

## The influence of migration and urbanization on the incidence of street children in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Many countries around the world are experiencing rapid urbanization, which is closely linked to migration. Cities are growing exponentially as people migrate in search of better opportunities. As the rural-urban influx continues, urban facilities are strained, and this results in poverty, which is a promising situation for the incidence of street children. Through the literature review, the study provides insights into the relationship between migration, urbanization and street child incidence in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria, and the reasons why children are involved in street life. It also explains some important theories that have advanced our knowledge of the phenomenon. The study shows that there is a relationship between migration, urbanization, and the incidence of street children in Nigeria. Although these children have some opportunities and freedom to work and do whatever they want on the streets, their dignity is still violated, which has adverse effects on their overall well-being in terms of mental, physical, emotional, and moral health. The article identifies poverty as the main factor that pushes children to the streets in Nigeria, and the same factor is observed to influence their migration from one geographical area to another. The article concludes by suggesting the enormous demographic benefits for children.

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## Introduction

The term urbanization describes the rapid expansion of cities in emerging nations (OECD/UN ECA/AfDB, 2022). Migration often happens simultaneously with major problems related to basic amenities, such as housing, clothing, food, health care, education, transportation, employment opportunities, and other necessities. Due to a much wider divide between the majority of poor people and the minority of affluent people, there is an increased problem with children who are unable to handle the demanding and difficult issues of urbanization. According to Barney (2015), urbanization refers to the process by which people migrate from rural to urban areas, the progressive increase in the proportion of people who live in urban areas, and the ways in which different cultures adapt to change. Population growth and urban migration go hand in hand, according to the United Nations (2012). The United Nations views urbanization as part of a process of societal transition that also includes modernization, industrialization, and rationalization. Based on this premise, several scientific studies predict that cities will double in population over the next 20 years and the number of "megacities" will rise by 1.5 billion (World Cities Report, 2020; UNDESA, 2019; UNDP, 2018). According to UNDP (2018), there are currently thirty-three (33) "mega-cities" with populations of 10 million or more, which accounts for around 7% of the global population.

Each country has its own definition of what constitutes an urban area (Agergaard *et al.*, 2019). As pointed out by Potts (2018), urban regions may not be the same as rural areas depending on the nation. For example, an urban area in Albania is defined as a town with fewer than 400 residents, but an urban region in Japan has 50,000 residents (Anderson, 2005). Density is a factor that

many other countries use to categorize a region as urban or rural. In his study, Richards (2019) notes that urban regions in India are places with a population density of at least 1,000 persons per km<sup>2</sup> and at least three-fourths of male adults employed in non-agricultural occupation. In Sweden, built-up regions are referred to as urban zones if there are less than 200 meters between homes (Anderson, 2005). Other countries define urban regions based on the abundance of urban elements, like the number of shopping centers or educational facilities, the existence of drains and sewers, and electricity and water supply systems, among other things (Richards, 2019). These prospects explain why migrating to cities is so tempting to many people and their families.

Migration refers to the movement of a person or persons from one location to another, which may be on a temporary or permanent basis (Segal, 2019). Several factors influence migration, including economic growth, technological development, conflict, and social disruption (Francis & Yinalabi, 2022; Rubenstein, 2018; Kilkey, & Palenga-Moellenbeck, 2016; White, Furlow, & Rice, 2007; Waugh, 2005). People move to urban areas because of pull factors, while they move away from the countryside due to push factors. Job prospects in urban centers are one of the key pull factors. There are several manufacturing industries in metropolitan areas that provide prospects for high earnings. Additionally, a larger variety of educational institutions provide programs and training in a range of disciplines. These variables all contribute to migratory movements into metropolitan areas, both temporarily and permanently. The push factors, on the other hand, include substandard living circumstances and the absence of paid work prospects in rural areas. Due to inadequate medical care, constrained educational and

employment prospects, droughts, floods, and a shortage of sufficient agricultural land, there is a movement away from rural regions (Gacinya & Kirimi, 2021).

As a result of moving to the city, one can gain access to better chances, job, healthcare service, and schooling, allowing them to escape poverty (Mather *et al.*, 2018; Rubenstein, 2018; White *et al.*, 2007). It has been noted that families migrate for several reasons, including shocks that make survival difficult, insecure rural livelihoods, and the need for upward mobility (Nnatu, 2018). However, facilities in cities are stretched beyond their capacity by an influx of migrants, who are unable to pay for social services and adequate accommodation. As a result, they become more susceptible to poverty, sickness, and violence and are frequently at risk of being forcibly evicted. Migrant children are particularly much more vulnerable to these difficult circumstances and are experiencing exploitation (UNICEF, 2008). Several of these children are forced to be working and/or living on the streets.

In light of what other academics have discovered, it is crucial to comprehend the contemporary situation of street children. The study sheds light on the relationship between migration, urbanization, and the prevalence of street children in Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria, as well as the causes of children's engagement in street activities. It also explains a few significant theories that have helped us grasp the existence of the phenomenon. The paper concludes by recommending vast demographic dividends for all children.

## Method

This study is conducted using a qualitative approach with descriptive methods according to the issues raised. The data analysis technique is carried out

through literature studies relating to the concepts of migration, urbanization, and street children incidence. The first step in this technique is the collection of literature based on academic documentation. Then, the study continues with an analysis of the link between migration, urbanization, and street children incidence in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria, as well as the reasons for children's involvement in street life. Finally, to assure greater efficiency, precision, and relevance of the literature assessed to meet the study's objectives, the researcher synthesizes two sociological theories.

## Results and Discussion

### *Migration, urbanization and street children incidence in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria*

The focus of academic research has recently shifted to child migrants, a topic that, at least in African literature, had not previously gotten much attention. Child migrants are kids under the age of 18 who leave their homes to look for better opportunities in another geographical location (Hall, 2021). According to Huijsmans (2016), most studies that have looked at these young people's experiences have labeled them as "street children," disregarding the fact that these young people are almost always those who have chosen to move from rural areas to cities on their own or with their families in search of greener pastures.

In sub-Saharan Africa, people move in a number of ways, including from rural to urban areas and from rural-to-rural areas, both seasonally and permanently, as well as intra-regionally and globally. Although they feel there will be more opportunities to improve their quality of life there, people from sub-Saharan Africa desire to move to urban areas (Abramidky, Boustan, &

Eriksson, 2013; Dorosh, Wang, You, & Schmidt, 2012). As a result, the urban areas are becoming incredibly congested and overcrowded, which puts pressure on the region's poor electricity, sanitation, and water infrastructure as well as its health care and educational systems (Franklin, 2018; UNECA, 2017; Min-Harris, 2010).

Urbanization can affect people's decisions to move inside their own country or across international borders (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016; Naudé, 2010). The differences in employment opportunities and expected salaries at potential destinations and places of origin may theoretically be considered and compared by aspiring migrants. Growing socioeconomic differences between urban and rural areas, as well as potential variances in the availability of facilities and services in these areas, may potentially have an impact on child migration (Naudé, 2010). Additionally, perceived differences in infrastructure and economic development between urban and rural areas may promote rural-urban movement and international emigration (UNECA, 2017). The decision to migrate in search of off-farm job is primarily influenced by the inequality in access to land and the plight of young women and people (UNECA, 2017; Bah *et al.* 2003). However, the possibility of youth inheriting land can reduce the chance of beginning a permanent migration. Young people are ready to work anywhere than in agriculture, maybe in the hope of receiving greater wages (Bezu & Holden, 2014; Abramidkyet *et al.*, 2013; Dorosh *et al.*, 2012).

Despite having the highest rates of urbanization when compared to the rest of the world, Africa still has the least level of urbanization in the globe, with the sub-Saharan area of the continent being particularly urban-poor (United Nations, 2014; Gwebu, 2006). African urban centers are not delivering the appropriate level of

economic and employment opportunities when compared to previous Asian urbanization trends (Gollin, Jedwab, & Vollrath, 2016; Jedwab, 2013). Because of this, many African cities are unable to absorb the continent's expanding young population. This may be partially observed in African cities, where high rates of young unemployment and urban squalor present considerable challenges for policymakers. According to Czaika and de Haas (2013), urban areas in Africa have a greater overall rate of young unemployment than rural ones. As a result, urban kids may not have any better chances of landing a good job than their peers in rural locations (Watson 2014; Min-Harris, 2010). In light of these circumstances, policymakers in African nations should prioritize observing current trends in urban growth and their effects on rural-urban migration.

The migration patterns in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries have certain fundamental similarities and driving forces. As noted in several studies, rural-urban migration is a significant phenomenon that has an impact on mobility in Nigeria (UNECA, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016). IOM (2016) cites unemployment and a lack of opportunities in rural regions as two key motivators for young people. Migrants go for work in urban areas in the hope of improving their standard of living and income (Abramidkyet *et al.*, 2013; Dorosh *et al.*, 2012). Young people are typically drawn to metropolitan areas by development programs that are primarily focused there and that are speeding up urbanization, which has resulted in congestion and overstretching in places like Abuja, Lagos, Kano, and Enugu (IOM, 2016).

The majority of migrants in Nigeria are children, and because of their tender age and vulnerability, they are forced to engage in hard labor in order to support themselves

and their poverty-stricken families (ILO, 2020; Ikwuyatum, 2016). Thus, most of these children make the street their source of livelihood. Arguments over how to define the ambiguous term "street children" have been raised. The objections are based on the term's lack of a generally accepted meaning. It has been emphasized that a society's distinctive conditions determine who belongs in the definition (Owoaje *et al.*, 2009). Many authors, policymakers, and practitioners, however, have adopted the definition developed by the Inter-NGO Programme for Street Children and Street Youth in the early 1980s, which defines street children as "any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, and so on) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, directed, and supervised." Although this definition has proven practical and helpful, there are still numerous difficulties. For instance, Muchini (2001) argues that grouping a lot of kids together under the umbrella term "street children" seems to erase any distinctions that could exist between them and their reasons for living on the streets.

UNICEF (2003) generally divides street children into two categories to solve the issue. Children who are "in" or "on" the streets make up the first category. These groups of children spend a significant amount of time on the streets, typically working as children and frequently with parental support. Although they often stay close to their families, they may occasionally spend the night elsewhere. The second group includes children "of" the streets. For these kids, the street has replaced their house as their main place of everyday living. The street is an integral part of their existence, serving as a place to meet friends, play, eat, learn, engage in drug usage, and, in most cases, sleep (Strehl, 2010). The two

distinct types of street children are taken into consideration for the purposes of this study. Given that the two groups of children cross paths and interact on the streets, the line between them is frequently hazy. Furthermore, transitioning from being "in" or "on" the streets to being "of" the streets is frequently simpler for adolescents.

Children who work and live on the streets in Nigeria are not only known as "street children," but also by a variety of other names, such as "city nuisances," "wheelbarrow pushers," "scavengers," "child hawkers," "street boys," "bus conductors," and "children in difficult circumstances" (Taiwo, Afon, Odufuwa & Oladesu, 2022). Children in these situations are frequently left unattended by caring adults. Although some of them still communicate with their relatives sometimes, the majority live alone.

According to current research, children in despair are jammed into every nook and corner of Nigerian towns and cities as they struggle to survive the rigors and cruelty of the country's endemic economic issues, which are causing havoc with its socio-political structure (Taiwo, Badiora & Adebara, 2021). They frequently must work on the streets to make ends meet since they lack essentials, including food, housing, and other basics of life. Most street children have a higher risk of experiencing violence and being involved in illicit activities such as prostitution, drug trafficking, stealing, and other social vices (Okpa *et al.*, 2021; Ugwuoke & Duruyi, 2015). Many youngsters labor in dangerous circumstances and reside in unhealthy slums (Taiwo, Dada, Ayoola & Faniran, 2022; Hassan, Akunesiobike & Uguoke, 2020).

Although the number of children in Nigerian streets is unknown, it has been noted that street children have continued to increase exponentially (Ozoh *et al.*, 2022). Children under the age of 18 make up

around 52% of Nigeria's population of over 200 million, according to UNICEF's Situation Analysis Report on Children in Nigeria (2020), and there are close to 14 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 who labor in hazardous conditions nationwide. Over 20 million school-age children in the nation are not in school, as has been reported (Alabi, 2022; Taiwo, 2022; ILO, 2020; Ikwuyatum, 2016), while most of them work and/or live on the streets. UNICEF (2020) also states that most of these children, referred to as *Almajiris*, are in the northern parts of the country.

While street children share the same metropolitan areas as other children in Nigerian culture and throughout the world, their environment is substantially different. Because they are youngsters, they live in a way that distinguishes them from other kids and from the regular activities and concerns of teenagers. Despite having relatives, most of them have never known what it is like to have a relative's affection and support. Although autonomous, they are not free. These youngsters live in extreme poverty and socioeconomic degradation while working and earning a living.

It should be mentioned here that even though these kids have some options to work on the streets and the freedom to do whatever they want, their dignity is still violated, which has an adverse effect on their general well-being in terms of their physical, emotional, mental, and moral health. They often suffer from grave physical abuse, physical exhaustion, and malnourishment. In line with this assertion, Okpa *et al.* (2021) point out that the work children engage in on the streets constantly exposes them to dangerous situations, resulting in them being unprotected and helpless, which often affects their wellbeing and development. It is important to stress that without the necessary political, economic, developmental, and

societal changes aimed at the two categories of children, it may not be possible to reduce the prevalence of street children.

### ***Reasons why children are involved in street life***

Incidence of street children in urban areas has been found to be influenced by several factors. These factors, which have been found at various times and in many nations, are essentially constant over time and across nations, and they are also strongly related. These factors, according to this article, are a persistent result of the migration process. According to a UNICEF study done in Zimbabwe in 2001, children who live on the streets attribute their situation to the following major and direct causes: the need for money, being orphaned, parental or family abuse, parental or guardian neglect, peer pressure, and lack of care and support. Bocar (2015) asserts that poverty, orphanhood, violence, and natural calamities are the primary driving forces behind the prevalence of street children in Ozamiz City, Philippines.

The efforts mentioned above are supported by Adewale and Afolabi (2013), who list a number of contributing factor to street children incidence in Nigeria. These are: the AIDS epidemic in Africa, which has killed countless parents and left their children orphans; parental abuse; children's decision to live on the streets because their parents cannot provide for their essential necessities of life, like food, shelter, and clothing; child neglect by poor families; the inability of families to provide for the basic needs of the children, like education, feeding, clothing, and so on. Ihejirika (2013) focuses on parental poverty, declining interest in education, the weak state of the Nigerian economy, gender preference, migration, an unsuitable family environment, child

abuse and neglect as the main causes of the prevalence of street children. Similar to this, Obioha (2009) indicates that factors such as the economy, family history, socio-cultural base, religion, peer factor, and social reaction are causes related with the incidence of street children in his research of becoming a child on the streets in a "poverty-ridden" culture. The factors mentioned above make it clear that poverty is the most pronounced. This is in line with the findings of a 2013 research by Obika and Onyeihe, who highlighted that poverty in Nigeria is glaring and obvious.

The majority of young boys and girls in Nigeria who work and/or live on the streets often come from rural areas, as this study has noted. They thus have less options to pursue education. It is acknowledged that selling their children to brokers who seem to provide legitimate work and educational opportunities is the quick and easy way for the parents to make money. According to Femi (2015), most families sell the services of their children usually to supplement their income and pay for food, clothing, and other necessities. The hired children are then sent out into the neighborhood to beg for money, sell food, clothing, and other goods in locations like parking lots, marketplaces, petrol stations, road intersections, and auto repair shops. In addition, Oyafunke-Omoniyi and Adewusi (2022) state that some of these young boys and girls are predisposed to prostitution and other antisocial behavior. The socioeconomic instability of their communities and their bad financial circumstances are what drive most of these youngsters into the streets (Taiwo, 2022; Abegunde, Afon & Taiwo, 2016). They think that since street life offers a quicker reward, it is the only way they can survive in this circumstance. Femi (2015) asserts that kids who are experiencing real adversity end up living on the streets. Given the range of factors that contribute to youngsters

working and living on the streets in Nigeria, it is significant to mention that neither the government nor non-governmental groups have taken significant steps towards safeguarding and defending these future leaders from the unscrupulous behaviors that street life has subjected them to.

There is a significant comparative propensity to combine two social concepts with this topic. The need to guarantee more complex tasks, accuracy, and the importance of the material reviewed to meet the study's purpose affected the choice of these theories. Lee's migration theory and modernization theory are these theories.

Lee's migration theory, developed in 1966, is one of the best theories to explain the link between rural-urban migration and the prevalence of street children. In his compositions, Lee starts with variables that affect how mobile a population is in space regardless of where they live, such as variables related to their place of origin, variables related to their place of destination, interfering barriers, and variables related to their own circumstances. The decision to move results from the interaction of all these variables. Each place, in Lee's opinion, offers a combination of positive and negative variables. While negative variables tend to repel individuals, positive variables tend to draw them in or keep them there. Additionally, there are elements that do not change and that most people do not really care about.

The push and pull variables in migration—basically, the causes of immigration and emigration—are the central concept of Lee's migration theory. Push variables are conditions that are not favorable in a specific area that cause individuals or groups to leave. Examples include poverty, war, drought, famine, unemployment, insecurity and so on. Conversely, pull variables are the features that attract individuals to an area.

These include better salary rates, higher standard of living, career prospects, better education, medical services, and so forth.

Push variables relate to features of the source region of a country that prompt outflow of people or deepen the burden to leave. Children's outflows are also supported by these variables, since the children are more likely to get greener pastures to alleviate their socio-economic struggles if they are more willing to migrate. In contrast, pull variables are features in host locations and countries that attract inflow of migrants. Such features are also responsible for the flow of children, whose primary objective is to find employment, as well as other things that could make life comfortable, like housing, clothing, nutrition, healthcare service, schooling, and transport.

The theory of modernization was widespread and significant from the 1950s to the 1970s (Bodo, 2019). According to the theory, urbanization comes because of the introduction of novel things and originations in the social order by way of industrial development, technological application, information dissemination, as well as cultural diffusion (Smith, 1996). When considering urbanization through the lens of modernity, it is common to discover modernization-related elements (new items) in every society that has made the switch from the Stone Age's primitive to a more contemporary way of life. Also, given that urbanization usually follows, it is evident how important technology is to how society is organized on a social level. As noted by Kasarda and Crenshaw (1991), the status of urbanization and development in the world cannot be detached from its starting state at the outset of modernity. Most developments are the outcome of a technological-driven social order, which can enhance or increase economic capabilities, provide excess nourishment by means of

enhanced agrarian structures, and make use of mechanical and technological equipment or tools to minimize citizen workload while growing the speed and effectiveness of work accomplished (Nolan & Lenski, 1985; Lenski & Nolan, 1984).

In this context, it is thought that social structure in society is less important than technology. Therefore, it is understood that the usage of technology is what drives urbanization in society. According to Kasarda and Crenshaw (1991), scholars who subscribe to this perspective usually believe that industrial development, not capitalization, has had a significant impact on the evolution of third-world or underdeveloped cultures. The "modern" approach, particularly in third-world countries, promotes societal fragmentation and results in asymmetrical progress (Kasarda & Crenshaw, 1991; Hawley, 1981). Due to ethnic, racial, and religious disputes and nepotism in politics that have resulted in income disparities and dissimilar growth within contemporary societies, it is believed that this type of urbanization was caused by the geographic concentration of welfare assistance and development programs in specific areas of the society (Alonso, 1980). Massive rural-urban migration of children becomes necessary because of forces related to push and pull variables being concentrated in a small number of locations (primarily cities) (Kasarda & Crenshaw, 1991; Berliner, 1977).

## Conclusion

This study confirms that more than 50% of Nigeria's population is under the age of 18, and the majority of those in this group engage in risky behaviors that directly jeopardize their safety, wellbeing, and moral growth. Data from cities throughout the world reveal that migration from rural to urban areas is



increasing the number of young boys and girls who end up on the streets. Desperate rural residents go to metropolitan areas in quest for job opportunities and popularity because they believe that here all their fantasies of grandeur and a happy life would come true.

The study demonstrates that children are predisposed to a variety of risky and hazardous circumstances, particularly those which are seen to increase their likelihood of engaging in prostitution, trafficking in drugs, and other antisocial activities in Nigeria. Children have some options of working on the streets, as well as the freedom to do whatever they want, but their dignity is also violated, and it has a detrimental influence on their overall wellness in terms of their mental, physical, emotional, and moral health.

The study further notes that the incidence of street children is a function of urbanization, which is also related to migration, and socioeconomic factors. It contends that without the necessary economic, political, growth-related, and social changes aimed at children in general, decreasing the prevalence of street children may not be feasible. In Nigeria, everyone is dealing with a worrying and unsettling scenario involving children, who will be the nation's future leaders. Children deserve the maximum amount of attention and safety that is possible to keep them from engaging in street life. They should be seen by governments and other stakeholders as realistic resources for national development in the future. It is important that their wellbeing is prioritized by every country, noting that if the abuses and exploitation brought on by street life continue, their full potential will not be realized. The study strongly suggests that governments, with the support of stakeholder groups, should harness their enormous demographic

benefits by making significant investments in the well-being of young people, like nourishment, social security, schooling, and their livelihoods. This should be done with the assistance of various stakeholder organizations. Government at all levels (local, state, and federal) should critically analyze and design systems to incorporate the Almajiris in the process of safeguarding child rights.

## Declaration of Ownership

This article is my original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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