

## **Institutionalization and Rehabilitation of Street Children in Benue State**

**Kembe, E. M.**

Department of Home Science and Management  
University of Agriculture, Makurdi

and

**Okonkwo, L. E.**

University of Agriculture, Makurdi

### **Abstract**

The study investigated institutionalization and rehabilitation of street children in Benue State. A Cross Sectional research design was used to conduct the study. Data was collected using two sets of questionnaires for staff and orphans, (Rehabilitation Staff Questionnaire, RSQ and Rehabilitation Orphan Questionnaire, RIQ). Two hypotheses were formulated and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings show causative factors like poverty, (3.20), Abandonment (3.10), death of parents ( 2.20), divorce and remarriage (2.17) being responsible for street children and rehabilitation of children. Findings also showed a number of problems in these institutions to include late feeding (3.18), harsh punishment (3.03), in fighting amongst the orphans (2.95) and liaise - faire attitude of the workers, (2.97). On the state of infrastructure and facilities, result shows that storage facilities and access road network represents 3.74 and 2.58 respectively, while, the environment and water recorded 2.28 and 2.20 respectively. On the programs for rehabilitation, all ten (10) programs scored below the acceptable mean of 2.00, which means performance was below expectations or these programs were minimally being carried out. Based on the findings, it was concluded that institutions for children rescued out of the street will continue to serve as alternative care centers for children, though, there are inherent problems that require interventions from the government, staff training and the involvement of NGOS and CBOS.

**Keywords:** Street children, Orphans, institutionalization, rehabilitation, programs.

### **Introduction**

Over the last five decades, the phenomenon of street children has become a prominent global problem with serious implications for the survival, development, protection and participation of children below 18 years.

The presence of street children in major cities of the world has transcended the level where it was viewed as strictly a religious and cultural injunction, (Dunapo, 2002, Child Rights Act, 2003). Global estimates of street children stood between 10-100 million in 2002 and the

number has been increasing rapidly since then, (UNFPA, 2003). The phenomenon has not only attracted public concern but has also become a matter of priority to governments as well as National and International Organizations (Panter-Brick, 2002). In Africa and in Nigeria especially, where the problem of street children is relatively new unlike the situation in Asia, Haiti and Lebanon, the presence of large number of children has also now become a major issue (Kopoka, 2000 and Mehta, 2000).

Street children have been variously described as homeless, vagrants, beggars, rag pickers, paupers, tramps, gathering of iron metals, outcasts of the street, idle, and jobbers, (Rivlin & Manzo, 1987), whose principal abode and source of living is from the street. Indeed, these groups of children are readily available for any kind of menial, criminal and anti-social jobs that will satisfy the day's meal.

It is important to note that, the emergence of large number of children on the streets of Nigeria, and Benue State in particular is partly a reflection of the extreme poverty both in rural and urban areas that will provide families with a reasonable quality of life, and the lack of social services (Kembe, 2010). Low level of technology has been given as one of the significant factors why no one can accurately specify the number of street children in Nigeria (Ebigbo, 2003). All available figures on street children in Nigeria are often contested as estimates rather than actual figures derived from specific studies, because of increasing social and economic burdens

on families and communities, the population of street children is likely to continue to increase in Nigeria.

UNICEF (2008) defines street children as "those who are of the street and on the street". In this study, the term street children refers to those children below eighteen years of age who earn their living on the city streets and stay there for most, or all, of the day, they may or may not have parents or legal guardians. According to Street Child Africa (2005), street children are vulnerable children who are separated from their families. The options open to these category of children is the institutional homes and adoption. The institutional homes are in the form of an orphanage, juvenile homes and remand homes. The latter two is as a result of conviction over a minor crime such as stealing, house breaking, fighting and arson, (Schurink, 1993, Panter-Brick, 2002).

According to Kembe (2010), the responsibility of child development, rearing and protection rests with the parents. The parents provide the child with physical care including food, shelter and protection as well as love and affection. The absence of parental care and positive environmental stimulation contributes to the emergence of street children. Ormrod (2009) and Kembe (2010) mentioned that the environment (institution) influences personality development. A child who is from a positive environment develops a sense of belonging, self-esteem and individuality. That is why the environment of the child is critical to child development.

UNICEF (2004) identifies two kinds of street children found in Nigeria: those who live and work on the street, (children of the street) and those who work on the streets full or part time but who return to their homes each night (children in the street). These categories of children pose some concerns to the society in general, since it affects sustainable family survival. Sustained economy growth and improved living standards for families and individuals cannot be complete without adequate provision for a percentage of Nigeria children who are in rehabilitation.

UNICEF (2004) and UNICEF (2008) estimates that more than one million children are institutionalized in rehabilitation facilities in Africa. The report of the study shows that street children are involved in child prostitution and trafficking, juvenile crimes, drug and alcohol abuse and disturbance of attachment and personality, (Mehta, 2000).

These children are vulnerable to different types of hazards such as vehicular accidents, collision, environmental threats and various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual abuse and exploitations. Dunapo (2002) and UNICEF (2008) revealed that 29.4% of children are on the streets. In a special report, it was revealed that in Lagos state alone there are one hundred thousand children who live on the street, (100,000). Rehabilitation institutions seem to be the option in providing a support system to help rehabilitate street children. It is possible to engage them in programmes which

will equip them with life sustaining skills.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study was to investigate institutionalization and rehabilitation of street children in Benue state.

Specifically the study:

1. Identified factors leading to institutionalization in Benue State.
2. Determined the problems street children encountered in the rehabilitation institutions in Benue state.
3. Determined the state of facilities and infrastructure of these institutions in Benue state.
4. Determined the various programs designed for rehabilitation of street children in Benue State.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the research questions that guided the study:

1. What are the factors leading to institutionalization of street children in Benue State?
2. What are the problems encountered by street children in institutional homes in Benue state?
3. What is the state of infrastructure/facilities in these institutional homes in Benue State?
4. What are the programs designed for rehabilitation of children in Benue state?

### **Methodology**

**Research Design:** The research design considered appropriate for this study was the cross sectional survey research

design. It sought data from institutional homes in two geo-political zones of Benue State that is, B and C. Each of these zones represents the Idoma and Tiv speaking areas which are the major ethnic groups in Benue state.

**Population for the Study:** The population for the study comprised all the street children under the custody of eleven registered institutional homes in Zone B and C in Benue State. The total of three hundred and thirty five people (335) comprising both staff working in these homes and the children, (Ministry of Women Affairs, 2006) formed the total population of the study.

**Sample for the Study:** The sample for this study was drawn from the three types of rehabilitation institutions, that is, orphanages, remand homes and juvenile homes. To ensure that each sample was adequately represented stratified random sampling was used to generate the required sample size for type of institutions. Furthermore, the proportionate sampling technique was used to select the final sample of one hundred and fifty eight (158)

respondents that is 47% of the population.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** Two types of questionnaires were developed. The Rehabilitation Staff Questionnaire, (RSQ) and Rehabilitation Orphan Questionnaire, (ROQ). Items on the questionnaire were developed in line with the stated objectives of the study and are divided into sections A and B. A total of 46 items were contained in the questionnaire respectively.

**Data Collection:** Three research assistants were trained for the purpose of assisting in data collection. The researcher was able to administer one hundred and fifty eight copies of the questionnaire over a period of one week to the respondents. On-the-spot collection was adopted to facilitate the retrieval of the instrument.

**Data Analysis Techniques:** Descriptive method of data analysis was used in answering the research questions using Means and Standard Deviation. A Mean of 2.00 was recorded as a factor and any score below 2.00 was referred to as not a factor.

## Results

**Table I: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Responses on the Factors Leading to Institutionalization in Benue State.**

Item	Mean	SD	Remarks
Mental Health Problems	1.37	0.50	NF
Peer Pressure	1.43	0.80	NF
Poverty	3.20	1.04	F
Death of Parent(s)	2.28	1.26	F
Abandonment	3.10	1.68	F
Divorce/Remarriage	2.17	2.00	F
Poor Parenting Style	1.62	0.80	NF
Step Parenting	1.33	0.70	NF

N= Factor; NF=Not a Factor

Table I shows the factors leading to institutionalization in Benue State. The highest factor was poverty with a mean value of 3.20; death of parents and abandonment recording, 2.28 and 3.10 respectively, another factor is divorce/remarriage, (2.17).

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Responses to the Problems Encountered by Children in Institutional Homes in Benue State**

Item	Mean	SD	Remarks
Beaten by caregivers	2.16	3.24	F
Infighting among the children	2.95	1.53	F
Sexual abuse	2.20	0.82	F
Harsh punishment	3.03	1.41	F
Late feeding	3.18	1.40	F
Lateness to bed	2.31	1.10	F
Laissez-fair attitude	2.97	1.51	F
Excessive freedom	2.28	1.31	F

F: Factor

Table 2, indicates the mean response to the various problems encountered by children in institutional homes. The responses shows all the items as factors: late feeding (3.18), harsh punishment (3.03), infighting, (2.95), laissez-faire parenting style,(2.97) and lateness to bed,(2.31).

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Responses on the State of Infrastructure/Facilities in these Institutional Homes in Benue State**

Item	Mean	SD	Remark
Access road network	2.58	1.39	F
Adequate accommodation	1.07	1.02	NF
Clinic/sick bay	1.82	1.11	NF
Kitchen equipment	2.27	1.21	F
Play Ground	2.27	1.64	F
Toilet & bathroom facilities	1.63	0.79	NF
Space (individual space & corporate)	2.77	1.54	F
Environment for good neighborhood	2.28	1.31	F
Vocational school/training Centre	1.88	0.67	NF
Electricity supply	1.74	0.88	NF
Portable water	2.20	0.82	F
Games/recreational facilities	1.70	0.74	NF
Furniture & furnishing	1.90	0.80	NF
Storage facilities (individual & corporate)	3.74	1.41	F

F=Factor; NF=Not a factor

Table 3, indicates that infrastructural facilities like storage facilities has a mean value of 3.74, access road network (2.58), space recorded, 2.77, environment (2.28), while

water scored 2.20, all indicating availability and adequacy. Facilities such as electricity, furniture and furnishing, vocational training, availability of a clinic or a sickbay, all recorded below the acceptable mean of 2.00.

**Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Response to the Programmes Designed For Rehabilitation of Street Children in Benue State.**

Programmes	Mean	SD
Agricultural skill acquisition in (Animal & Crop Husbandry)	1.05	0.89
Moral instruction	1.29	0.17
Entrepreneurship	1.95	0.03
Family adjustment programme	1.25	1.14
Citizenship education	1.51	0.21
Special trade training in (welding, woodwork & joinery)	1.62	0.80
Basic literacy programmes	1.90	0.96
Training in human kinetics/arts	1.28	0.89
Basic computer literacy training	1.67	0.68
Beads/soap/confectionaries training	1.73	0.86

Table 4 indicates the Mean and Standard Deviation of the responses to the programmes designed for rehabilitation of street children in the various institutionalized homes. The responses show that all of the programmes designed by these institutions are not a factor.

### Discussion of Findings

There are many complex factors leading to children living on the street as such it cannot be attributed to one particular factor. From the findings, the leading factor is poverty, closely followed by child abandonment, death of parents, divorce and remarriage. Rivlin and Manzo (1987), reports that young children have been driven by poverty toward independence by living on the street, providing their own food, clothing and shelter. There are other reasons that can contribute to street life,

such as emigration as can be observed by the number of children from the neighboring Niger republic who have thronged major urban streets in Nigeria for survival. Homelessness could be accompanied by internal crises which threatens the stability of the country.

The provision of orphanages and institutional homes by the government, religious and other philanthropic organizations seem to be principled along the lines of providing custodial and other care services to these children who are taken off the street, (Hodges & Tizard, 1989), however, it is pertinent to note that it may not be the best alternative to child care without positive environmental stimulation. That is why; factors affecting these institutions must be addressed.

Financial crises can often lead to depression creating unemployment,

poverty and homelessness, for example, the incidence of child hawking and abuse is often associated to street children. A child who is nurtured in a stable home environment develops positive outcomes in terms of self confidence, independence and achievements in other life outcomes, (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2002 & Kembe, 2010).

Also, Ohai (2010), revealed that poor financial base especially of orphanages in Nigeria who mostly depend on government and other philanthropic individuals for support has contributed to the low level of housing, feeding and essential requirement that may be needed by the children. In addition, Alemika, Chukuma, Lafratta, Messerli and Souckova (2004), believes that there is severe lack of financial support from both the federal and state government allocated to the protection and promotion of Children's Rights, especially vulnerable children like street children and orphans.

Other factors leading to street children and institutionalization aside from poverty includes; the issue of death of parents, child abandonment, divorce and remarriage. This is in agreement with Swart (1998) who stated that although few street children are actually homeless or orphaned needing institutional homes, there are some that are functionally homeless because their parents are incapable of caring for them due to such problems as divorce and remarriage. Issues related to family stability, family composition and its effect on child behavior are widely

reported in research showing an effect on children personality.

Furthermore, Schurdink (1993) reported that the problems encountered in most institutional homes include poor accommodation, absence of medical facilities and vocational training. This is in line with earlier research findings (Drake, 1989, Swart, 1998 & Alemika *et al*, 2004), who ascertained that problems encountered in institutional homes are related to lack of trained staff, poor funding and inadequate infrastructure and facilities. According to Hodges and Tizard (1989), virtually all cognitive, social and behavioral measures had the least outcomes with children who are institutionalized. Beijing International Committee for Chinese Orphans (BICCO, 2013) addresses staff capacity building amongst several other goals for the rehabilitation of orphans. It ensures that staff, caregivers, and volunteers play an active role in the children development.

The finding on programs designed for rehabilitation of street children in Benue State shows the following: Agricultural farming skill acquisition, Moral instruction, Entrepreneurship, Family Adjustment program, Citizenship, Special trade including welding, wood work/joinery, Basic literacy and other forms of training in the life skills. This is in line with the reports that rehabilitation of street children involves skill building programs and counseling. The findings show all the scores below the acceptable mean of 2.00.

An institutional home is considered adequate if it has made provisions for

basic educational facilities, establishing training centres for the inmates, so they can be trained and taught some vocational skills as well as the provision of games and recreational facilities. USAID (2008) initiated the rehabilitation of orphaned children in Lebanon; the components of the program were developed with the aim to prevent delinquency and address the needs of children living under difficult situations. This program has a social integration component which builds capacities for indigenous NGO's through the provision of equipment, materials and training programs, as well as initiating socio-economic development at an institutional level.

Another important program is the Housing, Education and Rehabilitation of orphans (HERO). The mission of this program is to provide housing, education and rehabilitation for orphans and street children in Haiti, (<http://www.haitihero.org>). Through the program, street children and orphans are given permanent housing and quality education and the ability to rehabilitate the mind and body from years of neglect. As a result, the children attain the knowledge and skills necessary to become successful participants both in Haiti and the world.

From the examples derived from Lebanon and Haiti, it therefore explains the low scores for all the programs for rehabilitation of orphans in Benue state. This therefore, calls for the involvement of other agencies aside the government in providing a suitable environment and in meeting the daily needs of these orphans.

### **Conclusion**

The institutionalization and rehabilitation of street children is a corporate social responsibility both for the society and the well being of children. Children are an important and potential segment of the society. Circumstances such as street life with all its accompanying factors have called for the need for these children to be placed in foster care, often at an orphanage, remand home and juvenile homes where there are incidences of anti-social behavior. These children are expected to be catered for socially, economically, educationally, physically and in other necessary dimensions. This research concludes that in as much as these institutions serve as an alternative care centers for children, there are inherent problems that need to be addressed through programs equipped with life sustaining skills such as vocational, literacy and entrepreneurial.

### **Recommendation**

As a result of the outcomes of the findings, the following recommendations were reached:

1. *Government Intervention:* The Nigerian government through the various levels, State and local government need to establish social security for the vulnerable group such as children and the aged. Furthermore, the Ministries of women affairs and youth development should establish cottage and small scale Agro-Allied industries so that youths can adequately gain skills. Youth skill



- acquisition program should be an integral component of rehabilitation of children in the institutions
2. *Need for training of Social workers and other care givers:* looking at the problems associated with these institutions, it can be seen that with adequate training of the social workers, some of the anti-social behaviors like infighting, beaten and bullying, harsh punishment, lateness to bed and late feeding are some of the practices that can be corrected with the staff being properly trained in providing social welfare services.
  3. *Involvement of NGOS/ CBOS and Funding:* Funding is needed from the government and other concerned people so that such rehabilitation facilities can be able to run effectively and efficiently.

## References

- Alemika, E.E.O., Chukwuma, L, Messerli, D. and Souckova, J.(2004). *Rights of the Child, Report On the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Nigeria*. Geneva: CLEEN Foundation.
- Beijing International Committee for Chinese Orphans, (2013). *Basic Care Program*. Hong Kong: BICCO Word Press and Atahualpa.
- Child Rights Act (2003) Lagos: Federal Government of Nigeria.
- Drake, E. (1989). *Workshop on Street Children in Botswana*. *The Child Care Worker*, 7(4), 14-15.
- Dunapo, S.O.(2002). Causative and Sustaining factors to street hawking in Nigeria: Implications for child Development . In R.U.N.Okonkwo & R.O. Okoye(Eds). *The Learning Environment of the Nigerian Child*. Awka: Erudition Publishers.
- Ebigbo, P. O. (2003). Street Children: The Core of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nigeria Children, Spring 2003. *Youth Environment*, 13(1),103-117.
- Hodges, J. and Tizard, B.(1989). IQ nad behavioural adjustment of ex-institutional adolescents. *Journal of Child Psychology, Psychiatry and allied disciplines*,30,53-75.
- Kembe, E. M. (2010). Socio-Cultural Practices Influencing the Implementation of the Child Rights Act in Nigeria. *Journal of Home Economics Research*, Vol.12,103-109
- Kopoka, A. (2000). The Problem of Street Children in Africa, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Paper Presented at the International Conference on Street Children and Street Children's Health in East Africa, Held in Dar-Es-Salaam, 19-21 April.
- Mehta, D. (2000). Street Children and Gangs in African Cities: Guidelines for Local Authorities. *UMP Working Paper Series 18*. Ministry of Women Affairs ,(2006). *Record of all registered Children Institutions in Benue State*. Makurdi: Benue State Government.
- Ohai, C.(2010). Harrassed and Abused Children in Ogun Orphanage Face Uncertain Future. *Saturday Punch*, 3<sup>rd</sup>, April.
- Ormrod, J.E.(2009). *Educational Psychology*. Boston: Pearson Allyn Bacon Prentice Hall.
- Panter-Brick, C. (2002). Street Children, Human Rights, and Public Health: a Critique and
- Papalia, D.E., Olds, S.W. and Feldman, R.D.(2002). *A Child's World Infancy through Adolescence*. Boston: McGraw Hills
- Rivlin, L.G. and Manzo, C.(1987). Homeless children in New York City: A view from the 19thC. *Children Environment Quarterly*, 5(1), Spring, 26-32
- Schurdink, W. (1993). *Street Children: An Investigation into the Causes and Incidence of the Problem in RSA with the Aim to Develop*

- a Model for Treatment, Rehabilitation and Prevention Programmes*. Pretoria: Human Science Research Centre.
- Swart (1998). *An Anthropological Study of Street Children in Hill brow Johannesburg With Special Reference to their Moral Values*. Unpublished Master's Dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- UNFPA (2003). *The United Nations Population Fund: The State of World Population*. 2003 Report. UNFPA
- UNICEF (2004). *The State of the World's Children 2004*. The United Nations.
- UNICEF (2008). *The State of the World's Children 2008*. The United Nations Report.
- Street Children Africa (2005). Retrieved : <http://www.streetchildafrika.org.uk/10/12/2011>.
- HERO (2010). Retrieved : <http://www.haitihero.org.10/4/13>