

At-Risk Children in Sokoto State: Causes and Challenges

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Abstract

This study investigates the causes and challenges of at-risk children in Sokoto State using a survey dataset for a sample of four hundred and eighteen (418) respondents. In the analysis, this study used descriptive technique of data analysis inform of mean and the results suggest that poverty, drug and substance abuse, school dropout, child marriage and domestic violence and, child pregnancy and abortion are among the causes of at-risk children in Sokoto State. Additional causes of at-risk children based on the findings are illegal child adoption, child trafficking, street hawking by children, gender-based and sexual violence and, child rape and child labor. On the challenges of at-risk children this study revealed that lack of access to qualitative education, corruption and bad governance, exclusion of girl child in skills acquisition schemes and inadequate of clothing and shelter and poor nutrition among others are the challenges affecting them. To reduce the hardship and integrate at-risk children, this study suggests the need for the government and relevant stakeholders to give more priority to entrepreneurship development skills such as animal husbandry, cosmetology, welding and fabrication, leather works, foods and beverages, tailoring and fashion design, poultry production, carpentry works, computer and handsets repairs and aquaculture. Finally, to ensure effective integration of at-risk children, the government must work with community leaders, religious leaders, and women leaders to raise awareness and mobilize support for the most vulnerable populations.

Keywords: At-risk children, causes, challenges, poverty, bad governance.

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INTRODUCTION

In Sub-Saharan Africa there are more than 12 million at-risk children (orphans and vulnerable children) and 9% of the children had lost at least one parent due to severe disease, communal conflict, and insecurity among others (Nthenya, 2018). The United Nations Children's Fund -UNICEF, (2008) further reported that the estimated number of at-risk children in sub-Saharan Africa grew to more than 16 million in 2011, of which 1,100,000 were in Nigeria (Eneji & Archibong, 2021). In addition, Nigerian children are vulnerable to a wide range of abuses and harmful traditional practices. This is connected to the national survey related to at-risk children conducted in 2014 which revealed that 6 out of 10 children have suffered one or more forms of violence before reaching 18 years of age with 70% of those experiencing multiple incidents of violence. The country has the largest number of child brides in Africa where 23 million girls and women were married as children (UNICEF, 2021).

To address the challenges, the government in collaboration with non-governmental organizations have introduced numerous policies and programmes with a view to help, support and reintegrate at-risk children. These policies include the Child Right Act (CRA), Almajiri System of Education and recently government introduced the At-Risk Children Program (ARC-P) among others. These policies focused on the protection of violence against children that occurs in homes, families, schools, communities and other places where children should feel safe. Despite the introduction of these policies, the number of at-risk children is increasing in Nigeria. For instance, the record shows that over 10.5 million children are not fully protected. Many of them deal with violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and discrimination every day. However, 47.4% (around 47 million) of these children live below the national poverty line of ₦374 naira a day in Nigeria. Furthermore, 53.9% (almost 54 million) of these children face multiple deprivations in health, education, nutrition, water, sanitation and protection and 13.2

million of them are out of school (UNICEF, 2021; ARC-P, 2022).

Sokoto state as one out of thirty-six (36) states in Nigeria is facing numerous developmental challenges. These include poverty, rate of drug abuse, increase in the number of out-of-school children and an increase in the number of most vulnerable like hawkers and Almajiri children among others. For instance, statistical records have shown that Sokoto State is the poorest state with a poverty rate of 87.73 and 436,570 number of out of school children (NBS, 2020). In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-UNODC (2018) noted that the estimated drug prevalence in Sokoto state is 230,000 and for every four drug users, one is a woman. However, Arabic and Islamic Education Board-AIEB Sokoto State (2022) added that there are 717,630 Almajiri children in the state out of which male Almajiri children accounted for 387,679 and female children are 329,951. Furthermore, Sokoto State Zakat and Endowment Commission-SOZECOM (2022) added that there are about 322,178 most vulnerable groups in Sokoto State out of which poor orphans are 86,321, poor old ages are 70,710, poor youths are 57,071, poor local teachers are 31,486, poor orphan mothers are 38,492 and poor divorces are 38,098.

Empirically, studies (see Sarkingobir *et al.*, 2019; Abubakar, Muhammad & Khalid, 2021; Tajuddin, 2015; Muhammad & Abubakar, 2018; Sarkin Gobir & Dikko, 2020) conducted in Sokoto State focused on the food security of almajiri children, needs of children with disability, challenges of almajiri education, almajiri education and social security and personnel hygiene of almajiri children. But specifically, there is no single study that examines the causes and challenges of at-risk children in Sokoto State. It is on the basis of the above that, this survey filled in the research gap by conducting research on the topic in Sokoto State, Nigeria. Furthermore, the study is justifiable because it will bring out the empirical evidence on the causes of at-risk children, and the challenges affecting them and provides policy recommendations on innovative and business skills that will help government and relevant stakeholders in designing and implementing informed policy decisions.

Given the aforementioned objective and challenges addressed, this study is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, section two presents a theoretical framework and review of related empirical studies. section three consists of data and methodology. Section four consists of results and discussions while section five comprises conclusions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretically, this study is bounded on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA). The SLA is developed on participatory methods and was introduced to organize and improve organizations' efforts to eradicate poverty (Atha, 2017). Krantz (2001) noted that there are three perceptions of the SLA. First, is the realization that economic growth may be indispensable for poverty reduction. Hence, no automatic connection between the two since it depends on the capabilities of the poor to take advantage of expanding economic opportunities. Second, the realization that poverty is not a matter of low income but also captures other dimensions such as illiteracy and lack of social services (Krantz, 2001). Finally, the recognition of the bottom-top approach. This is because the poor need to be actively involved in programmes and project designs that will help address their needs. Programmes and projects that targeted vulnerable children and their families need to explore contributory factors to child vulnerability. It will also explore empowerment opportunities and social services that families need to address child vulnerability. Hence, the arrangement will include relevant stakeholders with the opportunity of addressing challenges related to at-risk children (Chinwe & Eghosa, 2021).

A review of the available empirical studies shows that socio-cultural factors are among the causes of at-risk children in Nigeria. For instance, Abdullahi (2020) and Aransiola and Zarowsky (2014) show that poverty is the major cause of at-risk (vulnerable) children in Nigeria. Some studies (Anyacho & Anyacho, 2016; Isioma, 2019; Muhammad, Jaji & Wakali, 2019) revealed that harmful cultural and religious practices such as child marriage, the Osu-caste system, child witchcraft and female genital mutilation are the forces responsible for vulnerable children (at-risk children) in Nigeria.

It is further acknowledged that rural-urban migration, lack of preventive health practices, and child labour put children into vulnerability in Nigeria (Ebharevba, Ishmaef & Uzobo 2018). A study conducted by Nwaolikpe (2018) outlined child trafficking, illegal child adoption, and lack of essential support services to poor families as factors responsible for child vulnerability. Furthermore, Gwadabe (2018) and Olusegun (2019) mentioned that increasing social problems such as Boko Haram attacks, inter-communal crisis, herdsmen attack, and occasional natural disaster such as flooding leading to internal displacement are causative influences on child vulnerability in Nigeria.

Chinwe and Eghosa, (2021) reported that lack of social service and struggle to provide basic needs for their children, lack of income-generating activities or steady means of providing for basic needs, neglecting the contribution of relevant stakeholders in programmes

and projects implementation as the challenges affecting vulnerable children in Nigeria. Nthenya and Mutuku (2018) showed that over 90% of the family members taking care of the orphan and vulnerable children are facing extreme pressure and if governments and international development partners failed to redouble their current efforts to increase the capacity of the families to cope, the quality of lives of vulnerable households remain in threat.

Amali *et al.*, (2020) conducted a study on the educational challenges encountered by orphaned undergraduates of a public university in Kwara State. Their results suggested that orphaned undergraduates encounter difficulties in getting information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, financial support, accommodation/hostels, upkeep/welfare, learning resources and many more. Tagurum, *et al.*, (2015) investigate the situation of orphans and vulnerable children in urban and rural communities of Plateau State using a survey dataset. The survey indicated numerous challenges facing the vulnerable group in the areas of education, shelter, health, protection and nutrition, and most of the vulnerable children are cared for by mainly widowed subsistent farmers.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design in identifying and analyzing the causes and challenges of at-risk children in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The population of the study consist of all the people in Sokoto State. According to National Population Commission-NPC (2016), Sokoto State has an estimated population of 4,998,100. Based on the population of this study, the sample size was four hundred and twenty-seven (427).

The sample size was determined from generated with a margin error of 5% and a confidence level of 95% using a sample size calculator published by Review Applications in 2018. Moreover, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the target respondents across the twenty-three (23) local government areas of the State.

The survey used primary sources of data in the analysis. The data collected using a structured questionnaire from the target respondents. In the survey questionnaire, a Likert scale of Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly agree was employed. In the study, an average of 2.5 or higher is regarded agreed, while an average of 2.49 or lower is considered disagreed. The mean scores for four-point questions were computed using a criterion of 2.5. As a consequence, the mean criterion of 2.5 was obtained by dividing the sum of 4+3+2+1 by 4. Furthermore, the data collected from the questionnaire were coded, arranged and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques in the form of mean and standard deviation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, empirical results on the causes and challenges of at-risk children in Sokoto State are reviewed and published. A total of 427 questionnaires were distributed, out of which nine (09) were missing and four hundred and eighteen (418) were retrieved from responders. This represents 2.12% of all surveys. This also reveals that the respondents' response rate was 97.88 percent, which is more than enough to make general conclusion about the study. Beginning with causes of at-risk children, the results are summarized and reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Causes of At-risk Children

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Poverty	3.2010	0.8748	Agree
2.	Drug and substance abuse	3.0000	0.4488	Agree
3.	School dropout	2.8995	0.5404	Agree
4.	Child marriage and domestic violence	3.1005	0.5404	Agree
5.	Child pregnancy and abortion	3.1005	0.5404	Agree
6.	Illegal child adoption	3.3014	0.6422	Agree
7.	Child trafficking	3.2010	0.4012	Agree
8.	Street hawking by children	3.1005	0.5404	Agree
9.	Gender-based and sexual violence	3.3971	0.4898	Agree
10.	Child rape and child labor	3.0957	0.6997	Agree
Cumulative Mean		2.8297		
Decision Mean		2.5000		

Source: Authors' computation from SPSS Version 22.

From Table 1, the findings suggested that the respondent agreed that poverty, drug and substance abuse, school dropout, child marriage and domestic violence and, child pregnancy and abortion are the primary causes of at-risk children in Sokoto State. The reason for this is that the cumulative mean of 2.83

exceed the decision mean of 2.5. Other causes of at-risk children according to the findings are illegal child adoption, child trafficking, street hawking by children, gender-based and sexual violence and, child rape and child labor. The finding is in line with work of Krantz (2001), Ebharevba, Ishmaef and Uzobo (2018) and

Nwaolikpe (2018) who reported that the foregoing factors are among the causes of at-risk children in their

respective study areas.

Table 2: Challenges of At-risk Children

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Lack of access to education	2.8995	0.5404	Agree
2.	Corruption and bad governance	3.1005	0.8336	Agree
3.	Barriers that limit the inclusion of girl child in skill acquisition schemes	3.0000	0.4488	Agree
4.	Inadequate clothing and shelter and poor nutrition	3.3014	0.4594	Agree
5.	Culture of dependency, redundancy and begging	2.7943	0.7463	Agree
6.	Social exclusion of children and youth with disability and gender issues	2.8995	0.5404	Agree
7.	Illiteracy and lack of social services	3.0957	0.2945	Agree
8.	Lack of preventive health practices and rural-urban migration	2.9952	0.8949	Agree
9.	Insecurity such as kidnapping, banditry, hardmen attack etc.	2.8995	0.5404	Agree
Cumulative Mean		2.9984		
Decision Mean		2.5000		

Source: Authors' computation from SPSS Version 22.

Furthermore, it attested in Table 2 that, at-risk children are facing numerous challenges in the study area because the computed mean of 2.99 is greater than decision mean of 2.5. Thus, at-risk children are constrained by lack of access to qualitative education, corruption and bad governance, exclusion of girl child in skills acquisition schemes and inadequate of clothing and shelter and poor nutrition. The results also attested that other challenges of at-risk children in the study area are cultural dependency, redundancy and begging, social exclusion of children and youth with disability and gender issues, illiteracy and lack of social services, lack of preventive health practices and rural-urban migration, and insecurity such as kidnapping, banditry, hardmen attack among others. The results are connected to the studies of Chinwe and Eghosa, (2021), Nthenya and Mutuku (2018), Amali *et al.*, (2020) and Tagurum, *et al.*, (2015) who revealed that the above challenges are among the challenges that hinder the progress and development of at-risk children.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the foregoing findings, this study concludes that poverty, drug and substance abuse, school dropout, child marriage and domestic violence and, child pregnancy and abortion are among the causes of at-risk children in Sokoto State. Additional causes of at-risk children based on the findings are illegal child adoption, child trafficking, street hawking by children, gender-based and sexual violence and, child rape and child labor. Furthermore, this study concluded that at-risk children in Sokoto State are affected by lack of access to qualitative education, corruption and bad governance, exclusion of girl child in skills acquisition schemes and inadequate of clothing and shelter and poor nutrition.

The study further infers that cultural dependency, redundancy and begging, social exclusion of children and youth with disability and gender issues, illiteracy and lack of social services, lack of preventive health practices and rural-urban migration, and insecurity such as kidnapping, banditry, hardmen attack are among the challenges of at-risk children in the study area. To reduce the hardship of at-risk children in the study area, this study suggests the need for the government to give more priority to entrepreneurship development skills such as Animal husbandry, cosmetology, welding and fabrication, leather works, foods and beverages, tailoring and fashion design, poultry production, carpentry works, computer and handsets repairs and aquaculture.

Additionally, the government should include educators such as counsellors and psychologists in skill acquisition training for at-risk children with the aim of assisting victims of child marriage, rape, and drug addiction, among others. To guarantee the effective integration of at-risk children, the government must work with community leaders, religious leaders, and women leaders to raise awareness and mobilize support for the most vulnerable populations. As a result, rather than relying on the government, the community should encourage the establishment of cooperative organizations that would assist and support themselves.

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