



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Prevalence and Forms of Sexual Abuse among Female Hawkers in Sokoto State

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### Keywords

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Sexual abuse is a public health problem affecting one-third of women in their lifetime and female hawkers are especially vulnerable. This study assessed knowledge, prevalence and forms of sexual abuse among female hawkers in Sokoto metropolis.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study among two hundred and forty-five female hawkers using a multistage sampling technique was conducted. A structured interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to obtain information from the study participants. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 25. Continuous variables were summarized as mean and standard deviation, while categorical variables were summarized as frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistical analysis was done using chi-square test and binary logistic regression. The level of statistical significance was set at 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Results:** One hundred and twenty-three (50.2%) of the respondents were within the 10-15 age group, 223 (91.2%) were single, and 64 (26.1%), had Quranic education. Two hundred and nineteen (89.4%) and 26 (10.6%) had good and poor knowledge of sexual abuse respectively. The prevalence of sexual abuse was 24.5%; touching, verbal harassment and attempts at having intercourse were the commonest forms of sexual abuse reported. The living arrangement of parents was the only predictor of sexual abuse (aOR= 4.282; C. I= 1.344-13.643).

**Conclusion:** Free and compulsory education for children especially the girl child and economic empowerment of parents will discourage hawking by children thus limiting the likelihood of children being exposed to sexual exploitation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hawking is the most prevalent child labour in Nigeria and a common practice in Northern parts of Nigeria, especially among school-aged

female children.<sup>1</sup> These female hawkers who spend long hours on the street are exposed to numerous hazards including sexual abuse.<sup>2-4</sup>

Female hawkers are usually found around areas with high concentration and movement of people such as street pavements, markets, schools, motor parks, and bus stops. Many of the female hawkers carry their wares on their heads from place to place, but a few are stationary and often occupy a particular spot to sell their goods.

A study carried out among children aged 12-17 years on knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy of children about prevention of sexual violence against children in Indonesia found that 68.9% of the children had poor knowledge of sexual violence against children.<sup>5</sup> Another study conducted among children in Beijing, China on sexual abuse prevention knowledge and skills found that 44%, 70.5%, and 65.5% of the children knew that sexual abuse occurs when someone intentionally touches a child's private parts, someone asks a child to touch his or her private parts, or someone intentionally shows his private parts to a child respectively.<sup>6</sup>

A study conducted on sexual abuse and risky sexual behaviours among young female hawkers in Burkina Faso showed that 50.4% of them had been sexually abused.<sup>7</sup> Another study on the prevalence and pattern of child sexual abuse revealed a child sexual abuse prevalence of 29.8%.<sup>8</sup> Juvenile female hawkers reported different patterns of sexual abuse such as penetrative sexual intercourse (17.2%), inappropriate touches (81.5%), and verbal abuse (93.1%) in Anambra, South-East Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the South-South, the female hawkers reported verbal abuse (54.1%), inappropriate touch (56.4%), kissing (14.5%)

and rape (12.2%) as forms of sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup> The aftermath of this menace includes long-lasting consequences that could affect the physical and mental well-being of these hawkers.<sup>9,10</sup>

In northern Nigeria, there is paucity of literature on sexual abuse. This study, therefore, sought to assess knowledge, prevalence and forms of sexual abuse among female hawkers in Sokoto metropolis.

The findings of this study would serve as the fulcrum for further interventional activities aimed at reducing the menace of sexual abuse amongst females in general and hawkers in particular.

## METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted amongst female hawkers in Sokoto Metropolis who had been hawking for at least six months before the study. Sokoto Metropolis is the Capital City of Sokoto State, Nigeria which is made up of twenty-three local government areas (LGAs). Four of these LGAs are metropolitan; these include Sokoto North, Sokoto South, Wammako, and Dange Shuni LGAs. Female hawkers who were less than 10 years and those greater than 30 years were excluded. A sample size of 245 was determined using the formula  $n = Z^2pq/d^2$  and a prevalence rate of 81.5% obtained from a previous study on sexual abuse.

Where:

$n$  = Minimum sample size in a population of less than 10,000 people.

$z$  = Standard normal deviation at alpha probability (95% confidence interval) = 1.96

$p$  = Prevalence of sexual abuse amongst hawkers from a previous study = 81.5%.

$q$  = Complementary factor =  $1-p = 1-0.815$

$d$  = Accuracy = 5% (0.05)

After adjusting for non-response, a total of 245 respondents were recruited into the study using a multistage sampling method. The respondents were selected as follows:

Stage 1: Two Local Government Areas (LGA) in the metropolis were selected by simple random sampling using balloting (Sokoto North and Sokoto South); each of the selected LGAs comprised eleven political wards.

Stage 2: From each selected LGA, one political ward was selected (Waziri B and Waziri C) using simple random sampling by balloting. The female hawkers in the selected settlements were identified using the head of the hawkers in that settlement and listed to provide the sampling frame.

Stage 3: From each selected political ward, one settlement/area where hawking activities take place was selected by simple random sampling using balloting. Proportionate allocation was made based on the estimated number of hawkers in each settlement.

Stage 4: Using a systematic sampling method, the first respondent was selected via simple random sampling by balloting. Thereafter, every  $k$ th (4th) respondent was selected until the desired sample size for the settlement was obtained, with  $k$  derived as  $k=N/n$  where  $N$  is the total number of female hawkers in that settlement and  $n$  was the required sample size for that settlement. In a situation where the sample size was not realized, the nearest settlement (which was part of the initially selected settlements) was chosen and the procedure was repeated until the desired sample size was obtained.

### **Study Instrument and Data Collection**

A structured questionnaire designed on an open data kit (ODK) was used to obtain information from the study participants. The questionnaire had five sections: sociodemographic characteristics, hawking information, knowledge of sexual abuse and sexual abuse experiences of respondents. Data were exported from ODK into IBM SPSS version 23.0 Armonk, NY: IBM Corp. for analysis. Continuous variables were summarized as mean and standard deviation, while categorical variables were summarized as frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistical analysis was done using Chi-square test and binary logistic regression. The level of statistical significance was set at 5% ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents**

	Frequency (n=245)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age (years)</b>		
10- 15	123	50.2
16- 20	98	40.0
21- 25	19	7.8
26-30	5	2.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	223	91.2
Married	8	3.2
Separated	7	2.8
Others	7	2.8
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Hausa	230	93.9
Yoruba	3	1.2
Others	12	4.9
<b>Educational Level</b>		
None	8	3.3
Quranic	64	26.1
Primary	143	58.4
Secondary	30	12.2
<b>Educational Level of Mother</b>		
None	47	19.2
Quranic only	154	62.9
Primary	29	11.8
Secondary	9	3.7
Tertiary	6	2.4
<b>Educational Level of Father</b>		
None	28	11.4
Quranic Only	140	57.1
Primary	34	13.9
Secondary	35	14.3
Tertiary	8	3.3

Each correct answer to the questions on knowledge of sexual abuse was scored one mark with no marks for a wrong answer. The scores were converted to percentages and thereafter graded into  $\geq 50\%$  as good knowledge and  $< 50\%$  as poor knowledge.

A respondent was considered to have experienced sexual abuse if she answered yes to at least one act of sexual abuse, such as unwanted touching of the body, rubbing genitals against her body or clothes, making sexual comments about her body,

kissing/hugging her against her will, forcing her to watch other people having sex against her will, exposing their genitals for her to view and an attempt or fully engaging her in sexual intercourse against her will.

## RESULTS

One hundred and twenty- three (50.2%) of the respondents were within the 10-15 years age group with a mean age of  $16.1 \pm 3.44$  years, 223 (91.2%) were single, while 64 (26.1%) had Quranic education (Table 1).

**Table 2: Hawking Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (n=245)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Person respondent is hawking for</b>		
Parents	189	77.1
Guardian	17	6.9
Employer	1	0.4
Relatives	13	5.3
Others	25	10.2
<b>Items hawked/ sold</b>		
Fruits/ vegetables	167	68.2
Soft drinks	35	14.3
Clothes/ bags	1	0.4
Provisions	2	0.8
Traditional Medicine	1	0.4
Table/ Sachet water	19	7.8
Others (*Fura da nono, groundnut, *kulikuli)	20	8.2
<b>Reasons for hawking</b>		
Dropped out of school	1	0.4
Needed to support family	77	31.4
Needed money to get back to school	23	9.4
Needed money to prepare for marriage	109	44.5
Others	35	14.3
<b>Period of hawking</b>		
Morning	32	13.1
Afternoon	197	80.4
Evening/ Night	10	4.1
All day	6	2.4

A total of 189 (77.1%) of the respondents hawked for their parents, 17 (6.9%) hawked for their guardians, and only 1 (0.4%) hawked for an employer. The most prevalent reasons for hawking include saving money for marriage (109 (44.5%)), supporting a family (77 (31.4%)), and needing money to return to school (23 (9.4%)). (Table 2). One hundred and fifty-eight (64.5%) respondents had parents who lived together, and 165 (67.3%) had their daily needs met by their parents. (Table 3).

Two hundred and twenty-three (91.0%) of respondents knew that the act of rubbing a male genital against a girl's body or clothing (frottage) is sexual abuse. Two hundred

(81.6%) of the respondents knew that sexual abuse involved behaviours other than sexual intercourse. Of all the respondents, 219 (89.4%) and 26 (10.6%) had good and poor knowledge of sexual abuse respectively (Table 4). Twelve (92.3%) of the thirteen (5.2%) individuals who had engaged in sexual activity were married. (Table 5).

The prevalence of sexual abuse was 60 (24.5%), 241 (98.4%) never had anyone rub his genitalia on their body or clothes against their will, 245 (100%) never had someone make them see other people having sex against their will, one (0.4%) of the respondents witnessed someone expose his genitals for her to see when

she didn't want to, and two (0.8%) respondents were forced to have sexual intercourse against their wish. (Table 6).

**Table 3: Living Arrangement and Social History of Respondents**

Variables	Frequency (n=245)	Percentage (%)
<b>Currently Living with</b>		
Both parents	158	64.5
Alone	1	0.4
Mother only	45	18.4
Father only	16	6.5
Guardian	25	10.2
<b>Parents alive or dead</b>		
Both alive	176	71.8
Only one parent alive	54	22.0
Both dead	15	6.1
<b>Living arrangement if parents are alive (n=176)</b>		
Living together	154	62.9
Divorced	17	6.9
Separated	5	2.0
<b>Respondents' financial provider</b>		
Self	48	19.6
Boyfriend	5	2.0
Parents	165	67.3
Family/ relatives	21	8.6
Others	6	2.4

**Table 4: Knowledge of Sexual Abuse among Respondents**

Variables	Yes Frequency (n=245)	Percentage (%)
The act of rubbing a male genital against a girl's body or clothing (frottage)	223	91.0
A girl whose body was insulted using sexual words	214	87.3
Hugging and kissing a girl against her wish	175	71.4
Exposing young girls to see other girls in a sexual act with older boys/men	226	92.2
Exposing a man's genital(s) (Exhibitionism) for a girl to see against her wish	219	89.4
Exposure of young girls to materials that contain sexual images	218	89.0
Attempt to have sexual intercourse with a young girl against her wish	191	78.0
Sexual abuse consists of other behaviours other than sexual intercourse	200	81.6
Sex with a girl below 13 years (defilement)	245	100
<b>Graded Knowledge</b>		
Good knowledge	219	89.4
Poor knowledge	26	10.6

There was a higher proportion of individuals who had not been sexually abused among those under the age of 15 compared to those over the age of 15, albeit this was not statistically significant. (Table 7). Living arrangement of parents was the only predictor of sexual abuse (aOR= 4.282; C. I= 1.344-13.643, p= 0.014) (Table 8).

## DISCUSSION

According to the findings of this study, 230 (93.6%) of the respondents belonged to the Hausa or Fulani tribes, which may be related to the fact that the indigenous people of the studied area are primarily of these two tribes. This is identical to findings from a study on prevalence, pattern and predictors of sexual

abuse among female hawkers in Kano, where 93% of research participants were Hausa/Fulani.<sup>1</sup> About half of the respondents were within the 10-15 years age group and could still be categorized as children.<sup>11</sup> Nigeria has adopted the Child Rights Act to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of a Child which proscribes all forms of child abuse including child labour such as hawking. Almost two decades after, more than half of the children in Nigeria between 5 and 17 years are still involved in child labour.<sup>12,13</sup> This may not be unconnected to the fact that some states in Nigeria are yet to adopt the Child Rights Act, including Sokoto where this study was carried out.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 5: Sexual practices among Respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Ever had sex (n=245)</b>		
Yes	13	5.3
No	232	94.7
<b>Reason for having sex (n=13)</b>		
Marriage	12	92.3
Forced	1	7.7
<b>Age at first sexual intercourse (years) (n=13)</b>		
15-17	9	69.2
18- 20	3	23.1
≥21	1	7.7
<b>How sex occurred (n=13)</b>		
Willingly by both parties	12	92.3
forced to have it	1	7.7

More than half (57%) of the respondents in this study had no formal education which is in tandem with the findings from a study among hawkers in Burkina Faso where 53% of their study subjects had no formal education.<sup>4</sup> However, the proportion from our study was

higher than that obtained from the Kano and Anambra studies where 41.5% and 12.9% of their respondents, respectively, had no formal education.<sup>1,2</sup> These findings were however different from a study in Ekiti where the majority of the hawkers had formal education.<sup>5</sup>

The high level of informal education in these locations is not unexpected considering the dominance of Quranic education, high out-of-school children, and low female enrolment in schools.

The North-West zone of Nigeria where the study was conducted, has the highest prevalence of females without education (63.8%). Similarly, Sokoto State has the highest prevalence of females without education (81.6%) and the lowest literacy rate (10.6%) among women aged 15-45 years.<sup>6</sup> The poor female educational indices in this region of the country may not be unrelated to the fact that girls are generally married off at very young ages, often without education. It is widely assumed that females will eventually marry and leave their parents' homes, and that education may not be advantageous to them but rather hinder their ability to marry because the long years spent in school may turn potential suitors off. The dominant patriarchal system in most regions of Africa considers the less educated girl to be more submissive than the educated one.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the need not to send the girl child to school as resources expended on her are seen as being wasted since she will ultimately be married off to another family. These beliefs and practices are still rife in most parts of the country hence the low female school enrolment and high dropouts from schools. This underscores the need for compulsory and free education for the girl child as their education will mean educating the family in particular and the nation in general.

The prevalence of sexual abuse in this study was 24.5%, other studies have reported a higher prevalence of sexual abuse in the Southern parts of Nigeria.<sup>1,2,16</sup> This may not be unrelated to the socio-cultural milieu in the Northern part of Nigeria where females are generally conservative and sex outside marriage is regarded a taboo. However, there have been reports of indiscriminate touching of body parts and rubbing genitals against their bodies, which could stimulate young girls sexually and lay the stage for subsequent sexual intercourse. A similar finding has been reported in other studies in Kano and Jigawa States.<sup>1,5</sup>

The main reason for hawking in this study was that the girl needed money to prepare for marriage. In Northern Nigeria, the girl's family is responsible for furnishing the apartment where the young couple will live; in addition to numerous food items, most of these girls while preparing for marriage are also concerned with getting and saving enough money to tastefully furnish the husbands' to be's houses. This is corroborated by findings from other studies carried out in Northern Nigeria,<sup>16,17</sup> but differs from studies carried out in Ekiti and Jigawa where the main reason for hawking was to assist parents and alleviate poverty respectively.<sup>18, 19</sup> Most families send their female children to hawk to boost the economic situation of the home while some of the boys go to school, farm or engage in business activities believing that the boys will be future breadwinners while the girls will be married off.<sup>3</sup> This is supported by other studies where poverty was the main reason why girls were on the street hawking.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 6: Prevalence and forms of sexual abuse among respondents**

Variables*	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	If yes, did it happen in the last 3 months	
			Yes n (%)	No n (%)
<b>Have been previously abused</b>	60 (24.50)	185 (75.5)	27 (45.0)	33 (55.0)
<b>Forms of sexual abuse experienced (n = 60)*</b>				
<b>Someone touched some parts of your body when you did not want</b>	20 (8.2)	225 (91.8)	11 (55)	9 (45)
<b>Someone rubbed his genitals against your body or clothes against your will</b>	4 (1.6)	241 (98.4)	2 (50)	2 (50)
<b>Someone made comments about your body using sexual words</b>	18 (7.3)	227 (92.7)	6 (33)	12 (67)
<b>Someone kissed or hugged you when you did not want</b>	9 (3.7)	236 (96.3)	5 (55)	4 (45)
<b>Someone made you to watch other people having sex against your wish</b>	0 (0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
<b>Someone exposed his genitals for you to see when you did not want</b>	1 (0.4)	244 (99.6)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.0)
<b>Someone attempted to have sexual intercourse with you against your will</b>	18 (7.2)	227 (92.8)	8 (44.4)	10 (55.6)
<b>someone forcefully had sexual intercourse with you against your will</b>	2 (0.8)	243 (99.2)	0.0 (0.0)	2 (100)

\* Multiple responses applied

The majority of the girls in this study who had experienced sexual intercourse said it was willingly done. However, it is noteworthy that these girls are young and are incapable of making informed decisions. They also lack negotiating skills and are often desperate to sell off their goods and make money not minding having transactional sex just to make ends meet. Their partners are likely to be older men who are in other sexual relationships and are not likely to use condoms during the sexual intercourse thus exposing them to the double risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy.<sup>8</sup> Studies have shown that some of the girls involved in hawking are not even aware that they can contract STIs or even pregnancy by engaging in sexual intercourse, thereby worsening the problem.<sup>2,20</sup>

In our study, there was a lower proportion of girls who had formal education among those

who were sexually abused even though this was not statistically significant. Education is known to create awareness about their rights. Hence girls who are formally educated are less likely to fall prey to sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup> There was a higher proportion of hawkers who lived together with their parents among those who were not sexually abused as compared to those who lived with other relations.

The living arrangement of parents was the only predictor of sexual abuse in this study, as hawkers whose parents lived together were four times more likely not to be sexually abused as compared to those whose parents lived apart from each other. The family is the first agent of socialization for children hence parental involvement in the personal life of their children often involves strengthening and reinforcement of morals and values.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 7: Association between some variables and sexual abuse**

Variables	Experience of Sexual Abuse		Test Statistics & p-value
	Abused	Not Abused	
<b>Age</b>			
≤15 years	20 (16.3%)	103 (83.7%)	$\chi^2 = 9.047$
>15 years	40 (32.8%)	67.2 (67.2%)	<b>p= 0.003*</b>
<b>Person hawker lives with</b>			
Parents	27 (17.1%)	131 (82.9%)	$\chi^2 = 13.180$
Non-parents	33 (37.9%)	54 (62.1%)	<b>p&lt;0.001*</b>
<b>Parents alive</b>			
Both alive	33 (18.8%)	143 (81.3%)	$\chi^2 = 11.134$
Both not alive	27 (39.1%)	42 (60.9%)	<b>p= 0.001*</b>
<b>Living Arrangement of parents if alive</b>			
Living together	23 (14.9%)	131 (85.1%)	$\chi^2 = 11.770$
Not living together	10 (45.5%)	12 (54.5%)	<b>p=0.002*</b>
<b>Education of hawker</b>			
Formal	20 (27.8%)	52 (72.2%)	$\chi^2 = 0.596$
Informal	40 (23.1%)	113 (76.9%)	p= 0.440
<b>Education of mother</b>			
Formal	19 (25.0%)	57 (75.0%)	$\chi^2 = 0.016$
Informal	41 (24.3%)	128 (75.7%)	p= 1.000
<b>Hawking for</b>			
Parents	43 (22.8%)	146 (77.2%)	$\chi^2 = 0.351$
Non-Parents	17 (30.4%)	39 (69.6%)	p=0.245
<b>Currently has boyfriend</b>			
Yes	47 (29.9%)	110 (70.1%)	$\chi^2 = 7.012$
No	13 (14.8%)	75 (85.2%)	<b>p= 0.008*</b>
<b>Knowledge of Sexual abuse</b>			
Poor knowledge	6 (23.1%)	20 (76.9%)	$\chi^2 = 0.031*$
Good knowledge	54 (24.7%)	165 (75.3%)	p= 1.000

**Table 8: Predictors of sexual abuse**

Variables	aOR	Sexual abuse 95% CI		P-Value
		Lower	Upper	
<b>Age (in years)</b>				
≤15	1.864	0.794	4.376	0.152
>15	1			
<b>Person respondent lives with</b>				
Parents	1.244	0.372	4.156	0.723
Non- parents	1			
<b>Current boyfriend</b>				
Yes	0.540	0.210	1.389	0.201
No	1			
<b>Living arrangement of parents</b>				
Living together	4.282	1.344	13.643	<b>0.014*</b>
Not Living together	1			

**\*Significant at p<0.05**

## CONCLUSION

More than half of the hawkers in this study did not have formal education with about a quarter of them experiencing sexual abuse before the study. It was also observed that most of the hawkers took to their trade to raise monies for their marriage in the future and respondents whose parents lived together were four times more likely not to be sexually abused. There is a need to ensure free and compulsory education for all children including the girl child to nip in the bud the menace of exposure to sexual abuse and exploitation during hawking. Economic empowerment of parents will go a long way in discouraging hawking by the children.

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