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School absenteeism among orphans and vulnerable children in Lagos State, Nigeria: a situational analysis

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of factors associated with school absenteeism among orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) who are at greater risk could facilitate effective policies to mitigate school dropouts. This study assessed the level of school absenteeism and its associated factors among OVC in five local government areas (LGAs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional study of OVC households in purposively selected five LGAs in Lagos State was conducted. Enrolled vulnerable households were based on the National Household Vulnerability Assessment criteria. School absenteeism was measured by whether the OVC missed any school day, for any reason in the last school week. Data were collected by personal interview using a semi-structured questionnaire. IBM SPSS Statistics, version 20, was used for all analysis of data collected on schooling of OVC aged 10–17 years. Chi-square test and logistic regression model were used to determine significance of associations at 5% level. The 757 OVC participants were aged 13.1 ± 2.2 years and their caregivers were aged 43.1 ± 13.9 years from 1300 households. There was high proportion of school enrolment (85.7%) as well as absenteeism (20%). The rate of absenteeism among OVC was significantly higher among those who involved in household chores (31.2%) and who often sleep at night without food (40.0%). The odds of absenteeism were almost twice higher among OVC who involved in household chores (odds ratio [OR]: 1.93, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.14–3.27), whose guardian could not pay unexpected expenses (OR: 1.78, 95% CI: 1.05–3.02) and those from households where there was often no food (OR: 1.84, 95% CI: 1.04–3.27). A high rate of OVC school enrolment might not translate to regular school attendance. Also, a high proportion of school absenteeism can be attributed to OVC engagement in house chores, poor economy and food insecurity. Economic empowerment of OVC caregivers may improve school attendance.

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Orphan and vulnerable children; school absenteeism; school enrolment; caregivers; situation analysis

Introduction

Globally, it is difficult to accurately ascertain the number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) due to all causes. However, it was estimated that the number of orphans due to HIV/AIDS alone was expected to rise to over 25 million by the end of 2015 (Avert, 2015). It is very disturbing that Sub-Saharan Africa continues to bear the highest burden with more than 2.5 million living in Nigeria alone (Avert, 2015; Tagurum et al., 2015; UNAIDS, 2010). This has made addressing the needs of OVC and mitigating negative outcomes of its growing population in Nigeria a tasking exercise.

Although a number of programmes/interventions to alleviate OVC needs have been implemented in Nigeria, there is still a gap in some critical areas such as their educational needs (Biemba et al., 2009). Generally, studies on OVC in Africa have reported lower rates of school enrolment, attendance and school performance than non-OVC (Shann et al., 2013). And in many African countries, half the number of OVC who enrolled at school do not continue to secondary level at the end of primary school (Shann et al., 2013). The low transition rate into secondary schools has been reported to be partially due to the inability of caregivers to pay for a child's secondary education since secondary schools are rarely free in many Sub-Saharan African countries (Shann et al., 2013). Even in countries where universal secondary education is guaranteed by the government (such as Uganda and some states in Nigeria), students must pay additional fees imposed by the schools or indirectly by the government.

In a study conducted among OVC to assess the aftermath of the 2007–2008 election violence in Nakuru County, Kenya, it was identified that school absenteeism, lack of physical infrastructure, insecurity and psychological trauma were critical challenges of the OVC in the area (Majanga, Mukonyi, & Vundi, 2015). Also, Shann et al. (2013) provided useful information that could assist policymakers and donors in deciding what kinds of programmes are more likely to be effective in supporting the entry and continuation of OVC in secondary schools in developing countries. Apart from that, contrary to popular belief, evidences from studies in Tanzania and Uganda have shown that OVC girls had lower rates of school absenteeism and there were no gender differences in school dropout (Shann et al., 2013). In a situation analysis of OVC in Plateau state, Nigeria, it was reported that OVC (compared with non-OVC) were more likely to skip school or not go to school at all (Tagurum et al., 2015). Despite these distressing statistics, it is surprising to note that comprehensive studies focusing on school attendance among OVC in Nigeria are practically unavailable in the literature. Specifically, none of the articles reviewed in the current study had a direct focus on school absenteeism and related issues among OVC in Nigeria.

Past reports on the situations of OVC in Nigeria have emphasized this gap on the causes and patterns of school absenteeism among OVC in Nigeria including low school completion rates and how these can be addressed (Biemba et al., 2009). The present study aimed at assessing the burden of school absenteeism and its associated factors among OVC in Lagos State, Nigeria. Contextual and compositional causes of school absenteeism were explored to provide comprehensive reports that could inform policy and intervention activities among OVC in Lagos State and Nigeria at large.

Methodology

Study location

The present study was conducted in five local government areas (LGAs) in Lagos State, Nigeria: Agege, Ajeromi, Ojo, Badagry and Kosofe. The LGAs were purposively selected based on United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) guidelines dictated by the burden of HIV and non-presence of other implementation partners in the LGAs.

Study design and study population

This is a descriptive cross-sectional survey conducted among OVC and their caregivers in February 2015. A semi-structured questionnaire designed for this baseline survey included relevant items of information on the schooling of OVC aged 10–17 years, the target population for this report. School absenteeism was measured by whether the OVC missed any school day, for any reason in the last school week.

Sampling strategy and data collection

The five LGAs were purposely selected and using the National Vulnerable Household Assessment instrument (Biemba et al., 2009; FMWASD, 2007), a total of 1300 vulnerable households that met the selection criteria for 'most vulnerable' were enrolled in this baseline survey. These are households with a score of 21–28 points based on a four-point rating scale on household headship, health, education level of household head, shelter and housing, food security and nutrition, means of livelihood and household income. Household was classified as more vulnerable with a score of 14–20 points and vulnerable with a score of 7–13 points.

The semi-structured questionnaire adapted from Measure Evaluation and (MIS 001) also included information on socio-demographic characteristics, as well as items relating to the seven key OVC service areas: economy, education/work, food security, shelter, health and protection, psychosocial, care and support for children aged 10–17 years (Biemba et al., 2009; Measure Evaluation, 2017). The questionnaires which were interviewer-administered by research assistants/supervisors also included information on caregivers' characteristics. The interviewers and supervisors were carefully selected and trained so that they were culturally acceptable, had good knowledge of the local language and experience in household surveys. Prior training of research assistants focused on the contents of the questionnaire, the art of interviewing by appropriate role play and pilot interviews. The supervisors edited each completed questionnaire on site and necessary corrections were made on the field each day.

Data management and analysis

Data were coded and entered into the computer using the CSpro database management software while statistical analysis was done by IBM SPSS statistics (version 20) package. Initial data exploration, verification, cleaning and quality control were carried out by checking for possible outliers, entry errors, incompleteness and inconsistencies in the

dataset. Frequency tables were used to present data on relevant variables. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to summarize quantitative variables while categorical variables were summarized with percentages and proportions.

Chi-square test was used to assess the association between school absenteeism and selected caregiver/household variables as well as other related variables in the survey. Variables found to be statistically significant at 10% level of significance at this stage were included in an adjusted (multivariate) logistic regression analysis at 5% significance level.

Results

Demographic and economic characteristics of OVC caregivers

The socio-demographic characteristics of the 1300 caregivers presented in Table 1 revealed their mean age as 43.1 ± 13.9 years and a female preponderance (72.5%). Though most caregivers had attended at least primary school (75.6%), only 3.1% of them had had a tertiary education, and the proportion that are illiterate (44.4%) was higher than any other categories of reading ability test.

It is worrisome to report that some OVC (irrespective of their sex) were under the care of blind or visually impaired caregivers (male: 1.4% and female: 0.3%). Also, a considerable number of caregivers of OVC (34.1%) were widowed, while another 16.2% were either never married, divorced or cohabiting. More than 60% of the caregivers reported that they have employment throughout the year, but 27.9% indicated that they had not been working for the past 3 months prior to this survey.

In addition to that, about 38% of them reported they were unable to pay for the school expenses of the OVC under their care while majority of them (84.9%) reported that their households have not had sufficient food in the past 4 weeks with roughly 80% of them going to bed without food (Table 2).

Demographic and selected characteristics of OVC, age 10–17 years

The summary statistics of the age of 757 OVC was 13.1 ± 2.2 years old with the majority (51.8%) of females. There was a high proportion of OVC enrolled in school (85.8%) but more than 20% of them had missed school during the last school week (Table 2). Also, about 98% of the OVC reported that they had ever attended school; however, it was observed that about two-thirds have left schooling due to lack of money for school materials and transport fare.

Table 2 also shows that only 18.4% of the OVCs had completed more than 9 years of education while the proportion of the OVCs currently enrolled in >9 years of education was significantly higher among older (15–17 years) OVCs (62.9%) than their younger counterpart ($p < 0.001$). It was also found that many of them (15.9%) spent more than 3 h (a day) doing house chores and at the same time a high proportion (86.9%) regularly do other jobs outside their home in order to raise extra income. About 10% (8.3% for 10–14 years and 12.4% for 15–17 years) reported that they often go to bed without food, while some (11.4%) often go a whole day without food.

Table 1. Demographics and selected characteristics of caregivers of OVC, age 10–17 years in Lagos State, Nigeria, according to sex.

Caregivers' characteristics	Child's sex		Total frequency (%)
	Male frequency (%)	Female frequency (%)	
Sex			
Male	111 (30.4)	97 (24.7)	208 (27.5)
Female	254 (69.6)	295 (75.3)	549 (72.5)
Age of parent			
Younger (<40years)	121 (33.2)	130 (33.2)	251 (33.2)
Middle (40–49years)	129 (35.3)	143 (36.5)	272 (35.9)
Older (≥50years)	115 (31.5)	119 (30.4)	234 (30.9)
Education			
No formal education	87 (24.0)	97 (24.7)	184 (24.4)
Primary education	113 (31.2)	136 (34.7)	249 (33.0)
Secondary education	153 (42.3)	145 (37.0)	298 (39.5)
Tertiary education	9 (2.5)	14 (3.6)	23 (3.1)
Reading ability test			
Cannot read at all	155 (42.8)	179 (45.9)	334 (44.4)
Able to read only parts of sentence	94 (26.0)	103 (26.4)	197 (26.2)
No card with required language	4 (1.1)	6 (1.5)	10 (1.3)
Blind/visually impaired	5 (1.4)	1 (0.3)	6 (0.8)
Marital status			
Married	182 (50.0)	194 (49.5)	376 (49.7)
Cohabiting(but not married)	28 (7.7)	24 (6.1)	52 (6.9)
Never been married	7 (1.9)	8 (2.0)	15 (2.0)
Divorced or separated	19 (5.2)	36 (9.2)	55 (7.3)
Widowed	128 (35.2)	130 (33.2)	258 (34.1)
Religion			
No religion	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.1)
Christianity	200 (54.8)	218 (55.8)	418 (55.3)
Islam	163 (44.7)	172 (44.0)	335 (44.3)
Traditional	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)	2 (0.3)
Work status			
Throughout the year	192 (58.4)	223 (62.3)	415 (60.4)
Seasonally/part of the year	79 (24.0)	65 (18.2)	144 (21.0)
Once in a while	58 (17.6)	70 (19.6)	128 (18.6)
Relationship with the OVC			
Mother or father	283 (77.5)	295 (75.3)	578 (76.4)
Not parent	82 (22.5)	97 (24.7)	179 (23.6)
No job in the last 3 months	105 (28.9)	106 (27.0)	211 (27.9)
Not able to pay for household expenses	107 (33.0)	106 (30.2)	213 (31.6)
Not able to pay for school expenses	128 (38.8)	133 (37.0)	261 (37.9)
No food to eat in the past four weeks	309 (84.9)	331 (84.9)	640 (84.9)
Household go to sleep at night hungry	292 (81.3)	300 (77.9)	592 (79.6)

Also, 67 (8.9.0%) OVC (10–14 years: 6.7% and 15–17 years: 13.8%) admitted that they had ever consumed drinks containing alcohol, and 14.9% of them did so at least once in a week. Child labour rate among OVC included: Hawking (25.2%), help in household shop (33.7%), household/farm chores for other families (5.6%) labour at construction sites (1.9%), etc. (Table 2).

Factors associated with school absenteeism among OVC, age 10–17 years

School absenteeism was associated with a number of factors related to the OVC's personal and household characteristics. Specifically, the proportion of OVC missing school days was significantly higher among those who reported sleeping during the middle of the day (42.9%) and those who cleaned household toilet (31.2%) than those

Table 2. Demographics characteristics, school attendance and situations of OVC, age 10–17 years in Lagos State, Nigeria, according to sex.

OVCs' characteristics, school attendance and situations	Total sample	Age group		χ^2	<i>p</i>
		10–14 years <i>n</i> (%)	15–17 years <i>n</i> (%)		
Child's sex					
Male	363 (48.2)	245 (47.0)	118 (50.9)	0.95	0.33
Female	390 (51.8)	276 (53.0)	114 (49.1)		
Currently enrolled in school					
Yes	646 (85.8)	476 (91.4)	170 (73.3)	43.08	<0.01
No	107 (14.2)	45 (8.6)	62 (26.7)		
Miss on any day during the last school week					
Yes	131 (20.3)	100 (21.0)	31 (18.2)	0.60	0.44
No	515 (79.7)	376 (79.0)	139 (81.8)		
Grade/year in school					
≤9 years	497 (75.9)	431 (90.4)	66 (37.1)	201.03	<0.01
>9 years	158 (24.1)	46 (9.6)	112 (62.9)		
Have ever attended school					
Yes	735 (97.6)	510 (97.9)	225 (97.0)	0.57	0.45
No	18 (2.4)	11 (2.1)	7 (3.0)		
Reasons for not attending school					
No money for school materials and transport	51 (67.1)	25 (78.1)	26 (59.1)	3.04	0.08
Other reasons	25 (32.9)	7 (21.9)	18 (40.9)		
Not enrolled in school last session	620 (82.3)	444 (85.2)	176 (75.9)	9.67	0.002
Highest school grade/year completed					
≤9 years	523 (81.6)	429 (95.5)	94 (49.0)	194.34	<0.01
>9 years	118 (18.4)	20 (4.5)	98 (51.0)		
Sleep at night without food (in the past 4 weeks) because food was not enough	359 (47.7)	230 (44.2)	129 (55.6)	8.31	0.004
Often sleep at night without food	35 (9.7)	19 (8.3)	16 (12.4)	1.61	0.20
Go a whole day and night (in the past 4 weeks) without food	123 (16.4)	70 (13.5)	53 (22.8)	10.32	0.001
Often go a whole day and night without food	14 (11.4)	5 (7.1)	9 (17.0)	2.89	0.09
Ever consumed a drink containing alcohol	67 (8.9)	35 (6.7)	32 (13.8)	9.86	0.002
Frequency of alcohol intake					
Only once in a while	57 (85.1)	28 (80.0)	29 (90.6)	1.49	0.22
At least once a week	10 (14.9)	7 (20.0)	3 (9.4)		
Does household chores	729 (96.8)	504 (96.7)	225 (97.0)	0.03	0.86
Time spent per day doing household chores					
Less than 1 h	231 (31.7)	175 (34.7)	56 (24.9)	10.92	0.03
1–2 h	366 (50.2)	240 (47.6)	126 (56.0)		
3–4 h	107 (14.7)	70 (13.9)	37 (16.4)		
More than 4 h/most of the days	9 (1.2)	5 (1.0)	4 (1.8)		
It depends/it is different everyday	16 (2.2)	14 (2.8)	2 (0.9)		
Does other jobs outside					
Regularly	251 (86.9)	154 (88.5)	97 (84.3)	1.05	0.31
Not regular	38 (13.1)	20 (11.5)	18 (15.7)		
Time spent per day doing other jobs outside					
It depends/it is different everyday	29 (10.0)	11 (6.3)	18 (15.7)	10.54	0.005
≤4 h	190 (65.7)	126 (72.4)	64 (55.7)		
>4 h	70 (24.2)	37 (21.3)	33 (28.7)		
Child labour types and rates					
Hawking goods	68 (25.2)	46 (26.4)	22 (22.9)	19.85	0.010 [#]
Sell food at the market	29 (10.7)	20 (11.5)	9 (9.4)		
Household/farm chores for other families	15 (5.6)	13 (7.5)	2 (2.1)		
Help out in household shop	91 (33.7)	64 (36.8)	27 (28.1)		
Work in a shop	23 (8.5)	14 (8.0)	9 (9.4)		
Labour at construction sites	5 (1.9)	2 (1.1)	3 (3.1)		
Sewing clothes	31 (11.5)	12 (6.9)	19 (19.8)		
Mechanics	6 (2.2)	3 (1.7)	3 (3.1)		
Clerk, delivery and administrative	2 (0.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.1)		

[#] *P* value if for exact test.

who do not. Similarly, the proportion of OVC missing school days was significantly higher among those who often sleep at night without food (40.0%) (Table 3). But this was significantly lower among those who engage in other household chores (14.9%) and those who engage in informal recreation activities (11.6%) (Table 3).

In an unadjusted logistic regression analysis (Table 4), the odds of absenteeism were three times higher among OVC who sleep during the day than those who do not. Similarly, the odds of absenteeism were almost twice higher among OVC who cleaned household toilet (odds ratio [OR]: 1.93, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.14–3.27), whose guardian could not pay their school expenses (OR: 1.78, 95% CI: 1.05–3.02) and those from households where there was often no food (OR: 1.84, 95% CI: 1.04–3.27).

Discussion

A number of studies focusing on diverse aspects of OVC in Nigeria have been published but with scanty information on school attendance (Amolo, Onumonu, Edebeatu, & Onazi, 2003; Apata, Rahji, Apata, Ogunrewo, & Igbalajobi, 2010; Case & Ardington, 2006; Case, Paxson, & Ableidinger, 2004; Tagurum et al., 2015). The present study appeared to be the first survey on school absenteeism among OVC and its associated factors in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The finding of a high rate of school enrolment among OVC in Lagos State with more than 85% of children aged 10–17 years currently enrolled is very encouraging. And this can be attributed to the compulsory free education policy of the Lagos State government and the efforts of a number of education-based NGOs directly focusing on school enrolment among OVC in Lagos (Galleria Media Limited [GML], 2015). The slightly better enrolment among female OVC can also be attributed to the general school policy in Nigeria that has encouraged the education of the girl child (Ojobo, 2008). Thus, the high enrolment figures recorded in the present study may be attributable to the level of awareness created by some of these NGOs and some state government-sponsored programmes on access to free and compulsory education for all children of school age in Lagos. In fact, according to the Lagos State performance management report on the education sector, the gross enrolment rate (in the Early Childhood Care Development Education) in both public and private school was 81% (Performance Management Report [PMR], 2011). These findings also agree with the situations of OVC in Cameroon where most of the OVC studied in the Ekondo Titi and Isangele health areas were found to be in school (Nsagha & Thompson, 2011).

Though our finding on the school enrolment corroborates with the official statistics in Lagos State, previous studies in Plateau state, Nigeria, reported that 18.3% of the OVC studied (males – 54.9% and females – 45.1%) had never been to school while 10.7% of them had dropped out of school prior to the study (Tagurum et al., 2015). The situations in Lagos State became more disturbing when it was observed that more than half of the OVC responding to the reason why they were out of school indicated lack of money for school materials and transport fare as the major cause.

However, the rate of school absenteeism among OVC in the studied area is also worrisome, indicating that a high rate of OVC school enrolment might not translate to regular school attendance. We found that a number of factors were responsible for this situation among OVC in Lagos State. Surprisingly, some of the OVC reported that they

**Table 3.** The statistical significance of the association between OVC and their caregivers-selected variables and school absenteeism in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Child characteristics	Total OVC	Number absent from school	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Caregiver/household characteristics	Total caregivers	Number absent from school	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Sex					Relationship with OVC				
Male	307	69 (22.5)	1.64	0.20	Mother or father	499	95 (19.0)	2.26	0.13
Female	342	63 (18.4)			Not parent	150	37 (24.7)		
Current age					Sex				
10–14 years	476	100 (21.0)	0.60	0.44	Male	180	39 (21.7)	0.27	0.60
15–17 years	170	31 (18.2)			Female	469	93 (19.8)		
Sleeps between the time it got light and noon					Current age				
Yes	14	6 (42.9)	4.48	0.03	Younger (<40 years)	223	54 (24.2)	3.20	0.20
No	635	126 (19.8)			Middle (40–50 years)	229	41 (17.9)		
Does household chores					Older (>50 years)	197	37 (18.8)		
Yes	181	27 (14.9)	4.55	0.03	Education				
No	468	105 (22.4)			No formal education	146	34 (23.3)	2.08	0.56
Work on family/household farm					Primary education	222	42 (18.9)		
Yes	15	2 (13.3)	0.47	0.50	Secondary education	258	50 (19.4)		
No	634	130 (20.5)			Tertiary education	21	6 (28.6)		
Cares for a younger household member					Marital status				
Yes	73	13 (17.8)	0.33	0.57	Married	326	66 (20.2)	13.54	0.01
No	576	119 (20.7)			Cohabiting (but not married)	39	10 (25.6)		
Cares for an adult household member					Never married	12	4 (33.3)		
Yes	47	6 (12.8)	1.79	0.18	Divorced or separated	50	18 (36.0)		
No	476	126 (20.9)			Widowed	221	33 (14.9)		
Informal recreation/leisure					No job in the last 3 months				
Yes	86	10 (11.6)	4.64	0.03	Yes	474	44 (25.4)	3.68	0.06
No	563	122 (21.7)			No	173	88 (18.6)		
Cleaning of toilet					Not able to pay for school expenses				
Yes	77	24 (31.2)	6.16	0.01	Yes	371	65 (17.5)	2.84	0.09
No	553	105 (19.0)			No	229	53 (23.1)		
Does other things					Not able to pay for unexpected expenses				
Nothing	304	50 (16.4)	18.25	<0.001	Yes	197	32 (16.2)	4.65	0.03
Begging	35	9 (25.7)			No	148	38 (25.7)		
Others	62	25 (40.3)			House hold ever had no food to eat in the past 4 weeks				
Gives begging proceeds to parents/guardians					Yes	544	120 (22.1)	5.60	0.02
Yes	72	14 (19.4)	3.86	0.05	No	102	12 (11.8)		
No	133	43 (32.3)			Household often had no food (in the household) in the last 4 weeks				
Slept at night hungry (in the past 4 weeks) because food was not enough					Yes	113	35 (31.0)	6.79	0.01
Yes	297	70 (23.6)	3.46	0.06	No	434	85 (19.6)		

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

Child characteristics	Total OVC	Number absent from school	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Caregiver/household characteristics	Total caregivers	Number absent from school	χ^2	<i>p</i>
No	351	62 (17.7)			Household member go day and night hungry in the last 4 weeks				
Often sleeps at night without food					Yes	259	66 (25.5)	6.19	0.01
Yes	25	10 (40.0)	4.09	0.04	No	380	66 (17.4)		
No	272	60 (22.1)							
Go whole day and night without eating because food was enough									
Yes	102	18 (17.6)							
No	546	114 (20.9)	0.55	0.46					
Ever consumed a drink containing alcohol									
Yes	56	13 (23.2)	0.31	0.58					
No	592	119 (20.1)							

Table 4. Unadjusted and adjusted logistic regression analysis of factors associated with school absenteeism among OVC in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Variables	Unadjusted analysis		
	Odds of absenteeism	95% CI	p
Sleeps between the time it got light and noon	3.03	1.03–8.89	0.04
Does household chores	0.61	0.38–0.96	0.03
Informal recreation/leisure	0.48	0.24–0.95	0.03
Cleaning of toilet	1.93	1.14–3.27	0.01
Gives begging proceeds to parents/guardians	0.51	0.25–1.00	0.05
Slept at night hungry (in the past 4 weeks) because food was not enough	1.44	0.98–2.11	0.06
Often sleeps at night without food	2.36	1.01–5.51	0.05
Others jobs outside home			
<i>Nothing</i>	0.29	0.16–0.53	0.00
<i>Begging</i>	0.51	0.21–1.28	0.15
<i>Other things</i>	–	–	–
<i>Caregiver/guardian characteristics</i>			
No job in the last 3 months	1.50	0.99–2.26	0.06
Not able to pay for school expenses	1.42	0.94–2.13	0.09
Not able to pay for unexpected expenses	1.78	1.05–3.02	0.03
House hold ever had no food to eat in the past 4 weeks	2.12	1.12–4.01	0.02
Household member go day and night hungry in the last 4 weeks	1.63	1.11–2.39	0.01
Frequency of no food (in the household) in the last 4 weeks			
<i>Often</i>	1.84	1.04–3.27	0.04
<i>Sometime</i>	1.00	0.60–1.66	1.00
<i>Rarely</i>	–	–	–

sleep during the noon day when they were supposed to be in school while others go on informal recreation activities at the expense of school attendance. While OVC who sleep during the day were three times more likely to be absent from school, those who clean the household toilet and those who often go to bed at night without food were twice more likely to be absent from school. It is unclear whether this was because caregivers are not providing the necessary oversight on the children or due to other issues not covered in the present study. Nevertheless, engaging in other works outside the home was also found to significantly cause school absenteeism among OVC in Lagos State, Nigeria. In some instances, OVC have been used for street begging while others regularly take up odd jobs outside the home in order to raise money for the household. These situations have been aggravated (in some instances) by the difficulties in raising fund for school and other household expenses.

Past studies among OVC in Kenya have confirmed child labour as an important factor that hindered OVC from attending school. Majanga et al. (2015) reported that girl child among OVC was often used for labour required to support the family including looking after other siblings, helping with domestic chores, assisting in running small-scale businesses and caring for the sick. Actually, school absenteeism among OVC is subject to factors too numerous to mention but past studies in Nigeria and elsewhere have provided some relevant details. In a study conducted among OVC in Plateau state, Nigeria, Tagurum et al. (2015) found inability to pay school fees as the major reason for dropping out of school while 89% of those in school had irregular school attendance as a result of non-payment of school fees, lack of school uniforms and transport fares among other reasons. Past studies in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Uganda and Malawi have also reported that orphans were more likely to have higher rates of school absenteeism than non-orphans (Bennell, Hyde, & Swainson, 2002; Pittin, 1990; Watts et al., 2007).

The results of the present study blame school absenteeism among OVC on poor socio-economic standing (of caregivers) resulting in their inability to pay school fees and household-related expenses. And this in turn affects the poor provision of food and other household necessities similar to findings from a similar study that implicated nutritional status and physical safety as factors encouraging school absenteeism (Shann et al., 2013).

Majanga et al. (2015) had reported that household poverty level, distance from school and poor school infrastructure have been shown to affect school attendance among OVC. So that the fact that OVC living in households where caregivers are unable to meet the needs of the children were more likely to miss school during school days and that OVC in household where members had no food to eat were twice more likely to be absent from school are not surprising. Parental death has been reported to affect the schooling status of children in previous studies (Tagurum et al., 2015).

In fact, some children may require further special equipments or facilities to aid proper learning, the lack of which inevitably hinders their participation in school even if they have the motivation.

Strengths and limitations of the study

The present study provides potent greater information to audience interested in factors associated with school absenteeism among OVC in Nigeria. Apart from uniquely focusing on school absenteeism among OVC, the present report is the first and the most comprehensive study focusing on school absenteeism among OVC in Lagos State, Nigeria. Though efforts were made to ensure a scientifically sound report, the present study suffered a number of limitations. First of all, the cross-sectional nature of the present study does not permit the direct assessment of the causes of school absenteeism which could have been obtained in a prospective study. Also the 5 LGAs (out of the 21 LGAs) in Lagos State covered in this study might not truly reflect the situation of OVC in Lagos State. Therefore, generalizing the findings of the present study on the situations of OVC in Lagos State and elsewhere should be done with caution.

Conclusion

Though school enrolment among OVC in Lagos State is very encouraging, this has not translated to school attendance as a number of them have dropped out of school due to difficulties in payment of school fees, transport fare and other school materials. Also, a considerable number of those in school are not staying in school as the rate of school absenteeism is high and this is associated with certain personal and family background characteristics. Therefore, further qualitative studies may be necessary to clearly identify the factors for school absenteeism. Notwithstanding this, the study has shown certain fees, however, small may still be required of students in spite of the free education policy in Lagos State which the OVC found difficult to pay. It is suggested that an economic empowerment of OVC caregivers may most likely improve OVC school enrolment, attendance and staying in school in Lagos State, Nigeria.

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