

## Influence of Street Life and Gender on Aggression and Self-esteem in a Sample of Nigerian Children.

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### *Abstract*

*This study evaluated the influence of street life and gender on aggression and self esteem of children in two metropolitan cities of Anambra State, Nigeria. A total number of 412 participants aged from 13-17 years, comprising of 277(67-2%) males and 135(32.8%) females, with the mean age of 14.91 years and standard deviation of 1.36 took part in the study. They responded to Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (1992), Rosenberg self-Esteem scale (1979), Picture Apperception Test (2012), observation, interview and focused Group Discussion (FGD). The study adopted a 3x2 factorial design to test the hypotheses and used multiple Analyses of variance statistic for data analysis. The results showed that street children differed significantly from non- street children on level of aggression at  $F(1, 1410) = 108.54, p < .05$ . But did not differ significantly on self-esteem;  $F(1, 410) = 1.36, p > .05$ . Street children who had contact with their families and those who had not, did not differ in level of aggression;  $F(1, 258) = .02, p > .05$ , and also did not differ in their self esteem status;  $F(1, 258) = .02, p > .05$ . Male and female street children did not differ in their level of aggression at  $F(1, 258) = 0.6, p > .05$ ; but differed in their self esteem status;  $F(1, 258) = 4.44, p > .05$ . The study has provided background empirical information on the emerging cankerworm of street children phenomenon, which will serve as impetus for further studies in this area.*

**Key Words:** *Street life, Gender, Aggression, Self-esteem, Children.*

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### **Introduction**

There is ample evidence of increasing presence of children in the streets in Nigeria during periods when their age mates are in school studying. Street children generally refers to persons less than 18 years of age, either living or working on urban streets totally or relatively, outside the control and supervision of parents. The term street children emerged in 1980s to identify children who may have been forced by social and economic factors to spend most of their time on the street (Le-Roux, 1996a, 1996b), and Ebigbo (2000) defined a street child as any child that works and lives on the street, while Chukwuene (2002) opines that street children are those children for whom the street rather than their families has become their real home.

Street children include children who might not necessarily be homeless, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults (West, 2003, Pare, 2003; Conticini and Hulme, 2006; Consortium for street children, 2011).

Lusk (1992) identified four categories of street children. First, are poor working children returning to their families at night. They are likely to attend school. Second, is what he called 'independent street worker': their family ties are beginning to breakdown, their school attendance is decreasing and their delinquency is increasing. Third, are children of street families who work and live with their families in the streets. Finally, are children who have broken contact with their families, who reside in the street fulltime. Childhope (1993) conceptualized street children under three categories in terms of context of family contact. The group identified as 'children on the street are children hawking wares and other merchandise on the street, but have regular contact with the families. Most in this category attend school and return home at the end of the day.

The second category: children of the street; live and work on the street. This category views street as their home and it is the place from where they seek income, food, shelter, and sense of family among companions and peers. For this group, family ties may exist but are perceived negatively. Visits to their homes are not regular, and frequently they may have experienced parental rejection and physical abuse. The third category is made up of children who are completely abandoned and neglected. For this group, family ties with the biological family are severed and they are entirely on their own materially and psychologically.

According to UNICEF (1986), street children refer to boys and girls aged below 18 for whom the street has become the source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised; who have no protection from the natural elements or society and are vulnerable to exploitation. The concept include children who live and sleep in public places as well as street working children who work on the street during the day, return to their family to sleep (Szantor-Blame, 1994, Gomes da Costa, 1997).

There are different opinions on age range that constitute street children. Some researchers have reported age range from 13-18 years (Dabrem, Mullis & Cook, 2001), while for others (Adekunle, Smith, Onakinde & Benard, 2010) it is 5-17 years. It is worthy of note that majority of street children are males in developing countries, but in the developed world, males and females equally populate this class of children. Johnson (1991) reported that the number of boys and girls being thrown out of their homes in Europe is about equal, but the average age for girls is fifteen while seventeen is for boys.

Though these street children who may have been sent by their parents, guardians or have escaped from their homes due to delinquency, poverty or hardship seem gratified by immediate result of freedom and money in the pocket, the daily hazards they encounter in the streets at their age is potentially detrimental to their personality, intellectual, and socio-economic developments. This notwithstanding, there is dearth of studies in this area; there are insufficient information and data on the types, demographic and epidemiological features, and extent of the problems such children encounter in Nigeria. Also, very insufficient is information on the social and psychological consequences of early street life especially in respect of aggressive tendencies, and self esteem of these children in Anambra state, Nigeria.

Based on the foregoing, the purposes of this study include:

- (1) To determine the difference in the level of aggression between street children and non-street children.
- (2) To determine the difference in self esteem status between street children and non-street children.
- (3) To determine the difference in the level of aggression between street children who have contact with their families and those who do not.

- (4) To determine the difference in self-esteem status between street children who have contact with their families and those who do not.
- (5) To determine the difference in the level of aggression between male and female street children.
- (6) To determine the difference in self-esteem status if any between male and female street children.

Lemet (1972) proposed a theoretical model for the origin of street children based on the social interaction theory. In this theory, which is germane to the Nigerian experience, socialization was viewed in terms of career; a concept that includes the growth of identity, based on the series of experiences of self and others. In essence, this theory implies that children begin street life as a result of being pushed out of their homes because of family problems; and that while on the street, they tend to socialize with elements in the streets.

Aggression as a concept refers to a wide range or spectrum of negative behaviors; which is defined as any behavior intended to harm another individual who is motivated to avoid being harmed (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Green, 1998a; Dodge, 2000). Aggression also represents physical and verbal assaults of different magnitudes. Aggression refers to behavior between members of the same species that is intended to cause pain or harm. According to Taylor, Aggression takes a variety of forms among human beings and it can be physical, psychological or verbal. There are two broad categories of aggression: hostile, affective or retaliatory aggression, and instrumental, predatory or goal-oriented aggression (Behar, Hund, Riccinti, Stoff, and Vitiello, 1990; Mc Ellisken, 2004).

Further, Ramirez (2000) proposed a classification that emphasizes the difference between offence and defense, where he classified two main kinds of aggression: direct aggression and indirect aggression. Direct aggression, which is aggression of the physical type, was divided into three subcategories: offence, defense and indiscriminate or irritable aggression. Indirect aggression is subtler and includes dominant displays and symbolic aggression typical of human species. Underwood (2002) distinguished between verbal and non-verbal displays. Accordingly, verbal subtypes include gossiping, bitching, whispering, spreading vicious rumors, mockery, sarcasm, using code names and talking loud enough. While the non-verbal ones are gestures, staring, rolling –eyes, tossing hair, ignoring and social exclusion. In the context of this paper, aggression represents physical aggression, verbal, anger and hostility as measured by Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992).

Self esteem, another variable of interest in this study, is the evaluative aspect of the self-concept and represents the evaluation of self competence. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem refers to a person's positive or negative, favorable or unfavorable attitude towards himself or herself which is closely associated with personality functioning. In the views of Gottredson (1999), self-esteem is influenced by the discrepancy between one's desired self and one's existing self. Self-concept is how we see ourselves or who we are, while self-esteem is how we like what we see (Lopez-Justica, 2001). The word esteem is derived from the latin word "aestimare" which means "to estimate or appraise", self-esteem thus, refers to our positive and negative evaluation of ourselves (Coopersmith, 1967). For Blescovich and Tomakia (1999) self-esteem is an individual's sense of his or her worth or value, or the extent to which a person's values appreciate, approve of, prizes or likes him or herself.

Theorists have made many distinctions concerning types of self-esteem, ranging from contingent versus non contingent (Croker & Wolfe, 2001) explicit versus implicit (Hetts & Pelham, 2001), stable versus unstable (Kernis & Waschull, 1995); authentic versus False (Deci & Ryan, 1995) and global versus domain specific (Dulton & Brown, 1997). However, the themes that underlie all these conceptualizations and conceptions are that self-esteem refers to a person's evaluation of self and that people are generally motivated to maintain high levels of self-esteem, and defend their self-esteem when it comes under threat.

High self-esteem is manifest in enhanced initiative, happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, 1995; Furnham & Cheng, 2000). Self-esteem is positively associated with better self-rated health. On the other hand, low self-esteem has been associated with poor physical health outcomes. Low self-esteem often causes the basic problem leading to psychopathology (Rugal, 1995). Under some circumstances, low self-esteem predisposes to depression and disordered eating (Whisman & Kwon, 1993). It is also pertinent to stress that high self-esteem on the other hand, may promote initiative and confident action in either constructive or distractive ways (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi & Lagerspetz, 1999). Contextually, the researchers hold that self-worth (whether high or low) as measured by Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979).

Some theories that concern aggression and self esteem help to explain what the relationship among variables could be. Dollard and Miller (1939) view frustration as the blocking of ongoing goal directed behavior leading to arousal of a drive whose primary goal is to harm. This aggressive drive leads to aggression. Bandura (1983) postulated that aggression is learned by viewing aggressive models in social context. He strongly opined that people learn to be aggressive through exposure to social models, which is also referred to as imitation learning or vicarious learning.

Based on the foregoing theories, the researchers proposed a theoretical framework that is in consonance with frustration-aggression hypothesis as put forward by Dollard & Miller (1939) and social learning theory as proposed by Bandura (1983). The researchers are of the view that factors such as frustration, deprivation, pain, attacks, threats and competition, which are common features of a typical Nigerian street environment, could precipitate aggressive tendencies among children, especially the deprived and vulnerable. It is argued that in their effort to adapt to these aversive experiences, children, may experience negatively toned emotional arousal. Hence, once a person is aroused, situational cues or personal factors trigger or provoke aggressive response. The researchers also aligned themselves with the proposition of social learning theory of Bandura (1983) where he argued that children who see aggressive and violent actions subsequently behave with more aggression. This is hinged on the fact that there is overwhelming evidence of failure of socialization in contemporary society.

Our environment provides enough social models for children to acquire or learn aggressive behavior. It is plausible that given high level of deprivation, corruption and impurity that is prevalent in many aspects of life in Nigeria, the child has ready but wrong models to imitate.

The socio-meter theory of self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) posited that self-esteem is an internal gauge designed to monitor individual successes in interpersonal relationships, particularly the degree to which they are being included or excluded from social groups; and to motivate corrective actions when one's level of social inclusion gets dangerously low. This theory strongly suggests that social interactions and general environmental forces determine or shape self-esteem. Hence, the location where children live and interact must play a role in determining how they view or understand themselves.

Empirically, a number of foreign and local studies have been undertaken to buttress the fact that street children phenomenon is a social and academic issue. Chukwuene & Igbokwe (2004), in their study of 100 street and non street children in Enugu, Nigeria, where ages ranged from 8-18 years (61 males and 39 females) evaluated somatization and neurotic illness. They found that frequency of these complaints (somatization and neurotic illness) was higher among street life predisposed children to a lot of psychological conflict, distress and psychopathology and difficulty in keeping to social norms. Hence, the resultant delinquency, armed robbery, rape, violence, drug abuse, and aggression Falore & Asamu (2010), studied 275 street children in Ibadan, Nigeria aged from 10-17 years (260 males and 15 females) where they examined the social networks and livelihood of street children. They found a strong relationship between poverty and living on the streets. Lawaal (2011), studied gender differences in self-esteem and perceived social support of street children in Ibadan, Nigeria, among 148 participants (129 males and 19

females), aged from 12-26 years. They found that male street children give better regard to themselves than their female counterparts; and the kind of social support available for the street children is not gender biased.

Aplekar (2004) studied street children in Columbia, where he examined psychological symptoms and found that low levels of mental illness and also those street children are resilient to violent experiences. Trussell (1999, studied 103 street children in Guidad Juarez Mexico, using ethnographic procedure to determine the behaviors of street children in order to gain a better understanding of their condition. He found that there are varying levels of distrust, hostility and aggression between street children and gangs, police and general public. Oliviera, Baiserman and Pellet (1992) studied 71 Brazilian street children aged from 8-18 years, where he evaluated the mental health status of these children. He found several resilience characteristics, including a high degree of intelligence, a concern for each other and good self-esteem. Ajuku, Devries, Arapmengech and Kaplan (2004) in a study of 400 street children in Eldoret, Kenya, where they evaluated temperament characteristics of street and non-street children found high degree of adaptability and flexibility in the face of adversity and that street children are remarkably well adjusted.

## Hypotheses

- (1) Street children will differ from non-street children in level of aggression.
- (2) Street children will differ from non-street children in self-esteem status.
- (3) There will be difference in level of aggression between street children who have contact with their families and those who do not.
- (4) There will be difference in self-esteem status between street children who have contact with their families and those who do not.
- (5) Male and female street children will differ in their level of aggression.
- (6) Male and female street children will differ in their level of self-esteem status.

## Method

### Participants

A total number of four hundred and twelve (412) children comprising two hundred and seventy (277) (67.2%) males and one hundred and thirty-five (135) (32.8%) females selected through simple random sampling from the cities of Onitsha and Awka in Anambra state, Nigeria, participated in the study. They were made up of two hundred and sixty-two (262) street children and one hundred and fifty non-streets children. All the children were between the ages of 13-17 years with a mean age of 14.91 and standard deviation of 1.36.

### Instruments

A 29-item aggression scale developed by Buss and Perry (1992), a 10-item self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg (1979); and a 3-card'' picture apperception test'' developed by Okoye (2012) were used for the study. Also observation, interview, and focused group discussion (FGD) were employed by the researchers to further generate data. The Buss-Perry Aggression questionnaire was found to have internal consistency for the four subscales and total score range from .72 to .89. Also, retest reliability for the BPAQ ranged from .72 for anger to .80 for physical Aggression. Also, the Rosenberg scale coefficient of reproducibility of .92 showing good internal consistency. Further test-retest reliability showed correlation of .85 and .88, indicating excellent stability. Finally, reliability was established for the picture apperception test and a Cronbach alpha  $r$  of 0.93 was found for aggression and 0.88 for self-esteem.

### Procedure

The aggression and self esteem status among the street and non-street children studied were evaluated using , the instruments of observation, interview, projective test, objective psychological scale (BPAQ) and RSE), and focused group discussion (FGD). A total number of 40 children (20 street children: 14 males and 6 males and 20 non-street children: 12 males and 8 females participated in the interview. Two focused group session (1 for males and 1 for females were conducted with 40 participants (28 males and 12 females). Also, a semi-structured interview schedule that elicited data on socio-demographic characteristics, problems encountered on the street, reasons for being on the street and other demographic variables was administered.

Participants responded to the instruments in their natural milieu (streets, markets, motor parks and classrooms). During the course of the study, direct observation on the field was undertaken for two days in order to get first hand information on the life and experience of these children. After generating the data they were analyzed accordingly.

### Design and Statistics

The study evaluated the influence of street life and gender on aggression and self-esteem among children. The study has 2 predictor variables one having three levels, and 2 criterion variables. The 3x2 factorial design was adopted. Accordingly, multiple analysis of variance statistic was used for statistical analysis.

### Results

Below tables (Table 1 and Table 2) shows the results of the study based on research analysis of the study and data collected from research participants.

Table 1: Table of Multivariate analysis for aggression and self-esteem with respect to street and non-street children.

Source	Dependent variables	Type III sum of square	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Sig
Correlated	Aggression	10456.709a	1	10456.709	108.543	.000
Model	Self-esteem	153.981b	1	153.981	1.362	.244
Intercept	Aggression	249177.253	1	249177.253	2586.522	.000
	Self-esteem	312198.719	1	31298.719	2761.085	.000
Street	Aggression	10456.709	1	10456.709	108.543	.000
	Self-esteem	153.981	1	153.981	1.362	.244
Error	Aggression	39498.094	410	96.333		
	Self-esteem	46359.116	410	113.071		
Total	Aggression	349317.000	412			
	Self-esteem	379566.000	412			

Street children differed from non-street children on level of aggression at  $F(1,410) = 108.54, P < .05$ . However, street children did not differ from non-street children in self-esteem status at  $F(1,410) = 1.36, P > .05$ .

Table 2 multivariate analysis for aggression and self-esteem with respect to family contact and gender.

Source	Dependent variables	Type 111 sum of square	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Sig.
Contact	Agreesion	6.71	1	6.71	.02	.89
	Self-esteem	.32	1	.32	.02	.89
Gender	Aggression	85.77	1	85.77	.26	.61
	Self-esteem	84.04	1	84.04	4.44	.04
Contact & gender	Aggression	390.48	1	390.48	1.17	.28
	Self-esteem	4886.40	258	18.94		
Error	Aggression	86110.31	258	333.76		
	Self-esteem	165741.00	262			
Total	Aggression	2070028.00	262			
	Self-esteem	165741.00	262			

Street children who have contact with their families did not differ in aggression from those who do not at  $F(1,258) = .02, P > .05$ .

Street children who have contact with their families did not differ in self-esteem status from street children who do not at  $F(1,258) = .20, P > .05$ .

Male street children did not differ from female street children in their level of aggression at  $F(1,258) = .26, P > .05$ . Male street children differed from female street children in self-esteem status at  $F(1,258) = 4.44, P > .05$ .

### Summary of Findings

The findings of this study showed that street children differ from non-street children in level of aggression but did not differ from them in self-esteem status; that street children who have contact with their families did not differ in aggression level from those who did not; and both categories of street children did not differ in self-esteem status. The findings also showed that being male or female did not significantly influence the level of aggressive behavior of street children but significantly influenced their self-esteem status, with male street children showing higher self-esteem status than females.

### Discussion

The first hypothesis was accepted the result. The result is in agreement with the findings of Chukwuene and Igbokwe (2004), who found that street life predisposes children to a lot of psychological conflict, distress, and psychopathology, and also difficulty in keeping societal norms, with resultant delinquency, armed robbery, rape, violence, drug abuse and psychopathology. They also found that street children tend to exhibit aggression at little provocation. In the opinion of the researchers, the outcome of this result was based on the fact of street children's frequent exposure to aggressive antecedents while living on the street where survival of the fittest is the order; and exposure to all manner of persons and adverse conditions.

The second hypothesis was not accepted. The findings show that street life would not significantly influence self-esteem status of children. The study is not consistent with the findings of Aptekar(2004), who found low-self esteem, depression and hatred to be an attribute of street homeless children. This

findings of Olivera, Baiserman and Pallet(1992) who found several resilient characteristics, including a high degree of intelligence, a concern for each other, lack of drug abuse and good self-esteem. In the opinion of the researchers, the outcome could be attributed to the fact that both street and non-street children are part of the larger Nigerian culture that values self-importance and social grandiosity, which essentially could be achieved by whatever means the individual deems fit.

Hypothesis three was also rejected by the study. It implies that contact with family have no significant influence on level of aggression of street children. The result is not in agreement with the study of Trussell(1999), who found varying levels of distrust, hostility and aggression between street children and gangs. It is in keeping with the postulations of Freud (1938), who argued that aggression is part of human destiny and innate. In the researcher's opinion, the result turned out this way based on the reason that Nigerian society reinforces aggressive behaviors and tendencies as an acceptable norm.

In our daily lives, aggression manifests in all we do. The antecedents are numerous—intimidation and harassment by law enforcement agencies particularly the police, cultism, verbal abuse, and road rage by motorist, militancy, and terrorism—are all common experiences in Nigerian streets. The findings of the study did not accept the fourth hypothesis.

Street children who have contact with their families did not differ from those who do not in self-esteem status. The findings is also consistent with the study of Oliviera et al(1992), who found several resilient characteristics, including good self esteem among street children, but not in agreement with the findings of Aptekar(2004) who found low self-esteem, depression and hatred to be characteristics of street homeless children, in the opinion of the researchers, the outcome could be attributed to the fact that both category of street children are part of the larger Nigerian society has this orientation of not respecting and engendering positive values; rather negative values are usually entrenched and eulogized.

The society has derailed ethically to the level that those who achieve fame and honors through unethical behaviors and conducts are socially rewarded. also, those who are well educated are placed at-par with those rich men who made their money through unethical and dishonorable means. This position could have influenced the self-evaluation of the studied category of street children, as a result of their awareness that for most Nigerians, the end justifies the means. More importantly, it is plausible that those studied are yet to understand fully their vulnerabilities and future challenges because of their ages. The findings is also in conformity with that of Ajuku, Devries ,Arap-Mengech and Kaplan (2004), who found that street children remained remarkably well adjusted as individuals, with particular reference to temperament characteristics.

The fifth hypothesis was also not accepted. The result showed that being male or female did not significantly influence the level of aggressive behavior of the street children. This is in consonance with Freud (1938) who posited that aggression is part of human destiny and an innately generated instinctual drive that is inherent in human organism irrespective of gender. This could have influenced the outcome of this study. More importantly, there are very many models of violence and aggression in every part of the Country: kidnapping, violent bank robbery, Boko Haram insurgency, militancy in Niger delta, violent and dehumanizing rape cases, ethnic and communal strife, and general insecurity.

The sixth hypothesis was accepted. Male street children differed significantly from female street children in level of self-esteem status. This findings in the opinion of the researchers could be attributed to cultural factors prevalent in the setting (Eastern part of the Country), where the study was conducted. In this part of Nigeria, males dominate in outdoor events, are allowed greater latitude of behavior choices than females. This social stereotype may have influenced the outcome of the study.



Further to this quantitative findings, the analysis of information obtained from descriptive and qualitative observation, interview and focused group discussions revealed that no difference was observed due to family background and street life among street children; that the majority of the fathers of street children studied (83.2%) are of low status occupation. Furthermore, the findings also showed that street life will have social and psychological consequences. Majority of the street children reported being molested, bullied, cajoled, harassed, stigmatized and at times arrested by the members of the public or other security figures respectively. This form of labeling leads to stigmatization, which in turn may lead to low self-esteem. The outcome of the findings could be attributed to the type of environment where these children find themselves.

Findings from direct observation revealed that majority of the children are 16 years (32%); that “on the street” category of street children (those who have regular contact with their families) were more prevalent (67.6%). And also that “of the street” category (those who have no contact with their families) are also becoming prevalent (32.4%). The findings also showed that a significant number of the street children do not attend school (44.3%). That hawking is the most engaged activity on the street (49.6%). The data also revealed that parental lack of education or low level of education could have relationship with the incidence of street children in Nigeria. The data also showed that poverty and other economic considerations are among the principal motivating factors for parents and guardians to send their children out to the street.

This position was arrived at based on the fact that majority of street children studied have fathers and mothers whose occupation could be labeled “low status occupation”, with families that have large number of siblings (between 4 to 9 siblings). The study further revealed that majority of the children combines their education with their street work. However, some of the children working on the street leave school. Finally, among the street children studied, majority (77.9%) maintained regular contact with their families and 22.1% had no contact with their families. This picture is different from what is obtainable in some western and Asian cultures.

## Conclusion

Street children phenomenon in Nigeria is a problem that is undeniably complex and there are many causes. Obviously, this problem is related to wider problems such as poverty, lack of education, large number of members of the family, poor family functioning and societal changes. There are many similarities between the problems encountered by street children in Nigeria and those in other parts of the world. Although the majority of the street working children in Awka and Onitsha metropolis of Anambra state of Nigeria maintain contact with their families, the proportion of those who have no such contact with families and who adopt a life entirely on the streets should not be ignored. Since aggression has been found to be significantly predicted by street life, not gender, it is very likely that the current wave of crime in the Country is a function of increasing number of street persons.

## Recommendations

The researchers recommend that more studies be carried out on street children around Nigeria, especially in respect of variables such as traits, psychopathology, emotionality, resilience and trust-worthiness. Secondly, government at all tiers should facilitate the implementation of child's right act, especially in respect of education and policy makers should introduce policies that will focus on providing the needed redistribution of wealth among the citizens. Since this is an emerging problem, education and rehabilitation of existing street children should be considered urgently. Also public awareness on the effects of street life to the personality formation and development of street children is very important. Finally, programmes that will target the education of these children in their natural milieu should be initiated.

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