Motivations, income determinants and livelihood vulnerability of female teenage head porters in Kasoa, Ghana

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Motivations, income determinants and livelihood vulnerability of female teenage head porters in Kasoa, Ghana

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide statistical and empirical evidence on the motivations, income determinants and livelihood vulnerabilities of female teenage head porters. The paper draws from the motivational theory and the livelihood vulnerability approach to assess the motivations, livelihood vulnerabilities and income determinants of female teenage head porters in Kasoa, Ghana.

Design/methodology/approach – The mixed methods data collection instruments were used to collect primary data from 200 randomly sampled female teenage head porters in Kasoa. It includes both close and open-ended questionnaires, one case study and personal observation.

Findings – Based on the estimation, the study found that household poverty, unemployment, desire for regular income and quest for personal independence were significant motivational factors drawing teenage girls into head porting. Also, age of respondents and years of experience in the occupation were the significant determinants of income of respondents. Exposure to frequent malaria, stress and physical pains were common livelihood risk factors faced by the respondents. Majority of them were from the northern region of Ghana and less than 20 percent of them had formal education.

Practical implications – The paper proposed for extensive implementation of robust macroeconomic and specific social protection interventions to enhance equal job and income opportunities as well as to protect the vulnerable.

Originality/value – The study provides statistical and empirical results different from other related studies (Opare, 2003; Awumbila, 2007; Baah-Ennumh et al., 2012; Akanle and Chioma, 2013).

Keywords Women, Vulnerability, Income, Livelihood

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Reducing livelihood vulnerability among the world’s deprived population has over the past three decades remained the topmost policy agenda for governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the international community. This has become the central theme of some development research and discussion across the globe. While Ashley and Carney (1999) argue that sustainable livelihood initiatives are direct reflections of individual...
assets and capabilities, the United Nations Development Programme put forward an argument that livelihood hinges on two inextricable assumptions – one that may involve people’s capabilities and social context; and the other being a dysfunction of social institutions or a consequence of macroeconomic and social policy failures (UNDP, 2014a, b). Thus, the consequence of policy failure can be linked with livelihood insecurities in the sense that it limits opportunities for developing livelihood assets and obstruct the creation of enabling environment for reduced vulnerabilities through lack of access to equal job opportunities for the growing vulnerable youth.

A report by Action Aid (2012) attributed the livelihood insecurities and vulnerabilities among women and children living on the street to high-level global youth unemployment. The report further indicates that global youth unemployment recorded 3 percent increase between 1998 and 2008 representing 74.1 million unemployed youth. The consequence of which many, especially young girls resort to living on the street as head porters, hawkers and petty traders in support of their livelihoods. Livelihood vulnerability of women in general is further articulated by Todaro and Smith (2012). According to them, women and children are the most deprived, vulnerable and exposed to livelihood insecurities in developing countries where women have long been excluded in income jobs and other economic opportunities.

Ghana continues to strive to improve livelihood and vulnerability conditions of the poor which is evident in several poverty reduction strategies by successive governments and has resulted in 8 percent reduction in absolute poverty between 2005 and 2013 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p. 14). Nonetheless, the incidence of street children in Ghana remains alarming although poverty is declining (UNICEF and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 2011). Studies in Ghana point to poverty and unemployment as responsible for the growing incidence of street children and thus account for increasing number of women engaging in head porting on the street and marketplaces in southern Ghana, especially Accra and Kumasi (Baah-Ennumh et al., 2012; Awumbila, 2007). The Government of Ghana has made some attempts to drive these street children, especially head porters off the street by providing them one-time incentive packages, mainly travel allowances to enable these children go back to their hometown. This effort, however, did not yield any positive result and has therefore raised concern for scientific investigation to find out the significant factors responsible for retaining children on the street of Kasoa.

Although some studies (Akanle and Chioma, 2013; Baah-Ennumh et al., 2012; Zaami, 2010; Awumbila, 2007; Opare, 2003) have attempted explanation of the circumstances drawing women in general into head porting in Ghana and elsewhere, they barely provide statistical evidence on their motivations and income determinants. For instance, Awumbila (2007) employed qualitative approach in her study of “internal migration, vulnerability and female porters in Accra, Ghana.” Similar approach was used by Akanle and Chioma (2013) in their study of head porters in Ibadan, Nigeria. Thus, the lack of quantitative evidence forms part of the main objective of this study. Also, the chosen target group (teenage girls) and the spatial location of the study (Kasoa) make this study unique among the few existing studies. It is for these reasons that the main objective of the study is to provide statistical and empirical evidence on the motivations and income determinants of female teenage head porters in Kasoa and also to find out their livelihood vulnerabilities based on their personal experiences in the occupation.

2. Review of literature
2.1 Evolving dynamics of head porting
Head porting as a livelihood activity has evolved over time, dating back to precolonial cities in the era of 600 and 200 BC and was a common practice among men during the evolution of Greek and Roman cities (Aidan, 1998). Men were generally considered stronger than women
and aided in transporting goods mainly agriculture and building materials on their head over short distances either as slaves or in return for favors and protection of some sort (Aidan, 1998). However, motivation and preference have changed over time. For instance, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) noted a transformation in the practice of head porting in the 1970s with women gradually developing interest in carrying goods on their head at marketplaces, and other commercial business districts in developing countries (UNFPA, 2011). This was done in exchange of token fees and was common among elderly women working to augment household income either as single mothers or migrant women desperately in need of means to survive. This practice became common during Africa’s lost decade (Awumbila and Ardayfio, 2008).

Recently, however, more teenage girls than matured women have gained interest in the head porting business as a means of livelihood (Zaami, 2010; UNFPA, 2011; Baah-Ennumh et al., 2012; Wilson, 2012). For instance, a study in Ghana found that of about the 40,000 porters in Accra and Kumasi, the majority are girls less than 18 years (Baah-Ennumh et al., 2012, p. 230). Similarly, UNFPA (2011, p. 2) found about 61 percent of the estimated 7,787 head porters in Accra and other parts of Ghana to be less than 19 years old. The general deduction from these statistics and the historical antecedents show that indeed the practice has undergone transformation and has now become common among teenage girls than men and matured women. This raises two concerns in some development research. First, what is the motivation for the increasing teenage girls’ participation in head porting for livelihood and second, can head porting be a lifelong livelihood support activity based on its income opportunities and likely vulnerability outcomes looking at its tedious nature?

2.2 Income and livelihood vulnerability nexus
Income is widely recognized as the most crucial livelihood indicator and plays a principal role in sustainable livelihood outcome (Ojong, 2011; Albert et al., 2007). Albert et al. (2007) argued that access to regular income is a means to individual livelihood and thus surpasses other livelihood assets. Its absence poses consequences for consumption, savings and investment opportunities of people and compromise individuals or groups effort to remain resilient against livelihood vulnerabilities. Nobel (2001) cited in De Wet et al. (2008) classifies income based on a study conducted in Johannesburg into one of five multiple deprivation index of livelihood and argue that lack of income exposes households and individuals to multiple risks and render them incapable of expanding their livelihood choices. This condition makes people take desperate measures and account for the various reasons why many women, especially teenage girls are likely to engage in street occupation (Ramachandran, 2006).

2.3 Contextualizing the theoretical underpinnings of head porting
Studies point to several factors that motivate people to engage in economic activities. Such factors could be push or pull or both depending on how it is perceived. Volpi (2002) argues that conditions such as household poverty, homelessness, neglect, abuse, unemployment and loss of parents are push factors that compel young people to livelihood activities rather than being in school or learning a vocation to expand their opportunities for sustainable livelihood. On the other hand, people are motivated by the beneficial outcomes associated with certain economic activity. In a related study, UNFPA (2011) agrees with Volpi (2002) and UNDP (2014a) that macroeconomic failures and its associated unemployment implications combine to push vulnerable children into hard labor and other related works. In light of this argument, UNDP (2014a) concluded that institutional support schemes and the lack of effective social protection interventions make it difficult to address critical issues affecting the poor and vulnerable which in turn pushes young people into early economic activities. In a similar study in Ibadan, Akanle and Chioma (2013) found that motivation of head porters are also driven by constant demand for
their services at market centers. They argued based on their findings that commercial activities at marketplaces in Ibadan could barely flourish without the services of head porters who aid in transporting market goods for both sellers and buyers at a meager fee. Because they use their physical strength to carry the goods, they charge relatively lesser amount compared with their male counterparts who use trucks and carts. This makes demand for female porters preferably higher than their opposite sex. In effect, the constant demand for their services could also be an incentive for attraction or pull factor.

Graham and Weiner (1996) used the motivational theory to posit the rationality in peoples’ choice and decision to work. Such rationality embodies key variables that include a driving force or determination to achieve a goal within a given time period expressed as:

\[ F = f(t,G)/e \]  

From Equation (1), the tension variable or push factor \( t \) is what compels people to engage in a particular work. \( G \) is the goal or expected end result (pull factor) while \( e \) connotes the psychological gap of the person’s present socio-economic status and the perceived goal (unobserved variable). Based on the equation, it can be said that both push and pull factors may combine to influence people’s decision to engage in an economic activity. However, Pardee (1990) notes that pull factors are paramount in determining the factors responsible for drawing people to engage in work. Similar study finds that people’s choice of livelihood is motivated by socio-economic goals or needs and that most people care less about the risk involved in their chosen occupation in their attempt to sustain a balance for livelihood (Abuka et al., 2007). Thus, someone who is desperately in need to survive will do whatever it takes to get it regardless of the consequences.

2.4 Livelihood vulnerability of head porting

The concept of vulnerability has since the 1980s remain relevant in most livelihood studies and is widely researched. It has become a contextual issue in recent times due to its multidimensional nature and inverse relationship with positive livelihood outcomes (Albert et al., 2007; UNICEF, 2006; Philip and Rayhan, 2004). Although it defies single definition, vulnerability is variously conceived as susceptibility and likely exposure to shocks, stress and risks; it encompasses ones inability to respond to expected and unexpected risks that has the potential to compromise one’s livelihood outcome (Philip and Rayhan, 2004). The World Bank (2005) contextualized vulnerability in two ways: income vulnerability and vulnerability to well-being. The former explain the inadequacy of stock and cash flows or income to respond to basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter whilst the latter captures one’s exposure to external shocks such as ill-health, death, rape, disasters and so forth. In both cases vulnerability is induced by certain proximate factors including unemployment, lack of assets or resources and a persons’ level of knowledge, skill and expertise to deal with livelihood threats. Makoka and Kaplan (2005) also provide a simplistic explanation of vulnerability to mean a forward-looking phenomenon that measures ones’ inability to overcome certain socio-economic obstacles to livelihood. This definition captures both well-being and income vulnerabilities into social and economic obstacles, respectively and further indicate the criticality of these two variables in determining livelihood outcomes. One therefore needs to have in possession adequate means and capacity to respond to certain shocks and stress, hence, security of livelihood assets is crucial when determining the extent of one’s vulnerability. More importantly, the Department for International Development’s (DFID) sustainable livelihood approach provides a comprehensive broad base theoretical and conceptual understanding of the interplay between various assets and its interconnectivity with sustainable livelihood outcomes and vulnerabilities. According to Ashley and Carney (1999), livelihood vulnerabilities are more or less associated with deprivation of assets.
From the various conceptualizations, vulnerability of head porters in livelihood context can be derived on a continuum scale of between 0 and 1 (0 = highly vulnerable and 1 = highly secured). Hence, from the DFID livelihood approach, vulnerability is equal to the lack of asset(s) required to enable a person respond to shocks and stress. This is expressed as:

$$1 - (H + F + N + S + P)$$

where; $H$, $F$, $N$, $S$ and $P$ represents the various livelihood assets as: $H$ – human capital; $F$ – financial capital; $N$ – natural capital; $P$ – physical capital; and $S$ – social capital. Thus, the magnitude of the vulnerability of head porters may depend on their possession or otherwise of these assets. For instance, Akanle and Chioma (2013) observed that human and financial capitals were major contributory factors of livelihood vulnerability outcomes of head porters in Ibadan, Nigeria. This notwithstanding, Alberto et al. (2005) argued that street children including head porters need more than income to have secured livelihood. According to Alberto et al. (2005), destitute children who are forced into street livelihood activities such as head porting may require protection, care, education, good health, social relations and networking, decent shelter among other basic necessities of life to enable them have secured livelihoods. The absence of these livelihood and social support interventions therefore complicates their vulnerability and expose them to multiple risks.

3. Study area and methodology
3.1 Description of the study area
By geographic location, Kasoa is located at the eastern corridor of the Central Region of Ghana and it is 31 kilometers drive from the national capital of Accra. It is the municipal capital and commercial business district of the Awutu Senya East Municipality where diverse informal businesses provide income-generating opportunities for young people. As a commercial business district, Kasoa is noted for being the center of attraction for migrants and explains why migrants constitute about 78 percent of Kasoa’s population[1]. The strategic location of Kasoa along the Accra-Cape Coast road makes it accessible for all purposes including trade and commerce.

3.2 Methodology
A stratified random selection approach was employed to select the 200 survey participants in Kasoa between February and March 2016. The actual selection of the participants was done after obtaining their names from their various group leaders which were then written on pieces of papers, collated and put into a basket. Thereafter the names on the papers were shaken together and afterwards each name was randomly picked and recorded in a field notebook for onward identification by their group leaders who assisted in identifying the respondents by their names. Having selected each respondent, personal interview was conducted using survey instrument, one case study and personal observation of their place of dwelling and living conditions. The quantitative data were processed using STATA version 13.0 and later analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the determinants of income were estimated via the regression model below:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1Age + \beta_2Edu + \beta_3Exp + \beta_4Rgn + \mu$$

where $Y_i$ is the dependent variable (weekly income) per respondent, $\beta_x$ are the regression coefficients of the independent variables ($Age$, age of respondents, $Edu$, educational level of respondents, $Exp$, years of experience in the occupation, $Rgn$, place of origin), $\beta_0$ is the constant coefficient value of the model and $\mu$ is the unobserved or stochastic variable(s) that may influence the outcome of the model.
4. Results and discussion

4.1 Descriptive

Table I indicates that the mean age of the 200 respondents was 17 years while their minimum and maximum ages were 13 and 19 years, respectively. The reported mean age of the respondents supports the finding by Baah-Ennumh et al. (2012) that most head porters in selected marketplaces in Ghana are less than 18 years old. Also, 24.5 percent were below the minimum national statutory working age of 16 years and this raises child labor concerns as stipulated in Goal 8, Sub-section 8.7 of the post-2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The mean years of experience in the occupation based on the data was 2 years while the minimum and maximum figures were one and four years respectively. Further, 84 percent of the respondents had no formal education and 94 percent were from the northern part of Ghana and thus indicate that majority of the respondents were migrants. This finding corroborates other studies conducted in Accra and Madina (Awumbila, 2007; Zaami, 2010; Kwankye et al., 2009). These researchers found that the occupation is dominated by migrants from the northern part of Ghana. In terms of ethnicity, Dagombas were more (29 percent) followed by Gonjas (20 percent) and Frafra (19 percent).

In total, 93 percent of them considered their livelihood sustainable based on their income and 48 percent said they remit their families from their earnings. The mean weekly income earned by the respondents was GHs47.00 ($11.75) while the minimum and maximum incomes were GHs20.00 and GHs70.00 ($5.00 and $17.50), respectively. It was observed that 44 percent of the respondents sleep in uncompleted but roofed buildings while a total of 33 and 14 percent sleep in rented kiosk and containers, respectively.

Although observation shows that their place of dwelling were vulnerable to attacks such as robbery, 47 percent of the respondents said their place of dwelling were secured. The mean expected years of working in the occupation by the respondents was found to be five years. However, 39.5 percent of them said they have seven more years to spend in the occupation because it gave them opportunity to raise income for sustenance. Their reason was that they needed to save some money to start a trade and prepare for future marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (n = 200)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.51707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience as head porter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.58241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected years of working as head porter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.00325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal educational status (Yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.36753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin (Northern = 1)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.23808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly earnings (GHs)</td>
<td>47.00$</td>
<td>20.00$</td>
<td>70.00$</td>
<td>1.08248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (Total = 1)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonja</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagomba</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frafra</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents place of dwelling (Total = 1)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncompleted but roofed house</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented kiosk</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented container</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of dwelling is secure (Yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send remittances home (Yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livelihood is sustainable (Yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $1.00 = GHs4.00

Source: Field Data (2016)
4.2 Push and pull motivational factors of teenage head porting in Kasoa

Literature categorizes factors that draw young people into head porting into push and pull factors (Opare, 2003; Akanle and Chioma, 2013). In this study, respondents were asked to indicate which factors attracted them into the occupation or compelled them to leave their place of origin to Kasoa and engage in head porting. Table II indicates that out of the 200 respondents, 48 percent were pushed into the occupation while the remaining 52 percent were pulled. In relation to the push factors, majority (45.8 percent) of the respondents attributed their decision to engage in head porting to household poverty whereas 24 percent associated it with unemployment in their home region. The disaggregated distribution of the push factors were statistically significant except for those who said they were pushed because the occupation provided financial support for their family (Table II).

Regarding the pulled motivational factors, it was found that regular income, ready employment and sustenance had positive and significant effect on the decision by the respondents to engage in head porting for livelihood. For instance, 53 percent of the respondents said they were pulled into the occupation because it offered regular income while 36 percent said it was because the occupation offered them ready employment without having to inject any capital. The finding lends support to Equation (1) adapted from the work of Graham and Weiner (1996). The equation explains the motivational force for driving people to work as a function of both push and pull factors. Further, it supports the finding by Akanle and Chioma (2013) that unemployment and poverty account for the major reasons why people engage in head porting. It is therefore expedient to argue based on the finding that measures by government to reduce the incidence of children going into head porting for livelihood must focused at addressing both household poverty and unemployment conditions since they remain the key driving forces attracting and compelling children to engage in head porting.

4.3 Income determinants of female teenage head porters

Table III presents the result of the multivariate regression analysis of the income determinants of respondents. It shows that respondent’s age and years of experience in the occupation related positively with their income. For instance, the results indicate that one unit change in the age of respondents explain approximately 19 percent change in their weekly income. The model also show that a unit increased in the years of experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Push factors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Household poverty</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unemployment</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Quest for personal independence and sustenance</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Provide financial support for family</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pull factors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Regular income</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employment</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Peer effect/influence</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sustenance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. No skill required</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Push/pull motivational factors drawing teenage girls into head porting in Kasoa

Notes: p-value is significant at 0.05

Source: Field data (2016)
in the occupation accounted for approximately 44 percentage change in the income earned by respondents. The $R^2$ also explains that the model accounted for 72 percent of the variation in earnings by respondents (Figure 1).

As indicated earlier, the mean weekly income of the respondents were GHs47.00 ($11.75). This amount translates into GHs188.00 ($47.00) monthly per respondent. It also reflects a daily amount of approximately GHs6.20 ($1.60), and is lower than the average daily income of GHs10.00 ($2.50) earned by some head porters in Accra (UNFPA, 2011). However this variation in income opportunities could have resulted from the differences in location, scope and vibrancy of the markets in Accra and Kasoa and also because the sample selected by UNFPA had older porters (10-24 years) than the selected 13-19 years for this study. Regardless of these differences and relative to Ghana’s lower and upper poverty lines of GHs792.05 ($198.01) and GHs1,314.00 ($328.50) respectively per adult equivalent per year, respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014), it is imperative to say that the mean daily income earned by the respondents is above the national upper poverty line of GHs3.60 ($0.90) per adult per day (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). Further analysis show variations in respondents’ income. For instance, 57.5 percent of them earned weekly income above the overall average of GHs47.00 ($11.75) while 42.5 percent of them earned below the mean weekly income. So suppose income equal consumption, 97 percent of the respondents who earned weekly income of GHs30.0 ($7.50) may be classified above those considered absolutely poor in Ghana. However it can also be said that their average daily income of GHs6.70 ($1.70) is lower than Ghana’s daily minimum wage of GHs8.00 ($2.00) and hence may have implications on their livelihood outcomes.

The implication of the finding is that on the basis of the positive relationship between income and age of the respondents, the occupation may be found attractive to older people (those aged 20 years and above) because they are likely to earn higher income compared with teenagers. It can also be argued that reasons why respondents intend spending more

### Table III.

Multivariate regression analysis of the determinants of income of the respondents

| Variable name                  | Coefficient | Robust SE | $P > |t|  |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------|---|
| Age of respondents            | 0.192       | 0.05992   | 0.001** |
| Place of origin               | 0.40396     | 0.13748   | 0.091 |
| Educational status of respondents | -0.12316 | 0.20499   | 0.549 |
| Years of work experience      | 0.440627    | 0.09517   | 0.010** |
| Constant                      | 1.5751      | 0.09517   | 0.000 |

**Notes:** Observation = 200; $R^2 = 0.720$; $F (4, 195)$; prob. $F = 0.000$. **Significant at 0.05

**Source:** Field data (2016)
time in the occupation is perhaps because their income relates positively with their years of experience. This could probably account for reasons why government’s effort to drive them off the street has so far yielded no positive result. The income variation also shows that like any other occupation, determinants of reward for labor varies with experience and individual abilities and other unobserved circumstances. Nonetheless, in the case of this study and based on the sample, age and years of experience of the respondents accounted for 72 percent of the variations in their income.

4.4 Livelihood vulnerabilities of respondents

This section discusses the livelihood vulnerabilities and risk exposures commonly experienced by the respondents. In total, 53 percent of them said they were often exposed to frequent acute malaria resulting from their sleeping environment while 20.5 percent of them said that they were victims of theft at varying time periods due to the vulnerable nature of their place of dwelling. A respondent who participated in the case study interview narrated the following:

For the past two years that I have been in Kasoa doing head porting, five of us have been sleeping in this small kiosk and I have never had it easy getting sound sleep because we are more than the kiosk can accommodate. Mosquitoes bite us every night and thieves break in to steal our monies. We are just not safe but we currently cannot afford to rent a house so we are stacked here for a while although we are suffering (Case study interview, female, 17 years, 2016).

In total, 24 percent of them added that they had to always risk sleeping in parked vehicles at lorry stations, especially during rainy season. About 74 percent (73.5 percent) of them said they experienced physical pains each day and as a result had to buy pain killers after each day’s work before they were able to sleep. Aside the risks associated with their place of dwelling, respondents indicated that they faced two major challenges categorized into physical (51.5 percent) and social (48.5 percent). Respondents related their physical challenges to exposure to harsh weather conditions including severe and prolonged sunshine and rains which increased their susceptibility to ill-health conditions including cold, catarrh, cough and fever. Physical abuse was mentioned by 13.5 percent of them as a part of the physical challenges they faced in the occupation. According to them, they were often beaten by their peers in the occupation, especially because they were young and could not fought back. One of such respondent reiterated that she was slapped by her customer because she slipped fell with goods belonging to her customer which got broken. She mentioned that it was an experience she will never forget in her lifetime and that if she had her own way she could have quit being a head porter. Socially, about 49 percent (48.5 percent) of them said they were unable to socialize with other ethnic groups in the occupation because of ethnic rivalry. This coupled with language barrier were major limitations to their social capital formation and therefore explains why Awumbila (2007) argues that head porters faced multiple social deprivations. Responding to the case study interview, one respondent narrated her personal life history as follows:

My name is Mmabilla and I come from Bolgatanga in the Upper East region of Ghana. I am 17 years old and the third born of my parents among five siblings made of three females and two males. Three of us are currently in Kasoa doing head porting for livelihood except my elder brother who is a gardener in Tema. The first time I came to Kasoa was last two years at age fifteen after my mother told me to join my sisters in Kasoa to look for work and take care of myself and support them. When I got to Kasoa, my sisters introduced me to the head porting business and I had to start by first going round lorry parks and bus stops looking for people who needed my services as a head porter. I started by first carrying the loads directly on my head without a head pan and did so for more than one year before I finally bought my own head pan. At the beginning it was very tiring so I thought of going back home but realised home was worse because there is no job there for me.
I struggled to make GHs 5.00 (US$ 1.25) a day because customers were not willing to pay more than
GHs 0.50 for short distance and GHs 1.00 for long distance regardless of the weight of the load.
Therefore I could barely save but now I am able to earn on average GHs 40.00 (US$ 4.0) per week,
and GHs 10.00 (US$ 2.50) on market days and save GHs 10.00 (US$ 2.50) every week. I know this
money is not enough but I am working to support myself and live on my own without depending on
anyone and also get small money to send to my mother through mobile money. The last time I sent
her money was February 2016. My challenge as a head porter has always been my inability to hear
the Akan language so I am unable to make friends and socialise as I used to back in the north. I also
receive verbal abuse from people, especially those who hire my services and always want to pay
less than I charge them. They tell us that we are dirty and we must learn to be in our hometown or
bath and dress well. But the truth is that, I have no regret for my job because it is helping me
survive and I am better than someone who is a thief or not working at all. One request that I want to
make is for government to develop the northern part of Ghana like the south so that we will stop
coming to work here and that way I can avoid the insults and risks I go through just to survive
(Case study interview, 2016).

Deductively, the vulnerability and risk factors experienced by the respondents has
implications on their quest to improve their livelihoods. For instance, in relation to
financial capital, income earned by respondents could only guarantee them of daily
nutritional requirement but they could not save enough money to respond to severe
shocks and stress such as critical ill-health conditions. They could also not acquire or
possess any meaningful natural and physical assets such as secured comfortable place of
dwelling or a land which necessary to safeguard their vulnerabilities given their meager
earnings. This therefore exposes them to further risks and compromise their ability to
remain resilient to shocks such as theft, rape and exposure to malaria. In effect, their most
reliable asset which is their human capital was also under constant threat due to their
frequent exposure to ill-health and physical pains. In a personal narrative, one of the
respondents added that although her condition in terms of access to daily nutrition and
income is better than the past, she lived in constant fear of uncertainty as a result of her
multiple risks and exposure and the fact that she could not gain any meaningful
employment like her peers who have completed school. Drawing on Equation (2) where the
differences between secured livelihood and vulnerability is explained with a continuum
scale, the combined effect of the deprivation of assets, risks and experiences of
respondents raises doubt about their livelihood security although in the short run, the
occupation provide them with a means of sustenance. It is against this backdrop that some
have argued that the occupation should be strictly regulated and restricted to prevent
children, especially those below the statutory working age of 16 years from engaging in the
occupation (Zaami, 2010; Baah-Ennumh et al., 2012).

5. Conclusion and recommendations
The study has provided statistical evidence in support of factors driving teenage girls into
head porting. It has revealed that age and years of experience have significant effect on
income of head porters. It shows that both push and pull factors combine to motivate
teenage girls into the occupation, however household poverty, unemployment and personal
desire for regular income were paramount. Also the risks and vulnerabilities mentioned by
the respondents had negative implications on their livelihood asset formation. The question
therefore is could the compelling factors, risks and vulnerabilities faced by them have been
averted and how? This resonate concerns about existing policy implementation meant to
provide support and alternatives to these children. Based on the findings, the following
policy recommendations are deemed necessary. First, the lack of strict regulatory and
implementation mechanism to prevent children of school going age from engaging in street
livelihood activity require immediate attention. For instance, the Ministry of Gender and
Social Protection need to spearhead effort in collaboration with local law enforcement
agencies and city taskforce to restrict children, especially those below the statutory working age of 16 years old from engaging in the occupation. This initiative could also involve prosecution of parents who by negligence of responsibility drive their children to the street rather than making sure they go to school. Equally, the challenge also mean that the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations has not been very effective in implementing the labour laws of Ghana which among other things seek to restrict children below age 16 years from engaging in active labour.

The finding also raises questions about the effectiveness of Ghana’s social protection program such as the Livelihood Empower Against Poverty (LEAP) program and the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP). The LEAP provides financial support for the aged and disabled individuals, mostly registered, for sustenance but no such scheme exists for poor parents who may require very little financial assistance to become economically empowered to take charge of their responsibilities and provide the needed care for their children. In circumstances where such provisions are made with support from philanthropists, existing power relations and patron-clientelism makes it difficult to identify the very poor who need this form of social assistance. Thus, the lack of effective social support mechanisms coupled with the growing incidence of youth unemployment require that policy makers, development partners and NGOs focus attention on pragmatic and robust macroeconomic and social policies which are demand driven to provide equal job and income opportunities for all sections of the population. Socially, the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection must charge and resource all its department and agencies in all the districts in Ghana to identify vulnerable street children through means testing mechanisms and give them social support. Such assistance could be a vocational training that could guarantee them of sustainable jobs. The country’s youth employment program such as the youth in agriculture project is to provide employment in agriculture and agribusiness for the unemployed in deprived rural communities. However, the project is currently politicized and should be depoliticized to allow those who genuinely need employment to benefit from the program to reduce household poverty which is found to be the main cause of children going into head porting. Also, instead of government giving travel allowance to street children to go back to their hometown and villages, such monies could be channeled into providing entrepreneurship and apprenticeship training such as catering, dressmaking and hairdressing for those age 16 years and above. These are indeed practical ways to address the incidence of vulnerable children going into the risky venture of head porting.

Note

References


World Bank (2005), The Urban Poor in Latin America, World Bank, Washington, DC.


Further reading


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