

ASSESSING MASS MEDIA PROTECTION OF CHILD'S RIGHTS AND MENACE OF STREET CHILDREN IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Child Rights violation is a cankerworm ravaging the society today, which has contributed adversely to shattered dreams and future of most Nigerian children. This constitutes a big threat to societal growth and development. Both government and the mass media have great roles to play in the promotion and protection of rights of children in the society. Unfortunately, the reverse is almost the case in most Nigerian societies as these rights are being violated and ignored with outright impunity by persons who ought to have protected them. Worst still, issues on child rights violation do not enjoy prominence and adequate media attention as most cases are unreported or underreported with negatively framed reports against the children. This study therefore assesses the combined role of the mass media and government in promoting and protecting child's rights and preventing violence against street children in Cross River State. Using survey research method with questionnaire and interviews to collect data from 400 respondents and interviewees, which was analysed using descriptive statistics and explanation building method. The common causes of children rights violation were identified while the study also evaluated the roles of the mass media and government with practicable recommendations.

Keywords: mass media, child rights, violations, child abandonment, street children, child protection

Introduction

Communicating development issues, exposing societal ills, maintaining peaceful coexistence and proffering solution to factors that militate against wellbeing of the society is cardinal to its growth and development. A good and timely application of communication is very crucial here, and the mass media have a remarkable role to play in helping the society overcome its challenges (Ngwu, 2018).

One of the disturbing issues still affecting Nigerian society and many other developing nations is violation of rights of children. Children are bedrock and future of any society but unfortunately, their rights and privileges are often ignored as well as trampled upon by those who should have protected them. As pointed out by Onwe (2014), the peace, economic, social and cultural configuration of the society cannot be achieved or sustained if children are not given the required attention and a delightful place in the future. But the increasing cases of child abuse and neglect remain a big treat to societal progress and development as a nation.

The society has been unnecessarily silent over the promotion and protection of child's rights. There seems to be collective failure in the defence of children by media, government and wealthy individuals in the society. Hitherto, most Nigerian children do not enjoy those rights guaranteed under the Nigerian Constitution 1999 and Child Rights Act 2003. Children in their numbers still lack basic amenities like

food, shelter, health, security and education needed to sustain their life and wellbeing (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2019; Amdi, 1990).

Diane (2006) observed that child neglect is the most common type of child maltreatment in Nigeria, yet people pay less attention to conditions of neglected children. Nnam (2015) noted that abuse of children's rights is prevalent and has continued unabated in our societies due to some harmful cultural practices. Olatosi et al. (2018) observed that most children are taken to the cities by their parents' relatives or friends for greener pasture, but end up as domestic servants with little or no pay, denied education, vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuses. Only a few lucky ones as Mbakogu (2004) noted, opportune to acquire education sponsored by their masters.

In other instances, some children are compelled by circumstances beyond their control to contribute to family income by subjecting them to street hawking and trading even during school hours, to their detriments. These children are often disadvantaged in several ways due to their involvement and exposure to all sorts of hazardous works, which affect their education, health and developmental process (Clark & Yesufu, 2012). In response to the inhumane treatments on them, most children run away from home to avoid such punishments and continuous pains, as such, they end up in the streets.

'Street children' according to Humanium (2013) are minors who due to family conflicts, live and survive in streets of major cities and towns. They usually grow up in public places like bus stops, train stations, under the bridges, etc. Urban Management Programme (2000) had pointed out that these children may have completely or partially ruptured family ties and engage in various survival activities on the streets.

In Calabar Metropolis, Alaye (2021) noted that these street children are called 'Skolombo boys' and 'Lakasara girls' from dysfunctional and destitute families, and lack adequate educational and vocational role models. Unfortunately, the general public consider these street children as nuisance. As such they are subjected to extreme deprivation and social exclusion, which often create opportunities for their involvement in various crimes and social vices, as they perceive the society hates them.

Over time, several laws and policies have emerged internationally, nationally and locally by way of ameliorating the suffering of vulnerable children. This includes the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of 1999, Child Rights Act of 2003, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 2003, Cross River State Girl Child Marriages and Female Circumcision (Prohibition) Law 2000, etc. For instance, the International Convention on the Right of the Child proved that every child must be protected against all forms of exploitation, indecent or degrading treatment, including child labour, abduction and sale (UNICEF, 2000).

However, despite the existence of these laws and policies, child's rights abuse cases and children seen loitering the streets in urban towns have continued unabated, casting doubts on the efficacy of government to provide social welfare of the children. Dike (2024) attributed this alarming situation to ignorance or simply a high-strung negligence of the law. More worrisome is the position of Agboola (2020, p. 80) that media institutions have not lived up to their expectations towards child rights advocacy and development. Awosola and Omoera (2008) had previously noted that the average Nigerian child is ignorant of their rights and mechanism to actualize them.

One could imagine why, despite the persuasive powers of the mass media in creating awareness and ensuring social changes as well as the proliferation of media outlets in almost all parts of the society, issues concerning abuse and violation of children's rights are mostly unreported or under-reported. This however questions the social responsibility of the mass media in Nigeria and prompting a study of this nature to assess the prevailing causes of violation of child's rights and street children menace as well as the role of mass media and government of Cross River State towards addressing them.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing rate of abuse and neglect against children is alarming and calls for urgent concern. This is as children are found roaming the street helplessly in major Nigerian cities, hence, constituting serious security and developmental threats to the society at large. Most of these children fall between the ages of seven and 16. More worrisome is the violence and cruelty against children by members of the society who brand them as thieves and modifying their names by calling them several names with very negative

connotations like ‘Skolombo boys’ and ‘Lacasara Girls’, derogatory names used to address street children in Cross River State (Isine, 2016).

Pitiably, instead of providing succour by way of ameliorating the suffering faced by these street children or fully rehabilitating them, government periodically arrest, detain or even repatriate to other states (Cross River Watch, 2016), without addressing the preceding factors that pushed them to the streets. This study therefore seeks to assess the causes of child abuse, neglect and increased street children hitherto while assessing the roles played by the mass media and government to addressing this societal problem.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Ascertain the level of public awareness on issues of child abuse, neglect and street children.
2. Examine the role of mass media in promoting awareness of child rights and issues related to street children in Cross River State.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of media coverage in addressing the causes and challenges of street children in Cross River State.
4. To assess the impact of media advocacy on government policies and societal attitudes toward protecting child rights and supporting street children in Cross River State.

Research Questions

The following questions are generated to guide this study:

1. What role does the mass media play in promoting awareness of child rights and issues related to street children in Cross River State?
2. What role does the mass media play in promoting awareness of child rights and issues related to street children in Cross River State?
3. How effective is media coverage in addressing the causes and challenges faced by street children in Cross River State?
4. What impact does media advocacy have on government policies and societal attitudes toward the protection of child rights and support for street children in Cross River State?

Theoretical Framework

Three communication theories were adopted to drive the theoretical framework of the study namely agenda setting, framing and social responsibility theories.

Agenda Setting Theory

Propounded by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the agenda setting theory posits that the media plays a significant role in setting the public agenda by focusing attention on particular issues, thus influencing what people think about, though not exactly what to think. This theory suggests that by prioritizing certain topics, the media shapes societal discourse and assigns importance to specific social concerns. Applied to the issue of child rights and street children, the theory underscores the duty of the media to highlight issues of child abuse, neglect, and the increasing number of children on the streets, making these topics prominent in public discussions and government agendas. For instance, consistent media coverage on child protection could pressure policymakers to implement and enforce laws that safeguard children’s rights and address the factors leading to child homelessness. By doing so, the media can consistently prioritize stories on child children and homelessness, making these issues visible and compelling policymakers to address the root causes.

Framing Theory

Goffman (1974) introduced framing theory, which focuses on how the media presents issues to the public. The “frame” within a story affects audience perception and interpretation, shaping the way people process and understand issues. In this study, framing theory is essential to exploring how the media’s portrayal of street children influences public opinion. For instance, by framing street children not merely as “delinquents” but as victims of systemic failures, the media can foster empathy and encourage solutions focused on rehabilitation and support, rather than criminalization. Thus, framing theory highlights the power of media narratives in shaping society’s attitudes and policy preferences regarding vulnerable children. By portraying street children through a lens of empathy and highlighting systemic failures, media narratives could shift public perception and policy focus from punitive responses to protective and rehabilitative measures.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory (SRT), formalized by Siebert et al. (1956), argues that the media has an obligation to serve the public by addressing critical societal issues. This theory contends that media organizations must consider the public good, reporting on issues such as child rights violations and the challenges faced by street children as part of their social duty. According to the theory, the media should act as a watchdog, holding institutions accountable and promoting societal welfare. Applying this theory, media coverage on child welfare in Cross River State should aim to raise awareness, provoke public discourse, and prompt governmental and non-governmental organizations to act on behalf of children’s rights and needs. News outlets can champion child protection by holding relevant authorities accountable and calling for structural reforms to ensure children’s welfare.

Literature Review

Child abuse encompasses any act or failure to act that jeopardizes a child's physical or emotional well-being and development. Each day, countless defenceless children endure physical, sexual, and emotional trauma at the hands of their abusers (Kemi & Bosede, 2011). This issue is pervasive on a global scale, involving various forms of physical and emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation, all of which result in actual or potential harm to a child's health, development, or dignity (Uzodimma et al., 2013).

Owo (2014) identifies several forms of child abuse, including physical assault, neglect, sexual abuse, abandonment, and battery. Physical assault refers to situations in which children suffer severe physical harm, leading to bruises, fractures, and other injuries. Child children arises from a breakdown in the parent-child relationship, where parents fail to provide essential care and values. This research specifically focuses on the plight of street children.

While child abuse is often narrowly defined as life-threatening physical violence such as severe beatings, burns, or strangulation, it is crucial to adopt a broader perspective. This perspective recognizes that any treatment less favorable than the highest standard of care constitutes abuse, encompassing neglect, sexual, or emotional mistreatment, as well as exploitation. Ultimately, child abuse represents a blatant violation of children’s rights, undermining their dignity, freedom, and well-being (Akpan & Oluwabamide, 2010).

In Nigeria, Dike (2024) highlights alarming instances of child rights violations, from excessive bullying in schools to cases of pedophilia and the troubling proposal of mass marriages involving orphaned girls. Such stories reflect a disturbing disregard for child rights, often stemming from ignorance or negligence of existing laws, which necessitates re-education on children's rights in Nigeria.

Fatunmole (2022) reveals that Nigeria has approximately 20.2 million out-of-school children, far exceeding the 6.9 million claimed by the government. Obimakinde and Shabir (2023) observe that many street children are those who spend their days on the streets while returning home at night. Despite the increasing prevalence of streetism, the health and well-being of this vulnerable group remain poorly documented.

Uzodimma et al. (2013) note that many children face inhumane treatment, leading to neglect and forcing them to roam the streets. This exposes them to various forms of physical and emotional abuse, including child labor, kidnapping, early marriage, and exploitation. These experiences often result in severe malnutrition, illness, and failure to achieve educational goals. Alaye (2021) emphasizes that these challenges frequently push children into gangs or criminal behaviour, exacerbated by their lack of awareness of their rights and inadequate protection.

The United Nations (2012) defines "street children" as those for whom the street has become their primary residence or source of livelihood, lacking adequate adult supervision. Street children can be categorized into three groups: those who work on the street but return home at night; those who live on the street while maintaining some family connections; and those who are completely abandoned. Anderson (2019) differentiates between children "on" the street, who engage in activities like hawking and begging but have family support, and children "in" the street, who lack familial ties and often live entirely on the streets.

Communication and media play a crucial role in promoting and protecting child rights. However, as noted by Angle et al. (2014), there is a significant lack of meaningful and socially relevant media coverage regarding child rights issues. Asare-Donkoh (2017) observes that children often remain underrepresented in media narratives, resulting in their issues being deprioritized in public discourse and policy agendas. Oyero (2011) had highlighted the significant underreporting of child rights issues in Nigeria, noting that this lack of coverage prevents a proper public understanding of child rights and the need to prioritize them. The inadequate media coverage of child rights and the struggles of street children results from various challenges, including the focus and financial goals of many news organizations (Angle et al., 2014). Nigerian media outlets often prioritize sensational and high-profile stories that attract more viewership and advertising revenue, sidelining complex social issues like child rights. This results in limited attention to child protection, as noted by Uzochukwu et al. (2015), and perpetuates the lack of focus on issues affecting vulnerable children.

Ihechu et al. (2022) also found that covering child rights in Nigerian media remains challenging for journalists, hindered by factors like media ownership policies and prevailing cultural and religious beliefs that conflict with the Child Rights Act. Hence, key stakeholders and media agencies, religious leaders, parents, and the government were recommended as effective strategy to address these challenges and foster a supportive environment for child welfare advocacy.

The importance of parental love, care, and protection in the lives of young children cannot be overstated. Any lapses in parental responsibilities can have dire consequences on a child's physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Bada (2015) emphasizes that parents must provide a nurturing environment to foster self-confidence and development. Unfortunately, rising street children remains a persistent issue in Nigerian society.

Terre Des Hommes (2010) urges individuals to consider the plight of street children, highlighting the severe dangers they face without care, shelter, or companionship. Aliyu and Kayode (2024) attribute street begging among school-age children to factors such as poverty, unemployment, and broken homes. They note that while efforts exist to address street begging in Nigeria, challenges such as inadequate funding, governmental changes, and corruption hinder progress.

The increasing rate of child abuse and neglect in Cross River State raises urgent concerns. Children are often found in vulnerable positions throughout major streets, posing significant security and developmental risks. This historical city, once the first seat of government in Nigeria, is losing its peaceful character amid the rising issue of street children.

Despite existing laws, such as the Child Rights Act of 2003, many children continue to suffer on the streets of Nigerian cities. Olusegun and Idowu (2016) argue that laws designed to protect children often fail due to poor enforcement, extreme poverty, corruption, and insufficient rehabilitation programs for offenders. Harry (2017) highlights the abandonment of children by parents who believe they are possessed by evil spirits, leading to neglect and homelessness. Many children, lacking proper support, are forced to fend for themselves, often resorting to begging or criminal behaviour. Most of these children come from dysfunctional homes, broken marriages, or are orphans, resulting in their abandonment in public spaces like markets and parks. Their exposure to life on the streets fosters antisocial behaviours and criminal tendencies due to a lack of parental care and supervision (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2016).

Communication and mass media hold significant potential for addressing societal issues and promoting positive behaviours. Ngwu (2018) notes that effective communication can foster societal transformation and encourage community involvement in development initiatives. While the mass media has been utilized for advocacy and public sensitization regarding child rights in Nigeria, as Fayoyin (2011) observes, much more remains to be done as the rise of new media offers fresh opportunities for mobilizing support for child rights issues.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method using questionnaire and interviews as primary instrument for data collection. The population of this study was drawn from Cross River State, which has a total projected figure of 4,021,245 as at 2019. These include adults and children from major cities in the state (Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja). Using Yaro Yamane sampling formula (Yamane, 1998), a sample size of four hundred (400) was drawn from the population while ten interviews were also conducted in the area of study. These include street children, parents and relevant stakeholders. Data from the interviews were analysed using explanation building method, while data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistical method.

Results

Four hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 390 were correctly filled and duly returned and form the basis for the quantitative data analysis as presented below:

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by gender, age and educational qualifications

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.1 Gender		
Male	222	57%
Female	168	43%
Total	390	100%
1.2 Age		
20 – 35	101	26%
21-25 years	94	24%
26-30 years	43	11%
31-35 years	55	14%
36-40 years	51	13%
41-45 years	23	6%
46-50 years	23	6%
Total	390	100
1.3 Educational Qualification		
Semi-literate	43	11%
Primary	66	17%
Secondary	109	28%
Diploma	8	2%
Degree	78	20%

Masters and above	86	22%
Total	390	100

Table 2: Frequency Analysis of Responses on Nature of Street Children

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
2.1 Whether Respondents are aware of rising cases of Street Children:		
Yes	343	88%
No	47	12%
Total	390	100%
2.2 Whether respondents view Street Children as being a bad omen in the society:		
Yes	347	89%
No	43	11%
Total	390	100%
2.3 Whether Street Children constitutes nuisance:		
Yes	304	78%
No	86	22%
Total	390	100%
2.4 Whether respondents have witnessed increased Street Children:		
Yes	351	90%
No	39	10%
Total	390	100%
2.5 On how often street children are seen loitering the street:		
Everyday	86	22%
Once a week	66	17%
Five times a week	43	11%
Whenever you go out	195	50%
Total	390	100%
2.6 On how often mass media report cases of Street Children:		
Very often	43	11%
Often	23	6%
Not often	109	28%
Once a while	215	55%
Total	390	100%

Table 3: Responses on Causes of Street Children and Enforcement of Child's Rights

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
3.1 Whether increased Street Children can be linked to poverty:		
Yes	359	92%
No	31	8%
Total	390	100%
3.2 Whether superstitious believes are associated with Street Children and abandonment:		
Yes	340	87%
No	50	13%
Total	390	100%
3.3 Whether broken homes can induce child abandonment to the street:		
Yes	277	71%
No	113	29%
Total	390	100%
3.4 Whether government/authorities are doing enough to enforce child's right as expected:		
Yes	129	33%
No	261	67%
Total	390	100%
3.5 Whether authorities should apprehend any parents that push children to the street:		
Yes	347	89%
No	261	11%
Total	390	100%
3.5 Whether the mass media have adequately covered cases of children violation and plights of street children:		
Yes	123	32%
No	267	68%
Total	390	100%

Interview Results

Opinion on What Child Abandonment and Street Children Mean to Them

The interviewees shared a common understanding of child abandonment and street children phenomenon, describing it as the act of neglecting a child and denying them essential parental care and support. One participant viewed child abandonment as a deliberate disregard for a child's right to proper upbringing, while another defined it as a breach of the duty of care, failing to meet the standard of care that a reasonable person would provide in similar circumstances.

Opinion on Common Causes of Child Abandonment and the Rise of Street Children

Participants identified key causes of child abandonment and the prevalence of street children, including poverty, superstitious beliefs, broken homes, polygamous households, unemployment, illiteracy, and unplanned pregnancies.

1. Poverty

Poverty emerged as a significant factor, with participants explaining that many parents who are low-income earners, or lack resources entirely, feel compelled to abandon their children as a means of alleviating their financial burdens.

2. Superstition

Superstitions about children being possessed by evil spirits or being sources of misfortune lead some parents to reject and abandon their children, leaving them to survive on the streets.

3. Broken Marriages

Many street children are abandoned as a result of broken marriages. Some children become targets of resentment or neglect from one parent or stepparents, often leading to abandonment. A child recounted being forced onto the streets when his father remarried and his stepmother began to mistreat him.

4. Mismanaged Polygamous Homes

Children from polygamous households frequently reported maltreatment from stepparents, who might deny them food and basic needs or accuse them unjustly, pushing them toward street life.

5. Alarming Unemployment Rate

Many parents struggle without stable income sources, either due to job loss or lack of employment, which often forces them to leave children without support.

6. Illiteracy

Parents with limited education tend to be more likely to abandon their children under difficult circumstances, while educated parents are more likely to provide for their children despite financial hardship.

Opinion Negative Implications of Street Children Phenomenon

Child abandonment and the resulting street children phenomenon have serious social consequences. Participants pointed to rising crime rates, including theft, gang activities, cultism, and indiscipline, among street children. These children, often denied access to education and deprived of basic rights, miss out on essential opportunities, making it difficult for them to fulfil potential roles in society. In an interview, one street child recounted being forced onto the streets at age seven when his parents separated. Now, he struggles to recall his family or his community.

Opinion on Mass Media Coverage of Child Rights and Street Children

Participants observed that the mass media provides minimal coverage of child rights and issues faced by street children in Cross River State. The limited media attention typically focuses on crimes committed by street children, rather than the challenges and health risks they face. This narrow portrayal overlooks the systemic issues behind the phenomenon and fails to advocate for their rights.

On Perceptions of Government Intervention and Enforcement arising from Media Advocacy

Interviewees expressed frustration with the government's limited support for street children. While laws exist to protect child rights, their implementation is often weak. Instead of receiving assistance, street children are frequently harassed, arrested, or displaced. The frequent negative portrayal of street children by the mass media as thieves or cultists often results in discrimination from wealthier individuals who may be hesitant to provide support.

Suggested Solutions

Participants emphasized the need for the mass media to focus on promoting the rights of children and actively report against children abandonment to the street. The government and NGOs are suggested to develop effective strategies to address the challenges faced by street children. Suggestions included establishing rehabilitation centres and preventive measures to deter child abandonment. Some street children expressed a strong desire to return to school and pursue their dreams, with one stating that his goal of becoming a lawyer depends on access to education. Interviewees also recommended tackling unemployment and promoting programs aimed at improving economic stability for low-income families. Collaborative efforts from all stakeholders were urged to create a supportive environment to end child abandonment and street children phenomenon.

Discussion

This study highlights the role of mass media in promoting awareness of child rights and addressing issues faced by street children in Cross River State. Findings indicate a significant awareness among respondents aged 20 to 50, with 57% identifying as male and 43% as female. Nearly 88% of participants acknowledged the presence and rising numbers of street children, resonating with Uzodimma et al. (2013), who stressed that neglect and exploitation severely impact children's health and well-being. This increase aligns with the findings of Fatunmole (2022), emphasizing that poverty and limited educational access contribute to the high number of street children in Nigeria.

In examining the effectiveness of media coverage, the study found that 90% of respondents recognized street children as a growing concern within their communities. Contributing factors include poverty, broken homes, and illiteracy, supporting conclusions drawn by Kemi and Bosede (2011) and Harry (2017), who argue that these social and economic challenges perpetuate a cycle of child abandonment and neglect. Despite the pressing nature of this issue, findings suggest that media coverage on street children's plight remains limited, often focusing on the negative behaviours of these children rather than the underlying societal issues. Most media coverage usually only emerges in connection with criminal activities, protests, or public disturbances, reinforcing negative perceptions and neglecting systemic causes like poverty, family breakdown, and parental neglect. Such coverage fails to inspire empathy or advocate for necessary policy changes. This tendency aligns with observations by Angle et al. (2014), which highlights a lack of balanced representation in media portrayals of child rights, where coverage frequently reinforces stigmatizing stereotypes rather than addressing the structural causes behind child homelessness and abandonment.

Oyero (2011) had lamented the underreporting of child rights issues in Nigeria, noting that this lack of coverage prevents a proper public understanding of child rights and the need to prioritize them. Consequently, there is a pressing need for the media to bring child rights to the forefront, recognizing these issues as crucial to national development. This will entail applying development journalism principles by taking responsibility for advocating child rights as integral to societal welfare. The study also addresses the impact of media advocacy on government policies and societal attitudes. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with government intervention, noting that while the Child Rights Act exists, enforcement is weak. This aligns with findings by Olusegun and Idowu (2016), who identified corruption and ineffective implementation as ongoing barriers to child protection. Instead of adopting rehabilitative or supportive measures, authorities tend to resort to punitive approaches, often criminalizing street children rather than addressing their needs.

The study further highlights the critical role of parental care in preventing child abandonment, as noted by Bada (2015), who found that parental neglect profoundly impacts children's development. Unfortunately, societal issues such as superstitious beliefs (Harry, 2017) and economic hardship (Aliyu & Kayode, 2024) have led to an increase in child abandonment, with many children turning to street life, begging, or criminal activities as a means of survival.

Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the rising numbers of street children in Cross River State including the improvement of media representation to focus on child rights advocacy, enhancing government support and enforcement of child protection laws, and fostering community engagement to build awareness and support. Again, leveraging on new

media platforms could play a transformative role in mobilizing advocacy efforts and bringing critical attention to the needs of street children as well as working towards sustainable solutions to break the cycle of neglect and exploitation.

Conclusion

Child rights violations represent a grave concern that significantly undermines the health, education, and future aspirations of children. The harsh realities faced by these vulnerable individuals can lead to a cycle of violence and anti-social behaviour, as they perceive a lack of value placed on their lives by society, resulting in neglect and abandonment. This study concludes that extreme poverty, superstitious beliefs, broken marriages, illiteracy, child labour, and high unemployment rates are critical underlying factors contributing to increasing number of street children in Cross River State.

Moreover, the enforcement of existing laws aimed at promoting and protecting child rights appears inadequate, with few, if any, reported convictions serving as deterrents. The lack of media attention on the challenges faced by these children, combined with a focus on the crimes they allegedly commit, exacerbates their plight and denies them public sympathy and support. Consequently, the phenomenon of street children continues to rise, leaving many without the necessary care, shelter, and resources. To effectively address the issue of street children and safeguard child rights in Cross River State, a multifaceted approach is essential. This should include proactive media engagement to raise awareness, responsive government actions to provide support and rehabilitation, and community-led initiatives that foster social justice and uphold human dignity. By collaborating, all stakeholders can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive and realize their potential.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

1. The mass media and communication experts should intensify advocacy efforts to promote and protect child rights. This should involve reaching both urban and rural populations to ensure widespread awareness and action on child protection issues.
2. Media outlets should increase coverage of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment cases as part of their corporate social responsibility. Reporting on these issues should extend beyond crimes committed by street children to focus on the systemic challenges they face. Publicizing cases and bringing perpetrators to justice will encourage societal accountability.
3. Government intervention should include strict enforcement of laws against parental neglect and child abandonment. Sanctions for intentional neglect will serve as a deterrent, reducing cases of child abandonment and street children over time.
4. The government should take responsibility for children who are homeless and roaming the streets, especially orphans, by establishing rehabilitation programs, offering shelter, and ensuring access to education and social services.
5. To oversee and ensure child rights are protected, the government should create a Child Protection Commission managed by qualified professionals. This body should have the mandate to monitor, advocate for, and implement policies safeguarding child rights.
6. The government should initiate programs that support the reintegration of neglected children into society. This includes providing educational opportunities to help them achieve their aspirations, access stable social services, and foster personal development.
7. The media should actively monitor and report on cases of child rights convictions, highlighting both the consequences for violators and the government's commitment to enforcing child protection laws. This transparency will reinforce deterrence and public trust.
8. Government and civil society organizations should regularly engage with traditional rulers, community-based associations, and other local leaders to identify and abolish cultural practices that contribute to child neglect and rights violations. Town hall meetings and interactive sessions should be conducted to foster community commitment to safeguarding children.

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