	**14%**
Total	**70**	**80**	**150**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

The table above shows that out of 150 respondents, 99 (66%) comprising of 50 males and 49 females agreed, 30 (20%) comprising of 10 males and 20 females disagreed, while 21 (14%) comprising of 10 males and 11 females don't know if there is a relationship between provision of formal education by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

Table 3: Respondents view on provision of skill acquisition programmes/family-like environment by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

Responses	Males	Females	Total	Percentage %
Yes	40	64	104	69%
No	20	10	30	20%
Don't know	10	6	16	11%
Total	70	80	150	100%

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

The table above shows that out of 150 respondents, 104 (69%) comprising of 40 males and 64 females agreed, 30 (20%) comprising of 20 males and 10 females disagreed while 16(11%) comprising of 10 males and 6 females don't know if there is a relationship between provision of skill acquisition programmes/family-like environment by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

4.2 **Data analysis**

In the course of this study two hypotheses was formulated. These hypotheses were tested so as to accept or reject them. The hypothesis shall be tested using the chi-square (X^2) statistical analysis.

4.2.1 Hypothesis one

Hypothesis one was stated in a null and alternate form.

H_0: There is no significant relationship between provision of formal education by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

H_1: There is a significant relationship between provision of formal education by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

Cell	O	E	o - e	$(o - e)^2$	$(o - e)^2$ e
1	55	51.33	3.67	13.4689	0.26
2	55	58.67	3.67	13.4689	0.23
3	7	12.6	5.6	31.36	2.49
4	20	14.4	5.6	31.36	2.18
5	8	6.08	1.93	3.7249	0.61
6	5	6.93	1.93	3.7249	0.54
					X2 = 6.31

Therefore $X^2 = 6.31$

Degree of freedom (df) (c-l)(r-l) (3-1)(2-1)

2x1=2 df=2

Table value = 5.99

Level of significance = 0.05

6.31 > 5.99

Decision Rule

Accept null hypothesis if chi-square calculated value is less than the table value at 0.05 level of significance, otherwise accept the alternate hypothesis. The measure of difference between the observed and expected frequencies is given by the formula;

x^2=y (E-E). The calculation shows that the chi-square calculated value is 6.31 and is e greater than the table value of 5.99 at 0.05

level of significance. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between provision of formal education by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal.

4.1.2 Hypothesis two

Hypothesis two was stated in a null and alternate form.

H_0: There is no significant relationship between the provision of skill acquisition programmes/family-like environment by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

Hi: There is a significant relationship between the provision of skill acquisition programmes/family-like environment by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

Cell	O	E	o - e	(o - e)2	(o - e)2 e
1	50	46.2	3.8	14.44	0.31
2	49	52.8	3.8	14.44	0.27
3	10	14	4	16	1.14
4	20	16	4	16	1
5	10	9.8	0.2	0.04	4.08
6	11	11.2	0.2	0.04	3.57
					X2= 10.37

Therefore, $X^2 = 10.37$

(3-1) (2-1)

2x1=2

df=2

Table value = 5.99

Level of significance = 0.05

10.37 > 5.99

4.1.3 Decision rule

Accept the null hypothesis if chi-square calculated value is less than the tabulated value of 0.05 level of significance, otherwise

Degree of freedom (df) (c-1) (r-1)

accept alternative hypothesis. The measure of difference between the observed and expected frequencies is given by the formula; x^2=y (E-E). The calculation shows that the chi-square calculated value is 10.37 and is greater than the table value of 5.99 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between the provision of skill acquisition programmes/family-like environment by

government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal

5.0 Discussion of findings

Hypothesis one established the fact that there is a significant relationship between provision of formal education by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal. These findings is in line with Anietie (2015) observed that various services are provided by the NGOs to the children living on the streets so as to ensure their total rehabilitation. The services provided include primary education in order to prepare the child for a productive life. The children who pass the primary education examinations are selected to join the secondary schools and are given opportunities to pursue further education. In addition, Anietie (2015) further asserts that street children are gifted and talented like other children and therefore the other NGOs who are yet to do same should take concerted efforts to develop those talents.

The findings also support the words of a former street child interviewed by the Punch (2010), stating thus: Dominic Edet Inyang, 18 years, said, "I thank God I was picked up and trained by SYDRI. I thank God for this organisation. I am now in JS 3 in New Government Secondary School, Lagos Street, Calabar. My life before now was bad. I was a street tout, but I thank God, SYDRI has changed my life. Dr. Onoyom Ita brought me up like a parent would, which nobody gave me in the street. There are still many children out there and my advice to them is that if any organisation comes for them, they should not miss the good 'chance to bring change."

Hypothesis two has proven that there exists a significant relationship between the provision of skill acquisition programmes/family-like environment by government and street children lifestyle in Calabar Municipal. The findings supports the commend of one of the street children interviewed by the Punch (2010), stating that a former street child Emmanuel Inyang Edet said thus: "In the past, we fight, stole, smoke, gamble and do all manner of evil things in the street. Fortunately, God favoured me.

6.0 Conclusion

The street children issue can best be addressed through preventive programs and policies that will strike at its social and 6conomic causes. Special protection measures are needed to increase development opportunities for young persons currently suffering the hardships of street life.

As mentioned earlier, goodwill alone cannot guarantee a positive, lasting impact on the lives of children. Focusing only on assistance is just as ineffective and can even make the problem worse, by increasing the child's dependence on charity and destroying its incentive to leave the street. The right kind of program is one that will help young participants strengthen their connections with family, school, and the community. Lobbying and advocacy can make the voices of street children heard, by producing changes in policies and laws that affect their life. The impact and sustainability of government programs can be increased by networking and cooperating with municipalities and local services in developing initiatives geared to a broad range of vulnerable groups. To date, few programs for street children have been adequately evaluated. Those that are able to show and quantify their results are usually operated by the largest and the best-endowed NGOs. But

a significant part of the work in this field is carried out by small, low-funded organizations.

Amidst supporting and protecting street children, the government and the community members are key members in ensuring that street children have access to formal education and skill acquisition programmes. On the part of supporting street children to access formal education, the government and community members are faced with a variety of challenges including social construction of street children as hooligans' vagabonds, and people prone to committing crimes. These findings hold our conclusion that the government and the community have negative attitude towards street children to support and protect them. In the same veins, we consider that if both the government and the community cannot support street children, it would be a sheer dream to expect them to access formal education which will further lead to urban development.

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Skills acquisition programmes should be developed by government and nongovernmental agencies for self-support by street children, as well as 24 hour drop in centre and shelter homes should be set up
2. Social workers should be held at contact points to providing basic needs like medical aid, food, shelter, washing facility and basic education through the help of the government.
3. Government need to ensure that the rights of all the children are protected under the law by employing social workers to oversee that those rights are implemented.

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