
PARENTAL POVERTY AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR AMONG STREET CHILDREN IN MAJOR TOWNS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty leads to the escalation of the menace of street children, thereby increasing their susceptibility to delinquent behaviour. This study examined how parental poverty predisposes street children to delinquent behaviour in Akwa Ibom State. Guided by the assumptions of Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory, the descriptive survey design was adopted and the study locations were Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene towns. Street children aged 7-17 years, who rely on the streets for survival formed the study population which was 200. The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed in the selection of street children. Data collected through Focused Group Discussion and In-depth Interview were transcribed and analysed in themes. The findings showed that parental poverty was a major factor driving children into street life, where severe deprivation compels them to engage in delinquent activities for survival. Without access to food, shelter, or education, many resort to theft, drug peddling, begging, and gang-related activities. Their experiences underscore significant gaps in child welfare, poverty alleviation, and social protection systems. The study recommended urgent need for targeted interventions that address the root causes of child homelessness. Strengthening social welfare systems, ensuring access to healthcare and education, and implementing poverty alleviation programmes are critical in breaking the cycle of deprivation.

Keywords: Parental Poverty, Delinquent Behaviour, Street Children, Major Towns

Introduction

Poverty, street children and juvenile delinquency are global issues that affect many families negatively, particularly in Africa, where Galal (2025) opined that about 438.6 million people in Africa are living in extreme poverty, with the poverty threshold at 2.15 US dollars a day. Galal (2025) furthered that the number of inhabitants living below the extreme poverty line would decrease to around 426 million by 2030. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), 63 per cent of persons living within Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensional poor, and 65 per cent of the poor (86 million people) live in the North, while 35 per cent (nearly 47 million) live in the South. Poverty levels across States vary significantly, with the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranging from a low of 27 per cent in Ondo to a high of 91 per cent in Sokoto. Over half of the population of Nigeria are multidimensionally poor and cook with dung, wood or charcoal, rather than cleaner energy. High deprivations are also apparent nationally in sanitation, time to healthcare, food insecurity, and housing. Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 72 per cent of people are poor, compared to 42 per cent of people in urban areas.

The high prevalence of multidimensional poverty in Nigeria has profound implications for parental poverty and the involvement of street children in delinquent behaviour (Asangausung, 2024). With a significant portion of the population struggling to meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, and housing, many families are unable to provide a stable and supportive environment for their children. The economic hardship faced by parents often leads to child neglect, forcing many children into street life, where they become vulnerable to delinquent activities such as theft, drug abuse, and gang involvement (Asangausung

et al., 2025). The regional disparities in poverty levels further exacerbate the problem, particularly in areas with extreme deprivation. In states with higher poverty rates, children are more likely to drop out of school to engage in street trading or other survival strategies, increasing their exposure to criminal influences (Ben et al., 2018). The lack of access to education and social support systems limits opportunities for personal development, making street children more susceptible to exploitation and recruitment into organised crime networks (Nkop & Mboho, 2024).

Udensi & Agwu (2016) defined poverty as a state where resources, both material and cultural, are lacking. Gunuboh (2023) posits that poverty is a social stressor that various families deal with in different ways. Ekong (2010) opined that poverty is either absolute or relative. Absolute poverty, according to Ekong (2010), refers to destitution, characterized by insufficient resources, income, and high risk of failure. Udensi & Agwu (2016) added that absolute poverty refers to the absence of basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter, and security, while relative poverty refers to the availability of resources for the smallest level of living. Relative poverty, on the other hand, is misery linked to less satisfactory outcomes compared to others, leading to adaptation rather than innovation. Poverty impacts various aspects such as inability to feed well, poor health, infant mortality, low life expectancy, poor housing, single parent families, street children, and high school dropout rates.

Children's lives are seriously endangered by parental poverty, especially when the children come from low-income households, that parents are finding it difficult to manage their financial burdens. Asangausung (2024) argues that parental poverty is a state in which parents or guardians are unable to meet their children's fundamental necessities financially. This covers needs including clothing, food, housing, medical treatment, and education. Parental poverty frequently leads to a lack of access to opportunities and resources that are necessary for children's healthy growth and wellbeing. Parental poverty is characterised by low income, material deprivation, social marginalisation, and limited opportunity (Mboho, 2022).

Asangausung (2024) defined street children as children who permanently reside on the streets and rely on the street for survival. However, children on the street and children of the street are the two groups of street children, according to Charles *et al.* (2005) and Ekpenyong & Udisi (2016a). Children who live on the streets are individuals who spend a significant amount of time there, frequently working. Their priorities in life remain at home. A fraction of them go to school, the majority come back home at the end of the workday, and they still feel a part of the neighbourhood where their family house is located. Most of them continue to have some sort of interaction with their families (Ekpenyong & Udisi, 2016b). Children who work and still have familial ties make up the population of street children, but at night, they go back to their homes.

Children living off the streets consider the streets to be their home; they use them as their main place to work, play, sleep, and mature. Their numbers are significantly lower, and they socialise outside of the home and school. These children struggle for survival without support, and lack the resources to cope with the challenges they face (Diriba, 2015). Diriba (2015) further indicated that street children are influenced by two main factors: push and pull factors. Push factors, such as poverty, violence, abuse, and inadequate parental guidance, make home life unattractive, while pull factors, such as independence, financial security, and the glamour of city life, make street life attractive and encourage children to leave their homes.

Parental poverty remains a critical factor driving children into street life, exposing them to various forms of delinquent behaviour. In major towns of Akwa Ibom State, extreme economic hardship, food insecurity, lack of education, and family instability force many children to seek survival on the streets. Without adequate parental care and social support, these children become vulnerable to begging, theft, drug peddling, gambling, gang activities, and other delinquent behaviour as coping mechanisms. The persistent cycle of poverty and homelessness highlights systemic failures in child welfare and social protection, thereby raising concerns about the long-term consequences for both the children and society. Despite various poverty alleviation efforts, the increasing number of street children suggests that existing interventions are insufficient (Mboho & Tahirih, 2014).

Previous scholars such as Gunuboh (2023), investigated the relationship between neighbourhood circumstances and parental poverty and the incidence of adolescent crime. Wamunyinyi (2016) conducted

a study on the impact of families' socio-economic position on children's involvement in criminal activity in Bungoma County in Kenya. Diriba (2015) conducted a study to justify family problems as a contributing factor to streetism in Nekemte Town. A study by Mobarakeh (2015) investigated the impact of family income on adolescent anti-social behaviour among 395 adolescents aged 13-18 in Tehran, Iran. However, none of these studies examined how parental poverty predisposes street children to delinquent behaviour in major towns in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This study has closed the gap in literature.

Literature Review

Gunuboh (2023) investigated the relationship between neighbourhood circumstances and parental poverty and the incidence of adolescent crime. The OLS linear regression model and the negative binomial regression model are two different regression models that are used to test for various hypotheses. In the negative binomial regression model, the link between dependent students and independent variables is predicted, whereas the OLS is used to investigate the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The first regression (OLS) results showed a statistically significant positive correlation between the rates of adolescent violent crime and parental poverty. The incidence rate ratio of the negative binomial regression model shows a 1.48-fold rise in violent crime arrests when parental poverty increases within a county. This indicates a considerable increase in juvenile crime rates.

Gunuboh's (2023) study investigated the relationship between neighbourhood conditions, parental poverty, and adolescent crime, finding a significant correlation between parental poverty and increased rates of violent crime among adolescents. However, while the study effectively links parental poverty to adolescent crime, it does not specifically explore the mechanisms by which poverty predisposes children to delinquent behaviour. Additionally, it does not consider other factors beyond poverty, such as family structure, parental involvement, or broader social influences that may also play a role in predisposing children to delinquency. This leaves a gap in understanding the direct processes and other potential contributors to how parental poverty leads to delinquent behaviour.

Diriba (2015) conducted a study to justify family problems as a contributing factor to streetism in Nekemte Town. Utilising a hybrid methodology, the researcher collected data using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The information was gathered from ten additional concerned Nekemte Town residents as well as 100 street youngsters. Three distinct methods of data collection were employed: focus groups, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. The majority of street kids (58.1%), according to the report, were from low-income families where the parents worked in low-paying jobs. Their exploitation and eventual eviction from their homes are caused by a number of factors, including broken families, deaths, peer pressure, abuse, domestic disputes, and labour exploitation.

Based on the above, Diriba's (2015) study examined family problems as a contributing factor to streetism in Nekemte Town, finding that many street children come from low-income families and are affected by various issues, including broken families, parental death, and domestic disputes. While the study identifies a range of factors that lead to streetism, it does not specifically isolate parental poverty as a distinct factor influencing delinquent behaviour. The focus is on broader family problems and their link to street life rather than examining how parental poverty alone predisposes children to delinquent behaviour. Additionally, the study does not delve into the mechanisms through which parental poverty leads to delinquency or consider how other factors might interact with poverty to affect behaviour. This leaves a gap in understanding the specific role of parental poverty in fostering delinquent tendencies.

The growing issue of street children in Tehran was studied by Salihu (2019). It concentrated on the risks and difficulties these kids faced as well as the ramifications for the nation's general public. The research utilised data from primary as well as secondary sources. A qualitative design (in-person interviews) was used to collect the primary data. This demographic comprises all of Tehran's street youngsters. For this study, 3,725 street adolescents were chosen using the purposive and snowball sampling procedures. To quantify the results and show the frequency of responses to the open-ended questions relevant to the research objective, the collected data was coded, categorised, and analysed using EZ Test Software. According to the study, there are two types of street children in Tehran: children of the street and children on the street. These children face a variety of difficulties, including harassment, rape, extortion, and exploitation. In addition, people took part in various activities in order to make money or survive. The

study comes to the conclusion that the main reasons of the occurrence were the disruption of families' socioeconomic structures and the inflow of people from various backgrounds into the cities.

Salihu's (2019) study focused on the risks and challenges faced by street children in Tehran, categorising them into "children of the street" and "children on the street", and highlighting various forms of exploitation and survival strategies. While it provides valuable insights into the general conditions and difficulties of street children, it does not specifically isolate parental poverty as a factor that predisposes children to delinquent behaviour. The study emphasised broader socio-economic disruptions and urban migration as primary causes, without delving deeply into how parental poverty alone impacts delinquent tendencies. Additionally, the study does not explore the specific mechanisms through which parental poverty leads to delinquency or how it interacts with other factors to influence behaviour, leaving a gap in understanding the direct relationship between parental poverty and delinquent behaviour in children.

Piotrowska *et al.* (2023) looked into the connection between behavioural problems and household income. A representative sample of 2,399 children in the UK, aged 5 to 15, was employed in the study. The outcomes and determinants of behavioural disorders were modelled as hypothesised mediators using the cross-lagged longitudinal mediation models that allowed testing for interactions. The study discovered a strong correlation between wealth and behavioural issues, but it found no evidence of child or family factors having an impact on this relationship, only tangential relationships.

The study conducted by Piotrowska *et al.* (2023) does not specifically address how parental poverty alone predisposes children to delinquent behaviour. It identifies a general link between income and behavioural problems but does not delve into the mechanisms through which poverty influences delinquency or explore other contributing factors beyond household income. Additionally, it lacks focus on the impact of parental poverty on specific types of delinquent behaviour or how other family and contextual factors might interact with poverty to affect behaviour. This leaves a gap in understanding the direct relationship between parental poverty and delinquency and the specific processes through which poverty might lead to such outcomes.

Wamunyinyi (2016) conducted a study on the impact of family socio-economic position on children's involvement in criminal activity in Bungoma County in Kenya. The sample size for the study was 83 institutionalised juvenile offenders and 100 non-institutionalised offenders. Utilising both descriptive and inferential statistics, data was gathered via the distribution of copies of questionnaire. The results show that the majority of those who committed juvenile crimes originated from low-class families. Consequently, as family socio-economic status rises, Bungoma County experiences a decline in crime, violence, and minor infractions but an upsurge in disruptive behaviour and drug and alcohol abuse.

Wamunyinyi's (2016) work did not specifically isolate parental poverty as a distinct factor influencing delinquent behaviour. The focus was on general socio-economic status rather than on how parental poverty alone predisposes children to delinquency. The study did not also explore the mechanisms or pathways through which parental poverty impacts delinquent behaviour, leaving a gap in understanding the direct effects of parental poverty on such outcomes.

A study by Mobarakeh (2015) investigated the impact of family income on adolescent anti-social behaviour among 395 adolescents aged 13-18 in Tehran, Iran. The study used cluster sampling and descriptive statistical analysis to describe variables and determine the direction and strength of the linear relationship between family income and anti-social behaviour. The results showed a significant relationship between family income and anti-social behaviour among Iranian adolescents, with a mean age of 15 years and an SD of 1.44.

The above study by Mobarakeh (2015) explored the relationship between family income and adolescent anti-social behaviour, finding a significant link between the two among adolescents in Tehran. While the study identifies a correlation between family income and anti-social behaviour, it does not specifically isolate parental poverty as a distinct factor. The focus is on family income broadly rather than on how parental poverty specifically influences delinquent behaviour. Additionally, the study does not delve into the mechanisms or processes through which parental poverty may lead to delinquency, leaving a gap in understanding the direct impact of parental poverty on such outcomes.

In summary, the reviewed literature indicated that parental poverty significantly contributes to delinquent behaviour among street children. The lack of financial resources and stressors creates an environment conducive to delinquent activities. Inadequate provision of basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, and education can push children to seek resources and opportunities, increasing their risk of delinquent behaviour. Financially stressed parents may work long hours or multiple jobs, leading to insufficient supervision and guidance for their children. This lack of supervision can lead children to seek support and companionship on the streets, potentially exposed to criminal activities. Poverty can lead to increased stress and conflict within families, causing children to flee to the streets. This vulnerability to delinquency is exacerbated by limited access to quality education and extracurricular activities. Social exclusion and discrimination further isolate children from positive social influences, further driving them towards street life and delinquent peer groups.

Theoretical Framework

The study used Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) developed in 1992 to explain why individuals may engage in crime or delinquency. Agnew posits that failure to achieve goals, removal of positive stimuli, and harmful impulses are the main reasons for strain. He also suggests that strains can lead to negative emotional states like anger or depression, which can be conducive to delinquent behaviour without adequate coping skills (Yilmaz & Koca, 2015). For street children, parental poverty usually results in extreme stress, which affects their choices and actions.

Parental poverty hinders the achievement of essential goals like basic needs, stable housing, and education, leading to delinquent behaviour. This deprivation is exacerbated by financial difficulties, which remove positive stimuli like parental care. Neglect or abandonment of street kids increases their vulnerability to negative emotions, leading to substance abuse or delinquent behaviour.

The GST suggests that harsh and unfair stressors can lead to delinquency in street children. They often feel unjustly treated, leading to anger and aggression. The lack of social control, such as parental supervision, further complicates their emotional and social difficulties. As a result, delinquent behaviour becomes a more practical coping mechanism. Poverty worsens the issue by causing negative emotional states like depression and anger in children. These can lead to drug use and violent behaviour, which are exacerbated by a lack of social resources and coping mechanisms. The stressors of parental poverty and lack of social support contribute to delinquent behaviour in street children, highlighting the significant impact of stress on their decisions and lives.

Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. The reason for using the descriptive survey design was to describe the experiences of children (male and female), who live permanently and independently on the streets of Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene towns of Akwa Ibom State. The data for this study were gathered from the emic perspective. The research was entirely qualitative and was based on the primary data obtained from the street children, who participated in a study that concerns them. The results of the data analysis were used to answer the research questions earlier raised in the study.

This research was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, where three (3) major towns were purposively selected for investigation. These towns were: Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene and they were chosen due to the high concentration of street children in these areas. As noted by Ekpenyong and Udisi (2016a), Akwa Ibom State is among the states in Nigeria with a high concentration of street children. This situation may be due to the state's rising poverty rate of 5.08 million people (Etim, 2023). Akwa Ibom State was created from Cross River State on September 23, 1987. Akwa Ibom State has thirty-one (31) local government areas and Uyo is the state capital. The Gulf of Guinea borders it on the south, Abia State to the north, Cross River State to the west, and Rivers State to the east.

The target population for this study was the street children, aged 7 and 17 years (male and female), who have made the streets their permanent residence and they rely on the streets for survival. This category of children was included because they are the ones who understand the hardships of living and surviving on the streets without their parents. As such, they are best suited to share their experiences and difficulties without considering the opinions of others around them. The number of street children in Akwa Ibom State

remains unknown due to an absence of statistics (Ukpong, 2021). The inclusion of street children for this study was because they are the experts in their own experiences and challenges. Allowing them to participate gives them a direct voice in a study that impacts their lives. The inclusion criterion was that selected street children have to be found within Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene towns of Akwa Ibom State. Street children who were less than 7 years and above 18 years were not part of the study.

Two hundred (200) street children (159 males and 41 females), who were 7-17 years old and lived permanently and independently on the streets of Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene towns, made up the study sample size. Since this was a qualitative survey, determining the sample size using a recognised statistical technique was not necessary. Rather, the sample size for this study was determined through data redundancy or saturation, or the point at which gathering more data would no longer yield new information relevant to the research objectives. A total of 19 focus group discussions (FGDs) with nine (9) street children from each group were held, and 29 in-depth interviews with 29 street children were also held. At the 19th FGD session and the 29th in-depth interview, data redundancy or saturation was attained. The studies of Rahimi and Khatooni (2024), Daher (2023), Henninck and Kaiser (2021), and Glasser and Strauss (2017) provided support for this technique of choosing a sample size in qualitative research.

The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed in the selection of street children in Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene towns.

Table 1: Sample allocation according to LGAs and methods of data collection

Location	FGD	IDI	Total
Uyo	72 (8 sessions of 9 street children each)	13	85
Eket	45 (5 sessions of 9 street children each)	6	51
Ikot Ekpene	54 (6 sessions of 9 street children each)	10	64
Total	171 (19 sessions of 9 street children each)	29	200

Source: Field data (2024).

The sample distribution according to LGAs and data collection techniques is displayed in Table 1. Of the 200 street children who live constantly on the streets without their parents or guardians, 85 of them were from Uyo town, 51 were from Eket town and 64 of them were from Ikot Ekpene town. Twenty-nine (29) street children participated in the In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), while 171 street children participated in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and In-depth interview (IDI) were used for data collection in this study. The researcher developed an interview schedule for both FGD and IDI, which was divided into sections, to aid the collection of qualitative data. The street children are transient population, as such; they were traced to locations on the streets of Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene towns and solicited their participation in the study. All the study participants gave their oral consent after discussing the goals of the investigation with them.

Prior to the interview sessions, quiet locations were selected for ease. The socio-demographic information of the street children was collected before the actual discussion or interview began. Every FGD and IDI session was tape recorded to aid transcriptions, and field notes were also collected concurrently. The interviews were conducted in Ibibio, Annang, and Oro languages. For individuals unfamiliar with the local languages, pidgin and plain English were suitable. To assist with gathering primary data, three (3) research assistants (RAs) were engaged.

Ethical and Attitudinal Reorientation Commission (EARCOM), 25 Idoro Road, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State provided the ethical approval dated June 10, 2024, with reference number (EARC/AD/27/VOL.II/291). Additionally, permission was given to the researcher to collect data from the street children by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, Department of Social Welfare, Akwa Ibom State, with Reference Number (MWASW/AD/272/428) dated January 17, 2024; this ministry is responsible for the welfare of the vulnerable children.

The data collected from 200 street children were presented descriptively and analysed in themes. The frequency tables and simple percentages were used to present the personal information of street children and the qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis in this study involved a systematic approach to identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within the

qualitative data collected from street children. After transcription of the Focus Group Discussions and In-depth interviews, the researcher familiarized with the data by reading through the transcripts multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the responses. Initial codes were generated based on recurring words, phrases, and ideas, allowing the identification of emerging themes related to the lived experiences of the street children. These themes were refined and categorised according to their relevance to the research questions, ensuring that they captured the core issues expressed by the participants. The process was iterative, with themes being reviewed, merged, or adjusted as necessary to maintain coherence and accuracy. Finally, the themes were interpreted within the context of existing literature to provide meaningful insights into the challenges, survival strategies, and social dynamics of street children in Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene towns.

Results

Table 2: Distribution of street children according to their personal information (N = 200)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Town of Residence:		
Uyo	85	42.50
Eket	51	25.50
Ikot Ekpene	64	32.00
Sex:		
Male	159	79.50
Female	41	20.50
Age bracket		
7-9 years	60	30.00
10-12 years	57	28.50
13-15 years	48	24.00
16-17 years	35	17.50
Level of educational attainment:		
Never attended school	50	25.00
Not completed primary school	81	40.50
Completed primary school	40	20.00
Not completed secondary school	29	14.50
Completed secondary school	0	0.00
Custodial role before taking to street life		
Mother	14	7.00
Father	55	27.50
Both parents	20	10.00
Step parent	91	45.50
Guardian	20	10.00

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 2 shows the distribution of street children according to their personal information. The data reveals that street children in Akwa Ibom State are predominantly male, accounting for 79.5% of the sample, indicating a gendered dimension to street life, where boys are more likely to end up on the streets due to societal expectations or a higher tolerance for their mobility. However, the presence of 20.5 per cent females suggests that poverty-driven homelessness affects both genders, albeit differently. The distribution across towns shows that Uyo, being the state capital, has the highest concentration of street children (42.5%), followed by Ikot Ekpene (32%) and Eket (25.5%), which may reflect urbanization and economic disparities influencing street migration patterns.

Age distribution indicates that the majority of street children fall within the 7-12 age bracket (58.5%), a critical developmental stage where children should ideally be in school but are instead exposed to survival struggles. The educational attainment levels further underscore this concern, with 25 per cent of respondents having never attended school and 40.5 per cent dropping out before completing primary

education. Notably, none of the children completed secondary school, highlighting the severe impact of parental poverty on education and future opportunities.

Custodial roles before taking to street life reveal that nearly half of the children (45.5%) were under the care of step-parents, suggesting that blended family dynamics and potential neglect or maltreatment could contribute to their homelessness. Additionally, 27.5 per cent lived with only their father, and 10 per cent were with guardians, reflecting possible disruptions in traditional family structures due to factors such as parental death, separation, or economic instability.

The implications of these findings emphasize that parental poverty not only forces children into street life but also limits their access to education and social stability, increasing their vulnerability to delinquency. The high prevalence of children under step-parental or single-parental care suggests the need for targeted social support interventions that address family welfare and child protection. The concentration of street children in urban areas signals a need for city-based policy interventions, while the educational gap highlights the necessity for reintegration programs that offer accessible learning opportunities.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Excerpts derived from the FGD and IDI showed that parental poverty plays a critical role in street children's trajectory towards street life and their involvement in delinquent behaviour. When living with their parents, these children often experienced extreme deprivation, with basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter being inadequately met. The parents, burdened by poverty, often struggled to provide consistent care and support, leading to a household environment marked by instability and insecurity. The experiences shared by the street children illustrate the deep-rooted connection between poverty, family instability, and child homelessness. Economic hardship emerges as the central factor pushing children onto the streets, with many families unable to afford basic necessities such as food, shelter, and education. Some children were born into generational poverty, while others faced additional challenges such as parental illness, widowhood, or loss of caregivers. The lack of social support systems further compounded their struggles, leaving them with little choice but to seek survival on the streets. The implications of these narratives are significant, as they highlight systemic failures in addressing child welfare, poverty alleviation, and social protection. Without intervention, the cycle of homelessness and deprivation is likely to continue, exposing children to further risks such as malnutrition, exploitation, and delinquency.

When asked about the economic condition of their parents when they were living with them, the street children said thus: A 12-year-old street child had it that, *"My parents were very poor and could not afford food for me. I was forced to drop out of school and live on the streets in order to survive..."* (FGD/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 12-year-old street child highlights the direct link between poverty and child homelessness. The mention of parents being unable to afford food underscores severe economic hardship, which ultimately led to school dropout and life on the streets. This reflects the broader socioeconomic challenges that force children into street life, including unemployment, lack of social support, and inadequate welfare systems. The child's experience suggests a survival-driven decision rather than a voluntary choice, emphasising the vulnerability of children from impoverished backgrounds.

Also, a 13-year-old street child held, *"My condition is a result of my parents' poverty. My parents were also homeless when they were young, and I was born into a life of poverty and raised on the streets. My parents encountered each other on the streets. For me, it is a horrible circumstance. I have never attended school, I do not eat well, and I used to go to public events to find food..."* (FGD/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 13-year-old street child reveals the intergenerational cycle of poverty and homelessness. Being born into a life of deprivation, with parents who also grew up on the streets, suggests a systemic failure to break the cycle of hardship. The child's expression of his condition as "horrible" emphasises the emotional and physical toll of street life, marked by a lack of education, food insecurity, and dependence on public events for survival. This highlights deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities, where limited access to basic needs and opportunities perpetuates marginalisation.

Another 8-year-old street child said: *"Having food and other necessities was a problem for us because my parents were low-income earners. I joined the streets due to my parents' poverty..."* (FGD/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 8-year-old street child reflects the impact of low-income

earnings on family stability and child welfare. The inability of the parents to provide basic necessities such as food indicates economic hardship that forces children into street life as a means of coping. The child's statement suggests that poverty was not just a temporary struggle but a defining factor that shaped their circumstances. This highlights the vulnerability of children in low-income households, where financial instability often translates into neglect, deprivation, and eventual displacement.

A 10-year-old street child held that, *"We often go to bed hungry. Of my twelve siblings, three of them died of hunger, and I had to run to the streets because I did not want to die like them..."* (IDI/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 10-year-old street child reveals the extreme deprivation faced by their family, where hunger was a persistent struggle and even led to the death of siblings. The mention of going to bed hungry highlights the severity of food insecurity, while the decision to flee to the streets reflects a desperate attempt at survival. The child's experience underscores the life-threatening consequences of poverty, where basic needs are unmet, and children are left with no choice but to seek refuge in the streets.

A 14-year-old street child opined that, *"My mother was a widow, and she survived through weeding on people's farms for a fee. She eventually developed diabetes and was unable to provide food, clothing, and school fees..."* (FGD/male/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 14-year-old street child highlights the compounded challenges of single parenthood, poverty, and health issues. As a widow, the child's mother relied on low-paying, labour-intensive farm work to survive, indicating financial instability. Her eventual illness further worsened their condition, making it impossible to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and education. This situation underscores the vulnerability of widowed mothers in low-income settings, where a lack of economic support and healthcare access can push families deeper into hardship. The child's experience reflects the intersection of poverty and health crises in driving children into street life.

A 12-year-old street child said, *"My mother was unable to care for me since my dad suffered from a mental illness. On occasion, I remained with relatives who could not support me because of their financial situation..."* (FGD/male/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 12-year-old street child highlights the destabilising impact of mental illness within a household, particularly when it affects the primary breadwinner. The mother's inability to provide care suggests financial and emotional strain, which was further compounded by the lack of external support. Although, the child sought refuge with relatives, their own financial struggles rendered them incapable of offering sustained assistance. This situation underscores the link between health crises, economic hardship, and child vulnerability, revealing how the absence of a strong social support system can push children into street life as a last resort.

Another 11-year-old street child submitted that: *"My parents were impoverished, and they lived in a thatched house. We barely ate a day, before I left them to live on the streets..."* (FGD/female/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 11-year-old street child illustrates the depth of poverty within his family, reflected in both inadequate housing and severe food insecurity. Living in a thatched house signifies a lack of stable and proper shelter, while the struggle to eat even once a day highlights extreme deprivation. The child's decision to leave home suggests that survival on the streets seemed like a better alternative to enduring hunger and hardship at home. This experience underscores the harsh realities faced by impoverished families, where basic needs remain unmet, pushing children into homelessness in search of better survival prospects.

A 15-year-old street child explained: *"My parents were very poor. There were times when we had to rely on collecting items from dump sites since we didn't have enough money to buy food..."* (IDI/male/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 15-year-old street child highlights the extreme poverty that forced his family to scavenge for survival. Relying on items from dump sites indicates not only food insecurity but also a complete lack of financial resources to meet basic needs. This form of deprivation suggests social and economic marginalisation, where the family was pushed to the fringes of society with little to no support. The child's experience reflects the desperation that drives many into street life, as the struggle for daily survival becomes unbearable at home.

A 9-year-old street child said that: *"As a single mother, my mother battled to make ends meet and eventually passed away, leaving me all alone. I regularly relied on my neighbours for assistance..."* (FGD/female/Ikot Ekpene/July, 2024). The response of the 9-year-old street child reveals the profound

struggles of single motherhood in the face of economic hardship. The mother's battle to make ends meet suggests persistent financial instability, which may have affected both her well-being and her ability to provide for her child. Her eventual passing left the child in complete vulnerability, with no immediate family support. Relying on neighbours for survival indicates a fragile and uncertain safety net, which likely proved insufficient, ultimately leading to street life. This narrative underscores the devastating impact of poverty, loss, and the absence of strong social support systems for orphaned children.

A 14-year-old street child submitted that: *"The health issues my parents were facing were severe, and they lacked the funds to get medical attention. I had no food and no one to look after me, so I had to fend for myself on the streets..."* (IDI/female/Ikot Ekpene/July 31, 2024). The response of the 14-year-old street child highlights the devastating effects of health crises within financially struggling families. The severity of the parents' illnesses, coupled with their inability to afford medical care, suggests a lack of access to essential healthcare services, which likely worsened their condition. With no financial stability or caregivers to rely on, the child faced neglect and food insecurity, ultimately being forced to survive on the streets. This situation emphasises the intersection of poverty and inadequate healthcare, showing how the absence of social and medical support can push vulnerable children into homelessness.

When asked them about how growing up in the street exposes them to delinquent behaviour, the street children made several conversions. A 13-year-old street child suggested thus: *"I was not born a thief, this condition pushes me to steal. To survive, I also beg from people. We have a group that we constantly gather ourselves to cause disturbances at public events in the hopes that people will notice us and provide us food..."* (FGD/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 13-year-old street child illustrates how survival on the streets drives children into delinquent behaviour. The statement "I was not born a thief" suggests a reluctance toward criminality, indicating that theft is a consequence of desperation rather than an inherent trait. Begging and causing disturbances at public events reflect strategies for securing food, revealing the extent of deprivation these children face. The mention of a group engaging in disruptive activities highlights the formation of social bonds among street children, where collective action becomes a means of survival. This response emphasises the link between poverty, social exclusion, and delinquency.

Similarly, a 10-year-old street child said thus: *"I started stealing people's things to make ends meet because I didn't have money to buy food..."* (FGD/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 10-year-old street child highlights the direct connection between survival and delinquent behaviour. The act of stealing is portrayed as a necessity rather than a choice, driven by the lack of money and food. This underscores the desperation that forces street children into unlawful activities, not out of malice but as a means to endure hardship. The statement reflects the harsh reality of life on the streets, where basic survival often takes precedence over moral or legal considerations.

A 13-year-old street child said that, *"I used to sell hard drugs for one man who always assisted me with money. I sold hard drugs to people in the streets..."* (IDI/male/Uyo/July, 2024). The response of the 13-year-old street child reveals how economic vulnerability makes street children susceptible to exploitation and involvement in illegal activities. Selling hard drugs was not a personal choice but a survival strategy facilitated by an adult who provided financial assistance in return. This highlights the manipulation of street children by individuals who take advantage of their desperation. The exposure to drug-related activities at such a young age suggests a lack of protection and oversight, reinforcing how street life fosters delinquency.

Another 13-year-old street child opined that, *"I engaged in begging people for arms in the streets..."* (FGD/male/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 13-year-old street child highlights how extreme poverty and lack of support push children into street begging as a means of survival. The phrase "begging people for arms" likely refers to seeking alms, indicating dependence on public generosity due to the absence of any structured assistance. This form of street activity exposes children to various risks, including exploitation and criminal influences. The child's experience underscores the broader issue of social neglect, where the failure of family and institutional support systems leaves vulnerable children with no choice but to rely on begging to meet their basic needs.

A 10-year-old street child said that, *"Scrap picking was a means for me to generate some money when I found myself on the street. Living on the street exposed me to negative people..."*

(FGD/male/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 10-year-old street child highlights the struggle for survival through informal means such as scrap picking. This activity reflects the desperation to earn money in the absence of parental or social support. Additionally, the mention of exposure to "negative people" underscores the vulnerability of street children to harmful influences, including criminal networks and exploitative individuals. This suggests that while street life offers a means of survival, it also presents significant risks that can lead to delinquent behaviour.

Another 11-year-old street child said that: *"I joined a gang because they provided me with little money through stealing and protection that my family was unable to provide. I am from a low-income family..."* (IDI/male/Eket/July, 2024). The response of the 11-year-old street child highlights how economic hardship and lack of family support drive children into gang involvement. The decision to join a gang was not out of preference but necessity, as it provided both financial assistance and a sense of security that was absent in their family life. This underscores how street children seek alternative support systems, even if they involve criminal activities. The mention of a low-income background further reinforces the link between poverty, social instability, and delinquency.

Discussion of Findings

The result showed that parental poverty is a strong factor driving street children's susceptibility to delinquent behaviour. This category of children blamed their conditions on household poverty, which prevented them from having access to basic needs including food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and education. These children were more likely to engage in a range of delinquent behaviour, such as stealing, drug abuse, gangsterism, and violent acts. The experiences of street children reveal the profound impact of poverty, family instability, and social neglect on their lives. Economic hardship emerges as a major driving force, with many children forced into the streets due to their families' inability to provide basic necessities such as food, shelter, and education. In several cases, these hardships are rooted in generational poverty, where children born into homelessness or extreme deprivation find themselves trapped in the same cycle. The instability of single-parent households, particularly those affected by illness, further exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them without reliable support systems.

The findings also highlight the link between poverty and delinquent behaviour, as children resort to begging, theft, and even drug-related activities as survival strategies. Many expressed that they were not inherently criminal but were pushed into such behaviours by circumstances beyond their control. The absence of structured support makes them susceptible to exploitation by individuals who manipulate their desperation. Additionally, some children form groups or gangs to provide one another with protection and financial aid, reinforcing patterns of social exclusion and criminal behaviour.

The result of this study is supported by the works of Gunuboh (2023), Piotrowska *et al.* (2023), Salihi (2019), Wamunyinyi (2016), Mobarakeh (2015) and Diriba (2015), who agreed that poverty is a social stressor, and children from impoverished households always regard the street as a place to find opportunities, thus they resort to delinquent activities to get by on the streets. Street children are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour because they lack basic needs such as food, clothing shelter, education, protection and care.

In summary, growing up in a poor household increases the risk of delinquent behaviour due to challenges such as deprivation, social exclusion, and limited opportunities for positive development. This leads to frustration, helplessness, and mental health issues. Children from low-income families also face threats, insecurity, marginalization, and extreme vulnerability. Lack of access to occupational training and education further impacts self-esteem, hinders positive relationships, and makes adult care difficult.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined how parental poverty predisposes street children to delinquent behaviour in major towns in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The results demonstrated that parental poverty significantly influences children's street life and delinquency. Extreme deprivation, including food insecurity, inadequate shelter, and lack of education, drives many to seek survival on the streets. Growing up on the streets exposes these children to risky behaviours, including theft, drug peddling, and gang involvement. Their engagement in delinquency is largely survival-driven rather than voluntary, as they struggle to meet

their basic needs. Many resort to begging, scavenging, or forming groups to secure food and protection. The narratives highlight systemic failures in child welfare, poverty alleviation, and social protection.

This study contributes to knowledge by deepening the understanding of how parental poverty directly shapes the experiences of street children and predisposes them to delinquent behaviour. It highlights the intergenerational nature of poverty and homelessness, emphasising how economic hardship, family instability, and lack of social support create a cycle that pushes children to the streets. By drawing insights from the lived experiences of street children in Akwa Ibom State, this study provides empirical evidence of the systemic failures in addressing child welfare and social protection, offering a localised perspective on a global issue.

Further research should explore the long-term effects of street life on children's psychological and emotional well-being, as well as their reintegration into society. Comparative studies between urban and rural settings would provide deeper insights into how environmental factors influence street survival strategies. Investigating the role of government and non-governmental organisations in mitigating child homelessness and delinquency would also be valuable in shaping more effective intervention programs.

Addressing the issue requires a multi-sectoral approach, including poverty alleviation programmes that target low-income families, improved access to free and quality education, and strengthened social support systems. Community-based interventions should focus on family empowerment, economic support, and parental education to reduce the likelihood of children turning to street life. Policies aimed at rehabilitating street children should prioritise not just immediate relief but long-term strategies that address the root causes of homelessness and delinquency. Strengthening legal frameworks to protect vulnerable children, alongside expanding vocational training and employment opportunities, would provide sustainable pathways for them to exit street life.

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