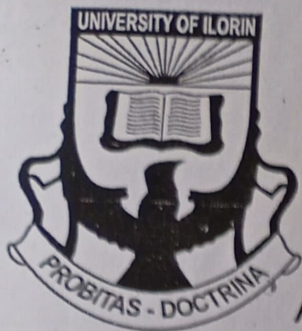




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Under age Children and Street Economy in Nigeria: Examples from Ilorin and Offa, Kwara State.

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Abstract

This paper examines some problems associated with under age children-a type of child abuse-commonly found in some major cities of Nigeria. The work assessed two major urban centers of Ilorin and Offa- where most young children, ages from 6 to 16 years, who are supposed to be in schools were found roaming the streets either hawking assorted milk (Kunu) or packed water (pure water) and other goods in the name of maintaining family economy. Both questionnaires and on the spots observation methods were used simultaneous to solicit information in the selected two urban centers. The findings revealed that both parents and guardians encouraged hawking and trading in the streets by youngsters. The menace of streets trading and hawking portray problems of unplanned economic system within our major cities and urban centers in the country. Appropriate solutions are recommended accordingly.

Introduction

Under age children are youngsters under the age of 16 years, who spend most of their time on major streets of urban centers in Nigeria. In other words, they are children who work, beg, trade, hawk, and at times steal in order to supplement their family's income and/or ensure their own survival. They often spend varying amounts of time on the street and have different reasons for being there: some work on the street on part-time basis, others go there to find friendship and sometimes protection from dangerous home situations; and others live on the street on full-time basis. The geographical location of these under age children in urban centers of Nigeria include; major streets arteries, round-about, petrol filling stations, market squares, railway station and at junk area of cities/urban centers. It should be borne in mind that, the growing awareness of the issue and the recognition that the use of children under the age of 16 years to roam about the streets in the name of hawking, or taking up parents work, or straying about aimlessly and inanely is a typical form of child abuse. Child abuse, by all standards, has been relegated to Dickensian era of the 19th century. Yet, many youngsters still live and roam about the streets of the world's urban centres (cities) at this computer age. The phenomenon being explained is a sad issue that lies

in the heart of the disparities in our urbanized world, and it is common in many areas, most especially the third world countries.

This study assesses the type of activities that are engaged by the under age children in the study area. The focusing objectives are; the examinations of some hawking activities that under age children are carrying out among others in Ilorin and Offa Kwara State. Both parents and guardians may want to improve their sources of income or upgrade and maintain family trades, but some normal measures must be put into use in as to avoid misuse or abuse of youngsters in the name of socio-economic improvement.

The Concept of Under age children and Child Abuse.

Under age children all over the world produce dichotomous definitions in the adult lexicon: from 'Porecito' to poor little thing, to 'Menion de rua' - Street rat. Both pity and horror inform the adult reaction. Under age children as referred by Guerardi (2005), are children under age of 18 who spend most of their time on the streets of the urban centers. According to Guerardi in one of his studies of economic recession in Brazil during the 1980's the numbers of children living and working on the streets of Brazilian cities, often-African descent, increased significantly. A 1990 UNICEF report estimated that 7.5 million children between the ages of 10 and 18 work on Brazil's streets and parts of this estimate live on the streets. These children do what they can to survive, from selling candy on street corners, shinning shoes, and watching parked cars to drug dealing, petty theft and prostitution.

An Under age child (boy or girl) therefore, is a child that is abused, neglected, deprived and lack proper care (Debbie, 2000). Street kid involves the young primary school leavers or the drops-out from elementary school that participate in street's hawking of goods, or roaming about the streets carelessly and doing all sort of odd jobs and receiving menial wages. Thus, the Nigerian child is one among numerous that is most abused, neglected, deprived, de-based, defiled, exploited and dis-regarded of his rights in the world. Of course, they are denied of early nursery that other children elsewhere are enjoying from cradle to adulthood life. A large proportion of Nigerian children are on the streets searching for economic survival for themselves or their parents.

According to the Labour Policy approved by the UNICEF Executive Board (UEB, 1986), children are exploited if they are working full time at too early an age; if their work exerted undue physical, social or psychological stress than they would endure; if they are working for inadequate pay; if they were working at jobs with too much responsibility; if their work hamper access to education and was detrimental to

their full social psychological development; and if they are working and living on the streets under harsh environment condition.

All over the world, under age children are not comfortable as such; they live in fear of the security agents, the police, children's asylums, kidnappers and death squads. Their lives are characterized by constant insecurity, even those who live with their parents, guardians or working for their bosses. They are always warned to be vigilant at all times, more especially, by the camaraderie of the street where they are forced to form their own world of support and create substitute families with their street mates (Dominic, 2000). One positive impact that emerges from the tales of horror and abuse of children is that, governments, politicians, practitioners and women folks all over the world are beginning to agree that working with the whole family unit can improve the lots of children straying in a functioning family. This is possible by treating addicted parents and providing them training in crafts, medical checkups for siblings, and making schooling available to all. In other words, the welfare of the whole family unit is taken care. As Elie Weisel (2000) puts it: "Once you bring life into the world, you must protect it. We must protect it by changing the world". She said further that, "the rights of children to live healthy and safe lives should be the aim of all the societies, if this fails to address the problems, we fail in our commitment to all humanity."

In the case of Nigerian cities, the official response to issue of under age children is often to ignore them or at best, keep them in the orphanages, police cells and, or in prisons. Although, there are at present paucity data pools that have published reliable statistics about the numbers of children that are roaming about our major urban centres/cities. These children either spend their days barely surviving on the streets, or if picked up by the government agents or authorities, they are held for sometimes and later discharged to their fate.

Moreover, geographers, city planners, and some well meaning Nigerians are not folding their arms; they are more often than not concerned about this ugly phenomenon tagged 'child- abuse'. They find it difficult to stop wailing to the rest of the world to disengage from the act of **ungodliness**. The implications that centered round the issue of under age children on our streets are not only set for future bleaks on the youngsters, but a potential dreary prospects on our leaders of tomorrow. Concomitantly, allowing youngsters on the streets is a form of child abuse and as such, it is a sort of eyesore to the general public and a colossal downturn on socio-economic predicament to a developing nation as ours.

Women make a nation, and a nation is liberated if her products-children, who are leaders and parents of tomorrow, survived. Children can only survive if they are well brought up. Young children are valued as great assets in all societies of the

world. Though, Nigeria still records a high level of fertility of 5.2 children per woman (NPC, 2000). Paradoxically, having as many of children as possible may not be a problem, but how they are catered for (both socially and economically) may be a serious bane. In the same vein, the achievement of aspirations for children is expectedly related to parents' economic status. Where parents have a good source of income and a good home relationship (husband and wife), their offspring would definitely be well brought up, but where all the indices of achievement suffer, such as, where parents are many miles apart from each other; or at variance with one another through divorce, broken homes, or economic crunch preference, children of such homes are left to stray all about. It is such children that are found in urban streets and left to dictate labour for survival (Ajala, et al., 2002).

Appraisal of Streets in Study Area

Cities and urban centres in Nigeria generally have distinct socio-economic and cultural background. They possess a unique insight into the realities of urban life and how bad youngsters try to adapt to living in them by all means and at all costs.

Ilorin city is regarded as a gateway between northern and southern areas of the country and due to its geographical proximity; it plays some key roles in the socio-economic development of the surrounding towns and cities. While Offa serves a similar purpose-another transition point linking northern parts of the country, and a gateway to many other states like Kogi, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo. All these attributes make both towns communicate with youngsters, providing in words and life stories; the sweat, toil, agonies, and sometimes triumph of people cut off from their roots and unwilling or unable to return to them.

Big towns or cities manifest a compelling picture of individuals and social communities in their daily struggle to survive today and any other day. The typical youngsters of these areas are proud of this character heritage even though, some of them misused opportunities provided by the natural environment. They form themselves into different groups and they are alike when they are seen in different corners, streets and hot-spot areas of the city where they operate. There are many places where under age children are found in the study areas (see table 1), some of them are found either hawking or do street trading from onset of the sun to the late evening. It is natural that children are fascinated by city's attributes or are allured into streets as either part of the national manpower or are engaged in unconventional activities. Many of them work in the streets as water vendors or selling either pure water or assorted milk (kunu) and other family businesses. These are referred to in this work as 'hot-spot areas' where under age children are straying about in the name of hawking goods for wages earning and maintaining family trades.

Methodology

Geographical investigations of social problems in Nigerian urban centers are scanty but are much needed, not only for academic exercise, but also as benchmarks for measuring socio-economic and political turmoil of a lifetime. Specifically, the upbringing of youngsters to face the reality of life is a priority that needs attention of all and sundry from all walks of life. In this work, a survey of some selected major markets and streets in Ilorin and Offa was carried out (fig.1-2.). Apart from pre-tested structured interviews that were carried out using some trained field assistants, two hundred (200) under age children representing 20% of the total with age ranges of 6 to 16 years, were interviewed at different locations in Ilorin and Offa. This selection is informed by the fact that, there are more than one thousand (1000) under age children in two urban centers that were involved in this study, and the population of children in streets of Ilorin is more than that of Offa. Therefore, the choice of selecting 15% and 5% population from each area is requisite. Metiboba (2004) in a study of child labour and reported health hazards among O-kun Yoruba in Kogi State of Nigeria used a similar method.

During the fieldwork, it was discovered from the Police Divisional Headquarters records in Ilorin that there were more than a thousand street children in Ilorin and Offa. Thus, the purpose of this selection is to find out from them whether they are working for payment/wages or not, who they are working for and whether they are still in schools or they are drops-out (see table 2a-b). It was also to find out from them; the status of their parents/guardians, where they come from, the estimation of their daily income, if any, and to verify if the type of jobs they are doing are safe from all sort of different life threatens.

In order to complement the above assessment, another set of 250 questionnaires was administered to some individual households in Ilorin and 150 questionnaires in Offa. This selection were based on account that a large population of major street arteries of two urban centers were involved. Also that, this choice is the standard that is manageable by the researcher in order to save time and efforts. Dominic (2000) used a similar method when assessed why children are found in streets of Albania and Mongolia. Thus, this assessment was carried out at some designated areas that were first clustered and later selected randomly for proper response to questionnaire administration. Most of the children in both study area were found either hawking in goods or working for personal earning (wages) in order to upgrade family trade, but at the same time going to school. The thorough investigation of this work was carried out during the months of September and December 2005. This is the period when most youngsters leave their parents or

guardians, and are compelled to seek greener pastures in preparation for new or next academic session in schools or in preparation for both Christmas and Yuletide.

Table 1. Hot-Spot Areas in the Study Area

	Ilorin	Offa
1	Oja-Oba (Emir's Market	Orita-Merin
2	Ago-Olopa Market	Oja-Owode
3	Ipata Market	Oja-Oba
4	Baboko Market	Railway Level Crossing Area
5	Idi-Ape Area	Garage Idiogun
6	Geri-Alimi Roundabout	Ira-Garage
7	Maraba Garage Area	Offa Polytechnics Garage
8	Oloje Motor Park	Ipee/Igosun Garage
9	Offa Garage Area	Igbona/Ikotun Garage
10	Unilorin Mini-Campus Area	Ile-Film Area
11	Serikin-KaunMotor Park	-
12	Oko-Olowo Transist Area	-

Source: Author's Field survey, (2005).

Table 2a. Types of Activities Engaged by Youngsters in Ilorin.

Type of activities	No.	%	Monetary Value	
			Weekly Income	Monthly Income
Street Hawking	598	27.37	#3,500.00	#24,00.00
Service Business/Shop Attendance	157	7.14	-	#2000.00
Automobile Mechanic work	98	4.49	#200.00	#1000.00
Electric Work Apprentice	60	2.75	-	#750.00
Farming	82	3.75	-	#8,000.00
Construction Work Labourers	420	19.22	#3,500.00	#17,000.00
Industrial Work Labourers	81	3.71	-	#2,5000.00
House Boys/Girls	45	2.06	-	#2000.00
Car-Wash Attendance	205	9.38	#650.00	#20,000.00
Others	440	20.14	-	-

Source: Author's Survey, 2005.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from this work indicate that, biological, demographic and psychological characteristics of under age children have some impacts in their quest to remain in some major streets of Ilorin and Offa. It was discovered that, majority of

the under age children have only one parent with many siblings. That is, most of them are from extended family and they receive little or no attention from their parents. Some children said, they were fascinated to streets as they always seen other children in the streets enjoying themselves. The irony of it is that, most of these children are less than 12 years but are taking active part in the streets as if they were men. This obviously indicates a contravene of ILO's standard that, the minimum working age requirement for admission to employment of youths is 15 years (ILO, 2000). Other findings from this work also reveal that, there were more males in the streets than females in both study area as it is indicated in table 2a. For instance, Ilorin has 83 (14%) males and 67(11.2%) females in the major streets during the time of this study. While Offa has 58(14.5%) males and 42(10.5%) females – a daily average of children in the selected study streets.

Table 2b. Types of Activities Engaged by Youngsters in Offa.

Types of Activities	No.	%	Monthly Value	
			Weekly Income	Monthly Income
Street Hawking	601	47.21	#2,500.00	#18,000.00
Service Business/Shop Attendance	44	3.46	-	#1,500.00
Automobile/Mechanic Work	39	3.06	#100.00	#1,600.00
Electronics Work Apprentice	24	1.89	-	#400.00
Farming	180	4.14	-	#5000.00
Construction Work Labourers	205	16.10	#2,500.00	#15,000.00
Industrial Work Labourers	22	1.73	-	#1000.00
House Boys/Girls	18	1.41	-	#1,500.00
Car-Wash Attendance	52	4.09	#2,500.00	#12,000.00
Others	88	6.91	-	-

Source: Author's Survey, 2005.

Other findings from this work also reveal that, there were more males in the streets than females in both study area as it is indicated in table 2a. For instance, Ilorin has 83 (14%) males and 67(11.2%) females in the major streets during the time of this study. While Offa has 58(14.5%) males and 42(10.5%) females – a daily average of children in the selected study streets.

It was similarly discovered that, some of the children were simultaneously going to school and at the same time embarked in a typical child-labour activity or hawking in some streets in Ilorin and at Offa respectively. During the interview section of this work, most of the children were found to be in primary school or in junior secondary school. For instance, 8% and 7.5% of the total (48 and 30 pupils) in

both Ilorin and Offa were in primary school. Whereas, in both urban centers, 54 children representing about 5% of total population of selected areas were not attending any formal education at all. That is, only 25% of school age (children) of the total population in Ilorin and Offa were in schools. This population-number is barely too low if planning for children under UNICEF's standard is to be maintained.

Apart from the above, the study also reveals some relative relationship that assist between status of children's parents and their choice of being on the streets. It is rightly said, home is the child and where home could not provide love and affection for the child, or where parents are always at warpath, and where one of the parents is not responsible, such a child is badly affected if not marred for life. A large proportion of children are found on the street of Ilorin and Offa, which indicated that their parents were either separated or divorced. For instance, the findings revealed that, in Ilorin alone, 52 of the selected children (8.7%) said their parents were divorced and 25 (4.2%) were from widowed family. While at Offa, 11(1.2%) out of children selected said they were orphans, 28(4.7%) and 38 (6.3%) of them said they were from separated or divorced parents respectively.

Table. 3a Background Characteristics of Under Age Children in Ilorin

Location	Sex		Age			Education				Family Status				Total	%
	Male	Female	<8	8-12	13-16	Prim. Sch..	Jss.1-3	SSS. 1-3	Non-formal	Intact	Separate	Divorce	Widowe		
Oja oba	9	7	3	5	8	7	3	-	6	7	6	2	1	64	10.7
Ago market	7	7	2	8	4	4	1	-	9	8	2	4	-	56	9.4
Ipata market	7	7	1	5	8	5	5	2	2	4	7	2	1	56	9.4
Baboko market	8	6	-	5	9	4	6	-	4	4	6	2	2	56	9.4
Idi-ape area	8	7	-	4	11	4	5	3	3	2	9	-	4	60	10.0
Gari-Alimi Area	7	5	-	7	5	5	3	4	-	5	3	2	2	48	8.0
Maraba Garage	7	4	-	8	3	3	6	1	1	2	3	4	2	44	7.3
Oloje Motor Park	7	4	-	6	5	2	2	2	5	3	1	2	5	44	7.3
Offa Garage	6	4	-	3	7	3	3	4	-	5	1	3	1	40	6.6
Unilorin Mini Ca	4	3	-	5	2	2	3	-	2	3	2	2	-	28	4.7
Serikin-Kanu	7	6	-	4	9	4	4	1	4	4	3	2	3	51	8.5
Okolo-Olowo Transit Area	6	7	-	5	8	5	3	-	5	4	2	3	4	52	8.8
TOTAL	83	67	6	79	65	48	44	18	40	28	45	52	25	600	100

Source: Author, 2005

Table. 3b Background Characteristics of Under Age Children in Offa

Location	Male	Female	< 8	8-13	13-16	Prim.scch.	JSS 1-3	SSS 1-3	Non-Formal Education	Intact	Separated	Divorced	widowed	Total	%
Drita-Merin	1	3	-	6	4	2	3	5	-	2	4	2	2	40	10.0
Dja-Owode	15	6	4	8	9	6	9	4	2	11	4	4	2	84	21.0
Dja-oba	16	6	3	4	5	5	2	-	-	4	5	3	-	48	12.0
Railway Crossing	6	2	1	3	4	3	1	1	3	3	2	1	2	32	8.0
Idi-Ogun Garage	2	4	-	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	-	24	6.0
Ira Garage	7	3	4	2	4	4	-	3	3	1	6	2	1	40	10.0
Offa-Poly Garage	5	7	-	6	6	2	5	-	1	-	5	6	1	48	12.0
Ipee/Igosun Garage	3	3	1	3	3	2	2	2	-	3	1	2	-	24	6.0
Igbona/Ikotun Garage	3	2	1	1	3	1	1	1	2	2	-	1	2	20	5.0
Ile- Film	4	6	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	5	1	40	10.0
Total	58	42	17	39	44	30	27	29	14	30	31	28	11	400	100

Source: Author's Survey, 2005.

This according to them put them on the streets in order to support their single parent. However, a lot of them are on the streets with their parents are intact, while some are on the streets as deviants or for just 'life' on the street – begging, aiding and abetting criminals, perfecting prostitution and using drug to become addicted. Generally from the surveys carried out both in Ilorin and Offa, majority of the under age children interviewed indicated that they detested the typical works they were doing on the streets, shops, industries and in homes. They also showed that, from occasional inadequate medical attention, some of them were home sick and tired of street engagements. Some of them portrayed a typical haggard look and unwell- kept mode of characteristics when met in their various locations both in Ilorin and Offa respectively. In both study areas, a large proportion (30% of both males and females) of under age children suffered from more loss of weight due to malnutrition or inadequate feeding, stress and other poor health conditions. In Offa alone, those that suffered from cough, sore leg and feverish were more than those found in Ilorin a similar problems; while those that had psychological problem (visusal disturbance) rough or haggard appearance and those who possess eczema disease in Ilorin were more than those found with the same infirmity at Offa (see table 4). But however, no HIV/Aids tested and confirmed reports established

among the children surveyed in both Ilorin and Offa. The most reported in this study among the under age children in Ilorin and Offa is not surprising. This, is so, simply because most of the diseases are contagious and the children who swarm along together in their various engagement activities can easily contact one dieses or the other. This aside, some of them was age-mate; therefore their haggard rough appearance and physical appearance may be established since most of them come from low income parents/ guardians.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the activities of under age children in some streets of Ilorin and Offa Kwara State. The study has revealed some relative socio-economic danger, which this country may be facing in future if our youngsters are left unchecked from roaming about streets when they are supposed to be in schools. Apart from facing one danger of becoming rouges, thieves, prostitutes and permanent truants, they are facing unknown situations. Even though these youngsters are yet to know the implications of what they are doing now. Most of the under age children as revealed from the study believed that they are enjoying themselves by forming their own gangsters on the streets. But this perpetual bad performance must be checked by their parents,(stakeholders),government agencies, and other policy makers so they would become a potential future nuisance and burdensome, not only to their parents, and their communities, but to the nation as a whole. Thus, their present bad habits and attitudes must be nipped in the bud.

One of the basic setbacks but unknown to these children is that, they have it at back of their minds that they are supporting themselves or their families by working as carriers, or served as bus conductors, and scavenging. Some of them also serve as hawkers in both study areas (Ilorin and Offa). While other engage in work like dishwashers in restaurants or Inns, or sell packaged water or assorted milk (kunu) on the major roads and streets. Others wash clothes or help in a cinema, or a few admitted to being beggar. These street children trek long distance from where they are found. Destitute and haggard as they are, they often exploited by others elders who keep them. Some have pay daily tolls to their keepers in order to rest for the day in uncompleted building, under bridge and in some trading shop for protection. Their social appearance presents an eyesore to the on-looker or mostly embarrassed the foreigners.

Appraising the above, the larger society most especially, the developing countries may face a dark side in the nearest future. In order words to avoid a future dwindle enjoyment life of our children, the following suggestions are put forward to all parents, stakeholders and government for resilience and consideration. Firstly, there should be awareness and recognition of the rights of the children and protection. Secondly, there are some programmes embarked by some countries like; Poland, Britain, U.S.A., The Czech and Manila, to taking care of the kiddies. Such programmes worked but not without the

co-operations and supports from the individuals, parents, religious bodies, women associations, philanthropists and NGOs among others. The third is the policy that would involve the family/community participations in the socio-control mechanisms that taking care of the kiddies in our societies. By this, all eyes would be focusing attention on the controlling affairs that related to child abuse and deprivations. Lastly, parents should be re-educated most especially in the study areas (Ilorin and Offa), where kinsmen or member of another family is employed to rear the children on their behalf. Parents should take the responsibly of rearing their wards themselves. Children should not be exchanged for wages (Owo-Iwofa) as the case commonly perpetrated by some group of people in the villages. Most of these children are being deprived opportunities to go to school or lean a good trade. Thus, they are deprived good opportunities for life.

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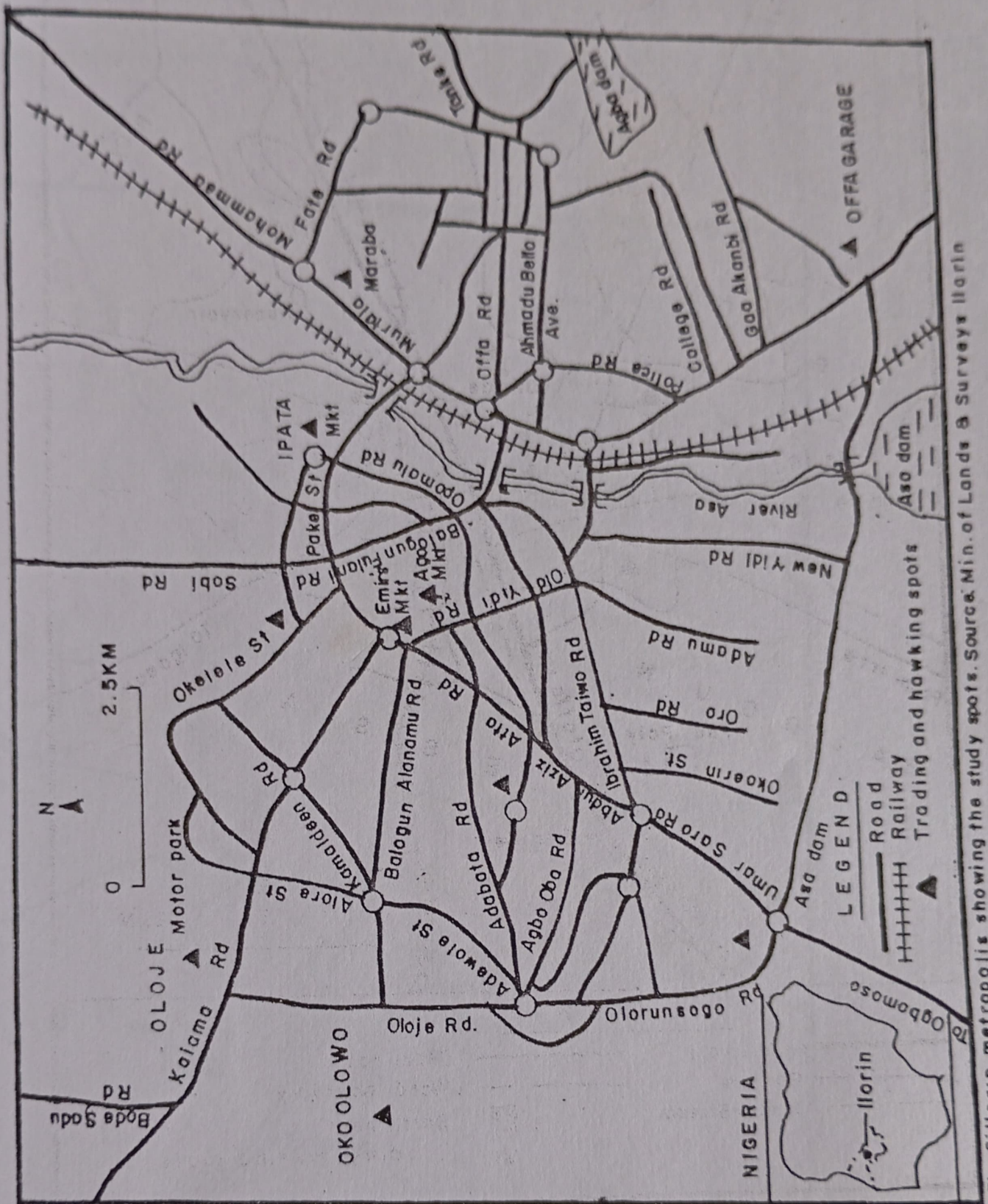


Fig.2: Ilorin metropolis showing the study spots. Source: Min. of Lands & Surveys Ilorin

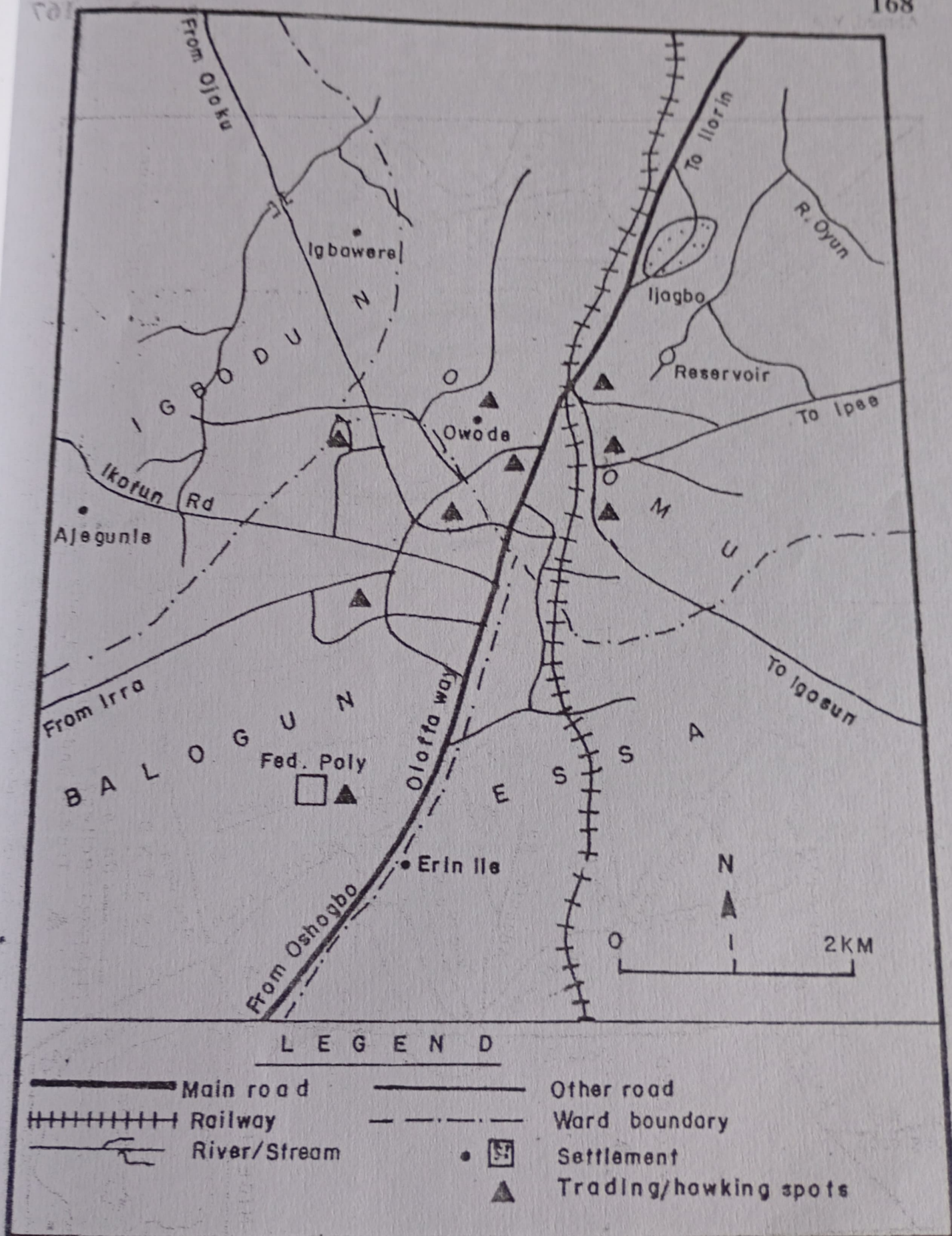


Fig.3. Offa Township map showing the study spots. Source: Offa LGA Secretariat Offa.