

Childhood Practices among Rural Settlements in Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS) Environment in Sokoto State Nigeria: Issues and Prospects

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Abstract

The study focus was to examine the practices on handling children in Usmanu Danfodiyo environments and suggest ways they can be improved upon. The population is made up of 85 village settlements and members of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. The Purposeful sampling technique was used to select 200 students and 100 parents for the study. The instrument used was researcher-constructed questionnaire titled questionnaire on Environmental Practices against Children in Usmanu Danfodiyo, University, Sokoto', which has a reliability index of .78. Three research questions were raised, and the statistical tools used were percentages and means score value. The findings of the study were: Some of the harmful practices involving children are hawking, not enrolling them in schools, babysitting, begging, early marriage and house maids. The effects include illiteracy, delinquency, political thuggery, negative socialization and drug addiction. The practices are as source of income, source of job, marriage suitors and positive socialization. Though the practices constitute form of child abuse and Neglect, parents viewed the practices as satisfactory because they are source of their income generating activities. Recommendations offered were: the need for enlightenment and sensitization to create awareness on practices that are harmful and need to be stopped. University management should provide support services like childcare services and promote affordable private laundry service providers. It should support education of village children. Similarly, the University management should ban all form of practices that are harmful to school-age children within its environment.

Keywords: Childhood; Settlements; Rural.

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1. Introduction

The environment in which a child is raised plays a significant role in child's life, well-being and life outcomes. Experiences children are exposed to could have either positive or negative effect on them. Center for Disease Control (2016) pointed out that childhood experiences both positive and negative have tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity. Virtually, geographical and demographic constitute of an environment along with human interactive modes are sources of every child life experiences. Each environment has its peculiarity in term of its practices and how the practices affect children either positively or negatively, similarly University environments have their peculiarities in terms of their practices or functions toward their immediate communities and society. Practices are considered to be harmful when they affect the fundamental right of a child such as right to education, health, dignity, and physical integrity (Badu, 2004). Also, anything that constitutes danger to a child, either inform of decision, activities, comments and practices, or that does not take cognizance of the need, aspiration and wellbeing of a child may form part of harmful practices. In this regard, any act that is harmful is considered as violation and violent, whether done intentionally or not deliberately in any form by anybody especially when it is meted against innocent, harmless children. Violence against children is detrimental as it has both short-term and long-term consequence on their wellbeing. Actually, among of the cardinal principles and mission of UDUS is "to identify the needs and aspiration of the people where it is located". Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS) is known as the most peaceful university in Nigeria which entrenches etiquette of worthiness in learning and character to its students which should transcend to members of its immediate and extended communities.

Currently, campaigns against harmful practices, abuse and violence against children is a global concern, due to high prevalence of various forms of commissions and omission done against children in different set-up in all societies around the world. Article 18 of United Nation (UN) Convention on the right of children as ratified by many countries including Nigeria is to ensure that child's best interests are parents basic concern (Uba, 2002.) At regional level Nigeria also ratified the Africa Charter on the Rights and welfare of the

child (Ahmed, 2015), so as to protect the child from being harmed. However, existing researches revealed (UNESCO 2010, UNICEF 2013) that even custodians of children like parents, family members and leaders entrusted to serve and safeguard children's interest and wellbeing partake in some forms of harmful practices against children. Schools, educational and health institution and even children welfare centers who are stakeholders also engaged in harmful practices against children. The short- and long term consequences of these harmful practices could be grave and damaging not only to the child, but to society and humanity at large. UNICEF (2006) reported that exclusion from education may translate into illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, deprivation and inequality. This means that any community where children of school age are engaged in activities other than education during school hours form part of harmful practices.

Fundamentally, a university has to be concerned with all categories of human beings within their vicinity and in all their manifestations that is educational, biological, and mental and also objective and subjective realities in their socio-cultural emotional and economic interaction with each other based on which substantive progress and advancement could be achieved. Geoffrey (2009) outlined some of the functions of universities to include among others are serve as national assets in addressing many policy priorities, and as source of knowledge and innovative thinking, provide skill personnel and credible credentials, contribute to innovations, attract international talent and business investments, agents of social justice and mobility, contribute to social and cultural vitality and determinants of health and wellbeing.

This is quite in tune with the vision statement of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto:

"To be a center of excellence in teaching, research and community services in all fields of human endeavor. While the mission statement is to provide quality teaching, research and community services to all, under the most conducive atmosphere, and in line with the national policy on education, irrespective of social class, gender, race, nationality and religion."

The inference drawn by this paper is that the role of the university is to provide in and out benefits to its members, those of immediate

environment and larger society. Based on geographical location of Usmanu Danfodiyo University main campus the village settlements within its immediate environment are part of its community development mission. Children form part of these community settlements, how the activities and circumstances in the university influence their life is the focus of this paper. The university permanent site campus occupies vast land, with some villages located in close range with hostels, staff quarters, and academic and office structures. Like any university, the main campus environment is lively and full of activities ranging from academic, social, business or economic enterprises involving staff, students and people from immediate communities and outsiders coming from different part of the state and country at large. The environment fosters a lot of interaction between different human groups, for instance because of the busy like nature of academic timetable which preoccupies the students time from 8:00am to 6:00 pm daily and lack of certain services by the university like laundry services, baby care provisions, and meal services as obtainable in the past, couple with distance to town services, students resort to use the villagers and their children to get cheap and affordable services. The nearby villagers specifically considered the University environment as safe heaven to boost their socio-economic status, sequel to which children are subjected to child labor, child neglect and child abuse. Children are engaged in menial paid job, baby sitters, housemaids, and hawking. These are children who are supposed to gain from rich educational and academic activities in the university, but are out of school. From the 44 years of existence of the university, there aren't many records about villager's participation in educational and academic programs in the university. Therefore, this research explores the role played by various groups within the university as they engage children in some paid service and other activities, and to establish the benefits, consequences and prospects of the practices on children and society at large.

Statement of Problem

The issues at stake in UDUS is prevailing practice of student (mothers) offering their babies to young village girls to serve as baby sitters or care givers while also school age children are seen roaming about, hawking, begging, engaged in domestic work as house girl/houseboy, or serving as errand boys/girls (Yarinya girls and Yaro boys) for token amount of money. Education is not their

priority. This amount, to some sort of neglect on the part of parents and other stake holders in university environment, can weaken developing brain architecture and permanently set the body's stress system in high alert. On the positive side, nurturing relationships in the early years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effect of early life stress with lifelong benefit for learning, behavior and health. With this clue in mind, this study is to investigate the prevalence and forms of practices against children within and around the Usmanu Danfodiyo University community, their effects and ways to address them.

The purpose of this study intends to highlight some activities and practices that have adverse effect on immediate or future life of children in the study area. The objective is to find out how these some practices could be addressed for the generation of children living within the campus to have a better package of services that will better their future life outcomes. The picture of the future is through the child of today. To achieve the objectives set out by this study, the following questions were set:

- What are the forms and prevalence practices within the study area that are harmful to children?
- How do the practices affect children around the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto?
- What are the views of parents in the village communities on these practices against the children?

2. Methodology

The survey method was employed in this study. The population area comprises staff and students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (Main campus) and inhabitant of villages around the University environment. The villages within the main campus are 85 disperse small or village communities, whose major occupations are farming, trading and other menial jobs. Some of them are employed in the university as daily paid laborers and security personnel. The villages rely in engaging their children in serving as domestic workers, hawkers, errands' performers to support financial incomes. Purposeful sampling method was used to select 200 students and 100 parents with children from the surrounding villages comprising 50 males (fathers) and 50 females (mothers) purposefully selected. The instruments used were an interview schedule and questionnaire which

were validated and reliability construct of 0.76 was obtained. Likert four scales were used as follows: strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics of means and percentages. Based on data and results obtained, the decision was an aggregate score of 2.50 and above is accepted and means score below 2.50 is rejected for Likert scale.

Data Presentations and analysis

Four research questions were posed and were interpreted and analyzed using frequency count and means average.

Research Question

Research Question One: What are the forms and prevalence practices within the study area that are harmful to children within the university environment?

Table (1): Forms and rank order of prevalence of childhood practices in Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto environment

Types of harmful practices	Rank order	Prevalence area in frequency count					
		Hostel Area	Academic Area	Staff Quarters	Villages	Primary School	Total
Hawking	1 st	54 (27%)	83(42.5%)	13(6.5%)	25(12.5%)	25(12.5%)	200(100%)
No schooling	2 nd	35(17.5%)	24(12%)	20(10%)	120(60%)	11(5.5%)	200(100%)
Baby care	3 rd	22 (11%)	178(89%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	200(100%)
Begging	4 th	133(66.5%)	10(5%)	54(27%)	13(6.5%)	00(0%)	200(100%)
Neglect	5 th	00(0%)	76(38%)	12(6%)	112(56%)	00(0%)	200(100%)
Errands	6 th	25 (12.5%)	10(5%)	45(22.5%)	111(55.5%)	9(4.5%)	200(100%)
Domestic works	7 th	00 (0%)	00(0%)	53(21.5%)	147(73.5%)	00(0%)	200(100%)
In adequate feeding	8 th	00(0%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	200(100%)	00(0%)	200(100%)
Economic exploitation	9 th	45(22%)	52(26.6%)	30(15%)	51(25.5%)	22(11%)	200(100%)
Hard labour	10 th	57(29.9%)	21(10.5%)	54(27%)	60(30%)	13(6%)	200(100%)
Early marriage	11 th	00(0%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	200(100%)	200(100%)
Physical exploitation	12 th	67(33.5%)	23(11.5%)	33(16.5%)	51(25.5%)	25(12.5%)	200(100%)
Beating	13 th	16(8%)	00(0%)	5(2.5%)	113(56.5%)	70(35%)	200(100%)
Corporal punishment	14 th	00(0%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	50(25%)	150(75%)	200(100%)
Sexual exploitation	15 th	00(0%)	00(0%)	00(0%)	45(22.5%)	00(0%)	200(100%)

The data in table one shows the opinions of 200 student respondents on the types of practices that constitute harm to children within UDUS campus. Using ranking order in hierarchy of prevalence, hawking was first as most prevalence, not attending school was 2nd and child care service by young school age was 3rd. The table shows baby care were mostly engaged in school academic area with 178(89%) of responses. Children considered to be physically exploited and engaged in laborious

work in hostels are 67(33.5%) and villages are 51(25.5%). Child neglect and beating were considered high in villages with 112(56%) and 113(56.5%) respondents respectively. While corporal punishments are practiced with most prevalence in primary school area with 76 (38%) responses.

Research Question2: How do the practices affect children around the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto environment?

Table (2): showing opinion of participants on the effects of the practices on children?

Effects	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	means	Decision
Delinquency	528	90	54	11	3.42	Accepted
Illiteracy	800	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	Accepted
Social Ills	625	96	24	00	3.73	Accepted
Corruption	572	96	40	5	3.57	Accepted
Drug addiction	48	120	42	137	1.74	Rejected
Redundancy	180	207	60	54	2.51	Accepted
Prostitution	80	99	48	123	1.75	Rejected
Joblessness	62	046	38	108	2.08	Accepted
Political thugs	312	186	16	22	2.68	Accepted
Begging	452	135	60	12	3.12	Accepted
Health Hazard	452	135	60	12	3.30	Accepted

Data in table 2 shows that the entire participants strongly agreed (4.00) that illiteracy are effects posed by the practices with 625 views who strongly agree that the practices bring about social ills to children while 572 participants and an aggregate 3.57 consider the practices that children are exposed to as source of corruption. The least effect indicated was drug addiction with (137) and prostitution (123) out of 200 participants strongly disagree that they constitute effects to children. The findings of the study show that delinquency,

illiteracy, social ills, corruption, redundancy, joblessness, thuggery, begging and health hazard are possible effects and the decision was accepted because they met statistical aggregate of 2.50 and above while the decision for drug addiction and prostitution was rejected.

Research Question Three: What are the views of parents in the village communities on these practices against the children?

Table (3): showing opinion of parents about the practices children are exposed to in UDUS environment

Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Decision
Source of income	400	00	00	00	400	4.00	Accepted
Marriage	300	30	20	5	355	3.55	Accepted
Source of job	240	45	40	5	330	3.30	Accepted
Positive Socialization	280	60	16	02	219	3.58	Accepted
Negative Socialization	40	30	40	60	170	1.70	Rejected
Child abuse	20	45	40	50	155	1.55	Rejected
Child neglect	60	75	80	20	235	2.35	Rejected
Illiteracy	280	18	44	02	344	3.44	Accepted

Table 3 indicates that parents accepted the practices children are exposed to in Usmanu Danfodiyo University served as source of economic income, marriage, job and positive socialization, because the decisions level obtained on these

factors ranges above 2.50 mean. They rejected these practices to be a form of child abuse, child neglect and negative socialization. However, illiteracy was accepted as issue resulting from the practices children are exposed to in UDUS environment.

Table (4): Showing responses of parents on how they rated treatment of children in university environments

Parents	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Un Satisfactory	Very unsatisfactory	Mean	Decision
Mothers	160	15	10	0	3.70	Accepted
Fathers	120	30	14	3	3.33	Accepted

Table 4 provides opinions of mother and fathers in village communities in UDUS environment and shows that the conditions faced by children are acceptable to them with both parents' responses rating above the decision level of 2.50 mean.

Major findings

This study was able to find the following based on the objectives and research questions raised:

- Some of the harmful practices involving school children are hawking, not enrolling them in schools, babysitting, begging, early marriage and housekeeping. The places where these practices are prevalent are academic areas, student hostels, and staff quarters.
- The practices affect children in issues such as illiteracy, delinquency, political thuggery, corruption and drug addiction.
- Parents of these children were found to regard the practices as source of income, source of job, marriage suitors and positive socialization.
- The parents viewed the practices as very satisfactory.

3. Discussion

Research question one: The study was able to identify (table 1) fifteen practices that could have adverse effects on children raised in Usmanu

Danfodiyo University Sokoto village environments, the most predominant is hawking, followed by not attending school, then baby care, begging, neglect and the least prevalences were sexual abuse,

beating and corporal punishment. The study was able to establish that most of children engaged are school age children, which result to lack enrolment in schools, which is a fundamental right of every Nigerian child as stipulated in child right act ratified by National Assembly of Nigerians 2013. Based on the field survey observed that there are only four public primary schools for 75 village settlements within UDUS main campus. This is highly inadequate, due to their locations and distance, young children cannot cover the distance daily, so the population of children going to school is very small while the only existing private school is Usmanu Danfodiyo Model Primary School and parents from the villages cannot afford the fees charged. This might have accounted for the reason why the children are engaged into hawking, babysitting, begging, domestic house help and errands for students and staff of UDUS. This finding collaborates with the findings of (UNICEF, 2013) that poverty is one of the factors responsible for children not attending schools. The inference drawn by this study is that these children denied education as a birth right. The Universal Basic Education (UBE Acts 2004) indicated basic education as free compulsory education for all citizens irrespective of tribe, status and location. Rather taking advantage of university environment for education and its advancement, children are left to grow up as illiterates adding to high illiteracy rate in Sokoto state. This is a challenge to the state and the country at large. Moreover, Nigeria is signatory to the global missions of Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and other laudable programmes like UNICEF and UNESCO which are meant to promote the wellbeing of children and prepare them as future leaders. But from all indications, the children in villages around Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto are not having fair share of the programmes.

This study also found girls are used to serve as care givers in the University Campus. This is inimical not only the girl child being denied schooling and education, but to the young baby who needs quality care and stimulating environment that will compensate and serve his growth and development needs. There is no existing child care center for provision of care services for children of students and staff in the University. An astronomical cost of child care services for children in the town in addition to the distance of the university to the town (about 4 Kilometers) might account for the reason why

breast-feeding mothers in the campus resort to the only alternative they have, which is the use of village girls despite their incapacities to attend the needs and demands of infants and babies. The plight of these babies during lecture and exam time is quite worrisome, couple with consequences it has on the student's mother who may have to leave lectures or exam halls to fulfill crying baby needs. The scenario was described by the Association of American University Women (AAUW, 2016) that mothers in colleges wear many hats as parents, wives, employees, breadwinners, caregivers, daughters, home managers, sisters, students and many more competing demands which make her stay in the institution very hard, and they mostly indicate care giving responsibility and limited resources as reasons for drop out or reason for their inability to succeed as desired. Robust literatures have revealed some benefits of institutionalized child care services to enhance psycho-social, cognitive, development of the child (Abubakar 2013). It also contributes to efficiency of working class parents, and enhances workers productivity (AAUW, 2016). Although the National Policy on Education through UBE acts (2004) has included Early Child care Education (ECCDE) programme as its mandate by instructing all public primary schools the country to open an ECCDE centers, but in reality there no such service center in all the primary school in UDUS campus. Association for Childhood Education International has reiterated the need for quality child care and education services in all communities (Oduolowo, 2016). Evidences available shows that higher educational institutions have embraced the practice of providing child care services in its environment for students, workers and members of public. AAUW (2016) indicates that in United State alone, more than 100 community colleges that offer an on-campus, which is a must for mothers in colleges, but none is available in UDUS, this makes early child care center very relevant as a supportive strategy to promote girl-child and women education. Currently, female education is being advocated by the State and Federal governments as means to salvage the fate of female citizens and the country at large. It is also in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) number 4 and 5 respectively.

Research Question Two identified the effects of harmful practices against children. The study found that the children indulged are those from the villages around UDUS, but none of them is from staff children. They are exposed to series of

problems (table 2). All the 200 students participants and 100 parents strongly agreed that the practices make children illiterate, other effects include begging, delinquency and corruption, as well as some health hazard, social ills, drug addiction, redundancy, political thuggery and becoming societal menace known as boy's area. The outcome of this study is in congruence with Obinaju (2004)'s opinion that parenting practices, child abuse, child neglect and child labour can lead to deviant behavior and criminality. Actually, society that aspire to be among the 20 most developed economic nations of the world, cannot stand great when its younger generation is being exposed to harmful practices that ill-equip them and hamper their development and erode their chances to achieve success. the findings, it could be deduced that children who have been abused or harmed can be socially, educationally, economically, psychologically enraged. They can show sign of anger, hurt, confusion and even worse violence, their self-esteem is shattered and they can grow to be adults who continue the cycle of violence to other children.

Question Three explores how the parents and members of villages around the University consider the practices. The study shows that (table 3) parent's opinion comprising 50 mothers and 50 fathers viewed the practices of engaging their school aged children in hawking, house helping, baby sitting as beneficial. This may be attribute to ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness, lack of focus on the long-term consequences. They seem to focus only on immediate gain yielded by the practices. They do not see it as form of child abuse or neglect. This confirms further that a generation of abused parents will replicate the cycle of child abuse.

Still on research question three: Relating to Parents views on consequence of the practices. The study was able to discover (table 4) that all the parents agreed that the practices yield economic income, job for their children, marriage suitors for their girls and positive socialization. The findings of this study correlate with the opinion of Chikodi (2004) that it is the family that usually practices and sustains harmful traditional practices against children. This equally and clearly shows that the parents (villagers) do not see it as wrong or regret their practices and actions, also they do not consider the practices as harmful. This is because they lack education awareness. They feel they cannot change the cycle of regenerating children who are illiterate, ignorant and subservient to

bourgeoisie class or education elites. The study discovered that staff children living in main campus are sent to school and their children are not used as sale boys, house girls, baby sitters and hawking like the village children. The study further discovers that all the student participants used in the study declare that they will not allow their own children engage in those practices. It is in this regard that this study considered the practices as not only harmful but violent as it violates the fundamental right of child. Actually, children of the elite, workers in the University are not engaged into such practices. As such the management of the University may need to intervene to rescue these innocent children from being misused and subjected to harmful practices due to circumstances of being born to village poor parents.

4. Conclusion

Every society or community around the globe is involved in some form of practices that are inimical to children. Therefore, the quests to eliminate the practices begin with having resourceful parents and adults who are capable and interested in attending all the needs of children that are essential for their survival, growth and development in all dimensions. Children are like raw material that can be refine and mold into any shape desired. In this regard the practices children are exposed to should be such that guarantee them to grow into the kind of adults we want them to be, taking cognizance of the peculiarities associated with individual differences. There is need for corroborated efforts, approaches, programmes, projects and packages especially in villages to ensure that children are given what they deserve, and all adults are stakeholders in this venture. The generation rests on the adults just as the future of adults rests on the younger generations.

Recommendations

- The university management should provide laws banning the harmful practices involving the use of children during school hours for whatever purpose.
- University management should establish on-campus child care services center that is of quality standard and affordable.
- Parents and members of communities within the university environments should be enlightened and sensitized to stop the practices that have effect on children such as advanced by this study.

- There is need for capacity training of parents through education, skill acquisition and economic empowerment to boost their capacity to send their children to school and train them properly.
- As students and staff do not engage their children in these practices, they should stop using school children during school hours for any activity.

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