impact International Journals and Publications

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 1004-1021 | ISSN: 2636-4484

SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING SERVICES AND STREET HAWKING AMONG TEENAGE GIRLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

*Litigeh Paulina Ashima[1], Otu EKpenyong (PhD)[2], Peter Emejuru (PhD)[3] & Dr Oyama, S. Egor[4]
[1,2,3]*Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria*
[4]*Department of Obst/Gynae University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar*

***Corresponding author:** praiseoyama9@gmail.com*

ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0699
Accepted Date: 01/10/2026
Published Date: 15/11/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
This study examined social work support and counselling services in relation to street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State, Nigeria. It focused on the relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship, and between social work counselling services and family instability, as predictors of street hawking. The study adopted the mixed method research design and was anchored on the Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Learning Theory. The population comprised teenage girls aged 13 to 19 years who had lived in Cross River State for at least two years and had participated in street hawking. A sample of 308 respondents was determined with the Cochran formula and selected through multi-stage (stratified, simple random and purposive) sampling from the Central and Southern Senatorial Districts, while 16 informants took part in four focus group discussions. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire on a four-point Likert scale and a focus group discussion guide, and 297 questionnaires were properly filled and returned. Data were analysed with frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, and Spearman's rank order correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed mixed perceptions of support services: respondents agreed that free school materials reduce hawking (mean = 2.90), but views on financial assistance (mean = 2.98) and the accessibility of welfare services (mean = 2.89) were divided. Counselling services were rated more favourably, especially for improving self-confidence (mean = 3.54) and raising awareness of the dangers of hawking (mean = 3.26). There was a significant positive relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship (rho = 0.802, $p < 0.05$), and between social work counselling services and family instability (rho = 0.726, $p < 0.05$). Focus group accounts showed that many parents know the dangers of hawking but still depend on their daughters' earnings. The study concluded that effective social work must address material deprivation and family relationships together, and it recommended family-centred support linked to social protection, together with counselling institutionalised in schools, health centres and religious institutions.

Keywords: Social work support services, counselling, poverty, economic hardship, family instability, street hawking, teenage girls

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 1004-1021 | ISSN: 2636-4484

Introduction

Street hawking among teenage girls is a widespread socio-economic issue in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State. The phenomenon exposes girls to exploitation, abuse, poor academic performance and long-term psychological harm. In Cross River State, street hawking among teenagers appears to be linked to poor parental income, family disorganisation and broken homes, large family sizes and a lack of social services for teenage girls. In many developing countries, the informal economy provides an important means of survival for poor households, and children may become involved in economic activities to supplement family income. In many African communities, children contribute to household survival through petty trading, hawking and other informal activities, and the practice may be socially tolerated because it is seen as a way of teaching children responsibility or helping families meet immediate needs. Social acceptance, however, does not remove the risks of children's prolonged presence on the streets, which include road traffic accidents, exploitation, physical and sexual abuse, kidnapping, harassment and exposure to harmful substances.

The scale of children's work in Nigeria is large. The Nigeria Child Labour Survey 2022 reported that about 24.67 million children aged 5 to 17 years, or 39.2 per cent of children in that age group, were in child labour, and that about 14.39 million were in hazardous work (National Bureau of Statistics & International Labour Organization, 2024). Reports of the survey showed that Cross River State had the highest prevalence of child labour of any state, at 67.4 per cent (Ogunyale, 2024). These figures cover all forms of child labour and not street hawking alone, but they show that children's work is a serious welfare concern in the state. Two household conditions are the focus of this paper. The first is poverty and economic hardship. Families with little or no steady income often rely on their children's labour to survive, and girls are particularly affected because they are often expected to contribute to household upkeep. The second is family instability. Where parents are separated, divorced, absent or deceased, supervision weakens and income falls, and teenage girls may be sent to the streets to make up the shortfall. In a qualitative study of children on the streets of Ibadan, Obimakinde and Shabir (2023a) found broken homes, large families, poor economic resources and weak parent and child relationships among the family dynamics behind children's street work, most of which was hawking.

Social work offers a framework for responding to both conditions. The International Federation of Social Workers (2014) defines social work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Social work support services involve practical and emotional assistance provided to individuals and families facing hardship, including financial aid referrals, food assistance, shelter support, educational guidance, healthcare referrals and crisis intervention. Social work counselling services refer to professional guidance and therapeutic interaction that helps individuals understand, manage and overcome personal, emotional or social challenges, with a focus on listening, empathy, problem-solving and helping clients make informed decisions. Material support without attention to family relationships may leave conflict or unsafe expectations unresolved, while counselling without practical help may ask a household to change behaviour while its basic needs remain unmet. It is against this background that this study examined social work support and counselling services and street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State, Nigeria.

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 1004-1021 | ISSN: 2636-4484

Statement of the problem

Teenage girls involved in street hawking are often compelled by poverty, broken homes, peer influence, lack of access to education, large family sizes and parental neglect. The income earned from hawking is irregular and insufficient, making it difficult for these young people to meet their basic needs, yet it may still be vital to the survival of their households. Street hawkers are exposed to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, harsh weather, poor sanitation, poor nutrition and inadequate sleep, which compromise their physical and mental well-being, and they face accidents, violence, harassment and assault. Many also face stigma and social exclusion, because society regards street hawking as an inferior occupation. Government and non-governmental organisations have worked to improve the socio-economic and psychological well-being of street hawkers, but a wide gap remains, especially in Cross River State. Support services may exist in principle but be difficult to reach, insufficient in value or unevenly distributed, and families experiencing separation, death of a parent or conflict may receive little guidance on how to protect their daughters while meeting household needs.

Counselling creates opportunities for girls and caregivers to discuss family expectations, stress and safety, but it must respect confidentiality and must not blame girls or parents for structural poverty. Where parents understand the dangers of hawking but see no other means of feeding the household, counselling alone may achieve little unless it is joined to practical help. Most available studies on street hawking in Nigeria have described its causes and effects, and few have examined the relationship between specific social work services and the household conditions that keep teenage girls on the streets, particularly in Cross River State. In spite of the efforts of government and non-governmental organisations, the relationship between social work support and counselling services and the predictors of street hawking among teenage girls in the state remains to be ascertained. The problem of this study, therefore, was to examine the relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship, and between social work counselling services and family instability, as predictors of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to examine social work support and counselling services in relation to the predictors of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State; and
2. investigate the relationship between social work counselling services and family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State?
2. How do social work counselling services relate with family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between social work counselling services and family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

Literature review

Concept of street hawking

Street hawking refers to the act of teenage girls selling goods such as food items, water, fruits, snacks or household products in public places like roads, markets, motor parks and traffic junctions in Cross River State. The activity is typically carried out to contribute to household income and often takes place during school hours or late in the evening. The concern is not that every activity undertaken by an adolescent is harmful in itself, but that work becomes a child protection issue when its conditions expose the child to danger, interfere with education or undermine physical and psychosocial development. Ijadunola et al. (2015), in a study of 435 in-school adolescents in Ile-Ife, south-western Nigeria, found that female adolescents and children of trading mothers were significantly more likely to hawk, and that adolescents who hawked were significantly more likely to fail term examinations. This shows that the household occupation of parents, especially mothers who trade, can draw girls into hawking, and that the practice carries a cost for their schooling. Street hawking among teenage girls is therefore best understood as a household strategy shaped by income, family structure and community norms, rather than as an isolated behaviour of the adolescent, and responses based only on punishment or removal from the street are unlikely to be sustainable.

Poverty, economic hardship and street hawking

The economic hardship of households is the most commonly reported reason why young girls end up as hawkers. Poverty is not only low income; it can involve unstable employment, insufficient food, limited access to health care, school costs, insecure housing and few opportunities to obtain assistance. Where households face several of these pressures at once, a teenager's contribution to income may be treated as necessary. Usman (2010), in a qualitative study of nomadic girls who sold dairy products on the streets of three northern Nigerian cities, found that family poverty, the gendered division of household labour and the wish to supplement family income and save for marriage drove girls into hawking, and that the girls faced a lack of safety, exposure to abuse and the risk of being left behind in basic literacy. Ojo (2013) found in Agege, Lagos State, that parents' education, parents' occupation and family size were significant factors behind child street hawking and recommended poverty alleviation together with free and compulsory education. This context requires social workers to avoid explanations that treat family decisions as a matter of ignorance or neglect alone. Protection plans are more likely to last when they connect families to practical resources and check whether the support actually reduces the need for children to work in hazardous settings.

Social work support services

Social work support services are practical and emotional resources that help individuals and families meet needs, improve access to services and strengthen coping. They aim to reduce immediate stress, stabilise families during difficult periods and prevent problems from getting worse. In this study, the questionnaire items covered financial assistance programmes, the social acceptance of disabled persons through support services, free school materials and the accessibility of social welfare services. Support may also involve referral to cash or livelihood programmes, school fee relief, transport support, health services and community-based organisations. Omorogiuwa (2020), in a qualitative study of Nigerian social workers' views on reducing child labour, identified schooling assistance and the socio-economic development of parents as key parts of a holistic strategy, and recommended that policies build the economic

sustainability of households and respond to the needs of service users. At the international level, the International Labour Organization and UNICEF (2022) concluded that direct assistance that helps families cope with crises can reduce harmful coping strategies such as child labour, that social protection works best within integrated systems, and that coverage has not reached the families most in need fast enough. A sound social work assessment should therefore establish which needs are most urgent, what services are available, what eligibility rules apply and how referrals will be followed up.

Family instability and street hawking

Family instability refers to conditions such as separation, divorce, desertion, the death of a parent, persistent conflict and weak parental supervision, which disrupt the care and protection of children. In unstable homes, a single parent may carry the full burden of household income, older children may take on adult responsibilities, and supervision of children's movements may weaken. Obimakinde and Shabir (2023a) grouped the family dynamics of children on the streets of Ibadan into family structure, including broken homes and large families, family resources, including poor economic and social resources, and family relationships, including weak emotional connection and poor support for children's growth. They concluded that children's street work, mostly hawking, was driven by the devaluation of family life, parenting irresponsibility and poor parent and child relationships, made worse by economic constraint, and they called for family-level interventions. The same team reported that children who moved between home and the street suffered injuries, poor diet, infections and sexual, verbal and substance abuse, and that they rarely sought proper health care (Obimakinde & Shabir, 2023b). These findings show that family instability is not only an economic problem but also a relational one, which is where counselling becomes important.

Social work counselling services

Counselling services may address family conflict, trauma, low self-esteem, grief and behavioural problems, with the goal of helping individuals gain clarity, build resilience and develop healthier coping strategies. For teenage girls who hawk, counselling can raise awareness of the dangers of hawking, build self-confidence and help girls who have suffered abuse to recover, while family counselling can help parents and guardians reconsider the decision to send their daughters to hawk. Evidence on family-focused approaches is encouraging. Bosqui et al. (2024), in a systematic review of 80 studies with 18,193 participants on parenting and family interventions in low and middle income countries, found that 43 of 64 interventions improved child or adolescent mental health outcomes, with caregiver education, communication skills and the reinforcement of positive behaviour as common components, and they noted that trained non-specialists can deliver such interventions and that services addressing family needs together work well. Yu et al. (2023), in an evidence and gap map of 697 studies and reviews of child and adolescent mental health and psychosocial support in low and middle income countries, found that school-based interventions formed the largest share of the evidence, while gaps remained in prevention and early intervention. In Nigeria, however, Isangha et al. (2024) found that child protection social workers had too few staff, high caseloads and limited resources, which limits how much counselling can actually be offered.

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on the Ecological Systems Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which holds that human development is shaped by interactions between the individual and layers of environment: the microsystem of family, peers and school; the mesosystem of connections between these; the exosystem of institutions that affect the child indirectly, such as

parents' workplaces and welfare agencies; the macrosystem of cultural values, laws and economic conditions; and the chronosystem of change over time. Applied to this study, poverty and family instability are features of a girl's microsystem that are themselves shaped by the wider economy and by the availability of welfare services in the exosystem. A girl from a single-parent home in a poor household is not choosing to hawk in a vacuum; her circumstances are set by the income of her parent, the support available to the family and the norms of her community. The theory therefore supports social work at several levels at once, with support services that strengthen household resources and link families to institutions, and counselling that works on relationships within the family. It also explains why counselling alone may not succeed where the economic environment of the family remains unchanged.

The study was also guided by the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (1977), which emphasises observation, modelling and reinforcement in learning behaviour. Where girls see siblings, peers and parents treating hawking as a normal household duty, and where the money they bring home is praised, the behaviour is reinforced. In some families, as the focus group accounts in this study show, hawking is even treated as a way of raising children the hard way to make them strong, which is a learned family norm. Counselling can challenge these norms by giving parents and girls new information and new models, and by rewarding safer choices, while support services can remove some of the immediate rewards that make hawking necessary. The theory therefore complements the ecological perspective: one explains the conditions that push girls into hawking, and the other explains how the practice is learned and kept going within families and communities.

Empirical review

Omorogiuwa (2020) examined social work practice in strengthening household economic empowerment and support for the parents of working children in Nigeria. Using a qualitative approach with social workers and thematic analysis, the study identified schooling assistance and the socio-economic development of parents or guardians as the main elements of a holistic response to child labour, and it recommended that policies and programmes build household economic sustainability and that social workers make sure their support meets clients' needs. The study is relevant to the present work because it links social work support with the household economy, but it presents the views of practitioners and does not measure the relationship between support services and street hawking. Howard et al. (2025) evaluated the CLARISSA cash plus pilot in a Dhaka slum in Bangladesh, which combined unconditional cash transfers worth about a fifth of monthly household income, paid for seven months, with case management and community organising over 21 months. Using contribution analysis and several sources of data, the authors concluded that the transfers reduced poverty and improved economic resilience and well-being, and that case management and community organising acted as a form of social protection and produced household changes linked to children's work. This suggests that support works best when material help and casework go together, although the study was carried out in a very different setting.

Obimakinde and Shabir (2023a) explored the family dynamics of children on the streets of Ibadan through 53 interviews with children aged 13 to under 18 years, parental figures, child welfare officers and street shop owners in the five urban local government areas of the city, with data collected between June and September 2021. They found that broken homes, large families, poor economic resources and weak family relationships underlay children's street work, which was mostly hawking, and called for family-level interventions. Bosqui et al. (2024) showed in their systematic review that family and parenting interventions in low and middle income

countries often improve the mental health of children and adolescents, particularly where they educate caregivers and build communication. Isangha et al. (2024), interviewing eleven certified social workers in non-governmental organisations in Lagos and Kano States, found that counselling and therapeutic support formed part of their remedial work but that resources and staffing were inadequate and the Child's Rights Act had not been fully implemented. Together, these studies show that poverty and family instability are recognised drivers of children's street work and that support and family-focused counselling are promising responses. None of them, however, measured the relationship between social work support and counselling services and the predictors of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State, which is the gap the present study sought to fill.

Methodology

The study adopted the mixed method research design, combining a questionnaire with focus group discussions so that numerical data and contextual accounts were collected and analysed together. It was carried out in Cross River State, one of the 36 states of Nigeria, in the South-South geopolitical zone. The state shares boundaries with the Republic of Cameroon to the east, Benue State to the north, Ebonyi and Abia States to the west, Akwa Ibom State to the south-west and the Atlantic Ocean to the south, covers about 23,000 square kilometres and has three senatorial districts and 18 local government areas, with its capital at Calabar. It is largely agrarian, with most of its people engaged in subsistence farming in rural communities. The population of the study comprised all teenage girls aged 13 to 19 years in Cross River State who had lived in the study area for at least two years and had participated in street hawking. Because the number of such girls is not known, the Cochran formula for an unknown population, $n = Z^2pq/e^2$, was used with $Z = 1.96$, $p = 0.723$, $q = 0.277$ and $e = 0.05$, giving $n = (3.8416 \times 0.723 \times 0.277)/0.0025 = 307.7$, approximately 308 respondents.

A multi-stage sampling technique, made up of stratified, simple random and purposive sampling, was used. The 18 local government areas were first arranged in strata; the Central and Southern Senatorial Districts were then selected by simple random sampling, and four local government areas were selected from each district by balloting, with one community chosen from each, as shown in Table 1. Street hawkers were then purposively selected in the study communities to give 308 respondents. In addition, 16 informants, made up of street hawkers, parents and stakeholders, were purposively selected for four focus group discussions of four persons each on the basis of age, vulnerability, location and experience.

Table 1: Selected Senatorial Districts, Local Government Areas and Communities

Senatorial district	Local Government Area	Community
Cross River Central	Boki	Okundi
	Ikom	Ikom Town
	Yakurr	Ugep
	Obubra	Ofodua
Cross River South	Biase	Akpet Central
	Odukpani	Odukpani
	Calabar Municipality	Marian
	Akpabuyo	Akwa Ikot Eyo

Source: Litigeh (2026), Chapter Three.

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 1004-1021 | ISSN: 2636-4484

The instruments were a structured questionnaire and a focus group discussion guide, designed by the researcher with the help of the supervisors. Section A of the questionnaire covered demographic characteristics, while Sections B and C measured the independent and dependent variables with close-ended items on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The support items covered financial assistance, the social acceptance of disabled persons, free school materials and the accessibility of welfare services, and the counselling items covered awareness of the dangers of hawking, self-confidence, counselling of parents and guardians, and the reduction of hawking in the community. The face and content validity of the instrument were established by experts in the Department of Social Work, who checked the relevance, wording and representativeness of the items before approving them. Reliability was established through a trial test on 20 respondents who were not part of the study sample, and Cronbach's alpha gave 0.76 for support services, 0.72 for counselling services, 0.71 for the predictors of street hawking and 0.74 for the instrument as a whole, which showed that the instrument was consistent.

The data were collated, coded and analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Simple percentages were used for the demographic data, item frequencies were summarised with means and standard deviations, and a mean of 2.50 or above was taken as agreement. Spearman's rank order correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance, and the null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated value was greater than or equal to the critical value. The focus group discussions were transcribed and used to explain the quantitative results. Informed consent was obtained before the instrument was administered, participation was voluntary with the liberty to withdraw at any time, and anonymity was kept by leaving names off the questionnaire. Of the 308 questionnaires administered, 297 were properly filled and returned, a return rate of 96.4 per cent, and these were used for the analysis.

Results

Table 2: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n = 297)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	297	100.0
Age	10 to 12 years	44	14.8
	13 to 15 years	103	34.7
	16 to 19 years	150	50.5
Marital status	Single	224	75.4
	Married	20	6.7
	Divorced	1	0.3
	Separated	50	16.8
	Widowed	2	0.7
Occupation	Farming	22	7.4
	Trading	152	51.2
	Business	104	35.0
	Unemployed	10	3.4
	Self-employed	4	1.3
	Others	5	1.7
Educational level	Primary	6	2.0
	Junior secondary school	139	46.8
	Senior secondary school	120	40.4
	No formal education	32	10.8
Family background	Both parents alive	45	15.2
	Single parent	188	63.3
	Orphan	64	21.5

Source: Fieldwork (2026).

Table 2 shows that all 297 respondents were female. Of these, 44 (14.8 per cent) were aged 10 to 12 years, 103 (34.7 per cent) were aged 13 to 15 years and 150 (50.5 per cent) were aged 16 to 19 years. Most were single (224 or 75.4 per cent), although 20 (6.7 per cent) reported being married and 50 (16.8 per cent) separated. On occupation, 152 (51.2 per cent) reported trading and 104 (35.0 per cent) business. On educational level, 139 (46.8 per cent) had junior secondary education, 120 (40.4 per cent) senior secondary education, 6 (2.0 per cent) primary education and 32 (10.8 per cent) no formal education. The family background of the respondents is particularly relevant to this paper: 188 (63.3 per cent) came from single-parent homes and 64 (21.5 per cent) were orphans, while only 45 (15.2 per cent) had both parents alive. This shows that most of the girls lived in households that had lost a parent through separation, divorce or death, which is the family instability examined in this study, and that they were largely engaged in informal trading.

Research question One: What is the relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Social Work Support Services (n = 297)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
15	Financial assistance programmes reduce the need for street hawking.	130	39	120	8	297	2.98	0.98	Agreed
16	Through social work support services, disabled people now feel accepted in society.	102	90	81	24	297	2.91	0.97	Agreed
17	Provision of free school materials reduces street hawking.	57	166	60	14	297	2.90	0.76	Agreed
18	Social welfare services are easily accessible to vulnerable families.	116	91	30	60	297	2.89	1.14	Agreed
	Grand mean						**2.92**		**Agreed**

Key: SA = Strongly Agree (4); A = Agree (3); D = Disagree (2); SD = Strongly Disagree (1). Frequencies are as reported in the thesis; means and standard deviations were computed from them. Criterion mean = 2.50. Source: Fieldwork (2026).

Table 3 shows that 130 (43.8 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed and 39 (13.1 per cent) agreed that financial assistance programmes reduce the need for street hawking, but 120 (40.4 per cent) disagreed and 8 (2.7 per cent) strongly disagreed (mean = 2.98). On the social acceptance of disabled persons, 102 (34.3 per cent) strongly agreed and 90 (30.3 per cent) agreed that through social work support services disabled people now feel accepted in society, while 105 (35.4 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed (mean = 2.91). Also, 57 (19.2 per cent) strongly agreed and 166 (55.9 per cent) agreed that the provision of free school materials reduces street hawking (mean = 2.90). In addition, 116 (39.1 per cent) strongly agreed and 91 (30.6 per cent) agreed that social welfare services are easily accessible to vulnerable families, but 30 (10.1 per cent) disagreed and 60 (20.2 per cent) strongly disagreed (mean = 2.89). The grand mean of 2.92 shows agreement overall, but at a lower level than for counselling. The results indicate that support services are seen as moderately effective, particularly for educational support, while views on financial assistance and the accessibility of services are divided, with a large share of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. This implies a need to improve the coverage, accessibility and value of support, especially financial help.

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 1004-1021 | ISSN: 2636-4484

Research question Two: How do social work counselling services relate with family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State?

Table 4: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Social Work Counselling Services (n = 297)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
19	Counselling services make girls more aware of the dangers of street hawking.	160	70	50	17	297	3.26	0.93	Agreed
20	Counselling services improve self-confidence among teenage girls.	191	85	11	10	297	3.54	0.73	Agreed
21	Social workers counselled parents or guardians against sending girls to hawk in your community.	67	190	30	10	297	3.06	0.68	Agreed
22	Counselling services from social workers have helped teenage girls reduce street hawking in my community.	98	150	30	19	297	3.10	0.82	Agreed
	Grand mean						**3.24**		**Agreed**

Key: SA = Strongly Agree (4); A = Agree (3); D = Disagree (2); SD = Strongly Disagree (1). Frequencies are as reported in the thesis; means and standard deviations were computed from them. Criterion mean = 2.50. Source: Fieldwork (2026).

Table 4 shows that 160 (53.9 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed and 70 (23.6 per cent) agreed that counselling services make girls more aware of the dangers of street hawking, although 67 (22.5 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed (mean = 3.26). Counselling was rated most highly for building confidence: 191 (64.3 per cent) strongly agreed and 85 (28.6 per cent) agreed that counselling services improve self-confidence among teenage girls (mean = 3.54). Also, 67 (22.6 per cent) strongly agreed and 190 (64.0 per cent) agreed that social workers counselled parents or guardians against sending girls to hawk in their community (mean = 3.06). On the reduction of hawking, 98 (33.0 per cent) strongly agreed and 150 (50.5 per cent) agreed that counselling services from social workers have helped teenage girls reduce street hawking in their community, while 49 (16.5 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed (mean = 3.10). The grand mean of 3.24 shows that counselling services were rated favourably, particularly for improving self-confidence and influencing parents, and that respondents saw counselling as an important strategy against teenage street hawking.

Table 5: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Predictors of Street Hawking among Teenage Girls (n = 297)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
23	You engage in street hawking because there are no job or skill opportunities for teenagers in your area.	162	49	60	26	297	3.17	1.04	Agreed
24	You go to hawk because you enjoy selling and making money.	84	192	11	10	297	3.18	0.65	Agreed
25	Your parents encourage or force you to hawk.	57	166	34	40	297	2.81	0.90	Agreed
26	Hawking among teenage girls is a common habit in your community.	116	91	50	40	297	2.95	1.05	Agreed
	Grand mean						**3.03**		**Agreed**

Key: SA = Strongly Agree (4); A = Agree (3); D = Disagree (2); SD = Strongly Disagree (1). Frequencies are as reported in the thesis; means and standard deviations were computed from them. Criterion mean = 2.50. Source: Fieldwork (2026).

Table 5 presents the responses on the predictors of street hawking. Of the respondents, 162 (54.5 per cent) strongly agreed and 49 (16.5 per cent) agreed that they hawk because there are no job or skill opportunities for teenagers in their area (mean = 3.17), and 84 (28.3 per cent) strongly agreed and 192 (64.6 per cent) agreed that they hawk because they enjoy selling and making money (mean = 3.18). Also, 57 (19.2 per cent) strongly agreed and 166 (55.9 per cent) agreed that their parents encourage or force them to hawk (mean = 2.81), and 116 (39.1 per cent) strongly agreed and 91 (30.6 per cent) agreed that hawking among teenage girls is a common habit in their community (mean = 2.95). The grand mean of 3.03 shows agreement with all four predictors. The results show that economic need, the reward of earnings, parental pressure and community habit work together, which is consistent with the household and family conditions examined in this paper.

Test of hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

Table 6: Spearman's Rank Order Correlation between Social Work Support Services and Poverty/Economic Hardship

Variable	N	Mean	SD	rho	r^2	df	Critical r (0.05)	Decision
Social work support services	297	2.2579	1.08178	0.802	0.643	295	0.114	H_{01} rejected
Poverty/economic hardship	297	2.2342	1.05051					

Spearman's rank order correlation, two-tailed, significant at $p < 0.05$. N, means, standard deviations and rho are as reported in the thesis; r^2 and the critical value were computed for this paper. Source: Fieldwork (2026).

Table 6 shows the Spearman's rank order correlation between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State. The calculated rho of 0.802 was greater than the critical value of 0.114 at the 0.05 level of significance with 295 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a significant relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking, was accepted. The relationship is positive and strong, and the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.643$) shows that about 64 per cent of the variation in the ranks is shared between the two measures. Because the result comes from a single survey, it shows that the measures are strongly related but does not by itself show that support services caused a change in poverty or in hawking.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between social work counselling services and family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

Table 7: Spearman's Rank Order Correlation between Social Work Counselling Services and Family Instability

Variable	N	Mean	SD	rho	r^2	df	Critical r (0.05)	Decision
Social work counselling services	297	2.3705	1.33118	0.726	0.527	295	0.114	H_{02} rejected
Family instability	297	2.3365	1.32680					

Spearman's rank order correlation, two-tailed, significant at $p < 0.05$. N, means, standard deviations and rho are as reported in the thesis; r^2 and the critical value were computed for this paper. Source: Fieldwork (2026).

Table 7 shows the Spearman's rank order correlation between social work counselling services and family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State. The calculated rho of 0.726 was greater than the critical value of 0.114 at the 0.05 level of significance with 295 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a significant relationship between social work counselling services and family instability as a predictor of street hawking, was accepted. The relationship is positive and strong, with a coefficient of determination of 0.527, meaning that about 53 per cent of the variation in the ranks is shared between the two measures. Respondents who rated counselling services more highly also tended to give higher ratings on the family instability measure.

Findings from the focus group discussions

The focus group discussions with teenagers, parents and stakeholders added detail to the quantitative results. On support services, a stakeholder described how social workers can identify teenagers at risk early and help families cope with economic hardship, while a parent showed that some families send daughters to hawk not only out of need but as a deliberate way of raising them:

> Social work support services are very important in the reduction of street hawking among teenage girls. Through school and community-based programmes supported by the government, sometimes by non-governmental organisations,

> social workers can identify teenagers at risk early and help them and their parents to come out of the challenges of the economy and to develop healthier ways of coping instead of indulging in street hawking. (Stakeholder)
>
> In my view, we know that times are hard and living conditions are now tough. Some parents will still want to send their children to the streets to hawk, not because they need money for food, but as a lifestyle of raising their children in a hard way to make them strong. (Parent)

On counselling and family instability, a teenager linked her hawking directly to the break-up of her parents' marriage, and a parent explained why advice alone had not changed her situation:

> Actually, I did not know that selling on the streets is not good and can expose me to bad things. Nobody has advised me to stop hawking, even when some people collected all my money on my way back home. My father refused to send me to school because my mother left him. (Teenager)
>
> Sometimes I tell my daughter not to go to school so she can assist me in selling. She assists me when I am sick and tired. Some people came to our church before and advised all parents not to send their children out to hawk on the streets again. Now what do I do? We are two in the house, and if she does not help me go out hawking, where do I get the money to feed us and also pay her school fees? (Parent)

These accounts show that support services can reduce street hawking, but that some families have internalised hawking as a rite of passage and a survival strategy. They also show that counselling can help, but that it can only be sustained if the economic life of families improves, particularly where marriages have broken down. Most parents and guardians were aware of the dangers of hawking yet still sent their daughters out because of poverty and the need to make ends meet.

Discussion of findings

The first finding of this study is that there is a significant positive relationship between social work support services and poverty or economic hardship as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State (rho = 0.802). Respondents agreed that free school materials reduce hawking, but they were divided on whether financial assistance reduces the need to hawk and whether welfare services are easy for vulnerable families to reach. This finding agrees with Omorogiuwa (2020), who identified schooling assistance and the economic development of parents as central to the social work response to child labour in Nigeria, and with the International Labour Organization and UNICEF (2022), who found that social protection can reduce child labour but has not reached the families most in need quickly enough. The divided views on financial help and access suggest that this gap in coverage also exists in Cross River State. The finding is also consistent with Howard et al. (2025), whose Bangladeshi pilot showed that cash transfers joined to case management reduced poverty and changed household decisions about children's work. In terms of the Ecological Systems Theory, support services act at the level of the exosystem, linking the household to resources it lacks; where those links are weak or uneven, the household economy continues to depend on the girl's earnings. The parent's remark that some families send girls to hawk to make them strong shows, in line with the Social Learning Theory, that material support may also need to be joined to work on family beliefs.

The second finding is that there is a significant positive relationship between social work counselling services and family instability as a predictor of street hawking among teenage girls

(rho = 0.726). Counselling was rated favourably, especially for improving self-confidence and for counselling parents against sending girls to hawk, and most respondents agreed that it had helped reduce hawking in their communities. The demographic profile, in which more than eight in ten respondents came from single-parent homes or were orphans, shows how common family instability was among the girls. This finding agrees with Obimakinde and Shabir (2023a), who found broken homes and weak parent and child relationships behind children's street work in Ibadan and called for family-level interventions, and with Bosqui et al. (2024), whose review showed that family and parenting interventions that educate caregivers and build communication often improve children's mental health. The focus group accounts, however, show the limits of counselling. The teenager whose father stopped her schooling after her mother left, and the mother who could not afford to keep her daughter off the streets, show that counselling may change awareness but not the household economy. This is consistent with Isangha et al. (2024), who found that Nigerian child protection social workers are too few and too poorly resourced to provide sustained support, and it suggests that counselling must be joined to practical help if its effects are to last.

Taken together, the two findings show that the household conditions behind street hawking, namely poverty and family instability, are closely related to the support and counselling services that respondents experienced, and that the two kinds of service depend on each other. Respondents rated counselling more highly than support, yet they also agreed that the absence of job or skill opportunities and parental pressure push them to hawk, and the focus group accounts repeatedly returned to the question of money. This suggests that counselling has changed what many girls and parents know, but that support services have not yet changed what many households can afford. In ecological terms, social work in the state has reached into the microsystem of family relationships more effectively than it has strengthened the economic resources around the family. Because the results are correlational and based on self-reports, the high coefficients should be read as strong associations rather than proof of cause. Nevertheless, the agreement between the questionnaire results, the focus group accounts and earlier studies gives confidence that family-centred case management, which combines material support, referral to social protection and counselling for both girls and parents, is a relevant response to street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical and qualitative evidence that social work support and counselling services are strongly related to the predictors of street hawking among teenage girls in Cross River State, Nigeria. Support services were related to poverty and economic hardship, with educational support valued but financial assistance and access to welfare services seen as uneven. Counselling services were related to family instability and contributed to the self-confidence of girls and the attitudes of parents. The study also highlights an underlying reality: street hawking among teenage girls is rooted in persistent poverty, broken homes, family survival strategies and, in some cases, culturally normalised practices, so that the impact of social work is constrained without broader structural support. The study concludes that sustainable reduction of street hawking requires an integrated approach in which material support, counselling for girls and families, and poverty alleviation and educational support programmes are delivered together.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Social work support services should be enhanced, particularly in the study area. Social workers should be placed in schools and local communities to identify vulnerable children and families early, and support packages including educational assistance, psychosocial support and links to livelihood programmes such as microcredit or cash transfer schemes should be developed for families.
2. Government and its partners should improve the coverage and accessibility of financial assistance and welfare services, since these were the weakest rated support items, and social workers should follow up every referral to make sure that families actually receive the help they are linked to.
3. Counselling services should be institutionalised within schools, health centres, religious institutions and community development platforms, and social workers and trained counsellors should provide regular, age-appropriate guidance to teenage girls while engaging parents, especially single parents, in family counselling.
4. Social work interventions should be integrated with broader poverty alleviation strategies, and government should implement targeted social protection such as conditional cash transfers, subsidised education and small-scale enterprise support for low-income households, so that parents no longer rely on their daughters' hawking for survival.

References

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.

Bosqui, T., Mayya, A., Farah, S., Shaito, Z., Jordans, M. J. D., Pedersen, G., Betancourt, T. S., Carr, A., Donnelly, M., & Brown, F. L. (2024). Parenting and family interventions in lower and middle-income countries for child and adolescent mental health: A systematic review. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 132*, 152483. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsych.2024.152483

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Howard, N., Roelen, K., Ton, G., Hermoza, M. E., Al Mamun, S., Chowdhury, K., Aktar, T., & Huq, L. (2025). A new approach to children's work that prioritises resilience, well-being and agency: Emerging findings from a 'cash plus' intervention in Bangladesh. *BMJ Paediatrics Open, 9*(1), e002422. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2023-002422

Ijadunola, M. Y., Ojo, T. O., Adelekan, B. A., Olatunji, G. J., Owolabi, G. K., Adewale, I. A., Ifedayo, I. F., & Friday, I. S. (2015). Street hawking among in-school adolescents in a south-western town in Nigeria: Pattern, determinants and effects on school performance. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, 27*(1), 41–48. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2013-0342

International Federation of Social Workers. (2014). *Global definition of social work*. https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/

International Labour Organization & UNICEF. (2022). *The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour: Evidence review and policy implications*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/publications/role-social-protection-elimination-child-labour-evidence-review-and-policy

Isangha, S. O., Akintunde, T. Y., Choi, W. M. A., & Tam, C. H. L. (2024). 'There is not much we can do': The roles and challenges of Nigeria's child protection social workers. *Child & Family Social Work, 29*(3), 625–636. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13122

National Bureau of Statistics & International Labour Organization. (2024). *Nigeria child labour survey 2022*. National Bureau of Statistics. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/nada/index.php/catalog/78

Obimakinde, A. M., & Shabir, M. (2023a). The family dynamics of children on the streets of Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria. *South African Family Practice, 65*(1), a5774. https://doi.org/10.4102/safp.v65i1.5774

Obimakinde, A. M., & Shabir, M. (2023b). Physical, mental and healthcare issues of children on the street of Ibadan, Nigeria. *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine, 15*(1), a3819. https://doi.org/10.4102/phcfm.v15i1.3819

Ogunyale, K. (2024, April 19). Child labour in Nigeria highest in South-East in 2022: Report. *International Centre for Investigative Reporting*. https://www.icirnigeria.org/child-labour-in-nigeria-highest-in-south-east-in-2022-report/

Ojo, M. O. D. (2013). A sociological investigation of the determinant factors and the effects of child street hawking in Nigeria: Agege, Lagos State, under survey. *International Journal of Asian Social Science, 3*(1), 114–137. https://archive.aessweb.com/index.php/5007/article/view/2405

Omorogiuwa, T. B. E. (2020). Social work practice in strengthening household economic empowerment and support: Building sustainable livelihoods for working children's

parents. *Social Work and Education, 7*(1), 53–64. https://doi.org/10.25128/2520-6230.20.1.4

Usman, L. M. (2010). Street hawking and socio-economic dynamics of nomadic girls of northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Economics, 37*(9), 717–734. https://doi.org/10.1108/03068291011062506

Yu, R., Perera, C., Sharma, M., Ipince, A., Bakrania, S., Shokraneh, F., Mosquera Sepulveda, J. S., & Anthony, D. (2023). Child and adolescent mental health and psychosocial support interventions: An evidence and gap map of low- and middle-income countries. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 19*(3), e1349. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1349