

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF STREET HAWKING IN ACCRA

By

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Introduction

Ghana and many sub-Saharan African countries have been experiencing rapid population growth and urbanization from both natural increase and high rates of migration into the cities and large towns. The contemporary situation in Ghana is that of the migration of young people from the hinterland into the main centres of commercial activity. In the cities and towns, most of these young persons have difficulty finding jobs in the formal economic sectors due to their often limited education and lack of skills for formal employment. In their quest to make a living, many of these persons, have no other choice than to take to the streets to fashion out a living. In fact, some of them virtually live on the streets and are exposed to the vagaries of street life, including rape, commercial sex work and crime. This growing segment of the vulnerable urban poor population is often overlooked mainly because they have no recognized addresses and are usually seen more as a liability rather than a potential labour force that could contribute to the national income if their interests are properly taken care of. Ironically, however, it is the huge numbers of people on the street that have often fuelled successive governments' promises of job creation. Unfortunately, it appears that the more jobs government claims to have created, the more the streets get choked with street vendors.

The basic drive for undertaking street economic activities has been poverty, which also largely accounts for the emerging development of child streetism in Ghana. The Ghana Child Labour Survey conducted in 2001 suggests that 83 percent of street children left home because of poverty and the majority of these children were from the northern regions of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003). The survey further indicated that of the 2,314 street children interviewed (i.e., those who live and work on the street), over half (54%) were aged 15-17 years. This suggests that there are other persons who may not be children but live their lives on the street. While children hawk on the streets to earn income for their parents and guardians, adults may do this for varying reasons. Similarly, the impact of street vending on each of these age groups may differ dramatically.

In some countries, street hawkers are licensed by statutory bodies and their activities are regulated by law. In Malta, for example, a street hawker is identified as "an individual who is licensed to carry out any commercial activity from any street, other than an open-air market, irrespective of the means by which such activity is carried out" (Ministry for Competitiveness & Communications, Malta, 2002). In Ghana, however, no such licensing regime is in operation and everyone can become a street hawker overnight. Thus, street hawking business in Ghana continues to expand, posing all kinds of problems that affect not only street users but also the street hawkers themselves.

The study attempts to find answers to a number of questions including the following: What are the social, economic and demographic characteristics of street hawkers? What are the predisposing factors that influence the decision of the hawker to go unto the streets? What reproductive health risks are they exposed to and how do they cope with these risks? Would street hawking necessarily reduce with increasing job creation in the formal or informal sector? Finally, would the hawkers abandon

street hawking if they are presented with alternative jobs with the requisite incentives, particularly in the area of agriculture, and with adequate governmental support?

In the light of the foregoing, the study's objectives were to investigate the fundamental factors that contribute to street hawking in Accra; understand the social, economic and demographic characteristics of street vendors that make them vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health risks; study the sexual and reproductive health behaviour of street hawkers; and investigate the extent to which street hawkers would leave the streets for alternative jobs with support from government.

The importance of the study is based on the opportunity it offers to understand the socio-demographic ramifications of street hawking as a way of guiding city authorities in evolving appropriate bye-laws to address the negative impacts while maximising its benefits (if any). The study again provides an opportunity to examine how the creation of alternative jobs elsewhere in the informal sector including agriculture (which is the main stay of the Ghanaian economy) is likely to lead to the movement of labour from the streets to more productive economic activities towards effective poverty reduction.

Background Literature

In a study on the vulnerability of street children to sexually transmitted diseases in Ghana, Anarfi (1997) found that more than a third (36%) of street children was involved in street hawking. He identifies poverty as the main factor pushing Ghanaian children onto city streets. He also adds that some of the children run away from home as a result of maltreatment from their parents. This finding is somewhat supported by the 2003 Ghana Child Labour Survey which indicated that 6 percent of children left home as a result of physical and emotional abuse (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003). In the same study by Anarfi (1997), there are accounts of some street children who began as street hawkers for their relations and thereafter decided to remain on the street when they could no longer live on the wages paid to them by those they worked for.

In another study, Obiri (1996) observed that children mainly hawk on the streets to supplement the income of their parents (especially those in the lower socio-economic stratum). Information on adult hawkers is lacking. Nevertheless, one can hypothesize that, like the children, poverty may be the main driving force.

Mitullah (2003) provides a synthesis of findings from case studies of street vending in six countries in Africa, namely Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, La Cote d'Ivoire and South Africa. The case study on Ghana was done in Kumasi, focusing on the Race Course Market where street vendors had been relocated. From the findings of these studies, there is a general lack of understanding of the sector in spite of the important economic contribution of street vending, and hence, it is often excluded from and largely unrecognized in national economic statistics. This situation has also resulted in the lack of accurate estimates of the numbers of street traders in many African cities.

Among other things, Mitullah finds that in all the six case studies, the majority of the street vendors are women made up of all marital status groups – the married, single, widowed and divorced. The study also reports that often widows and women who have been deserted by their spouses opt for the street trade. Again, these traders are reported to have very low levels of education and few have had any professional training. Also important is the finding that men tend to join street trade while young and leave early for other jobs, while women join street trade later in life and continue

till old age. These studies further document some of the negative factors that affect street vending to include high levels of personal insecurity particularly in the Uganda, Ghana and Kenya case studies. Due to the informal nature of their activities, street vendors' associations are weak to engage in any meaningful dialogue with city authorities. Consequently, where the associations exist, they are not in a position to do any effective negotiations with city authorities on behalf of the vendors.

One fundamental issue Mitullah's study highlights is the fact that women who are involved in street vending are often pushed to paying bribes to obtain licenses to operate and in some cases, offer sexual favours to law enforcement officers, a situation which is detrimental to their health, especially in this era of HIV/AIDS.

From the available literature, a number of factors affect the decision of persons to go into street hawking. These include principally the poverty situation of individuals, their age and sex, employment opportunities in the formal sector, level of education and migration status. Other factors that may push one to the street as a hawker are the household living conditions especially of children, spousal desertion, perception towards alternative jobs and non-enforcement of city authority bye-laws.

Once on the street as hawkers, they are involved in several behaviours and practices for the sake of survival. These include their life-styles, sexual relationships and the emergence of associations primarily to seek the welfare of the hawkers as well as negotiate on their behalf with city authorities. These developments tend to have short and long-term effects on the individual hawker and his/her household/family (i.e., in terms of security, risks, welfare, etc), the national income, city planning and development. When all these effects are considered at the individual and national levels, it could result in one of two possible outcomes: (i) the sustainability of street hawking as a permanent occupation as more and more people continue to hawk or join the trade on account of the benefits they derive from it or (ii) the decision to abandon street hawking for other alternative jobs either in the formal or informal sector. Again, depending on the preparedness of city authorities to evolve and implement appropriate policies and bye-laws, street hawking would continue to thrive, be minimized or curtailed completely.

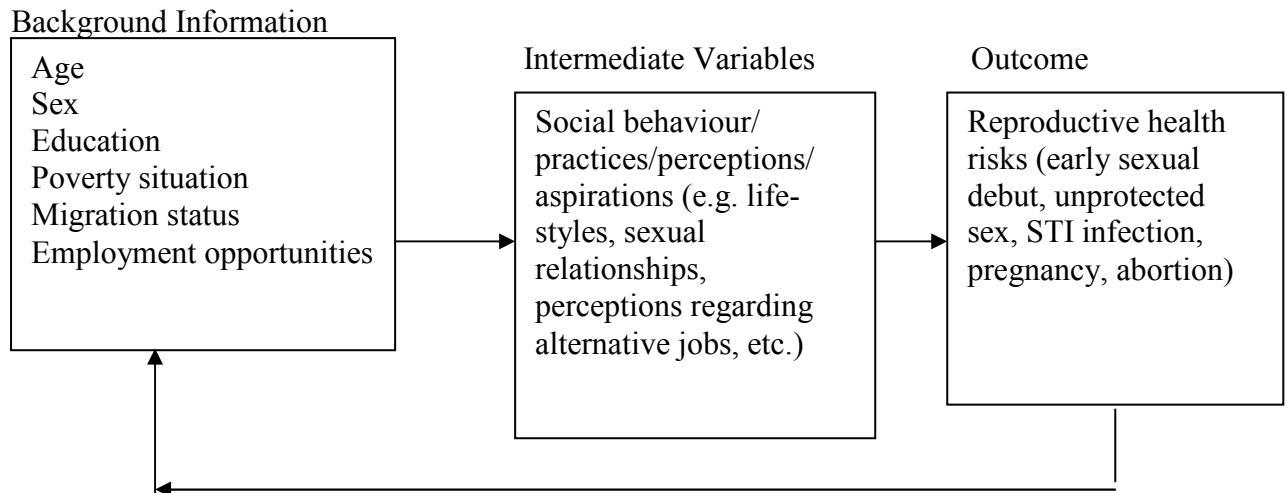
In their study of independent child migrants from northern Ghana to Accra and Kumasi, Anarfi and Kwankye (2005) investigated three aspects of the north-south independent migration of children namely; the costs and benefits of the migration; the decision-making process, and the coping strategies adopted by the independent child migrants in the two cities of destination. Though the study did not directly investigate street hawking, to the extent that majority of the children (especially the females) studied were working on the streets mainly as porters (*kayayei*), their experiences may be similar in several respects to that of the street hawkers.

The independent child migration study found, among other things, that the main reason cited by the migrants and their relations back at home (place of origin) for migrating was poverty in addition to their desire to enhance their living standards. This finding is in line with others (Anarfi, 1997; Obiri, 1996), which identify poverty as a major factor affecting street hawking or street living in Ghana and elsewhere. Anarfi and Kwankye's study also revealed the direct involvement of parents and other relations in the decision-making process of children intending to migrate to the cities, which in some cases leads them to work as porters or hawk along the principal streets in the cities.

In the light of the available literature, the present study is based on the framework in Figure 1, which shows the fundamental factors that affect street hawking/practices. These in turn impact on the individual, the family and the nation.

The consequences of these would provide feedback effects on the factors that produce the street hawking phenomenon in the first place.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study of street hawking and reproductive health risks



Source: Conceived by authors based on the available literature

Data and Methodology

The study uses data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews and participant observation. Face-to-face interviews were also held with a sample of 80 street hawkers along two of the principal arteries in Accra, namely; the Obetsebi-Lampitey-Kwame Nkrumah Circle and Abeka-Lapaz-Malam High Ways to collect data for quantitative analysis. Forty (40) street vendors who were willing to participate in the study were randomly selected from among the hawkers along each of the two selected arteries for interview. In-depth interviews were also held with 10 hawkers on these two arteries.

In addition to the interviews, four focus group discussions (FGDs) with hawkers from two other arteries not included in the survey were organised. These were the 37 Military Hospital and the Kaneshie-Odorkor roads. Along each of these two other large arteries, four separate FGDs were held, two with males and two with females. Each of these four groups consisted of five or six hawkers.

The data that were collected enabled us to answer relevant questions that relate to why the participants chose to do hawking, where they lived, their views about alternative jobs, the problems they faced and those they posed to the public at large. Most importantly, the study delved into their sexual and reproductive health behaviour, their understanding of risks associated with their sexual behaviour including their knowledge of HIV/AIDS, contraception and how they resolve pregnancy issues when they occur. The study is mainly qualitative in its presentation with limited quantitative analysis using percentages and means.

Background Characteristics of Street Hawkers

The hawkers numbered 80, 39 were males and 41 females. The majority of them were less than 30 years of age (Table 1). Specifically, one in four was aged less

than 20 years, a little more than a third were aged 20-24 years (35%) and a quarter of them (24.1%) fell within the 25-29 year age group. Just about 14% of the study sample was aged 30 years or more at the time of the survey. The street hawkers are in this sense young but not so young as to be ignorant about issues pertaining to their sexuality and livelihood. The youngest street hawker interviewed was 14 years while the oldest was 43 years.

The breakdown by gender shows that a relatively higher proportion of the males are younger than the females. A third of the males were less than 20 years compared with 18% of the females. Again, while half of the males were aged between 20 and 29 years, two-thirds of the females were in these ages (Table 1). Thus, the females were on average younger (24.33 years) than the males (25.0 years).

Table 1. Percent distribution of street hawkers by age and sex

Sex	< 20	20-24	25-29	30+	Not stated	Total	
						%	Number
Male	33.3	30.8	20.5	12.8	2.6	100.0	39
Female	17.5	40.0	27.5	15.0	0.0	100.0	40
Total	25.3	35.4	24.1	13.9	1.3	100.0	80

Analysis of the regions of origin of the hawkers shows that almost all of them were migrants from outside the Greater Accra Region. Only six of them (7.5%) were born in the Greater Accra Region. Close to a third of them were from Ashanti Region (28.8%), one in four from Eastern Region and 17.5% from Central Region. The rest of the distribution is as follows: Volta Region – 7.5%; Brong Ahafo – 6.3%; Western Region – 5.0% and Upper East – 2.5%. None of them was from the Northern or Upper West regions. The predominance of migrants from the Central, Ashanti, and Eastern Regions was also noted in the following statements:

“The Ashantis and Fantis outnumber the rest of us. Some come from Maamobi, Kaneshie, and Accra Central in general. Others come as far as Kasoa (in the Central Region) and return after hawking. They come here because the markets at their various locations do not enjoy high patronage as compared with selling on the streets here”. Another added: *“A great number of us are coming from the Fanti area”.* Again, according to the females from the Kaneshie-Odorkor FGD group, *“Some also are from Swedru, Bawjiase and Pokuase; they come to sell and go back at the end of the day”.* Similar responses were obtained from the in-depth interviews: *“First, a large number come from the Central Region and secondly from the Ashanti region” (Female Hawker, 22 years).* *“Some come from Cape Coast, Gomoa Fetteh, Mankessim, Takoradi, a lot of other places (Female Seller, 17 years)”* Another added: *“Others come as far as Kasoa (in the Central Region) and return after hawking. They come here because the markets at their various locations do not enjoy high patronage as compared with selling on the streets here”.*

The above comments highlight the distance some of the hawkers cover in order to get to their places of work on the street. In fact, other participants of the FGDs drew attention to some of their colleagues travelling from outside the Greater Accra Region as for example places like Akim Oda and Nkawkaw in the Eastern Region and Gomoa in the Central Region. Among the migrants, the majority (63.5%) are recent migrants i.e., less than five years. Thus, a little over a third of them (36.5%) have lived in Accra for 5 years or more. More than half of the hawkers interviewed lived with their siblings (31.3%) or other relations (23.8%), a clear indication that the

presence of a sibling or relation in the city might have made it easier for them to also migrate into Accra.

For close to half of the migrants (47.5%), the main motivating factor for migrating is to raise money for their education and yet, considering their ages, one is not sure whether they would give up hawking and get back to school. Almost a quarter of them (23.8%), however, came to Accra purposely to look for a job in order to make a living. Another 15% came to live with their relations and eventually enrolled as hawkers on the streets of Accra. Analysis of the FGDs indicates that the motivating factor of raising money for education or training in technical skills was indicated mainly by the male participants.

Concerning where they lived, the analysis showed that almost 60% of them reported living in rented houses. However, one in four was putting up in kiosks or containers, with six percent living their lives either on the streets/markets or in uncompleted buildings. With regard to persons the hawkers were living with, the analysis in Table 2 shows that a higher percentage of the males (18%) than females (7%) were living alone. Among the females, however, a relatively higher proportion reported to be staying with friends (17%) compared with their male counterparts (13%). Again, close to a third of both males and females reported to be living with their siblings. It is also significant to note that while a smaller proportion of the females (5%) were living with their own parents compared with the males (10%), more females (12%) were living with unrelated persons than their male counterparts (8%).

Table 2. Percent distribution of street hawkers by sex and person they are staying with

Living status	Male	Female	Total
Alone	17.9	7.3	12.5
Parents	10.3	4.9	7.5
Siblings	30.8	31.7	31.2
Other relations	20.5	26.8	23.8
Friends	12.8	17.1	15.0
Other unrelated	7.7	12.2	10.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	39	41	80

Almost all the hawkers had received some formal education: the majority (73%) had Middle or Junior Secondary School (JSS) certificate, 15% had completed Primary school, 8% have attained Secondary or Senior Secondary School (SSS) level of education and only three hawkers (4%) reported to have no education.

From Table 3, we observe that the males had higher education relative to the females. Almost four in five of the males had attained Middle or Junior Secondary School (JSS) level of education compared with two-thirds of the females. Again, while more than 10% of the males have had Secondary/Senior Secondary School (SSS) education, only a small proportion (less than 3%) of females had attained this level of education.

From the FGD report, some of the hawkers were in school and did not intend to do street hawking as a permanent vocation. Some of the males in the Kaneshie-Odorkor FGD had the following to say: *“This work is temporary, it is just to raise money for school”*. Another added that, *“I am into this to get money for school”*. There is, however, the temptation to abandon schooling completely once there is a guarantee of daily income from the streets.

Table 3. Percent distribution of street hawkers by sex, level of education and marital status

Education/marital status	Male	Female	Total
Level of Education			
No education	2.6	5.0	3.8
Primary	5.3	25.0	15.4
Middle/JSS	78.9	67.5	73.1
Sec./SSS	13.2	2.5	7.7
Marital status			
Never married	81.6	51.2	65.8
Currently married	10.5	19.5	15.2
Living together	0.0	7.3	3.8
Formerly married	7.9	22.0	15.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	38	40	78

As shown in Table 3, the data further suggests that about two in three of the hawkers were never married, 15% were currently married while 4% reported to be living together with a partner (consensual union). We note quite interestingly that as high as 71% of the hawkers who reported to be currently married or living together with a partner had spouses or partners who were also street hawkers (figures not shown in table). This suggests quite plausibly that their common trade might have attracted them to each other.

The analysis by sex also shows that more males than females were never married. Accordingly, a higher proportion of the females were currently married, living together or ever married (separated, divorced or widowed) compared with the males. This is however to be expected in Ghana where women usually get married earlier than males. From the 2003 GDHS, the median age at first marriage was 19.4 years among females but 24.7 years among the males (Ghana Statistical Service et. al., 2004).

A large proportion of the hawkers had not been engaged in street vending for a long time. A little more than half of them (56%) had been selling along the streets between one and 12 months, 21% had stayed on the streets between 13 and 24 months and 23% had been hawking for more than 24 months.

Further analysis of the data showed that street vending was the first job for a little over half of the respondents (53%): 56% of the males compared with 49% of the females. For those whose first job was not street vending, many of them worked as “chop bar” or drinking bar attendants before joining the street trading (46%) while another 27% were already in some form of trading but perhaps not on the street. It is worth noting that 14% were previously into dressmaking but had to abandon it for the streets. This suggests that though dressmaking goes with certain skills acquired through training, it is not considered as lucrative as street hawking and this perhaps explains why the respondents had to move unto the streets. This goes to reinforce the reason given by the majority of them (53) that the previous work they were engaged in was either not lucrative or attractive. The rest cited reasons to include the need to make a living (15%), lack of job opportunities (20%) and the fact that sales are considered to move faster on the street (13.2%) than elsewhere. A female participant in the FGD explained this in the following words: “*We do not have stalls in the market that is why we stand here to sell. Someone would be going to the market to*

sell but passengers would be calling them along the street to buy. In doing so, a lot of us enjoy doing business here.”

As more and more people begin with such a perception, the streets will continue to be choked with street hawkers. This point also highlights the active role of motorists and passengers who encourage the practice of street hawking when they patronize the wares on the streets instead of buying from the markets.

Earnings and Livelihood

In spite of the reasons given by the hawkers to suggest that street hawking is more lucrative than other jobs in which they might have previously been engaged, the analysis showed that just two in five hawkers were convinced that daily earnings from their trade are adequate. For the rest of them (i.e., more than half the number interviewed), their earnings are not enough to cater for their basic needs. The major source of support for those whose earnings were inadequate was from relations or friends. However, one in five of the hawkers reported seeking additional support from the spouse or partner.

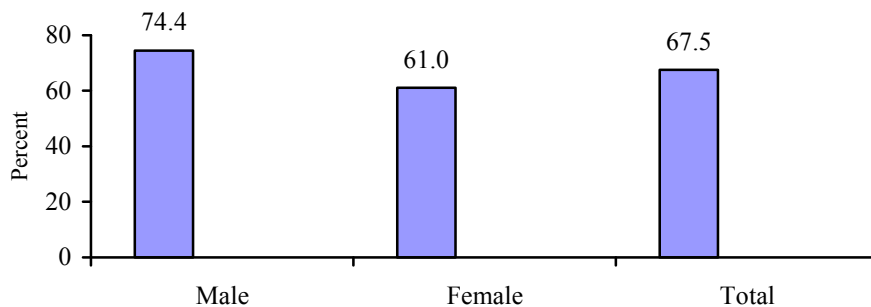
Table 4 presents information on what the hawkers considered to be the amount of money they would require to meet their basic daily needs. The results indicate that almost half of them (either male or female) considered an amount between ₵20,000.00 and ₵39,000.00 (\$2.20-\$4.33) to be their daily required income for their basic needs.

Table 4. Amount of money required by hawkers to meet daily needs

<u>Amount (₵)</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
<20,000	15.4	4.9	10.0
20,000-39,000	48.7	48.8	48.8
40,000-59,000	17.9	39.0	28.7
60,000+	18.0	7.3	12.5
Mean	₵39,615.38	₵36,341.46	₵36,375.00

Further analysis of the data suggests that, among those who reported to be earning adequate incomes from street vending, only two of them (5.7%) desired to continue with the street hawking while 11% could not decide. This is an indication that for a greater number of the street hawkers, they would wish to have an alternative job if the opportunity existed. Yet, almost a third of them indicated they would not leave the streets if government supported them with funding to go into agriculture (Figure 2). It must be noted that is the government’s policy to develop agriculture as the major employer in Ghana.

Figure 2. Percent of street hawkers who are ready to leave the street and go into agriculture with government support



In terms of savings, the analysis shows the prominence of the “*susu*” banking system as a means adopted by the street hawkers. Almost 60% (62% males and 56% females of them save their earnings with “*Susu collectors*” on a daily basis while about a quarter of them either keep their earnings on themselves (11%) or at home (13%). Only two male hawkers (2.5%) reported having bank savings accounts (Table 5).

Table 5. Percent of street hawkers by sex and place of savings

Sex	Bank	Susu	Self	Home	No savings	Other	Total
Male	5.1	61.6	10.3	12.8	5.1	5.1	100.0
Female	0.0	56.1	12.2	12.2	4.9	14.6	100.0
Total	2.5	58.7	11.3	12.5	5.0	10.0	100.0

It was also found that several street hawkers do not pay any taxes or tolls to the city authorities: only one in four indicated that they pay some form of taxes or tolls and this is done usually on a daily basis at fees ranging mostly from ₵500.00 to ₵2,000.00 (figures not in table).

From Table 6, the main items the street hawkers reported to be selling include fruits (38%), beverages (30%), mobile phone accessories and phone cards (25%). The fruits commonly sold include pawpaw (15%), apples (11%), pineapples (6%) and oranges (5%).

Table 6. Percent of street hawkers by sex and item sold on the street

Item sold	Male	Female	Total
Sachet water	0.0	2.4	1.3
Biscuits	7.7	4.9	6.3
Apples	7.7	14.6	11.3
Chocolate	10.3	7.3	8.8
Phone cards	10.3	39.0	25.0
Pineapples	12.8	0.0	6.3
Pawpaw	17.9	12.2	15.0
Oranges	5.1	4.9	5.0
Cocoa drink	28.2	14.6	21.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Items such as biscuits and sachet water (popularly called “pure” water in Ghana) formed a small proportion of goods sold. These should be accepted with some caution as it did not constitute a representative sample of the hawkers in Accra.

Even though this was not captured, some of the items sold by the hawkers could pose some danger to the lives of pedestrians, motorists and other road users. On the streets, it is common to find some of the hawkers displaying metal implements including sharp knives, cutlasses, axes, garden tools, etc. This should be a subject of serious concern considering the spate of armed robbery activities including car and mobile phone snatching at knife point which is reported regularly in the country. In an article titled “Danger – Hawkers threaten public safety” which appeared in “The Mirror” of February 17, 2007, Asiedu draws attention to this threat to public security. Citing a Police source, he draws attention to the possibility of some criminals who pose “as hawkers selling perfume or other spray items, walk up to a vehicle, spray dangerous chemicals into the driver’s eyes and rob him of his car or personal effects”. Clearly

therefore, the expansion of street hawking could be a real menace to every road user at any point in time and a big threat to public safety if not handled appropriately.

Again, two in three of the street hawkers sell at the same location all the time while a third occasionally change their location in response to variation in the volume of traffic. The findings also suggest that it is not uncommon for some of the hawkers to move from one end of the city to another where there is traffic congestion, in anticipation of higher sales or patronage of their wares. Knowledge of traffic build-up in the city at different points in time is therefore an advantage to becoming a successful street hawker. There were, however, not much variation between the males and females in terms of one's location of business although slightly higher percentage of the females (71%) indicated that they were operating at fixed locations along the streets compared with the males (67%).

All but two of the street hawkers reported that they did not belong to any association of hawkers with the reason that they do not know of the existence of any such association. From this account, therefore, the street hawkers operate simply as individuals who are responsible for their individual welfare.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Experiences and Practices

Sexual and reproductive health issues explored in this study included sexuality, childbearing, contraceptive knowledge and practice, sexual harassment and exposure to STDs.

Sexuality, Childbearing and Harassment

Of the 80 persons interviewed, 82% reported having ever had sex, the mean age at first sex was 18.5 years with no significant variation between the males (18.6 years) and females (18.5 years). The earliest age at first sex was reported to be 12 years. From Table 7, we observe that 76% of the males reported ever having had sex relative to 88% of the females. It is also noteworthy to state that among the female hawkers aged 15-19 years, 57% had ever had sex compared with 33% of their male counterparts. This goes to reinforce the fact that females tend to have sex earlier than males in Ghana. A high proportion of first sexual activity among either males or females also occurred within ages 15-19 years.

Table 7. Percent of street hawkers who have ever had sex by current age and age at first sex

Age	Male	Female	Total
<i>Current age</i>			
15-19	33.3	57.1	42.1
20-24	100.0	93.8	96.4
25-29	87.5	90.9	89.5
30+	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total %	76.3	87.5	82.1
<i>Age at 1st sex</i>			
< 15	3.8	5.4	4.8
15-19	65.4	54.1	58.7
20+	30.8	40.5	36.5
Mean at 1 st sex	18.58	18.46	18.51
Number	29	35	64

Note: The results exclude two persons who did not respond to the question on sexual activity.

As high as 83% of first sex took place before they started to sell along the streets. Half these hawkers indicated that they had regular sexual partners, 13% of these sexual partners were themselves street hawkers. Meanwhile, 64% of the males and 59% of the females reported that they were aware of sexual relationships among some of the street hawkers, an observation, which confirms street hawkers as having sexual partners who are also street hawkers. In spite of this, 61% of those who were aware of sexual relationships among some of the street vendors thought that such relationships are not right or constitute acts of immorality.

On the question of sexual harassment, some hawkers had this to say: *“Some married men, drivers and some of the boys who sell along the street with us do propose to some of the girls...”* (Female Hawker, 22 years old). Another indicated that *“...sometimes even the passengers or people who buy from us make sexual advances”* (Female Hawker, 32 years old).

The need for accommodation seemed to be a major factor that pushed the females into consenting to sexual pressures from men. One vendor commented as follows: *“... since some of them do not have proper accommodation, some guys tend to abuse them”* (Male Hawker, 18 years old). Similarly *“The females may be lured to bed by the guys when they are stranded and they may be pregnant or acquire the deadly disease AIDS”* (Female Hawker, 25 years old). Other explanations given include the following: *“They (the females) get impregnated by those who offer to help them get a place to sleep....Because they have to sleep with those who provide them with shelters before it can be given to them”* (Male Hawker, 18 years old). *“...I have seen a lot of them (pregnancies) but the guys here are not responsible for them. They sleep with other men for money for upkeep because of hardships”* (Female Hawker, 17 years old). Males are not spared this dilemma, as females are sometimes alleged to have instigated such interactions: *“...there are some of the women too when they see that you are hardworking and you make a lot of profit, then they start to push themselves on you...”* (Male Hawker, 23 years old); *“... some of the ladies like to come close to you when they realize you have money, and therefore they are willing to do anything”* (Male Hawker, 19 years old).

Further analysis of the data also indicates that 63% of the hawkers had either ever been pregnant or made someone pregnant. Of the 41 who admitted having ever been pregnant or made someone pregnant before reported, 36 (87.8%) ever having had children. This means that for up to 12% of them the pregnancy might have ended in either a miscarriage or induced abortion. Half (18) of the hawkers who had ever had children reported that they have had one child, 11 (30.6%) have had two children, six (16.7%) reported three children while one of them reported having had five children at the time of the survey.

It was again noted that 31% of the hawkers (22% of the males and 39% of the females) reported that in a situation where pregnancy occurred while on the street, it was likely that abortion would be resorted to. *“There are a few that we know are pregnant but the pregnancy vanishes, yet we do not know how it vanishes”* (Female Hawker, 22 years old). According to another respondent *“They commit abortions here and there when they become pregnant. I even had an instance where, together with a friend, I saw a new baby dumped behind a public toilet”* (Male Hawker, 23 years old). Abortion could therefore be quite high among the street vendors. However, such induced abortions are not devoid of health risks *“... the girls who get pregnant try to abort and some die in the process”* (Male Hawker, 18 years old).

Another 15% of the hawkers said they would go back to their homes (or places of origin) to deliver and yet, another third explained that the pregnant hawker would

usually continue to hawk with the pregnancy, though under stress. Yet, when asked about what each of them would personally do in such a situation, 18% of the males and 13% of the females said they would have the pregnancy aborted. Meanwhile, 36% of the males and 39% of the females reported being aware of a street hawker ever committing abortion.

A few of the hawkers attempted to justify the actions of females who find themselves pregnant. *“Some abort their pregnancies when they have the means or money to. Others also go back to their hometowns with the pregnancies all because of poverty. I even heard that a girl aborted her pregnancy within Odorkor but I don’t really know her. People do that because of hardships”*(Female hawker, 25 year olds). The in-depth interviews further indicate that these abortions can be mostly attributed to the younger females who are unable to determine who is responsible for the pregnancy. *“A lot of the young girls terminate pregnancies. They do so because of their unfaithfulness to the partners. Because they wouldn’t know who to apportion blame...”* (Male Hawker, 18 years old).

One out of every three females (32%) reported ever falling victim to sexual harassment while on the street, some as frequently as 10 times and as recent as the week prior to the survey. In contrast, 13% of the males reported some form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment was defined by the hawkers to include frequent love proposals, touching of “sensitive parts” of the body and abuse using indecent language. Among the four FGD groups, only participants in one of the male groups intimated that there were instances where some girls were raped. While this response appears to suggest that incidence of rape is not frequent on the street, it is important to note that the hawkers may not be too keen to report on these cases even if they occur frequently as a show of solidarity to their colleagues. Besides, they may not be willing to be drawn into bearing witness at a court of law if they are asked to give evidence to that. Their response therefore may constitute a way of exercising caution and not necessarily giving a true picture of the situation.

HIV/AIDS

All but two of the hawkers did not know of any of their members who had been diagnosed to be HIV positive. Their knowledge about the disease was also found to be high. For example, when asked about the services that are available for HIV positive persons in Ghana, 63% mentioned counselling, 18% cited condom use and 14% indicated anti-retroviral drugs. Again, regarding where one could obtain these services, 84% of the hawkers mentioned the hospital or clinic; the rest cited the Pharmacy or Chemical shops and HIV/Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) centres. It was also found that 14% of the vendors had undergone a test to know their HIV status, citing their interest in knowing their HIV status as the main reason for doing so. Other minor reasons include advice from medical personnel and as a requirement for processing travel documents.

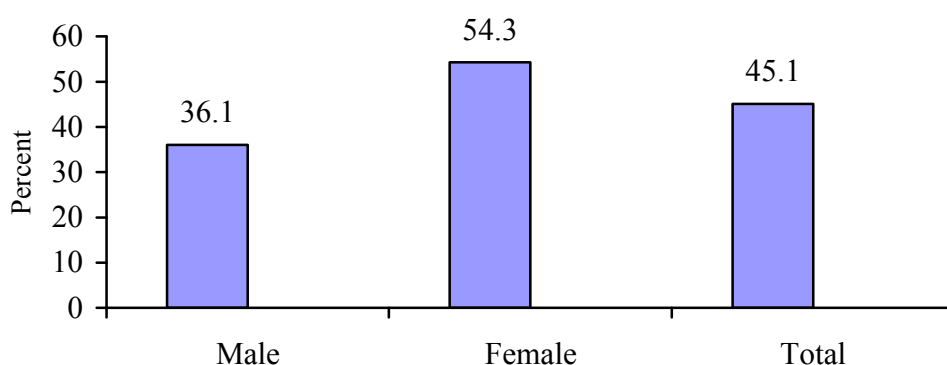
All of the hawkers were aware of how to avoid HIV infection: 54% mentioned abstinence from sex, (64% among the males and 44% among the females), 38% pointed to the use of condoms during sex (36% of the males and 39% of the females) while 5% considered remaining faithful to one’s sexual partner and 4% cited avoidance of unsterilised needles. Interestingly, being faithful to one’s partner and avoidance of unsterilised needles were mentioned by only females. Yet, faithfulness cannot be exercised by only one partner and so if the males do not think of it as a way of avoiding HIV infection, then it is not likely to be an effective strategy towards

HIV/AIDS prevention and control. Perhaps, this is rooted in traditional society's belief in polygyny where a man is permitted to marry more than one wife but the woman cannot.

Contraceptive Knowledge and Practice

Knowledge of any method of family planning among the street hawkers was lower (87%) compared to an almost universal knowledge recorded in the 2003 GDHS (Ghana Statistical Service et al., 2004). The male condom is the most commonly known contraceptive method (74% of the hawkers) and is followed by the pill (11%), and then the injectable (5%). Periodic or post-partum abstinence was mentioned by a negligible proportion of the hawkers. In terms of practice, however, a little less than half of the hawkers (45%) who have ever had sex had practised some form of contraception, the male condom and the pill being the most commonly used methods (56% and 24% respectively). Similar results were found with respect to the type of method currently used by the street vendors. It is however, significant to state that a higher proportion of the females (54%) indicated that they had ever used a method of family planning compared with the males (36%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percent of street hawkers who have ever practised contraception



Perception about Street Hawking, Risks and Problems

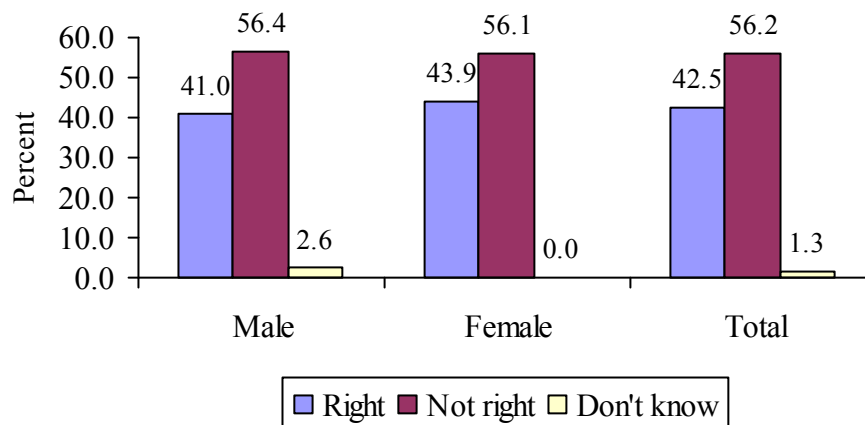
Occasionally, the city authorities do embark on exercises to free the streets and pavements of hawkers, suggesting that street hawking is an illegal activity. This view was largely supported by the hawkers: four in five agreed that street hawking is not right as explained by a female participant of the FGD when asked whether street hawking should be encouraged or not: *“No, it is not good for us. We lose our lives in the process. If the government encourages it, they (government) do not have the nation at heart”*.

Another (a male) also emphasised the risk of being knocked down by vehicles and the negative health implications by saying, *“It should not be encouraged because younger people are getting engaged in hawking and are being knocked down by cars. Also, for us the grown-ups, it is not good, health-wise to stand in the sun for hours”*. Yet, more than half of them thought the Accra Metropolitan Assembly's (AMA's) attempts to sack them from the streets were not right while 43% thought otherwise (Figure 4).

This suggests that although the hawkers know that it is illegal to hawk along the streets, they still cannot quit and hence, do not accept that they should be driven off the streets, considering that for several of them it would lead to a loss of livelihood for several of them. For some of them, their reason for staying in the business in spite of the risks is due to the fact that there is a demand for the service they provide. As one of them commented: *“Some passengers also feel hungry when travelling, so if we are not there to sell at that moment, where would they get food to eat?”*. To this hawker therefore, they are there to do hungry passengers some kind of favour.

Street hawking is seen by many outside the trade as a nuisance and have called on city authorities to take steps to rid the cities of not only street vendors but also beggars. For example, in a feature article in the “Daily Graphic” of September 4, 2004, Duh recounts his personal experiences with street hawkers (and beggars) which he uses as a justification for calling for their removal off the streets. He recounts various incidents, which he considers to be endangering the lives of the hawkers and beggars themselves as well as the lives of other road users”. These dangers are usually in the form of accidents.

Figure 4. Percent of street hawkers by sex and views on AMA's efforts and clearing the street of hawkers



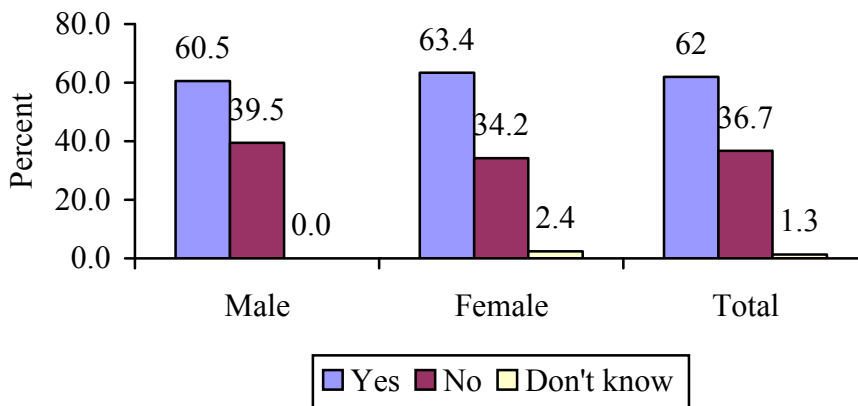
When asked about the problems street vendors create for the society, however, only six (7.7%) of the hawkers did not see any problem resulting from their activities, which suggests that they are well aware of the problems they cause. They listed the problems to include littering the environment i.e., sanitation problems (37.2%), occurrence of accidents (24.4%), traffic jams (16.7%) and causing nuisance to motorists and other pedestrians. As a solution to these problems, about two out of three of the hawkers were of the view that the creation of the hawkers’ market would be helpful in freeing the streets but a third thought otherwise with not much gender variation (Figure 5).

As most of the hawkers admitted, street vending can be a real bother to all manner of street users and it appears street hawkers are a nuisance not only in Accra but elsewhere in other countries. In India, Leelefever (2006) advances 10 reasons why street hawkers are like email spam. These reasons were listed to include the following: *“they are selling something you don’t want or need and never asked for; their message is indiscriminate – we often hear offers to shine our shoes, which are usually sandals; they will not take ‘no’ or ‘nahi’ for an answer, ever; they are*

inexhaustible. Behind each tout is a line waiting (or not) for their turn; they do not speak English well, the majority have hidden agendas and their only goal is to extract maximum amount of money, even through dishonest means; responding in any way only encourages them. Showing a bit of interest causes a feeding frenzy; they interfere with messages you want to hear. Well meaning individuals are often lost in the melee...”.

From an observer’s point of view, these descriptions fit squarely the Ghanaian situation. Ironically, however, it is the same people who complain about the operation of street hawkers that patronise their wares and services, revealing a state of dilemma as far as street hawking is concerned.

Figure 5. Percent of street hawkers by their views on whether the hawkers' market will free the streets of hawkers



In spite of the awareness that their activities create filth in town, less than half of the hawkers interviewed (46%) reported having an arrangement in place as hawkers to tidy up the streets. Such clean-up exercises were said to be done on daily basis (at the close of work) in addition to what the AMA occasionally organises them to undertake. Interestingly, among those who said there is no arrangement for clean-up exercises by the hawkers, 88% explained that the clean-up of the streets is the responsibility of the AMA. With such an attitude among hawkers, once the AMA does not undertake the clean-up of the streets, filth will engulf the streets as one occasionally comes across in Accra.

On top of the list of the problems the hawkers face as they move along the streets is being knocked down by vehicles (30%), followed by non-payment of items by buyers in moving vehicles (15.2%) and threats and insults from motorists (12.7%). Other problems cited included the destruction of their items when they fall and occasional seizure of their wares by the AMA. These problems were corroborated by participants in the FGDs: *“Last year, the AMA Task Force popularly known as the ‘Aaba eei’ came round and arrested most of us. They also seized our goods and prosecuted us. We were fined ₵1.5 million before our goods were released to us. Those who could not pay had to face up to about three months’ imprisonment. Some of the passengers also take our small monies away. They buy an item, pretend to be taking money from their purse and when the traffic light turns green and the car moves away, that is the end”.* *“Our goods are sometimes confiscated by Military Police (MPs) and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) Task Force. When we see*

the men in red shirts, we disperse immediately by running helter-skelter, thereby losing our goods which drop in the process. We also run in all directions in a pandemonium and when you are not lucky, you will meet a vehicle head-on”.

Some of the FGD participants emphasised the problem of vendors being knocked down by vehicles as a major risk in the following statements: *“At times, I just feel very sorry and sad for myself because you can be pressed between two vehicles and if you are not lucky, you could be knocked down”.* *“Sometimes, the drivers of trotro and other vehicles threaten to hit us with their vehicles or run the wheels on our feet”.* *“For the first timers, it is difficult for them because they don’t know how to stand by the road and move between the vehicles in the traffic. As a result, one was knocked down last month and this gave him infections on the leg”.*

This is supported by the evidence that in the one month prior to the survey, 11 of them had witnessed a street vendor being involved in a motor accident, five of them had seen two accidents, four had come across three accidents, three had seen four accidents and two reported of five such accidents. The identification of these problems and risks notwithstanding, quite a good number of them declined to go into farming with support from government with the following reasons: *“I don’t know how to weed. I have never handled even a cutlass”.* *“Because I have a vocational training, farming will not suit me”.* *“If I get money to learn a trade like carpentry to look after myself, I would stop standing here”.* The failure of some hawkers to leave streets also stems from misinformation regarding stall allocation in the newly constructed hawker’s market *“I learnt that the markets created are for those who go to Togo to buy and sell goods. I will go to the market when I’m given one” (Female Hawker, 31 years old).*

The above comments are examples of reasons given mainly by male participants when asked what their views were on what could be done to reduce street hawking and whether they would be interested in productive ventures like agriculture. The alternatives suggested are in the service sector. The females were more accommodating of any productive activity initiated by government (including agriculture), which could provide them with some sustainable income and get them off the streets. In addition, some of them preferred learning a vocation like hairdressing and sewing but others wanted to trade or go back to school.

One important dimension worth mentioning which was brought up by some female FGD participants bordered on the fact that there were some street hawkers who would never leave the hawking business to learn a new trade for the following reasons: *“There are groups of people selling here that I know of. They have been selling on the streets for about ten (10) years now. Such a person will never leave the street to go and learn a trade, even if the government finds him some money”.* *“In learning a trade, you have to endure a lot of things including suffering and hard work before one can finish learning any trade. For some, they make a day’s profit of about 55,000.00. For such a person to learn a trade for a period of between two to three years and forfeit all these profits and not make any money from the trade she is learning, the tendency or temptation to go back to the street is always greater”.* The suggestion then is that it may not be easy to encourage many of the hawkers to voluntarily leave street vending for any other trade if the returns of the alternative job do not prove to be more rewarding than hawking in the short term. *“Selling on the street would be reduced if the people involved would be given some incentives to enable them to expand their trading and to help them move to other markets” (Female Hawker, 22 years old).*

Conclusions and Recommendations

It has so far been shown that hawking in Accra has become a source of daily livelihood for several people mostly as a stepping-stone for preparation towards relatively better and more permanent jobs in the future. It has also been seen that hawking is such a popular and widespread economic activity that one does not necessarily have to live in the city centre before one could engage in hawking along the streets. However, the fact that only 4% of the hawkers who were interviewed had no education makes an intervention for higher educational training a possible option that could be explored. For example, a high proportion of the population involved in the street hawking business is very young, with 86% of them being under 30 years of age. This is a great source of worry, especially when one considers their inadequate training background and skill development. Most of these young hawkers were also found to be recent migrants who mainly take to hawking along the streets for lack of jobs or inadequate earnings.

Furthermore, a system of networking facilitates hawking as an economic activity in the city. For example, it has been found that among the 80 hawkers who were interviewed in the study, 15% of them initially came to live with their relations and eventually took to hawking on the streets of Accra. Such a system of networking also brings to the fore issues pertaining to fosterage, a situation that could result in child labour.

Sexual and reproductive health problems appear high, particularly considering the substantial proportion of the hawkers who engage in early sex and the large number of them who experience unwanted pregnancies. Over 60% of the hawkers had ever being pregnant or had made someone pregnant while close to two-fifths indicated being aware of some members who had resorted to abortion when they found themselves pregnant. At the same time, the prevalence of abortion among the hawkers themselves is evident in the high number of them that expressed their willingness to seek abortion any time it became necessary. Such a practice or thinking has obvious negative implications for the reproductive health of the hawkers especially the females among them.

The conclusions of this study are very important both for further research and for policy interventions. Based on the findings of this case study and developments that have taken place particularly with respect to the AMA's recent actions to herald the country's golden jubilee celebrations, it is quite clear that it would be difficult to do away completely with street hawking. It is therefore recommended that the state should consider introducing a licensing regime under which all hawkers would have to obtain a license which should spell out the conditions under which they could operate. In this case, their activities could be well regulated. Besides, equipping them with employable skills, a major strategy of reducing the volume of hawkers on the street, however, would involve organizing these hawkers and providing them with loans to engage in relatively stable income earning activities.

Clearly, this study has identified some reproductive health risks to which street hawkers are regularly exposed. Public health intervention programmes should focus attention on the reproductive health needs of this group of people to reduce unwanted pregnancies and other health risks. In terms of research, the expansion of the current study to cover wider areas in Accra and other cities in Ghana to find out how the construction and subsequent allocation of hawkers' markets to hawkers have and could succeed in moving hawkers from the streets of cities and large towns in the country might help provide the basis for a more general solution to the problem.

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