

# PHILOSOPHICAL PRAXIS AND THE MENACE OF STREET URCHINS IN NIGERIA

Christopher Akpan<sup>1</sup>, Dorathy Akpan<sup>2</sup>, Stephen Adi Odey<sup>3</sup> and Samuel Akpan Bassey<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria

## ABSTRACT

**\*Corresponding author:**  
Samuel Akpan Bassey  
[samuelbassey15@yahoo.com](mailto:samuelbassey15@yahoo.com)

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The problem of street children is becoming more severe because of their increasing number day by day and the violation of child rights by society at large in order to fulfil their vested interests. This paper examines the societal problem of street urchins in Nigeria and contends that the problem could be addressed through philosophical praxis. Using critical and contextual analytical approaches, the paper shows that street urchins have been dehumanised by several factors, which have consequently pushed them to become a societal nuisance. We argue that neither government efforts in ridding the streets of urchins through armed task forces nor non-governmental organisations' efforts towards rehabilitation have yielded lasting solutions. This is because they neither ask fundamental questions nor proffer essential solutions. We contend that since philosophy and philosophical praxis involve asking fundamental questions and consciously engaging in critical reflection to transform existential situations and social structures, contemporary philosophical practise should not be apathetic towards such a societal problem. We propose Philosophico-outreach Therapy (PoT) as a praxis framework in which professional philosophers could interact with distressed urchins, their parents, other caregivers, and the government through dialogue. We conclude that this approach can uncover any concealment that led to such a distraught situation, thereby paving the way to re-humanising them and sanitising society.

**Keywords:** Philosophical praxis; street urchins; dialogic; philosophico-outreach therapy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of street urchins, or as commonly known, street children, is usually unfortunate wherever it occurs. In Nigeria, the activities of street urchins constitute one of the many social ills and challenges the country is facing today. As Salihi (2019) notes, the phenomenon of street children "constitutes a leprous arm" of the alarming social ills that have degenerated into the "production of adult social delinquents," armed robbers, and the like. This phenomenon, which has in many ways presented challenges for businesspeople, road users, the government, and civic society as a whole, seems to have resisted answers from the government and non-governmental organisations, among others (Okoli, 2020). There is still a high prevalence of street children and their activities in almost every major city in Nigeria. The alarming prevalence is not out of a lack of efforts to find a solution but perhaps a lack of the right, sustainable, and enduring solution. It is in this regard that this paper sets out to contend that philosophers should live up to their billing as those

capable of asking fundamental questions about human existence and contribute their quota towards addressing this societal nuisance.

Lou Marinoff (2003), a philosophical counsellor, asserts that “our ability to inquire is our primary means to that end” and that philosophers, apart from being concerned with abstract ideas for their own sake, “can be helpful to ordinary people, through the application of useful ideas to their concrete problems of living” (p. 3). In this context, the paper proposes a philosophical praxis based on the framework of philosophical counselling, branded as philosophico-outreach therapy, to address this social predicament. Philosophical praxis refers to the practical application of philosophical resources to addressing (or solving) life’s problems (“Philosophical Counseling”) (Schuster, 1999). Mike Martin (2001) sounds more specific when he asserts that philosophical praxis is founded on philosophical counselling and that it is “the application of ethics, critical thinking, and other philosophical resources in helping individuals cope with problems and pursue meaningful life” (p. 3). Thus, it is imperative to consider philosophical counselling as a framework for philosophical praxis. Generally, philosophical counselling involves the conscious and systematic act of guiding people, especially the distressed and distraught in life—in the context of this work, the street urchins and those we term as their antecedents, philosophically to think through the significant existential predicaments in their lives and how to better their situation. This paper proposes Philosophico-outreach Therapy (PoT) as a praxis framework for solving Nigeria’s street urchin problem. In PoT, professional philosophers could talk to troubled street kids, their parents, other caregivers, and the government using dialogic. The Philosophico-outreach Therapy model of counselling involves five stages of systematic interrogation where the counsellor asks probing and open-minded questions. These steps are: becoming aware of the problem; asking questions about the social, cultural, and environmental factors; understanding the rationale for his/her present behaviour; maintaining equilibrium, and lastly, engaging in a therapeutic outreach session.

In this work, we shall also attempt to expose the meaning, activities, dynamics, and aetiology of the phenomenon of street urchins. Then we shall explain the nature of philosophical praxis and critically interrogate its place in dealing with contemporary social realities. We shall explain what philosophical counselling consists of and why it should be regarded as a framework of philosophical praxis in Nigeria. We give a brief review of attempts by government and non-governmental organisations to deal with the issue and show that philosophical inquiries are essential in stimulating the lopsided governance in Nigeria to better many street urchins. Our thesis (conclusion) is that while the government, NGOs, and other relevant organisations have failed to address the problem of street children, philosophical counselling may succeed due to the incisive, profound questions and appropriate responses that outreach therapeutic counselling can elicit.

## 2. STREET URCHIN: MEANING, MODUS OPERANDI, AETIOLOGY AND PROBLEMS

“Street urchin” is a word for a child that spends most of his or her time wandering, living, or surviving on the streets. According to Newman (1915), a street urchin is a mischievous, often poor and raggedly clothed youngster who is frequently seen roaming and living in the slum area. In many areas, such children are often seen as devilish, rascals, rogues, etc. Meanwhile, this definition shows the negativity (in all its senses) attached to street urchins. The reason for this negativity is not farfetched. It is often their predicament that drives them to engage in nefarious activities in order to survive.

Ibrahim (2012) distinguishes between two categories of street urchins in Nigerian cities. He mentions those who live and work on the streets (sometimes referred to as “children of the streets”) and those who work full or part-time on the streets but return home at night (children in the street). Although this is the case, it is vital to highlight that the distinction between the two groups is relatively minimal. However, both share the burden of a harsh street existence and the tragedy of abandonment to strive for survival. Street urchins are also seen by many as rejects and outcasts of society. Anietie Akpan (2015), citing the case of the street urchins in Calabar, known as the *Skolombo* boys, says that these are gangs of homeless boys and girls bonded by the shared misery of being abandoned on the streets by their parents or guardians.

Concerning the problem and focus of this work, we refer to street urchins as children under the age of eighteen who are abandoned in the street, which they then turn into a living abode and a means of survival. As a mode of operation, the street urchins are known to move mostly in groups and always hang around street corners. Some of them are scavengers who feed on refuse dumps and bins. Those who do not have any place to return to after the day’s business (children of the street) sleep in gutters, uncompleted buildings, and motor parks. By living, feeding on filthy bins and sources, and working in the streets, they are dehumanised and exposed to a hard life. They become more brutal as they associate with more prominent criminals daily. As they grow and graduate from one level to another in the street business, some are recruited into gangs of armed robbers and kidnappers who constitute security risks and a menace to society. Some of these urchins are engaged in petty theft using crude weapons. They dispose of unsuspected people’s valuables (such as phones,

bags, money, etc.) through pickpocketing (Onuoha, 2021). Apart from being recruited into armed robbery and kidnapping gangs, there is evidence that some street urchins are also engaged in many ethnoreligious conflicts that threaten national security (Chima et al., 2018). Nte et al. (2009) cite cases where street urchins took part in major ethnoreligious conflicts, such as those witnessed in recent times in Kano, Bauchi, Jos, Kaduna, etc. In Lagos, they note that the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) crises between 1999 and 2001, for example, involved many street urchins recruited as foot soldiers. The same can also be said of ethnic crises in Nigeria's south and eastern parts.

Given that street children constitute some security risk to the Nigerian nation, one could then ask, what factors birthed this unfortunate situation? How did Nigeria get to this level where urchins terrorise the streets and engage in social vices in a manner that sometimes threatens social security and national unity? The phenomenon of street urchins is attributable to many causes, most prominent among them being poverty, child abuse, false religion, displacement, domestic crises, peer pressure, and a lack of sustainable policy by the government to address this problem. It is a known fact that low-income families who cannot take care of their children sometimes send them out into the streets, deliberately or inadvertently. Most of the time, these children participate in mini-treading and hawking, and their peers often push them to forgo commerce in favour of pickpocketing, petty theft, etcetera. Child abuse by parents and guardians also causes some children to abandon themselves in the street. This is frequently done to avoid severe violence and torture. Many children are abandoned in the street due to displacement and domestic crises. Ethnic or religious crises could cause displacement, and such children might choose to run to the cities; with no means of livelihood, they could choose to roam the streets in search of greener pastures. There is also the case of religion as a factor. Some children have been thrown out into the streets on the pretext of false prophecy and the revelation that they are witches or wizards (Okam, 2019). Besides the case of false prophecy by some Christian churches, the Islamic religion sanctions a doctrine where some children, known as the *almajiris*, are forced to leave their houses to be under the tutelage of Islamic religious teachers (Idoko, 2011). These children are seen in groups with ragged dresses, begging for alms for survival (Adibe, 2019). The nuisance they constitute is, indeed, palpable.

### 3. A REVIEW OF ATTEMPTS BY GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO ADDRESS THE MENACE OF STREET URCHINS

Without a doubt, there have been both government and non-governmental attempts to address this problem. However, these efforts still leave much to be desired since the street urchin epidemic is still prevalent in virtually all Nigerian cities. This is mostly because there are no well-considered and systematic legislative efforts to solve this issue. Adibe (2019) notes that he is "not aware of any government intervention to cater specifically to the needs of the street children in Nigeria as done in other countries." Shockingly, according to him, Nigeria does not also seem to recognise April 12 as the day set aside since 2012 as the International Day for Street Children. The authors agree that this day set aside to arouse the attention of the public and government to the predicament of street children is not usually observed in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, let us suppose there is an internationally recognised day. In that case, it implies that there should be well-articulated programmes aimed at acknowledging the plight of street urchins, at least regularly, and perhaps addressing this phenomenon to a reasonable degree. Unfortunately, we think the Nigerian factor of treating issues of the downtrodden with levity still leaves the precarious social situation of the street urchin menace. The case of the child's right act, signed into law in 2003 but not put into practise or respected by successive governments, is also apt.

Meanwhile, whether Nigerians are aware of the International Day for Street Children or not, we wish to disagree with Adibe (2019) that the government has not done anything to address the street urchin menace. There have been a few instances where governments and even non-governmental organisations, religious bodies, and the like have waded into this problem, either for good or for bad. From the government angle, former military head of state, Ibrahim Babangida, established the People's Bank, which offered micro-credits to many "street boys" to start small businesses (Anyanwu and Uwatt, 1993). However, the programme suffered from insufficient funding and inadequate sustainability. In Lagos State, Bola Tinubu, as the governor of the state, set up a skill training centre to rehabilitate street boys. The programme collapsed like others because of a lack of commitment and poor implementation (Owolabi, 2017). In Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, Mrs. Obioma Imoke used government resources as the then First Lady of the State (a title for the governor's wife) to launch a programme called The Mother Against Child Abandonment (MACA), which led to the establishment of the Destiny Child Centre in October 2009 (Aniah et al., 2009). This was a rehabilitation centre for street children. However, as laudable as this initiative was, it became moribund because of non-commitment by successive governments and an influx of other street urchins that the available funds could not contain.

Recent attempts by the Lagos state administration to work with UNICEF to clear the streets of street urchins and allow their return to school have been frenetic (UNICEF, 2016). However, one cannot be optimistic about the future development of the issue. This is due to the failure of comparable collaborative programmes in several other jurisdictions to produce the desired outcomes. Several years ago, for instance, the Cross River State Government and the United Nations International Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) collaborated on a five-year initiative to combat the issue of street children. The government often failed to fulfil its obligations; therefore, the project was doomed from the start (Isine, 2016).

Another common intervention to stop the menace of street urchins is the launching of armed operations by some government agencies. Okam (2019) narrates how Operation *skolombo* was used brutally in Calabar, the capital of Cross River state, to either kill the street boys or dump them into some dungeons. The above is a typical example of how the Nigerian government sometimes brutally reacts toward street urchins. There are many such cases in other states. However, the problem is that dumping urchins into some dungeons will only toughen them more. Killing a few unfortunate ones caught misbehaving does not also put an end to the ugly phenomenon. Instead, we even witness an upsurge as their numbers, and nefarious activities have increased. Instead of repenting, the urchins that survive such operations usually vent their anger on the common masses as they steal, vandalise, rape, and commit unprintable crimes in society.

According to the preceding narrative, NGOs, sociologists, psychotherapists, clergy, economics, and others have contributed to finding a solution to this plague, but without any noteworthy and significant result. One then wonders if philosophers cannot, by training, have something to offer regarding addressing this societal menace posed by the street urchins. Michael Hauskeller (2014) believed that philosophers should not be indifferent to practical societal challenges and advocated the need for philosophical therapy as an alternative method for enhancing human well-being. He observes that if psychiatry, psychology, and other health workers who initially viewed philosophy as dangerous can become interested in and use philosophy, especially existentialism and phenomenology, as an integral part of their therapeutic vocation, then philosophers must finally "take a stand to help people think through life's issues." This should spur professional philosophers to focus their practise on this burning issue. Hence, we propose a philosophical counselling model as a framework of praxis to help in addressing this social menace.

#### 4. MEANING AND NATURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRAXIS

One does not need to go into the business of stirring minds regarding the debate on the meaning of the word "philosophy". Nevertheless, suffice it to say that we consider philosophy majorly as a human activity aimed at going beyond face-value assumptions and our shared, unreflective understanding of things, issues, and realities through the insightful application of reason. We think this is what John Cottingham means when he states that:

*The philosopher typically subjects our everyday convictions to careful logical scrutiny, exposing inconsistencies and misconceptions, and attempting to arrive at a critical standpoint which will enable us to discard what is confused and to supply a solid rational justification for what is retained* (Cottingham, 2008: 3).

In this sense, philosophy will become more compelling and relevant when concerned with praxis rather than mere arm-chair contemplation and postulations. This is not to say that the contemplative philosophical life is not a worthwhile venture. Nevertheless, in a contemporary world such as we are in, it behooves us to rethink what Karl Marx said in his *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach*—that "philosophers have concentrated more on interpreting the world and that the point is to change it" (Skowroński, 2018: 111).

The word "praxis" is a noun meaning "action". It implies doing, acting, and practice. It is usually contrasted with *theoria*, which is more or less speculative (Allen, 2019). According to Nielsen (2016), praxis is a Greek word that refers to the practical application of a branch of learning—in this case, philosophy—to solve life's problems. Philosophical praxis has a long history. It dates back to Socrates and his method of dialectics, with which he haunted the streets of Athens and "midwived" the youths to think things through for themselves; to the likes of Epicurus, who questioned the unfounded assumptions of his culture; and down to Paulo Friere and his method of dialogic-for the conscientisation of people towards understanding reality from their own perspectives and as it affects them (Outlaw, 1991). For Paulo Freire (2005), the "method of dialogic" involves recognising that students come first. Teachers who approach students genuinely desire to learn from and understand them to create more productive connections. A simple method focusing on student participation helps students and teachers learn and teach better. Paulo Freire (2005) also stated that, although it might seem like a cliché or meaningless platitude, believing in pupils is an essential component of education and learning. High expectations combined with good teaching are a proven approach to communicate hope to students and guarantee they can see the effects of their hard work, demonstrating that a teacher's words of encouragement



and hope are not hollow. Believing in a student's capacity to learn may help them believe in themselves if said honestly and supported by evidence of what they have learnt.

However, in contemporary character, philosophical praxis is credited to Gerd Achenbach, a German philosopher who decided to revive the classical and time-honoured practice. He founded the Society for Philosophical Praxis in 1982 and established philosophical counselling as a profession that can guide praxis for effective practice and counselling.

Achenbach (1998) formulated what he called the four guideposts, or what we can term the four imperatives of philosophical counselling, namely,

1. A sincere, open communication between the practitioner and the client.
2. A heartfelt dialogue that flows from being.
3. A search for explanations in which the practitioner becomes united with the client's problem, not by imposing his explanations on the client, but by giving the client a fresh impulse to better explain himself or herself and disposition.
4. An element of wonder that does not allow for fixed viewpoints, standard attitudes, or permanent solutions.

A prominent philosophical counsellor, Lou Marinoff (2003), in his formulation, gives what seems to be more elaborate imperatives in the acronym PEACE, which stands for:

P — Problem identification, clearly isolating and defining the core problem.

E — Expressing emotions and feelings aroused or aggravated by the problem.

A — Analysing one's various options to address the problem. The philosopher here can bring relevant philosophical perspectives to the table to make the client see his/her problem in a new light.

C — Contemplation of the problem and all its ramifications from an objective philosophical perspective. The client here should be guided to choose the option that best suits his philosophical disposition.

E — Equilibrium - where the client is guided to a state of mind-balancing between motives and reason, with consequent doubts that had hitherto ruled his/her mind.

It should be noted that every area of philosophy or philosophical branch of philosophy is relevant in philosophical counselling. But this, of course, should depend on the problem the client (the one to be counselled) has at hand. Philosophical counselling is based on a sincere and insightful dialogue between the counsellor and the client, where the counsellor asks honest and probing questions of the client. The questions should be designed to agitate the mind of the client in such a way that he/she can discover the discrepancies and errors that underlie his/her problem. So, the Socratic method of question and answer, dialogic is the core method in philosophical counselling. But the counsellor must not be judgmental in his process of questioning. The process must be open-minded and objective.

It is important to note that philosophical practice is commonly referred to as philosophical counselling. Philosophical practice is instrumental when applied to attain a goal associated with satisfying some other end. These objectives could include resolving a problem, healing a wound, or re-establishing a sense of normalcy. Not all philosophical practitioners agree that philosophy should serve practical needs. For instance, Lahav (2006) regards solving personal problems as contrary to "philosophy in the original, deep sense of the word". In contrast, Achenbach (1995) claims that the point of philosophical practice is not to "produce solutions but rather question them all." Some philosophical practitioners, such as Cohen, promote therapy as an end to happiness and fulfillment. The participant determines the end, which could be reducing stress or achieving a sense of happiness. According to Boele (1995), understanding, solving, overcoming, or managing everyday problems is an objective of philosophical practice.

## 5. ARTICULATING A MODEL OF PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING FOR THE STREET URCHIN PHENOMENON

In the section above, we made some brief attempts to expose the meaning, nature, and dynamics of philosophical counselling. In this section, we shall attempt to articulate a model of philosophical counselling that we think is well suited for the problem under discussion. In this scheme, we have borrowed immensely from the framework and ideas of the foremost philosophical counsellors: Gerd Achenbach's the *four guide posts* and Lou Marinoff's five-step *PEACE* process. Both have been mentioned above. Both frameworks are closely intertwined and, of course, are fundamental to the practise of philosophical counselling.

Given the Nigerian street urchins' operations, the nature of their worldview, the system of governance and administration in Nigeria, socio-cultural relationships, and many other variables, we needed to re-jig the counselling process into a framework that we call *Philosophico-outreach Therapy*. This therapeutic model is still founded on the notion of the therapeutic nature of philosophy, as postulated by Gerd Achenbach and popularised by Lou Marinoff. Here, philosophy is seen as a healing art, both for the individual mind and society

as a whole. Marinoff notes that “philosophical counsellors do not simply prescribe wise sayings that instantly cure clients’ diseases, as taking aspirin might cure a headache” (2003: 239). Through the Socratic tradition, philosophers help their clients gain inner wisdom. Thus, therapy in the philosophical sense has to do with the contribution of philosophical resources to personal and social wellbeing.

The concept of “outreach” in this model is based on two factors: (1) the need to bring the intellectual endeavour to the market. This was Socrates’ occupation as he walked from street to street in Athens to instruct the youths on virtues, knowledge, morality, and other virtuous social qualities. Similarly, given that street urchins are primarily found in groups in the streets, the philosophy counsellor can take his counselling machinery (the laboratory of his mind) to them where they can be tested, diagnosed, and worked on. This is important because Nigerian street urchins, at first, may find it difficult to leave the streets for a counsellor’s office. (2) Since there are usually antecedents or causes of an event, one must assume that the street urchins are usually being pushed out into the streets by some preceding cause. These causes may be diverse, but they could be summarised as socio-cultural-environmental factors.

Consequently, there is a need to beam the counselling light on the agents related to these factors. For instance, parents, guardians, caretakers, government authorities, peer groups, religious leaders, etc. This searchlight, of course, will depend on the answers proffered by the urchins during the interaction. Since the notion of “outreach” implies reaching out to the interconnected relevant people, the counsellor must be prepared to interrogate and counsel all agents that come into focus when the prime client (the street urchins) is being interrogated. Counselling the secondary agents (those we consider to be the likely antecedents) is crucial if there is to be a sustainable solution to the issue of urchins since a diseased urchin is first and foremost the result of a diseased home environment and a diseased society as a whole (Momade, 2021).

To qualify as a philosophical counsellor, one must be a professional philosopher. This means that such a person must be a practising philosopher and be in the business of teaching philosophy. Of course, such a person must have a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Philosophy or be a doctoral candidate with prior experience teaching philosophy. It is also expedient to point out that in this model, philosophical counsellors may work in a group of three or four, depending on the number of urchins to be counselled. In order not to intimidate the street urchins, it is advisable that though counsellors work in groups, they only concentrate on one urchin at a given time. If there is any need to swap, then the counsellors can do that so long as it will lead to success. Counselling may last between three and five weeks, depending on how quickly the individual being counselled can absorb the information being imparted.

The challenge many people would point out is whether children or the philosophically uninformed would be able to comprehend philosophical theories given the abstract nature of the discipline. Philosophy can indeed be abstract. Yet it is also true that children, even as young as four years old, ask philosophical questions. For example, it is not uncommon to hear children ask questions like: “When people die, where do they go to?” Are there people living on the other side of the sky? If God is powerful, why does he allow wicked people to kill the good ones? These are all philosophical questions, yet some children ask them without being acquainted with or exposed to philosophy books. This means that they have the natural ability to philosophise. What we need is intellectual stimulation.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that children can participate in philosophical conversations, even with adults, with a profound understanding of the discourse (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2002). Good enough, the Philosophers’ Association of Nigeria (PAN) is pushing hard for the Ministry of Education to approve the introduction of the study of philosophy in pre-tertiary institutions. In a two-day workshop held in 2018, the participants suggested that the subject could be introduced as an ethics curriculum to prepare children to adapt to good ethical living in pursuit of authentic existence. The body noted that introducing philosophy from the cradle could help to curb the prevalence of cultural and moral decadence and social menace among children, as well as introduce them to sound consideration for the “self” and the “other” (Vanguard, 2018). Beyond this, the importance of philosophy for children has been underlined by the founding of some institutions to promote philosophy for children. For example, Mathew Lipman founded the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), and there is an international council for philosophical inquiry for children (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2002). So, in light of the contemporary interest in introducing philosophy to children and with the good promises philosophy holds for children, it is crucial and apt for philosophical inquiry and counselling to be brought to bear on the lives of street children.

Philosophical pondering is a natural element of everything “being human”. What is the proper course of action? Why must humans perish? Is this individual a friend of mine? When humans consider such concerns, they engage in philosophy, a tradition that has existed for thousands of years. While most individuals who consider philosophical issues are not professional philosophers, this does not exclude them from doing so. Numerous people believe that young children are too immature and unsophisticated to think deeply about complex subjects, even though they know that young children tend to ask many questions. Most adults likewise

describe youngsters as “inquisitive” and sometimes assume they are oblivious to the philosophical aspects of the more significant issues they pose. Most adults will remember that their intellectual wanderings began as youngsters. Even some professional philosophers’ interest in the discipline stemmed from a childhood love of questioning. Some people recall attending a philosophy class or reading a philosophical book and immediately recognising the questions as ones they have considered since they were children.

According to Cohen (2018), Fritz Piaget, a Swiss psychologist renowned for his research on child development, said that until the ages of 11 or 12, most children are incapable of philosophical thought. It should also be noted that Fritz Piaget believed that children aged 11 or 12 could reach the level of philosophical thought; his query was for children younger than that age (Piaget, 1933). However, philosopher Gareth Matthews (1980) argued that Piaget failed to recognise philosophical thought in the same children he observed during his study. Using Piaget’s detailed research, Matthews (1980) presents several amusing examples of the philosophical puzzlement in children. Thus, as Piaget originally suggested, Matthews (1980) demonstrates that philosophical thinking may be seen in children younger than 11 or 12. Furthermore, some psychological research (Astington, 1993; Gopnik et al., 1999; Gopnik, 2009) also reveals that Piaget’s model grossly underestimates children’s cognitive ability. They argue that children can engage in some form of philosophical discourse.

Jana Mohr Lone (2021) thinks philosophy is a profoundly creative and enjoyable endeavour for youngsters when the proper method is applied. They demonstrate what is frequently referred to as a “beginner’s mentality,” a new and open orientation to experience. In addition, the study indicates that children’s questioning or looking at adults for explanations of certain events is the most fundamental philosophical activity, reflecting on the conceptions to acquire knowledge of the world, others, and themselves. Christopher Lucas et al. (2014) assert that since children are less burdened by expectations about how things should be, they are more flexible thinkers and better problem-solvers than adults in some contexts. Kizel (2016) says that, unlike conventional philosophy, where students are passively introduced to ideas, philosophy with children fosters critical thinking in young practitioners. Children are inquisitive about parts of the world that most adults take for granted. Thus, every child is a product of philosophy. Every child wants attention, wants to be heard, wants to know and wants to explore. Even though young children do not read philosophical books, write philosophical papers, or get degrees in philosophy, they still engage in the philosophical enterprise in one way or another. This is part of the motivating factor that instigated us to propose the Philosophico-outreach Therapy (PoT) model of counselling to help deal with the issue of street urchins in Nigeria.

The Philosophico-outreach Therapy model of counselling involves five stages of systematic interrogation where the counsellor asks probing and open-minded questions. These stages are:

1. Problem awareness: the counsellor would inquire to draw the urchin’s attention to the problem in which he or she is engaged. Questions include: Do you know that, as a human being, you have the right to a decent life? Do you know you have the right to shelter? Do you know that eating from the waste bins means that you are dehumanised? Do you know the interest you seem to be pursuing in the streets is a negative one and can ruin your life? The counsellor can continue with so many other relevant questions. What is important is that these questions are consciously and systematically asked to expose the urchin to the negativity of living the way he/she does. At this level, the urchin would be guided to understand that he/she is living an inauthentic life. Asking basic questions about the ambivalence of inauthentic existence (Akpan, 2011) would show the paradoxes that plague the lives of street children. These interrogative insights would prepare the urchin’s awareness to reject his current condition of inauthenticity, compelling him to look forward to a better state.
2. Interrogating the socio-cultural-environmental factors: here, the counsellor raises questions about the possible causes of the urchin’s present state from the social, cultural, and environmental angles. Questions about the beliefs of society and culture, the tranquilly or chaos of the surroundings, and whether the street urchin was abandoned or self-abandoned. Akpan and Bassey (2020) suggested that child abandonment is a kind of child maltreatment that significantly contributes to the street urchin phenomenon. Akpan and Bassey (2020: 13) see child abandonment or neglect as “withdrawing support and care from the child despite the natural allegiance, congeniality, or responsibility to care for the child”. Investigating such a social phenomenon may even reveal some superstitions based on witchcraft and the like. Hence, the counsellor must bring some critical thinking and expository objectivity. As Nancy Cavender and Howard Kahane (2013: 125) note, “the odd thing about superstitious beliefs is that their complete irrationality doesn’t seem to stop even the most brilliant people from having (or believing in) them.” In other words, the counsellor need not be carried away by appeals to superstition. Instead, the counsellor should apply some subtle critical thinking to disarm the mind of the person being counselled.

3. Justification for his/her current behaviour: Since every street urchin could give some reasons for taking to the streets, the counsellor must be able to raise questions in order to guide the urchin to table those fundamental reasons that would make him risk his/her life on the streets. In their study of how social networks affect street children in Ibadan, Nigeria, Omiyinka (2009) discovered that when street children were asked why they took to the streets, their reasons ranged from the loss of parents, maltreatment by caretakers, poverty, peer group influence, and the like. A counsellor should not disregard the reasons given by the street urchins. Instead, such reasons should provide the foundation upon which the counsellor will work. In addition, the counsellor must investigate the socio-emotional capability of the street children: how they feel about others in society; if they have empathy for others; and, if they do, why they would harm (assuming he/she participated in theft, pickpocketing, rape, etc.) other people. This is very important, especially as the socio-emotional capacity of the street urchins may not be appealing. This is why Bosah et al. (2015: 52), for example, note that "street hawking is one of the debilitating factors that influence the socio-emotional development of the children involved and society at large." The implication is that children whose socio-emotional development has been stalled by street life will not feel empathy towards others and may be unable to manage their frustrations and disappointments in a more civilised way. This is why counsellors must play a unique role in violent behaviour and seek to redirect the energy of the young to a more profitable venture (Oko and Okoli, 2015).
4. Equilibrium: Here, the counsellor must be able to appeal to as many philosophies of hope for a better life as possible to bring inner balance to the urchin: that he or she can still make it through a better means than being sentenced to the streets. Ethical values and existential philosophies must be laid bare to the clients to understand that there are better possibilities for a functional and meaningful social life than the detestable street life. Their minds must be prodded to understand the negativity of moral dissonance and be made to come to terms with social life as the life of being with others in a complementary relationship. The moral philosophy of Socrates, based on the dictum of the 'unexamined life is not worth living', should be the anchor point for bringing the urchin in question to a stage of equilibrium. This inner balance and harmony can only be achieved through a genuine and sincere philosophical resolution of the issue ("Philosophical Counseling").
5. Outreach Therapeutic Session: At this point, it is assumed that the urchin has achieved inner balance and harmony through interrogation. It is, therefore, the place of the counsellor to reach out to those connected or related to the urchin in one way or another. In this context, the parents or caretaker could be traced and approached for a counselling session. The counsellor should be able to interrogate the parents or caretakers with relevant questions that could help them understand the dangers and inauthenticity of allowing their wards or subjects to experience street life. In this way, the counsellor should appeal to the philosophies of care, conflict and resolution, reconciliatory philosophies, relevant ethical theories, and the like for total equilibrium of the circle of relations between the urchin and the antecedent. If the parents and caregivers are capable, it is possible they could take back their children. If they are not, the counsellor must follow up to liaise with a willing philanthropist who can help further rehabilitate the urchin.

It is important to note that the outreach session must get to the relevant government agencies and officials. This is because counselling the urchins alone will not have a positive impact without adequate funding. Hence, dialoguing with governmental agencies, top officials of government and relevant non-governmental organisations for funding and rehabilitation of the urchins are necessary aspects of the outreach session. The philosophical counsellors should devise a relevant mode of conversation in their engagement with such offices and officials to see the need for providing funds and the wherewithal for rehabilitation of the urchins. It is not expected to be an easy task, no doubt. With the expertise of the philosophical counsellor, who, as a philosopher, must have undergone training in critical thinking, it is possible to act as the gadfly in stinging and stimulating the relevant bodies to their responsibility. With this, rehabilitation of the urchin into mainstream society is possible and would provide enduring healing to both parties.

## 6. PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELING, THE QUANDARY OF STREET URCHINS AND LOPSIDED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

The question we seek to address here is how philosophical counselling (as we propose) would succeed in dealing with the menace of street children in the face of bad governance, incongruent policies, and the like, as witnessed in Nigeria. It is important to note that philosophy is arguably the mother of all disciplines. So philosophy is at the foundation of every human discipline, especially with regard to socio-political, economic,



and cultural issues as they concern us in this work. Hence, since the issue under discussion is relevant to public administration, philosophy has a role in enlightening the officials and citizenry about what good governance and management should be (Ikegbu and Bassey, 2019). After all, public administration concerns the study, analysis, organisation, and implementation of government policies and programs concerning the life and place of the citizens. According to Rabin et al. (1989), public administration is the advancement of government management and policies to ensure that government programmes can function correctly. It involves translating government policies into what the citizens see in their everyday experiences. Following from the above, it could be seen that the central goal of any government is to set in motion meaningful programmes for the citizens. This means that government should strive to achieve noble ends and a good life for its citizens by using the appropriate means. The question of what constitutes the “noble ends,” the “good life,” and “right means” actually falls under the domain of philosophical inquiry. This is why we have moral/ethical theories to guide human actions; political philosophies, educational philosophies, economic philosophies, and other sub-disciplines of philosophies aimed at questioning the approaches and principles of governance and, by so doing, stimulating government to do the right thing for the citizens. In this sense, philosophical counselling becomes quite apt and essential in contributing its quota to the government in dealing with the social malady of street urchins.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian government does not seem serious about implementing programmes that can ameliorate the suffering of the urchins. Surprisingly, there are Ministries of Youth and Social Welfare and other governmental agencies at every state and federal level that should take care of this issue under discussion. Interestingly, as shown earlier, the country is not in the lag of programmes formulated by the government and non-governmental agencies to deal with this phenomenon. However, what is lagging is the political will to implement and enforce the programmes. Hence, as correctly pointed out by Omiyinka and Femi (2010: 488), the “crosscutting tasks” of government have “yielded little or no significant impact on improving the lot of children in the streets.” The reason, as they noted, is significant because the measures taken are politically ill-motivated, uncoordinated, poorly implemented, and largely unenforced. In this regard, Akindele et al. (2002) decried the lopsided administration, the wrong quota system, federal character and untoward conflicts of interest as the bane of administration in the country. Hence, they call for a reorientation of the citizenry and the public technocrats if there is to be sustainable development in Nigerian society.

Given the aforementioned difficulty, we must accept the necessity of philosophical counselling as a potential means of addressing the problem of street urchins through its outreach approach, in which all parties involved (the urchins, their parents/caretakers, and the relevant government officials and agencies) are to be involved in resolving the issue. Contemporary Nigerian society is in a deep mess of crisis regarding value orientation. This has led to moral decadence or moral dissonance, especially concerning our youth and political leaders (Egbeji, 2019; Onyemachi, 2020). This value crisis cannot be resolved through technology or science, which the country so desperately desires. While science and technology have some role to play in the development of the nation in some other aspects relevant to its nature (Akpan, 2005; Bassey, 2020), it is left to philosophers to rise to the occasion of dealing with the issue of values and ethical well-being of the nation. More importantly, armchair philosophising will not help our wallowing youth on the streets. Hence, we must take philosophy to the marketplace *ala* Socrates’ style of philosophising through what we have articulated here as *Philosophico-outreach Therapy (PoT)*.

Because intellect, reason, and objectivity are highly prized in human effort, although subjective opinions, emotions, and experiences are not, philosophico-outreach therapy is vital in engaging street urchins in Nigeria. Philosophers must invest intellectually in their responsibilities as Socratic gadflies, teachers of critical reasoning, curators of ideas, social critics, trainers of aesthetic sense, and doctors of the soul. The practitioner’s job as a Socratic gadfly is to find the child’s worldview and any logical flaws he/she may have. As a critical thinking instructor, the practitioner encourages the participant to critically engage with his or her worldview. It is believed that via this procedure, he/she would have the argumentation and reasoning abilities required to continue this process independently. As an idea curator, the practitioner introduces the participant to numerous philosophical perspectives and concepts. The practitioner must have extensive and profound philosophical expertise in this regard. As a social critic, the practitioner questions commonly held values, ideas, and beliefs. Like the sceptic and cynic, the practitioner is not compelled to replace the concepts she has dismantled. As an aesthetic perception trainer, the practitioner’s job would be to give the participant the information and experience she needs to improve her sense of beauty.

It should be noted that trust concerns may arise during therapy sessions. However, for therapy to be effective, the client must be honest about their experiences and habits. However, many clients have spent their whole lives avoiding or hiding the same things they need to share in therapy. Many individuals have hidden ideas, sentiments, and feelings of shame. It might be tough to share things with a stranger, much less a therapist. It takes time for a therapist to gain a client’s trust, and therapists should not expect all clients to open up

immediately. It is critical to level the playing field at the start of therapy; the philosopher should openly ask for the child's expectations for therapy and gently correct any misinformation about the therapeutic process. It is crucial to frequently continue that openness by sharing how the process might unfold; initial sessions can be far less comfortable than future ones. The philosopher must work hard to understand the client—starting with the idea that the counsellor cannot know the urchin's world without listening carefully. Frequent questions are essential; for example, ask what "family" means and who is theirs. The philosopher must not assume that their idea of anything matches the urchin's idea. It is the philosopher's job to assess the situation carefully and correctly. If the philosopher has a misconception about the urchin's situation, it could complicate things for the urchin and impede progress towards the goal. Like in any other relationship, respect is essential in developing trust between therapist and client. The philosopher must respect the clientele from the start. The philosopher must make them feel valued. Personal information can also help create trust between the philosopher and the client. However, understanding when and how much to share is critical.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to expose the menace of street urchins in Nigeria. We argue that this phenomenon constitutes part of the social ills that the country is currently facing. It is shown that government and non-government organisations' attempts to address the problem have failed. The reason adduced is that they failed to ask fundamental and broad-based questions. We, therefore, proposed philosophical counselling as a framework of praxis for philosophers to try and see whether the phenomenon of street urchins could be curbed. We showed in the work that philosophical counselling has a long history dating back to Socrates. However, the work appealed more to prominent contemporary philosophical counselling as structured by Gerd Achenbach and Lou Marinoff.

Given the Nigerian factor and the subject matter of street urchins, we introduced a philosophical counselling model called *Philosophic-outreach Therapy (PoT)*. This model has five stages of interrogation with an emphasis on reaching out to the urchins and their antecedents in a Socratic manner, taking philosophy to the marketplace. Questions and answers concerning the awareness of the problem at hand, socio-cultural-environmental factors, the rationale for the urchins' present behaviour, and balancing the mindset through relevant ethical buffers are the hallmarks of this process. We must, at this juncture, make the point that this proposed model is different from psychotherapy, which has to do with treating emotional or mental maladies through psychological means. As earlier stated, the therapy we refer to in this model is philosophical. It involves the prescription of relevant philosophical principles and values to impinge on the minds of those being counselled. Its goal is to use philosophical resources such as ethical theories and critical thinking to guide the person(s) to reflect on problems that negatively affect the mind. We believe, to a large extent, it can contribute to the behaviour modification of the distraught. We also showed that philosophical inquiry and counselling are necessary for governance in Nigeria, especially given the lopsided nature of public administrative processes in Nigeria. Given this systematic counselling model where philosophic resources and theories are applied, this paper posits that many street urchins could be re-humanised and their social menace reduced to the barest minimum.

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