



Delinquency Among Street Children In OWO Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The Owo Metropolis has a unique social configuration rooted in ancient Owo culture, and a unique economic outlook tied to massive migrants' remittances, but the growing spread of street vagrants in the metropolis is gaining increasing public attention and concern. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to examine the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children. This is despite the fact that virtually all street children are seen to be involved in one form of economic engagement or the other. However, what engenders their increasing delinquency is empirically not known, and lacuna exists. To this end, to ascertain the causes of the increase of criminal activities among street vagrants becomes pertinent. The overriding objective of this study is to evaluate the delinquency of street children/vagrants in the Owo Metropolis. These specific objectives were to: examine the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children, ascertain the causes of the increase of delinquent activities among street vagrants, determine the level at which delinquent activities of street vagrants threatens societal security, and investigate the existence and nature of government's policy and programmes for street vagrants. For this study, the exploratory research design within the context of the one-shot or cross-sectional design proved to be ideal. The target population of this study comprised all male and female children in the street in the Owo Metropolis, who are between ages ten and seventeen, there are approximately 327 street children in the Owo Metropolis. A total of 21 interviewees, who were street children and members of the public participated in the collection of qualitative data. It

was found that the largest group of street children have been on the streets for 3 years, making up 29.2% of the respondents. The most common reason that led to living on the streets where is the lack of care from family members (41.7%) followed by the death of a parent (33.3%). A majority of the respondents, 54.2% believe that a street child can survive without stealing, and the majority (75%) of the respondents believed it is not possible to survive without begging. A majority of street children (58.3%) believe that other members of the society are afraid of them. A majority (75%) believe that the security threat they pose to society can be reduced. The government has policies for street children, but the implementation of these policies is poor. It is concluded that the street children are not content with their living situation and they likely face various challenges and hardships on a daily basis. The street children would like to leave the street and find a better life, and they do not view criminal behavior as acceptable or a normal part of daily life. It is recommended that in order to improve the prospects of street children, it is crucial for governments and other stakeholders to provide education and training opportunities for street children and create programs and policies to support their transition from the streets to a more secure and stable future.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vagrancy is a major contemporary social problem that the world faces, specifically in the third world countries (Sagbigsal, Mangubat, & Bretaña, 2019). According to statistics provided by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, there are 100 million homeless persons worldwide. Particularly in urban locations where there are many vagrants



present, this scenario becomes highly concerning. Vagrancy is the condition of a person going about as a gatherer or collector of alms or endeavouring to procure charitable contributions of any nature or kind, under any false or fraudulent pretence (Southern Africa Litigation Centre and Centre for Human Rights Education, Advice and Assistance, 2013). Also, vagrants are those who wandered idly from place to place without lawful or visible means of support and the transients as those who needed help to return to their homes (Aoki, 2013). The lowest socioeconomic group, those who depend on alms for their daily sustenance, those who suffer from hunger and cold, and those who are regarded as the poorest of the poor are those who are termed vagrants. Vagrants are, in addition labelled as deviant's street children, or children of the street.

Children and teens who are homeless or "children of the street" are a regular sight in many Nigerian big cities, particularly Lagos (Edewor, 2014). These youngsters live and work on the streets. They are unlike other street children (children in the street) who normally return home to sleep at night (Edewor, 2014; United Nations, 2020a). These street-dwelling children have wandered away from their primary residences or families of origin. The Almajirai can be found in Nigeria's northern cities. These kids are being used as street beggars by Islamic teachers. Northern Nigerian koranic education actually promotes this behaviour. In the cities of southern Nigeria, street vagrants abound, especially in the Owo Metropolis and their population and locations are soaring.

In Nigeria, the frequency of armed robberies has reached unprecedented heights undermining every facet of social life to the extent that people now live in fear in locked houses and apartments (Idemudia, 2017). In numerous urban centres, armed bandits break into homes and steal cars at gunpoint every hour. Armed robberies have evolved over time, becoming increasingly dramatic in type and pattern. In the 70s and 80s, armed robbers were usually aged above 40 years but now they are between 13 and 20 years (Adewale and Afolabi, 2013). The viciousness of their actions is unprecedented, leaving victims and their relatives with both short- and long-term psychological trauma (Idemudia, 2007). Many people think that homeless street kids are the ones who commit these acts. Street youths/children do engage in violent behaviours such as hired assassinations for political and other motives as well as gang warfare (Edewor, 2014).

One pressing societal issue that has received a lot of attention from social science academics is homelessness, especially among children and young

people. Several terms have been used to describe such children as 'throwaways', 'runaways', 'abandoned children', 'street children' (which has two variations 'children: in the streets' and 'children of the streets'), 'homeless children' and 'street youths' (Idemudia, 2017). Research has shown that street youths (usually between 14 and 30 years) who are completely homeless constitute the most dangerous segment of street dwellers due to their being involved in crimes and the socialisation of younger ones to criminality (Idemudia, 2007). The foregoing paragraphs thus provide the background upon which this study is built with the view to evaluate the causes of the proliferation of street vagrants and their increasing criminality in the Owo Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

An empirical observation of the body of literature on street vagrants or street children as the case may be indicates the subject matter was scantily researched in the distant past, and also in the recent times. Therefore, very small research efforts have expended to understand and evaluate the subject matter of street children/vagrants in Nigeria and in the Owo

Metropolis in particular. Consequently, a knowledge gap exists on the subject matter of street vagrants not only in Owo Metropolis but in Nigeria as a whole.

Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year, and UN-Habitat has noted an alarming rise in homelessness in the last 10 years (United Nations, 2020a). The age group that is most at risk of homelessness is young people. The UN Commission's decision acknowledges that a variety of different social and economic factors frequently force people into homelessness. The Owo Metropolis has a unique social configuration rooted in ancient Owo culture, and a unique economic outlook tied to massive migrants' remittances, but the growing spread of street vagrants in the metropolis is gaining increasing public attention and concern. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to examine the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children.

As a result of their involvement in delinquent activity as well as their ability to socialize younger children to delinquent behaviors, street kids (often between the ages of 14 and 30 years old) who are entirely destitute are considered to be the most dangerous sector of street vagrants (Edewor, 2014). Delinquency can play a big part in vagrants' lives; in a study nearly one third of the street vagrants studied



admitted to committing a "minor crime such as shoplifting or anti-social behaviour" in the hope of being taken into custody for the night (Ramesh, 2010). Anecdotal evidences abound about the nefarious interactions that street vagrants in the Owo Metropolis have other members of the metropolis and their propensity to take to crime and their actual involvement in delinquency is well known. This is despite the fact that virtually all street children are seen to be involved in one form of economic engagement or the other. However, what engenders their increasing delinquency is empirically not known, and lacuna exists. To this end, to ascertain the causes of the increase of criminal activities among street vagrants becomes pertinent.

Street children exist in many cities especially in developing countries and are subjected to lot of abuses, neglect exploitation and in extreme cases, organized murder arranged to eliminate them; they are also exposed to abduction for ritual killings meant for ritual sacrifices (Adewale & Afolabi, 2013; Aufseeser 2014a; Aufseeser 2014b; Aufseeser 2014c; Consortium for Street Children; 2019). Street The majority of the time, children experience physical and sexual abuse at the hands of society and the police, severe malnutrition, extreme hunger, health issues, substance abuse, theft, commercial sexual exploitation, and in many cases, social rejection as an unfit member of society, which may last the child their entire lives. Furthermore, part of the inherent assumption is that street children are mostly a problem of the global south (Aufseeser, 2017). It is a justifiable fact that ample research attention has been directed at what street vagrants can suffer while in the street, but little or no research attention has been given to the dangers that street children posed to other members of the society. Hence, a gap exists in the knowledge of the level of threat the criminal activities of street vagrants have on societal security in Owo Metropolis.

It is government constitutional obligation to guarantee that safety of lives and property are assured. This is the essence government is in place. The primary duty of government is to ensure that of lives of the citizens are protected and guaranteed under the law (Nigeria Constitution, 1999; Adeyemi & Agboluaje, 2019; United Nations, 2016). The 58th session of the UN Commission for Social Development held on 19th February, 2020, came up with resolution of the UN Commission for Social Development that all sectors within governments and societies should deliberately look into the issue of homelessness of children and the associated social ills (United Nations 2020a). The Commission recommended the resolution for adoption by the UN

Economic and Social Council later this year. Following the aforementioned obligations of the government, most especially, this study is partly premised on the understanding that governmental efforts are non-existence in the handling of the street vagrancy situation in the Owo Metropolis. Thus an investigation and evaluation of the existence and nature of government's policy and programmes for street vagrants becomes a crucial task.

Research Questions

Based on the identified gaps in knowledge regarding the issue of street children/vagrants in the Owo Metropolis, the following research questions are posed:

- i. What are the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children?
- ii. What are the causes of the increase of delinquent activities among street vagrants?

Objectives of the Study

The overriding objective of this study is to evaluate the delinquency of street children/vagrants in Owo Metropolis. However, a number of specific objectives are formulated to complement the main objectives. These specific objectives are:

- i. To examine the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children in Owo Metropolis.
- ii. To ascertain the causes of the increase of delinquent activities among street vagrants in Owo Metropolis.

II. Overview of Street Vagrant Children

As Adewale and Afolabi (2013) note, a few common accepted definitions of what describes the street children" phenomenon will lend a better understanding to what this world wide challenge is all about. Street children as a term is used to refer to "children who live on the streets of a city, deprived of family care and protection" (Adewale & Afolabi, 2013). It continues by stating that the majority of children on the streets are between the ages of 5 and 17. Street children are divided into two primary groups according to another widely used set of categories, which is frequently credited to Amnesty International:

- i. "Children on the street but are engaged in some kind of economic activity" including scavenging in dust buns, begging, engaging in some slave labour, carrying loads around markets, walking around residential estates to be hired to cut grasses or carry out all sorts of menial jobs. Most of them in this group "go home at the end of the day to contribute their earnings to their family." Some of them "attend



schools retain a sense of belonging to a family; as a result of the economic hardship experienced in the family, some of the children eventually opt to live permanently on the streets.”

ii. The second group is street “children who actively live on the street or in some self-determined place” outside the normal family environment. Some of them maintain casual and occasional ties with their family living independently and fending for themselves outside the family home.

The definition of street children as viewed by various schools of thought has generated diverse opinions and contexts tending towards increased confusion, however many development practitioners and policy makers have adopted UNICEF’s concept of “*street children*”. In the view of UNICEF, they are boys and girls under 18 for whom “*the street*” (including unoccupied dwellings and waste land) has become home and/or their source of habitation and livelihood, and who are inadequately protected, supervised or protected for (OHCHR 2012).

People may use a wide variety of words and terms in daily speech. Although the terms “street children,” “homeless children,” and “homeless youth” are sometimes used interchangeably, there are some distinctions. Not all homeless kids wind up on the streets, living in the open. Many people wind up sleeping in extremely unsuitable yet covert locations, such as on the floors of friends or strangers or in transitional housing like hostels. For instance, according to estimates from the homeless charity Shelter, up to 9,500 UK youngsters spent Christmas in a hostel or other type of temporary housing in 2018, frequently in a room with one family and sharing bathrooms and kitchens with strangers (Consortium for Street Children, 2019).

On the other hand, not every youngster that fits the description of a “street child” is homeless. They might live, work, or play on the streets, but they might eventually return to their parents’ or family’s bed for the night. Thus, Consortium for Street Children (2019) use the term ‘street children’ or ‘street-connected children’ to describe children who:

- i. Depend “on the streets to live and / or work, either on their own, or with other children or family members;” and
- ii. Have a “strong connection to public spaces (e.g. streets, markets, parks, bus or train stations) and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities.” This wider group includes “children who do not live or work on the street but regularly accompany other children or family members in the streets.”

Therefore, “street children” are kids who rely on the streets for their survival, whether they work, reside,

or have support systems there. They can also do any combination of these.

Prevalence of Street Children in some Selected Countries

According to Adewale and Afolabi (2023) the incidence of the number of street children in various countries of the world will partly be dependent among other factors on the state of the economy of the relative nations, the relative level of poverty and the impending standard of living of the people, the attitude of government to the welfare of the people, the level of peace and tranquility in the nation, the list below is a random sample of the outlook of the incidence of the number of street children in each of the listed nations which is a reflection of the level of development and the effect of poverty and the living standard of the people.

As it is now, Nigeria as a nation with an estimate of 7million “street children”, rank in a third position, with Russia among countries with the highest incidence of street children coming behind India (which is described as the home for the largest population of street children worldwide, estimated at 18million) (Adewale & Afolabi, 2023).

India 18million, Congo 250, 000, Russia 7million, Morocco 30,000, Nigeria 7million, Brazil 25, 000, Egypt 1.5million, Germany 20, 000, Pakistan 1.5million, Vietnam 8, 000, Philippines, 1.5million, Jamaica 6, 500, Kenya 250, 000-300,000

The Life of Street Children in Ethiopia

Urban poverty is closely related to the emergence of street children in Addis Abeba (and to a lesser extent in the other towns in Ethiopia). The majority of children are child workers who are on the street in order to contribute economically to the household; most of them still retain close contact with their families (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). This means that they return home every night to sleep. Over 80% of these children first became involved in street life in search of work, while another 10% first came to the streets to play or spend time with friends (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). The bulk of street kids in a community like Makele arrived there as a result of the ravages of war, famine, and drought. The majority of them later go on to work as street labourers.

On the streets they get involved in various petty occupations; the majority work as peddlers, others shoe shiners and others as carriers/messengers (35.2%, 19.4% and 19% respectively). (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). Over “two thirds of girls work as peddlers, while car washing. Taxi-



boy, shoe shining and carrying services are dominated by males. Some girls earn their living through prostituting.” To cope with “harshness of street life many of them use alcohol, glue and other drugs. Children on the streets (66%), attend school compared to 15% of children of the streets.” So the majority of children on the streets in Ethiopia attend school (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). The majority of children living on the streets continue to attend school despite their daily struggles. Their parents regret primarily that their children's schoolwork suffers as a result of the street life. However, the majority of street children are excluded from access to healthcare and educational institutions.

The main problem girls experience on the streets is rape and insecurity as about 12 out of the 32 girls interviewed in this study were raped (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). This may be in part due to the widespread belief among bar owners, street guys, and the general public that street girls are readily accessible for sex. Physical assault is the major form of abuse that street boys encounter. The study found that the majority of street boys were attacked frequently, largely by robbers (usually older street-boys) and sometimes police (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). They frequently steal from one another, with the bigger street boys often taking advantage of the younger boys. Violence is also widespread, primarily among young people who belong to gangs. When a member of a given gang is insulted or attacked, this often leads to a much larger dispute involving their gangs (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.).

Although delinquent gangs are not thought to be a serious issue in Ethiopia, the city of Addis Ababa's rapid job growth, family disintegration, and pervasive poverty are likely to increase the number of kids involved in theft and other minor crimes, which will aggravate the delinquency situation.

The Life of Street Children in Kenya

Kenyan street children's circumstances closely resemble those of Ethiopian street kids. The majority of children visible on the streets are boys; however, the number of female children is increasingly rapidly (New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). The boys who are commonly referred to as "parking boys" make a living by engaging in a variety of activities, such as garbage collection for sale, begging, pickpocketing, and helping drivers park. Typically, the only occupations the girls engage in to survive are prostitution and begging. A study on street girls in Nairobi found that close to 90 per cent of these girls came from households suffering from

physical and verbal abuse and alcoholism (Veale et al in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). More than half of the girls “originated from single-parent households in low income settlements” (Ochola in New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.).

Once on the streets, “some children stay in makeshift dwelling units popularly known as *chuom*” (New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). These are “usually located in dark alleys and backstreets. However, the majority of children come on the streets for some time and return back to their families in the evenings.” In the “*chuom*”, “street boys tend to take the responsibility for security of the girls by acting the role of husbands to them. They provide their wife with protection and make sure that they have sufficient food and medicines. The girls must in return accord the boys emotional and sexual favours.” This “marriage” is restricted to the “*chuoms*” (New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.).

According to New Zealand Digital Library (n.d.) Victimization by city police occurs frequently as well. For vagrancy or other minor offenses, the police detain street kids. They are typically brought before juvenile courts after being arrested, where sentences that require remand in juvenile facilities are frequently the norm. These kids still flee to the streets after being implicated, though.

The life of Street Children in Accra: the Case of Emmah

Based on the presentation in New Zealand Digital Library (n.d) publication, Emmah was born in Traboum, an Ashanti Region city about 20 miles north of Kumasi. He is a 12-year-old boy and the second child in a five-person family. His mother had six other kids from a previous union. Emmah stopped taking classes in primary four because his father was unable to afford the tuition. Additionally, because of teachers' harassment for unpaid tuition, he eventually developed a hate for school. Later, he departed for Accra with the idea of moving in with his brother, a mechanic. Unfortunately, he was unable to find his brother when he got to Accra. He eventually ended up sharing a home with other homeless children and adults at the train station. Their living quarters are cramped, their clothing is torn, and the floor serves as their bed here.

Emmah “started working as a rubbish collector at a fee of fifty cedis for each trip.” He has two friends who are doing similar work with him, and for their leisure, they play football at the beach, swim or go to watch a video (New Zealand Digital Library, n.d.). Emmah has run into danger on the streets before. He claims that his friend Macho asked him to go get a pair of pants for him. Little did he realise that



Macho did not actually own the clothes. He and Macho were both taken into custody as a result. Later, Emmah was freed, but his friend Macho, who had been brutally abused, was still being held. Emmah encounters harassment from the bigger males as another issue on the streets. When he refuses to do their shopping, they beat him. Additionally, Emmah has an extremely filthy wound on his leg that is left untreated. Regarding his future, Emmah hopes to join the military, work as a trader, or pursue any other profession that will pay well.

The life of Street Children in Lagos, Nigeria

Although the phenomenon of children living on the street is peculiarly an urban one in Nigeria, many of the children involved may originate from rural areas (UNICEF in Edewor 2014). It has been suggested that possible reasons for leaving home may include abuse, a desire for excitement or relief from oppressive home conditions but they may become vulnerable to all forms of abuse and hazards on the street (Edewor, 2014). They are most especially harmed by harsh physical conditions, violence and harassment, labour exploitation, absorption into criminal networks and denial of their right to receive an education that will equip them to achieve a better life (Richter in Edewor, 2014). Many of these street-dwelling children perform risky work, such as dodging traffic while selling goods to passing cars. While many are engaged in legitimate work, others choose or are pushed into illegal activities including engaging in crime and theft, commercial sex or drug trade or becoming drawn into organized begging (UNICEF in Edewor, 2014).

Causes of Increase of Delinquent Activities among Street Vagrants

Homelessness was one of the crudest manifestations of poverty, inequality and housing affordability challenges, and it affected people of all ages and of diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds across regions (United Nations, 2020). Homelessness was fueled by a number of structural factors, including rapid population growth, rapid urbanisation, rural poverty, persistent inequality, extreme weather patterns and natural disasters, armed conflict, and international terrorism. It was also influenced by other factors, such as climate change, armed conflict, and cross-border terrorism. Eviction, mental disorders, and drug and alcohol abuse were also among the leading causes of homelessness (United Nations, 2020).

Street kids and the associated gangs deal with many social groups on a regular basis. On the streets they mingle with taxi drivers, motorists, pedestrians, hawkers, city police, shop owners, business people, tourists, school children and others persons (New Zealand Digital Library, (n.d.)). These kids are seen as a nuisance by the broader public. Generally accepted preconceptions tend to link them to criminal activity, including robberies, car thefts, and pickpocketing. Although this does occur occasionally, it is incorrect to believe that all children living on the streets partake in these behaviours constantly. When such crimes happen, it is often because of opportunity rather than disposition (New Zealand Digital Library, (n.d.)). It goes without saying that extreme poverty and exile from society present opportunity for criminal activity. There is hardly much proof, nevertheless, that street kids purposefully or consciously plot illegal activity.

Table 2: Perceptions about Street Children

About their families:	About their futures:	About the children:
<input type="checkbox"/> They have been abandoned by their families; <input type="checkbox"/> They have been displaced because of ethnic conflicts; <input type="checkbox"/> They have been orphaned; <input type="checkbox"/> They have run away from home because of sexual abuse; <input type="checkbox"/> They are the result of the breakdown of family; <input type="checkbox"/> Their families have disintegrated because of poverty; <input type="checkbox"/> Their fathers are abusive alcoholics; <input type="checkbox"/> They come from mother- headed families; <input type="checkbox"/> They have no contact with their	<input type="checkbox"/> they will not survive to adulthood; <input type="checkbox"/> they cannot be rehabilitated; <input type="checkbox"/> they turn into terrorists and revolutionaries; <input type="checkbox"/> they are starving;	<input type="checkbox"/> they are thieves; <input type="checkbox"/> they are sick; <input type="checkbox"/> they perceive themselves as discriminated, hated; <input type="checkbox"/> they have no choice but to be prostitutes; <input type="checkbox"/> they are uncontrollably violent; <input type="checkbox"/> they have lost all ability to feel emotions such as love; <input type="checkbox"/> they do not know how to play; <input type="checkbox"/> they have no morals; <input type="checkbox"/> they are drug addicts; <input type="checkbox"/> they have AIDS.



families. <input type="checkbox"/> they will grow up to be criminals;		
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While much literature on street children presents them as victims in need of rescuing, another strand of thinking regards street children themselves as perpetrators of violence (Aufseeser, 2017). In order to highlight the dangers older children pose, a lot of this literature concentrates on them and employs distinct terminology. For example, articles will refer to street children as gang members, delinquents, or criminals instead of as children or will talk about the potential risk that children in the street face to become criminals (Aufseeser 2014c). Ursin (2011) discusses how, at some point, children transition from being seen as victims who need help to instead being seen as threats. Street kids are acutely aware of the various discourses surrounding their presence on the streets, which can exacerbate their marginalisation and resentment. Butler (2009) discovered that teenagers' repeated exposure to people who suspected they were criminals caused humiliation and occasionally "an acute experience of rejection, discrimination, and violence" in a study of street children in Brazil. In such regards, understandings of childhood constitute a form of symbolic violence that has material effects on children's well-being (Aufseeser, 2017). Symbolic violence "refers to assaults on human dignity, sense of worth, and one's existential groundedness in the world" (Scheper-Hughes 2004). In this case, as older children face more limited opportunities to earn money through informal vending or begging, they may be drawn to more criminal activities, such as robbing or assaulting, an assertion backed up by multiple studies of street children (Beazley 2003). While street children may in fact engage in violent or criminal acts, state responses to them are often disproportionately violent (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Children are frequently incarcerated or detained by police, despite posing no real danger to society (Pinheiro 2006; Aufseeser 2014a).

Views of street kids as violent offenders contrast sharply with those portraying them as victims in many ways. What these two strands of thinking have in common, however, is that they construct the street as a site of violence from which young people should be removed (Thomas de Benitez, 2011). Instead of addressing the more significant problems that street children experience on a daily basis, programmes frequently perceive them as a social problem. Although there is still a strong inclination in policy circles to see children as either victims or dangers, research shows that such a

binary bears little similarity to the lived experiences and individual identities of street children.

Level of Influence of the Delinquent Activities of Street Vagrants on threat to the Societal Security

It has been previously stated here in this research proposal that most studies on street vagrants have focused on what they suffered from the members of the public. And it has been stated in preceding sections that street vagrants could threaten social peace and society through their criminality. Reports on the effects of street vagrants' criminality on the public security was made by Odenyo (2017) in Kenyan newspaper. Odenyo (2017) reported that the recent upsurge of glue sniffing street children has made walking on certain streets in the city centre a nightmare. When using a phone, a handbag, or carrying food, it is even worse. The unruly youths pickpocket unwary people, harass shoppers for cash, and steal items. Residents of the city who spoke to Metropolitan claim that small-time criminals posing as street families have invaded Nairobi's streets, ending a period in which people felt safe even in alleys. They have invaded sections of Market Road, Kenyatta Avenue, Kimathi Street and Aga Khan Walk in the CBD, Ralph Bunche Road in Upper hill and Yaya Centre. (Odenyo, 2017). Both throughout the day and at night, the street lads are at work. Some of these so-called street families are really really small-time criminal gangs.

Differential Association Theory

Edwin Sutherland created the Differential Association Theory in 1939, and it was updated in 1947. It is now widely used and accepted in criminological circles. According to Sutherland (1947), criminal behaviour is learned in the same way as law-abiding values are learned, and that, this learning activity is accomplished, in interactions with others, through a process of communication within intimate groups. According to his argument, just as one can be socialised into good behaviour, the opposite is also true. Nine principles make up the differential association theory:

- i. Criminal behaviour is not inherited; it is learnt. This means that someone who has not been schooled in illegal behaviour will not come up with it, just like a young child will not be polite until they have been taught or socialised to do so. Courtesy for Boys and Girls captures perfectly what Sutherland intended to convey with this lesson.



- ii. Criminal behaviour is learned through speech and social contact. In many ways, this communication is vocal, but it also involves gesture communication, which is frequently referred to as non-verbal communication.
- iii. Learning takes place in small, face-to-face groups, according to Sutherland, who asserted that only such settings can have an effect on behaviour. As a result, he concentrated on peer or family groups as the most likely places where deviant values and behaviours are introduced. This indicates that impersonal media outlets like picture shows and newspapers have a minimal impact on the development of criminal behaviour.
- iv. When illegal behaviour is learned, it comprises (a) sometimes complex, sometimes very simple techniques for doing it; and (b) the specific direction of motivations and drives, justifications, and attitude.
- v. The descriptions of legal codes as favourable or unfavourable teach us the precise direction of motives and urges. This means that learning about criminal behaviour may be hindered if one's friends and family define the law as something to follow. This is incorrect.
- vi. Those that are more favourable to breaking the law than definitions that are unfavourable to breaking the law lead to someone becoming a criminal. The fundamental tenet of differential association theory is this. It supports the idea that both criminals and non-criminals can teach us definitions that are supportive of breaking the law. This principle has both positive and negative definitions of breaking the law that work against it.
- vii. The frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of differential association, or the propensity for criminality, vary. This indicates that the more frequently and intensively people are exposed to a set of attitudes concerning criminality, the more probable it is that they will become involved in the conflict.
- viii. The same principles used in all learning processes are used in the process of learning illegal behaviour. This suggests that the mechanisms used to learn criminal behaviour are the same as those used to learn moral principles and other socially useful abilities. The idea is that, despite the fact that what is learned has distinct substance, the process that leads to criminal behaviour is no different from that of other law-abiding behaviour.
- ix. The same needs and ideals are expressed in both criminal and non-criminal behaviour. In other words, criminals and law-abiding people typically have similar interests. What differs is the strategy they use to achieve this identical objective. For

instance, thieves typically steal to obtain cash. Honest workers also focus on the dollar amount when doing their work.

Differential Association Theory

Differential Association Theory was formulated by Edwin Sutherland in 1939 and revised in 1947; According to Sutherland (1947), criminal behaviour is learned in the same way as law-abiding values are learned, and that, this learning activity is accomplished, in interactions with others, through a process of communication within intimate groups. According to his argument, just as one can be socialised into good behaviour, the opposite is also true. Nine principles make up the differential association theory: Criminal behaviour is acquired through communication with members of a close-knit group. The learning of illegal behaviour involves the tactics for engaging in it, which can be occasionally difficult and other times extremely simple, as well as the precise direction of urges and motivations, justifications and attitudes. The descriptions of legal codes as favourable or unfavourable teach us the precise direction of motives and urges. Crime is committed because there are more definitions that support breaking the law than ones that do not. The same demands and ideals are expressed in criminal and non-criminal behaviour. In other words, criminals and law-abiding people typically have similar interests.

Research Design

For this investigation, the exploratory research design within the context of the one-shot or cross-sectional design proved to be ideal. The one-shot or cross-sectional research design requires gathering data from respondents just once. It guaranteed the formulation of a proper pattern for obtaining fundamental information on a specific occurrence in this research, as well as the provision of a chance to explain novel ideas and advocate for current ones related to the subject matter. Thus, both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to perform the exploratory and cross-sectional research design, which intrinsically allows for the selection of a sample of the study population. For the most part, qualitative approaches are designed to gain depth of knowledge, while quantitative methods are designed to obtain breadth of comprehension (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). Saturation (i.e., acquiring a full knowledge through sampling until no new substantive information is collected) is emphasised heavily in qualitative approaches.



Population of the Study

The target population of this study comprised all male and female children in the street in the Owo Metropolis, who are between ages ten and seventeen. For the purpose of this study, children in the street are operationalized and conceptualized as persons who are between age ten to seventeen who roam the streets homeless without any adult guardian taking responsibility for their wellbeing, upkeep and protection. The social organization of the street vagrants in the Owo Metropolis is highly volatile and irregular in nature. However, there are approximately

327 street children in the Owo Metropolis (Living Your Dream Initiative, 2022). Living Your Dream Initiative is an organisation that works in collaboration with the Edo State Ministry of Social Development and Gender Issues. The population of street vagrants is only applicable for the quantitative study. For the qualitative study, the population of the study comprise street vagrants in Owo. Selected members of the public, and the entire staff of the Edo State Ministry of Social Development and Gender Issues.

Table 1: Population Distribution of street children in Owo metropolis

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Females	130	40
Males	197	60
Total	327	100

Source: Living Your Dream Initiative, 2024.

Sample Size

Since it has been established that the entire population of street vagrants under investigation in the Owo Metropolis was 327, and the possibility that they might be reached conveniently due to their small population, a sample size for the collection of quantitative data is not calculated for this study. In the collection of qualitative data, and given that Owo Metropolis was made up of three local government areas, 4 street vagrants from each of the local government area were methodologically selected. Hence, a total of 12 interviewees, who were street children, participated in the qualitative study. To create balance and obtain reliable data on the threat that the actions of street vagrants pose to public security, three members of the public from each of the local government areas were selected. This gave a total 9 interviewees who were members of the public. Three officials of the Edo State Ministry of Social Development and Gender Issues were also sampled for the collection of data on the existence and nature of government's policy and programmes for street vagrants.

Sampling Technique and Sampling Procedure

Sampling procedures are designed to optimize efficiency and validity, regardless of whether the approach used is quantitative or qualitative (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). However, for the gathering of quantitative data, no sampling technique was used. Conversely, the purposive sampling technique was used in the gathering of qualitative data. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research strategy for identifying and selecting information-rich situations in order to make the most

efficient use of limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015). This entails locating and choosing people or groups of persons who are particularly educated or experienced about a topic of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, the chosen persons are available and have the desire to engage, and possess the capacity to explain, express, and reflect on experiences and ideas.

For a street vagrant to be eligible as a unit of analysis in this study and be involved in the data collection process, the following criteria were observed altogether:

Inclusion criteria

- Any street vagrant who is located in the Owo Metropolis.
- Any street vagrant who is between ages 10 and 17 years.
- Ability and willingness to give consent.

Exclusion criteria

- Any street vagrant who is not located in the Owo Metropolis.
- Any street vagrant who is not between ages 10 and 17 years.
- Inability and unwillingness to give consent.

In the gathering of qualitative data using the purposive sampling technique, any 4 interviewees from each local government area were selected. Hence, there were 12 street children interviewees from whom qualitative data were obtained, 9 members of the public interviewees from whom data on the threat street children's activities pose to public



security was obtained, and 3 interviewees from who are officials of Edo State Ministry of Social Development and Gender Issues.

Instrument of Data Collection

Basically, two research instruments of data collection were employed in this study to obtain the required quantitative and qualitative data. This was the questionnaire and semi-structure in-depth interview guide. Accordingly, the semi-structured in-depth interview guide were utilized to collect qualitative data from the purposively selected street vagrants. The questions contained in the in-depth interview guide were meant to acquire data on the substantive research issues such as the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children, the causes of the increase of criminal activities among street vagrants, level at which

criminal activities of street vagrants threatens societal security, and the existence and nature of government's policy and programmes for street vagrants.

III. Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained for this study was analyzed using frequency and percentage tables, charts, and inferential statistical techniques. The qualitative data gotten from the various in-depth interview sessions that were initially recorded was replayed and subsequently transcribed, and presented in the English Language format this study was expected to be written. The transcribed responses were then subjected to manual content analysis which involved the identification of recurring themes that were then be interpreted to support inferences.

Table Socio-demographic Characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency (n = 312)	Percentage
Age		
12 years	52	16.7
13 years	26	8.3
14 years	104	33.3
15 years	65	20.8
16 years	52	16.7
17 years	13	4.2
Gender		
Male	208	66.7
Female	104	33.3
Marital status		
Married	-	-
Never married	78	25.0
Divorced	-	-
Others	234	75.0
Highest educational qualification		
No formal education	143	45.8
Primary six certificate	143	45.8
Secondary school certificate	26	8.3
Religion		
Christian	299	95.8
Islam	13	4.2
Africa Traditional Religion	0	0
Have a sibling in the street		
Yes	52	16.7
No	260	83.3

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

Based on the given data, the majority of the street children who responded to the survey are 14 years old, accounting for 33.3% of the total respondents. The next largest group of respondents is 12 years old, accounting for 16.7%. The ages of the

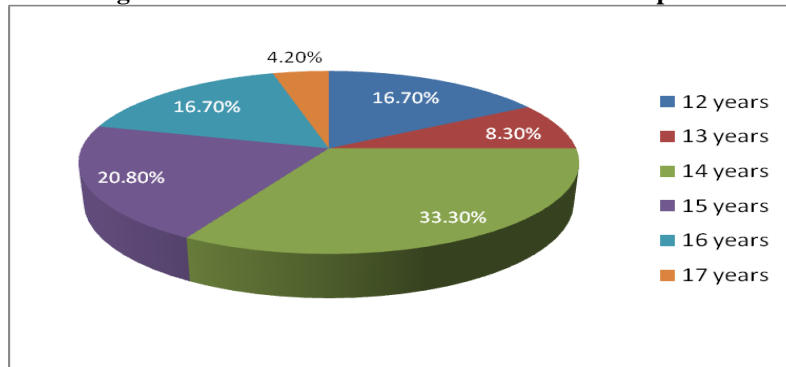
remaining respondents are distributed between 13, 15, 16, and 17 years old, with each group accounting for less than 17% of the total respondents. It can be inferred that the majority of street children are in their early teenage years, with the largest group being 14



years old. The lower number of respondents in the 17-year-old group suggests that street children are more likely to leave the streets as they grow older and enter adulthood. It is important to note that this data is only a sample and may not represent the entire

population of street children. Further studies with a larger sample size and comprehensive data collection methods would provide a more accurate picture of the age distribution of street children.

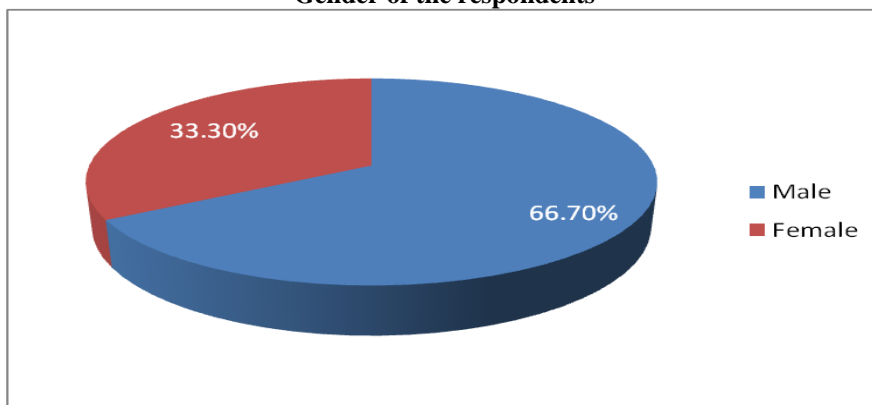
Age distribution of street children in Benn Metropolis



Based on the data provided, it can be observed that the number of male street children is more than the number of female street children. The number of male respondents is 208, which makes up 66.7% of the total number of respondents. Meanwhile, the number of female respondents is 104, which makes up 33.3% of the total number of respondents. This disparity between the number of male and female street children could be due to

various factors, including cultural and societal norms that may place more pressure on young boys to leave their homes and live on the streets. It could also be due to higher instances of sexual exploitation and trafficking among young girls, which could lead to them being removed from the streets or going into hiding. Additionally, gender-based violence and discrimination may also impact the number of female street children.

Gender of the respondents



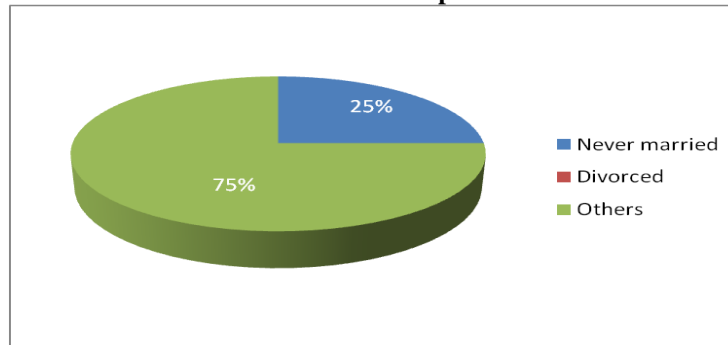
This data presents the marital status of respondents who are street children. There were a total of 312 respondents, out of which 78 (25%) stated that they have never been married, and 234 (75%) marked "Others." The category of "Others" could refer to a variety of different marital statuses, such as being widowed, separated, or in a common-law relationship. It's crucial to note that the categories of "Married" and "Divorced" are not present in the data, meaning that none of the respondents reported

being married or divorced. Given the high proportion of respondents who marked "Others," it's possible that many street children have complex and diverse family situations, which may not fit neatly into conventional categories of marital status. Additionally, it's essential to consider the socio-economic context of street children, who often face significant challenges and hardships, including poverty, homelessness, and lack of access to education and healthcare. In this context, it may not



be surprising that many street children have not married or have had disrupted family structures.

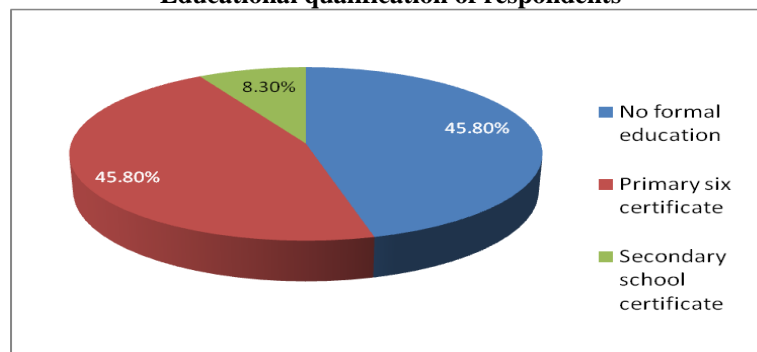
Marital status of respondents



Based on the data provided, the majority of the respondents who are street children have either no formal education (45.8%) or have completed primary six certificate (45.8%). This suggests that a significant proportion of street children in this sample have not had the opportunity to continue their education beyond the primary level. On the other hand, a small proportion of respondents (8.3%) have completed secondary school, indicating that some street children are able to access and complete

secondary education despite their circumstances. It is important to note that the lack of formal education can have significant implications for the future prospects and well-being of street children. Education is a key factor in determining the opportunities and resources available to individuals, and a lack of education can limit the ability of street children to access employment, earn a living wage, and achieve financial stability.

Educational qualification of respondents

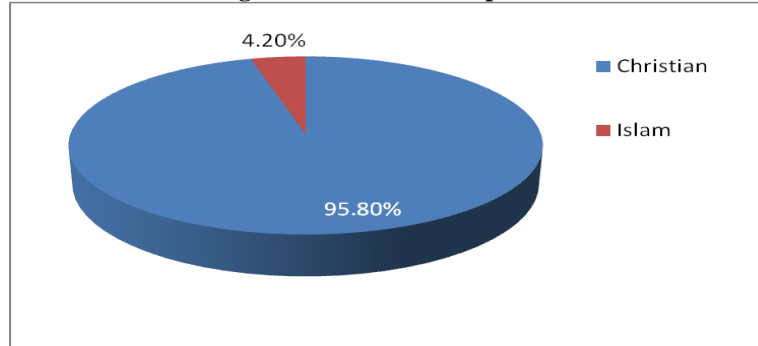


Based on the data, it appears that the majority (95.8%) of the street children surveyed identify as Christian, while a small minority (4.2%) identify as Muslim. No respondents identify as followers of African Traditional Religion. It is important to note that the religious affiliation of street children can vary greatly depending on their cultural background, personal beliefs, and exposure to different religions. The fact that the majority of street children surveyed identify as Christian could be due to the prevalence of Christianity in the region where they live, or perhaps they were influenced by the Christian community they interacted with. The small

number of street children who identify as Muslim could indicate that they come from a family or community where Islam is practiced, or they may have converted to Islam for personal reasons. The absence of respondents who identify as followers of African Traditional Religion suggests that this religion may not be as widely practiced or recognized among street children in the region. The religious affiliation of street children can provide insight into their cultural background and personal beliefs, but it is important to remember that religious identity is complex and multifaceted, and cannot be reduced to simple statistics.



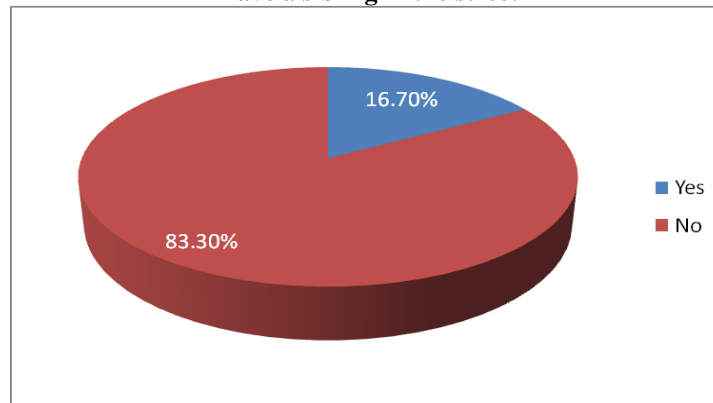
Religious affiliation of respondents



The given data is a summary of the responses of street children regarding the question of whether they have a sibling in the street. Out of 312 respondents, 52 (16.7%) answered "Yes" and 260 (83.3%) answered "No". The data indicates that a relatively small percentage of street children have a sibling also living on the streets. This suggests that street life may not be a common experience for siblings, and that the majority of street children come from families where only one member is forced to

live on the streets. It is important to consider the factors that may have led these children to end up on the streets and whether having a sibling present would make a significant impact on their situation. Access to resources, support networks, and safety may be affected by having a sibling present, and this should be explored in further research to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of street children.

Have a sibling in the street



Factors Responsible for Proliferation of Street Vagrant or Children

Table Length of time on the streets

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Length of time on the streets		
2 years	65	20.8
3 years	91	29.2
4 years	65	20.8
5 years	52	16.7
6 years	13	4.2
7 years	26	8.3
Total	312	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

The data shows that the largest group of street children have been on the streets for 3 years,

making up 29.2% of the respondents. The second largest group has been on the streets for 2 years,



making up 20.8% of the respondents. The next two largest groups have been on the street for 4 years (20.8%) and 5 years (16.7%) respectively. The group with the smallest percentage of respondents have been on the street for 6 years (4.2%). Finally, 8.3% of the respondents have been on the street for 7 years. This data provides valuable insights into the experiences of street children and the length of time they have been living on the streets. It highlights that a significant portion of these children have been living on the streets for an extended period, with some having been living in these conditions for over 5 years.

IV. Discussion of Findings

Objective one of this study was to examine the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children in Owo Metropolis. The data in Table 4.2 shows that the largest group of street children have been on the streets for 3 years, making up 29.2% of the respondents. The second largest group has been on the streets for 2 years, making up 20.8% of the respondents. The next two largest groups have been on the street for 4 years (20.8%) and 5 years (16.7%) respectively. The group with the smallest percentage of respondents have been on the street for 6 years (4.2%). Finally, 8.3% of the respondents have been on the street for 7 years. This data provides valuable insights into the experiences of street children and the length of time they have been living on the streets. It highlights that a significant portion of these children have been living on the streets for an extended period, with some having been living in these conditions for over 5 years. This indicates that they are in a vulnerable and potentially dangerous situation, as they have been exposed to the risks and hardships of street life for a prolonged period. Furthermore, the data suggests that there may be some consistency in the reasons why children end up on the streets. If a large portion of children have been living on the streets for an extended period, it is likely that there are ongoing underlying issues that are not being addressed. This could include poverty, neglect, abuse, or family breakdown.

The responses of the respondents who are street children on how living in the streets started reveals some important insights into the reasons behind the phenomenon of street children. It is evident from the data that the most common reason for children to start living in the streets is due to the lack of care from family members (41.7%). This suggests that many street children come from families that are struggling to provide for them, or that have abandoned them. The death of a parent is

another major reason why children end up on the streets, with 33.3% of respondents reporting this as the cause. The loss of a parent can be devastating for a child, especially if they are the sole breadwinner in the family. This could lead to the child being forced to fend for themselves, or being taken in by another family member who may not be able or willing to provide for them. The data also reveals that a small percentage of street children started living on the streets due to peer pressure (4.2%) or personal desire (16.7%). These respondents may have chosen to leave their homes for a variety of reasons, such as a desire for freedom or a sense of adventure. It is also possible that they were influenced by their friends or by societal pressures to pursue a life on the streets. The disownment of a child by their family is a lesser but still significant reason why children end up on the streets, with 4.2% of respondents reporting this as the cause. This could be due to a variety of reasons, including financial difficulties, abuse, or conflict within the family. In these cases, the child may have no other options but to leave their home and try to survive on the streets. The data reveals that there are several reasons why children end up living on the streets. The lack of care from family members is the most common reason, followed by the death of a parent and disownment by the family. Peer pressure and personal desire are also contributing factors, although to a lesser extent. These findings highlight the need for support systems and resources to be put in place to help prevent children from ending up on the streets and to support those who do.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

An empirical observation of the body of literature on street vagrants or street children as the case may be indicates the subject matter was scantily researched in the distant past, and also in the recent times. Therefore, very small research efforts have expended to understand and evaluate the subject matter of street children/vagrants in Nigeria and in the Owo Metropolis in particular. Consequently, a knowledge gap exists on the subject matter of street vagrants not only in Owo Metropolis but in Nigeria as a whole. Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year, and UN-Habitat has noted an alarming rise in homelessness in the last 10 years (United Nations, 2020a). The age group that is most at risk of homelessness is young people. The UN Commission's decision acknowledges that a variety of different social and economic factors frequently force people into homelessness. The Owo Metropolis has a unique social configuration rooted in ancient Owo culture,



and a unique economic outlook tied to massive migrants' remittances, but the growing spread of street vagrants in the metropolis is gaining increasing public attention and concern. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to examine the factors responsible for proliferation of street vagrant or children.

As a result of their involvement in delinquent activity as well as their ability to socialize younger children to delinquent behaviors, street kids (often between the ages of 14 and 30 years old) who are entirely destitute are considered to be the most dangerous sector of street vagrants (Edewor, 2014). Delinquency can play a big part in vagrants' lives; in a study nearly one third of the street vagrants studied admitted to committing a "minor crime such as shoplifting or anti-social behaviour" in the hope of being taken into custody for the night (Ramesh, 2010). Anecdotal evidences abound about the nefarious interactions that street vagrants in the Owo Metropolis have other members of the metropolis and their propensity to take to crime and their actual involvement in delinquency is well known. This is despite the fact that virtually all street children are seen to be involved in one form of economic engagement or the other. However, what engenders their increasing delinquency is empirically not known, and lacuna exists. To this end, to ascertain the causes of the increase of criminal activities among street vagrants becomes pertinent.

Street children exist in many cities especially in developing countries and are subjected to lot of abuses, neglect exploitation and in extreme cases, organized murder arranged to eliminate them; they are also exposed to abduction for ritual killings meant for ritual sacrifices. Street The majority of the time, children experience physical and sexual abuse at the hands of society and the police, severe malnutrition, extreme hunger, health issues, substance abuse, theft, commercial sexual exploitation, and in many cases, social rejection as an unfit member of society, which may last the child their entire lives. Furthermore, part of the inherent assumption is that street children are mostly a problem of the global south (Aufseeser, 2017). It is a justifiable fact that ample research attention has been directed at what street vagrants can suffer while in the street, but little or no research attention has been given to the dangers that street children posed to other members of the society. Hence, a gap exists in the knowledge of the level of threat the criminal activities of street vagrants have on societal security in Owo Metropolis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study the following are recommended to in addressing the issues of street children:

- i. In order to improve the prospects of street children, it is crucial for governments and other stakeholders to provide education and training opportunities for street children and create programs and policies to support their transition from the streets to a more secure and stable future.
- ii. Addressing the root causes of child homelessness and providing practical solutions for those currently living on the streets should be a priority for policymakers and advocates.
- iii. All stakeholders should endeavour to provide street children them with access to education, healthcare, and safe and secure housing. By addressing these needs, we can help to ensure that children are protected and given the opportunity to lead healthy and productive lives.

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