

Research article

THE FORMS AND INCIDENCES OF MENIAL AND HAZARDOUS ACTIVITIES AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTH – CASE REPORTS FROM THE SOUTH WEST

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Abstract

The study examines the behavioural consequences of menial and hazardous economic activities on the future generation of Nigerian youth. A non –randomized sample of 364 respondents spreading across four occupational groups were taken for the purpose of the research employing the questionnaire as the major research instrument. Findings revealed poverty, unemployment, ignorance and corruption as major causes of youth engagement in all sorts of economic activities which are apt to have an operational value on their future development. It was however suggested the provision of major infrastructural facilities and employment coupled with compulsory education as antidote to youth continuous involvement in demeaning works and a re-orientation into the mainstream of economic activities. **Copyright © AJSSAL, all rights reserved.**

Key Words: Okada Ridders, Human Trafficking, Prostitution, Road Menders, Waste Scavenger, Boko Haram.

INTRODUCTION

In it's over fifty years of Independence, Nigeria as a nation with the largest population in Sahara Africa still finds difficulty standing tall in the Committee of nations. This is because the country has been bedeviled by a lot of social vices such as kidnapping and of recent suicide bombing tagged 'Boko-Haram'. This embarrassing situation has further caused the nation a demean status the world over.

The above is uncalled for given the enormous potentials the country parades both interms of its human and natural resources. Nigeria is richly blessed with an estimated land of 924,768 square kilometres which house its rich cultures from over 250 ethnic groups, each of which could boast of at least one mineral/natural resources from such list as, zinc, bitumen, marble, gold, uranium, iron oil, graphite, lead, salt, columbite, germstone, kaolin, natural gas, crude oil etc. (National Planning Commission 2004). The nations arable land covers over 74 million hectares of land. Unfortunately, many of these resources have yet to be tapped. The nation's bitumen credited to be the second largest in the world remains largely untapped (National Planning Committee 2004, Olufayo 2008, 2010). So were very many natural resources that could have turned the economy around.

It therefore turns out that the Country's burden was largely dependent on crude oil and in recent times natural gas. The country is said to have a gas reserve of 174 trillion cubic feet and on daily basis producing over two million (2 million) barrels of oil. The over reliance on oil to the neglect of other resources has dealt a serious blow on the economy which could no longer sustain its teeming population of 158,423.182 people/inhabitants with an annual growth rate of 2.5% (ruralpovertyportal.org/2010). The labour market is saturated with a total Labour force of 49,646.411. As at 2009, only 34.7% of its total labour force were female (UNDP: 2010). With a crude birth rate of 40.1% per 1000 people, the rate of unemployment continues to rise sharply. This when compared to the level of social and infrastructural facilities spells doom for the present and the future generation of the country. Omotola (2008) in Oshewolo (2010) confirms this when he said that over 70% of the people live in abject penury. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2010) revealed the percentage of the core poor in Nigeria as 29.3% majority of whom dwells in the rural areas, with a rural population of 79,528,437.4 people.

Infant Mortality rate per 1000 live birth stood at 88.4% while mortality rate of the under 5 years declined from 191 per 1000live birth in 2006 to 142.9% per 1000 in 2009 (CIA 2009). This is still alarming when compared to situations in other African Countries of Togo with 100 per 1000 and South Africa with 69 per 1000 live birth. Well above 70% of the population live on below one U.S. dollar (\$1) per day (Earth Trends 2003), learning an alarming majority of children under 5 years (27%) underfed (malnourished) (CIA 2009).

The percentage of people having access to physicians remains below 30%. Infact, it is recorded as a physician per 1000 people (www.ruralpovertyportal.org). No wonder why life expectancy at birth is 50.9% of the total population (Garba 2006, UNDP 2010). The implications of the above for the country is unemployment and galloping poverty moreso with primary school enrolment of 83.3% compounded by over one hundred and seventeen 117 universities littering the streets of the Federation without adequate planning.

The dire consequences of this is unemployment and mass retrenchment of workers. The World Bank data on poverty in Nigeria as at 2010 reveals the population of 158,423,182 as unmatched for its GNI per capital of \$1,180 (www.data.worldbank.org/country/Nig). A large proportion of the labour force are either unemployed, underemployed or unemployable.

Given the present state of economic doldrum, the youth could be said to be contending with a risky future. With these life challenges, they are exposed to all sorts of vices as gangsterism, kidnapping business, human trafficking, prostitution etc. Others that would seek a moderate means of survival go into such trade as, waste scavenging, Road mending, Okada (motorcyclist-commercial) riders, mobile phone vendors, commercial wheel barrow traders (alaaru or meload) street hawking etc.

The youth no doubt engage in all these out of frustration as many of them are made to care for large families (Olufayo; 2005). In the face of unemployment, females are made to engage in acts which diminish their self-respect (e.g. Prostitution call it 'corporate prostitution) in an era of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Some females as well as the male go for odd jobs which endanger their lives. Youth unemployment has been

defined as a situation where able bodies men and women especially those within ages 15 and 24 are without legitimate means of income even when they are available and seeking employment (www.tradingeconomics.com).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The question then arises as to where lies the future of these young kids who are suffering the misdeeds of their past and present leaders and where lies the future of the Nigerian Society in a global world of competitiveness. Other questions emanating from the above is what is the rationale behind the youth involvement in this hazardous activities?, what is the societal perception of those engaged in them?, what consequences have these kind of economic activities on the individual as well on the society at large, what governmental policies are put in place to correct these anomalies all in the name of self-employment and what solution do we have in sight to youth unemployment in the country.

STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

It is against this background that the study seeks to examine the consequences of menial and hazardous economic activities among Nigerian youth. Following from the above, the study also seeks the following objectives.

- 1) Highlight the factors accounting for the involvement of Nigerian youth in risky and hazardous activities.
- 2) Knowing the societal perception of menial jobs as well as those involved in them.
- 3) Revealing the consequences of these forms of hazardous economic activities on both the individual and the general populace.
- 4) Pinpointing the governmental policies aimed at reversing this ugly trends and
- 5) Propffering solutions to the problem of youth unemployment in the country.

METHODS

A sample of 364 respondents were taken in a non-randomized fashion from the four groups of people/occupations identified viz: waste scavengers, Road menders, commercial wheel barrow load carriers popularly referred to as 'Alaaru' or 'Me-load' and the roadside communication service providers. The major sampling technique is accidental or availability sampling. This method appears the easiest way of reaching to the respondents as none of them ever want to be identified with their professions neither do they operate under a single umbrella or trade union. It is tagged business of circumstances.

The questionnaire was the major research instrument employed. The four part questionnaire were distributed to the respondents at their various sites which serve as the research locations. For this reason, a uniform member of each of the four occupational groups could not be taken. Table one below provided the details about the distribution.

Each of the sections in the questionnaire sought specific answers from the respondents many of whom were assisted in the interpretation of the questionnaire content due to language barrier or proficiency in English, the language of communication. This was done with the help of research assistants who understood the dialect of the respondents. Section one of the questionnaire sought information on the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents while the second section addressed the reasons for the involvement of the youth in this type of economic activities. The third section focused on the hazardous nature as well as the consequences of this forms of business while the last section also sought solutions to the menace posed by this ugly trade among our teeming population of youth. The unstructured questionnaire was complimented with the interview method.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution among Occupational Groups

Occupational Groups	N	%
Waste Scavengers	88	24.00
Road Menders	83	23.00
Wheel Barrow Load Carriers	91	25.00
Telecommunication Service Providers	102	28.00
Total	364	100.00

MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Findings from the study revealed that the male respondent (53%) were slightly more than the female population (47%) in the study. This no doubt could be attributed to the fact that the male child do quickly assert himself than the female who by nature is tender. Of significance are those within ages 16 and 30 years (54%). About one quarter (24%) of the study population are also below fifteen. This is alarming as it reveals that most youth who are suppose to go to school are not actually in school. This confirms the World Bank report that primary school enrolment is on the decrease (www.data.worldbank.org/country/Nig).

It is no surprise that about two-third (66%) were single since the study concentrated mainly on the youthful population. Another striking discovery is the population of literate people who are unemployed, underemployed or unemployable (68%). This again revealed the level of unemployment in the country as very high (www.ruralpovertyportal.org). Findings also showed that the preponderant of Christians in the population does not mean that they are the worst hit rather than the study was conducted in a typical Yoruba speaking area which is a majorly Christian community.

One factor which has been a major cause of poverty in Africa is our polygamous type of marriage. This study confirmed this as an overwhelming majority (93%) of the respondents came from large families which the family purse could not adequately cater for. Not less than half (50%) of the total population report being the fifth child and even sixth children of their parent. This is rather strange to the western culture where two children are considered very moderate for an ideal family.

It is also significant to note that a negligible proportion of the respondent (9%) earn above a monthly income of ₦20,000.00. Others earn less. Infant a little above one-fifth (23%) earn as low as ₦5,000 a month (about \$20 dollars). Majority of these people have as many as 4 dependants (86%). Garba (2006) was highlighting this when making comparison between Nigeria per capital income and the rest of the world saying it was one of the poorest and this no doubt tells on the country's life expectancy. Available statistics also revealed Nigeria poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line as 54.7% as at year 2004 (www.data.worldbank.org and www.tradingeconomics.com).

PERCEPTION OF MENIAL AND HAZARDOUS JOBS

Four of such hazardous economic activities were identified in this study namely, waste scavenging, Road mending, wheel barrow load carriers and telecommunication retail service providers. Opinions were similar in the responses of people about their feelings concerning the job in three of the occupations. While those in the first three occupations see the job as bad (47%, 36% and 36% respectively) those in the telecom service (65%) see theirs differently. The reason is not far fetched as it involves sitting on a spot under a shade (umbrella) while making cool money, its exposure to danger of oncoming vehicles and the scorch sun or rainfall or windfall notwithstanding. These people also believed that their chosen occupation is rewarding (85%). Quite a reasonable proportion of the scavengers (47.7%) as well as 36% road menders and 36% of those in the wheel barrow trade vociferously rejected the claim that the trade is good. Infact one of them, in an interview corroborated this view when he said:

*I am only in the business to keep
body and soul together. I cannot
steal and man must wack.*

(Male, Road mender, 24 years old).

The above again aptly summarized their involvement in the un lucrative businesses. Unemployment was reported by a clear majority as the chief reason why they dabble into the business. 68% scavengers and 78% roadmenders were of this view. A telecom retailer has this to say:

*After schooling and a certificate without a job,
what do you expect I do if I must make ends
meet moreso when my parent are so poor they
cannot afford a second degree for me.*

(Lady, telecom retailer, 25 years old)

THE HAZARDS ON THE JOB AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Majority respondents in all the four economic activities were unequivocal that their work are very hazardous. This was attested to by 69.5% scavengers, 73% road menders, 46% wheelbarrow carriers and an approximate 60% telecom retailers. The hazardous nature of these businesses has caused them a lot interms of their health status. 77% road menders and 62% scavengers reported fallen sick on the job due to health risk being confronted on the job. To compound the situation, they hardly have access to medi-care. This was reported by 64% scavengers and about 70% road menders. Only about one-third (32%) of service retailers admitted their access to medi-care as at when due. The figures therefore confirms (both Olufayo and Omotosho, 2009) and the report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP (2010) that the people access to physician per 1000 population is only 0.4% while the total health expenditure (% of GDP) as at 2009 is 5.8%. This to say the least is bewildering of a nation propagating health for all by the year 2020.

It was however suggested that employment on a large scale (92% service retailers, 56% scavengers and 38.8% road menders is the only antidote to the involvement of youth in this poverty induced activities. It was also agreed upon that compulsory education of youth and vocational training are also ways out of this economic doldrums (see appendix 4).

CONCLUSION

Poverty as a major scourge in Nigeria has come to be accepted as a way of life. This is inspite of the fact that the nation remains an economic giant in Africa whose foreign earnings derived mostly from crude oil. It is sad that development in the country is not commensurable with the wealth of the nation due to misplacement of priorities, misappropriation of funds and corruption. This has dealt a devastating blow on the progressive development of the youth regarded as the nation's future leaders. It is therefore suggested that efforts should be geared towards ensuring a better future for these teeming population of youth through the creation of employment, and the provision of infrastructural facilities to re-orientate them into the mainstream of economic activities in Nigeria.

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Appendix 1

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondent (In-percentages)

Variables		N = 364	%
Sex:	Male	194	53.3
	Female	170	46.7
Age:	Below 15 years	86	23.6
	16 – 25 yrs	90	24.7
	25 – 30 yrs	105	28.8
	30+	83	22.8
Marital Status	Single	241	66.2
	Married	113	31.0
	Divorce	08	2.2
	Separated	02	0.5
Educational Level	No Schooling	39	10.7
	Up to Secondary		
	School	78	21.4
	NCE/OND	143	39.3
	Tertiary	104	28.5
Religion	Christianity	220	60.4
	Islamic	73	20.1
	Freethinker	62	17.0
	Others	09	2.5
Family Type	Polygamous	337	92.6
	Monogamous	27	7.4
	Others	-	-
Position Among Father's Children			
	1 st Child	13	3.6

	2 nd Child		48		13.2
	3 rd Child		64		17.6
	4 th Child	55		15.1	
	5 th Child		110		30.2
	5 th and above		74		20.3
Approximate Income (Monthly)					
	Below ₦5,000		85		23.4
	₦5,000 – ₦10,000		141		38.7
	₦10,000 – ₦15,000		69		19.0
	₦5,000 – ₦20,000		37		10.2
	₦20,000+		32		8.8
No. of Dependants					
	None		26		7.1
	1 – 2		69		19.0
	3 – 4		218		60.0
	5 – 6		30		8.2
	6+		21		5.8
Years spent so far on the Job					
	1-2 years		146		40.1
	3-4 years		94		25.8
	5 years+	101		27.7	
			21		5.8
Ethnic Group					
	Yoruba		216		59.3
	Hausa		57		15.7
	Igbo		80		22.0
	Others		11		3.0

Appendix 2

Table 2: Perception of Menial and Hazardous Jobs (In percentages)

Feelings about the Job	Scavenging N = 88	Road Mending N = 83	Wheel Barrow N = 91	Telecommunication N = 102
Good	11 (12.5)	27 (32.5)	29 (31.9)	66 (64.7)
Fair	22 (25)	18 (22.0)	19 (20.9)	24 (23.5)
Bad	42 (47.7)	30 (36.1)	33 (36.3)	10(9.8)
Indifferent	13 (14.8)	08 (9.6)	10(10.9)	02 (2.0)
How Financially Rewarding is the Job				
Very Rewarding				
Rewarding	16 (18.8)	14 (16.8)	27 (29.7)	24 (23.5)
Fairly Rewarding	09 (10.2)	12 (14.5)	18 (19.8)	18 (17.6)
Not Rewarding	11 (12.5)	07 (8.4)	14 (15.4)	43 (12.7)
Indifferent	42 (47.7)	48 (57.8)	29 (31.9)	17 (16.7)
	10 (11.4)	02 (2.4)	03 (3.2)	-
Reasons for Involvement				
Unemployment	60 (68.2)	65 (78.3)	84 (92.3)	57 (55.9)
For the fun of it	02 (2.3)	-	-	03 (2.9)
As supplement to wages				
Others	20 (22.7)	15 (18.1)	-	31 (30.9)
	06 (6.8)	03 (3.6)	07 (7.7)	11 (10.5)
Peoples Attitude towards them				
Favourable	23 (26.1)	58 (70.0)	41 (45.1)	79 (77.5)
Unfavourable	61 (69.3)	16 (19.3)	43 (47.3)	16 (15.7)
Indifferent	04 (4.5)	09 (10.8)	07(7.6)	07 (6.8)
Feeling about Self in the Job				
Very happy	08 (9.1)	14 (16.9)	27 (29.7)	30 (29.4)
Happy	11 (12.5)	15(18.1)	13(14.3)	22 (21.6)
Not Happy	46 (52.3)	34 (41.0)	16 (17.6)	11 (10.8)
Very Bad	21 (23.9)	19 (22.9)	17(18.7)	28 (27.5)
Indifferent	02 (2.2)	01 (1.2)	18 (19.7)	11 (10.7)

Appendix 3

Table 3: Hazards on the Job (In Percentages)

Variable	Scavenging N = 82	Road Mending N = 82	Wheel Barrow N = 87	Telecommunication N = 99
Very Hazardous	57 (69.5)	60 (73.2)	40 (46.0)	59 (59.0)
Hazardous	33 ((26.8)	08 (9.8)	16 (18.4)	12 (12.4)
Sometimes Hazardous				
Not Hazardous	03 (3.7)	14 (17.0)	13 (15.0)	18 (18.2)
	-	-	18 (20.6)	10 (10.1)
Ever been sick dues to the Job nature	N = 82	N = 82	N = 87	N = 100
Yes	51 (62.2)	63 (76.8)	40 (46.0)	43(43)
No	21 (25.6)	14 (17.1)	31 (35.6)	44 (44)
Indifferent	10(12.2)	08 (9.8)	16 (18.4)	13 (13)
Access to Medi-care	N = 66	N = 79	N =68	N = 81
Quite Often	08 (12.1)	11 (14.0)	10 (14.7)	31 (32.3)
Often	16 (24.2)	13 (16.5)	08 (11.8)	28(35.0)
Not Often	33 (50.0)	40 (50.6)	32 (47.1)	16 (20.0)
Not at all	09 (13.6)	15 (18.9)	18 (26.4)	06 (7.4)
Ever used any form of Protection	N = 81	N = 80	N = 87	N = 100
Yes	31 (38.3)	15 (18.8)	12 (13.8)	86 (86.0)
No	50 (61.7)	52 (65.0)	63 (72.4)	04 (4.0)
Indifferent	-	03 (3.8)	12 (13.8)	10(10.0)
Possible Effect on those Involved	N = 82	N = 81	N = 83	N = 94
Sickness	45 (54.9)	28 (34.5)	35 (42.2)	90 (74.5)
Physical Injury	31 (37.5)	22 (27.2)	22 (26.5)	12 (12.8)
Death	06 (7.3)	31 (38.3)	17 (20.5)	22 (23.9)
Others	-	-	09 (10.8)	02 (2.1)

Appendix 4

Table 4: On Ways of Improving the Economic Activities (In Percentages)

Variables	Scavenging N = 66	Road Mending N = 71	Wheel Barrow N = 76	Telecommunication N = 87
Any known Governmental Policies on the trade				
Existing	03 (3.0)	-	-	-
Not Existing	60 (90.9)	71 (100.0)	67 (88.2)	81 (93.1)
Indifferent	04 (60.1)	-	09 (11.8)	06 (6.9)
Any suggestion for improvement	N = 82	N = 80	N = 88	N = 94
Employment Compulsory	46 (56.1)	31 (38.8)	23 (26.1)	86 (91.5)
Education of Youth	12 (14.6)	21 (26.2)	30 (34.1)	06 (6.4)
Vocational Training	20 (24.4)	18 (22.5)	32 (36.4)	04 (4.1)
Rehabilitate those involved	04 (4.9)	10 (12.5)	03 (3.4)	-
Enactment of Law protecting them/Legal backing	N = 82	N = 80	N = 88	N = 94
Yes	71 (86.6)	63 (78.8)	44 (50.0)	87 (92.6)
Not Necessarily	10 (12.2)	12 (15.0)	36 (40.9)	07 (7.4)
No	01 (10.2)	05 (6.2)	08 (9.1)	-