



Perceived Impact of Urban Waterfront Dwellers' Forced Eviction on Housing, Security and Social Support System in Njemanze and Otodo-Gbame Informal Settlements, Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author CHW designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author CAE managed the analyses of the study and the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the impact forced eviction has on the lives of urban waterfront community dwellers with regards to their housing, security and social support system. Its overall aim is to identify the level of impacts forced eviction had on the inhabitants of the urban waterfront communities and to highlight the need to view forced eviction as a major trigger for a humanitarian disaster. The focus was on two (2) urban waterfront informal settlements in two different cities in Nigeria, namely Njemanze community in Port Harcourt and Otodo-Gbame community in Lagos state. The survey research method was used in this study. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered to affected residents of Njemanze and Otodo-Gbame urban communities. The study

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revealed that the lives and livelihood of the target population were permanently damaged in one stroke by the singular act of forced eviction and that it provided the impetus for deeper housing problems and security challenges amongst others. It recommends that the government should understand that their first responsibility is to protect lives and property and against this backdrop, approach slum areas seeking community partnership in slum upgrading. Furthermore, the study strongly concluded that forced eviction does not lead to the eradication of slums, rather it causes a humanitarian crisis.

Keywords: Force eviction; housing; security; social support system; urban dwellers; waterfront.

1. INTRODUCTION

The UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights defines a forced eviction as “the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection [1,2]. The committee has emphasized in its general comment No. 7 that evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored and all procedural protections are in place. These include “an opportunity for genuine consultation with those affected; adequate and reasonable notice for affected persons before the eviction; information on the proposed evictions, and, where applicable, on the alternative purpose for which the land or housing is to be used, to be made available in reasonable time to all those affected, government officials or their representatives to be present during an eviction; all persons carrying out the eviction to be properly identified, evictions not to take place in particularly bad weather or at night unless the affected person consent otherwise, provision of legal remedies and provision, where possible, of legal aid to persons who need it to seek redress from the courts [1,2].

Adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses must be made available to those affected, regardless of whether they rent, own, occupy or lease the land or housing in question. Evictions must not “render individuals homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights” [1,2]. The prohibition on forced evictions does not, however, apply to evictions carried out by the law and in conformity with the provisions of the International Convention on Human Rights. The UN Commission on Human Rights has also recognized that forced evictions constitute gross violations of a range of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing [1,2].

On 28 August 2009, Njemanze informal settlement in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, was demolished as part of the state authorities’ urban renewal programme for the city. It is estimated that between 13,800 and 19,000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes. These evictions were carried out without prior and genuine consultation with residents and the provision of adequate notice, compensation or alternative accommodation and legal remedies (See Plate 1). Thousands of people, including children, women and the elderly were left homeless and vulnerable to other human rights violations [3]. Njemanze is one of more than 40 urban waterfront settlements [4] in Port Harcourt, which make up some of the city’s most densely populated areas [4]. If the authorities continue with the planned demolitions of all remaining waterfront settlements without first implementing adequate human rights safeguards, more than 200,000 people will be at risk of losing their homes and livelihoods. The Rivers State government claims the demolition of the waterfronts is necessary to implement the Greater Port Harcourt Master Plan, the main strategy document for the city’s redevelopment programme. But the plan has been developed without consultation with the communities affected and it has not been made publicly available. The state Governor has also repeatedly stated that “the demolition exercise will sanitize and check criminal activities” in the city [5].

In a likewise manner, Otodo-Gbame is an Egun word that means ‘houses built in the swamp’. It is located on the Lekki peninsular. Since 2014, there has been an on-going war over the acres of land the community has dwelt on over a decade. On the 11th of November, 2014, the Eleguchi royal family brought notice to the community giving them one week to vacate their community [2,6]. Before the expiration of the notice, thugs invaded the community with guns and machetes and the ensuing fracas led to the demise of a community member. On November 17, the thugs

returned and yet claimed another life. After these events, there was relative calm in the community until October 9, 2016, when the Governor of the State issued a statement stating that all waterfront communities in Lagos would be demolished. In response, the community assisted by Justice and Empowerment Initiative filed a suit seeking an injunction. This injunction was granted by the court. On the 9th of November, 2016, security personnel and thugs invaded the community and set some houses

ablaze. Terrorized by the security forces and thugs, the residents jumped into the lagoon for safety [2,7]. That day, 15 people lost their lives. Later on, that day, excavators were driven into the community to completely demolish the remaining structures that the fire of the previous night did not claim (See Plate 2). It's important to note that in all these, a court injunction prohibiting these activities was defiantly flouted. The people yet appealed to the judiciary system after these happenings.



Plate 1. A mother and three children, left homeless in the wake of the demolition



Plate 2. Sprawling luxury apartments built by private individuals dot the shoreline on real estate adjacent to the ruins of the Otodogbame community

The Court hereafter instructed the parties involved in the dispute to settle out-of-court through mediation. This was said on the 17th of March 2017. Less than two weeks later, the first meeting took place and it was largely unsuccessful. Security agents and thugs simultaneously carried out a random attack on the community. These attacks culminated to the attack that took place on the 9th of April, 2017. Justice and Empowerment Initiative estimates that 30,000 people have been displaced by the demolition [2,7].

Therefore, amidst a lot of relevant vital studies on forced eviction, it was observed by the researchers that there was none done on the impact of forced eviction on communities forcefully evicted in Port Harcourt metropolis and the Otodo-gbame eviction. This is the gap that this present study seeks to fill. The socio-political and economic climate in these two locations are peculiar and has a bearing on the community life of the people.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study is designed to pursue a number of objectives: Firstly, is to investigate the impact of urban waterfront dwellers forced eviction on housing development in the two mega cities in Nigeria, Lagos and Port Harcourt. The second objective is to examine the impact urban waterfront dwellers forced eviction has on security of life and properties of the evicted victims. Lastly, is to discuss the impact of these evictions on the social support system in the two Nigerian cities.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey research method was adopted for this study. The data used comprised of primary and secondary data. The primary data was gotten using structured questionnaires while the secondary source of information was gotten from online sources such as journals, newspapers, intellectual articles, etc. The sample frame consists of already demolished urban waterfront communities in the Port Harcourt metropolis. Njemanze waterfront community was selected amongst all the demolished urban waterfront informal settlements for survey using the purposive sampling technique. This decision was influenced by the fact that the nature of eviction disperses people to diverse places. Similarly, Otodo-Gbame urban waterfront community in Lagos was selected as a result of the on-going

eviction exercise taking place providing the researchers with ample opportunity to gather the information that would reflect the immediate impacts of forced eviction. The particular respondents that the questionnaire was administered to were selected using the Snowball sampling method. Here already evicted community members upon filling the questionnaire connected us to the location where other clusters of former community members now reside. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered to affected residents of Njemanze and Otodo-Gbame urban waterfront communities. A questionnaire was prepared and distributed to the sample size. It was divided into three categories, namely; pre-eviction, eviction and post-eviction. Generally, the questions were designed to give the researchers information about the impact eviction had on their lives; particularly on housing, security and social support system. This served as the primary tool for data collection.

The sampled data were used in comparing results and drawing conclusion. Percentages and column charts merged with tables were used in the description and analysis of data. Pie charts and bar charts were also used appropriately. Excel software was deployed in production of various charts.

2.1 Study Area

Presently, Port Harcourt is situated within latitudes 04°43' and 04°57' North of the Equator and between longitudes 06°53' and 07°58' East of the Greenwich Meridian. It is surrounded by patches of islands and creeks of the Niger Delta, such as the Dockyard creek, Bonny River and Amadi creek, at a height of about 12 m above sea level. It is approximately 60km from the crest upstream of the Bonny River. Port Harcourt is presently composed of two Local Government Areas, which are Port Harcourt and Obio / Akpor Local Government Areas (LGA) respectively (See Fig. 1). The city is bounded to the north by Oyigbo and Etche LGAs, to the south by Okrika LGA, to the east by Okrika and Eleme LGAs, and to the west by Emohua LGA [8].

From a humble beginning with about 5,000 people, the population of Port Harcourt grew rapidly to about 17,158 in 1921. In 1926, Port Harcourt was made the provincial headquarter; this further led to the rapid growth of her population, such that by 1953 national census, the population of Port Harcourt had increased to

about 71,634 and 213,443 in 1973. The 1991 census figure put the population of both Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt city LGAs at 703,416 with Obio/Akpor LGA accounting for 263,017 and Port Harcourt city LGA put at 440,399 [9]. Based on a growth rate of 2.84%, the projected population from 1991 figures for these LGAs put the population at 521,199 for Port Harcourt LGA and 311,199 for Obio/Akpor LGA for 1996. For 1999 projection, the figures are 552,745 (Port Harcourt), and 330,113 (Obio/Akpor). For 2002 projection, it is 605,981 (Port Harcourt), 361,906 (Obio/Akpor). The 2006 population and housing census put the population of the metropolis at 1,017,461 [10]. As Port Harcourt population and urbanization pushes higher and higher, the city's expansion in spatial context continues through the submerging of neighbouring autonomous villages and indiscriminate reclamation of waterfronts thus

making this study area one of the most rapidly growing conurbation in Nigeria [8]. Fig. 1 shows the study area while Fig. 2 illustrates the waterfronts in the study area.

According to Ogionwo [11], Port Harcourt has been geologically classified as the northern coastal and the southern lower delta planes; and it consists of accumulated cretaceous and tertiary sediments [12]. The relief of Port Harcourt region is a low-lying plane with tidal variations that influences the numerous rivers, creeks, swamps and the Atlantic Ocean serving as a unique drainage surface, though with a poor network essentially due to low relief, high water table and high rainfall. The land surface slope gently in an NW-SE direction [13]. While the dry land area of the region is characterized by an equal thickness of the upper soil layer of silt and sand. The entire topography is made up of low

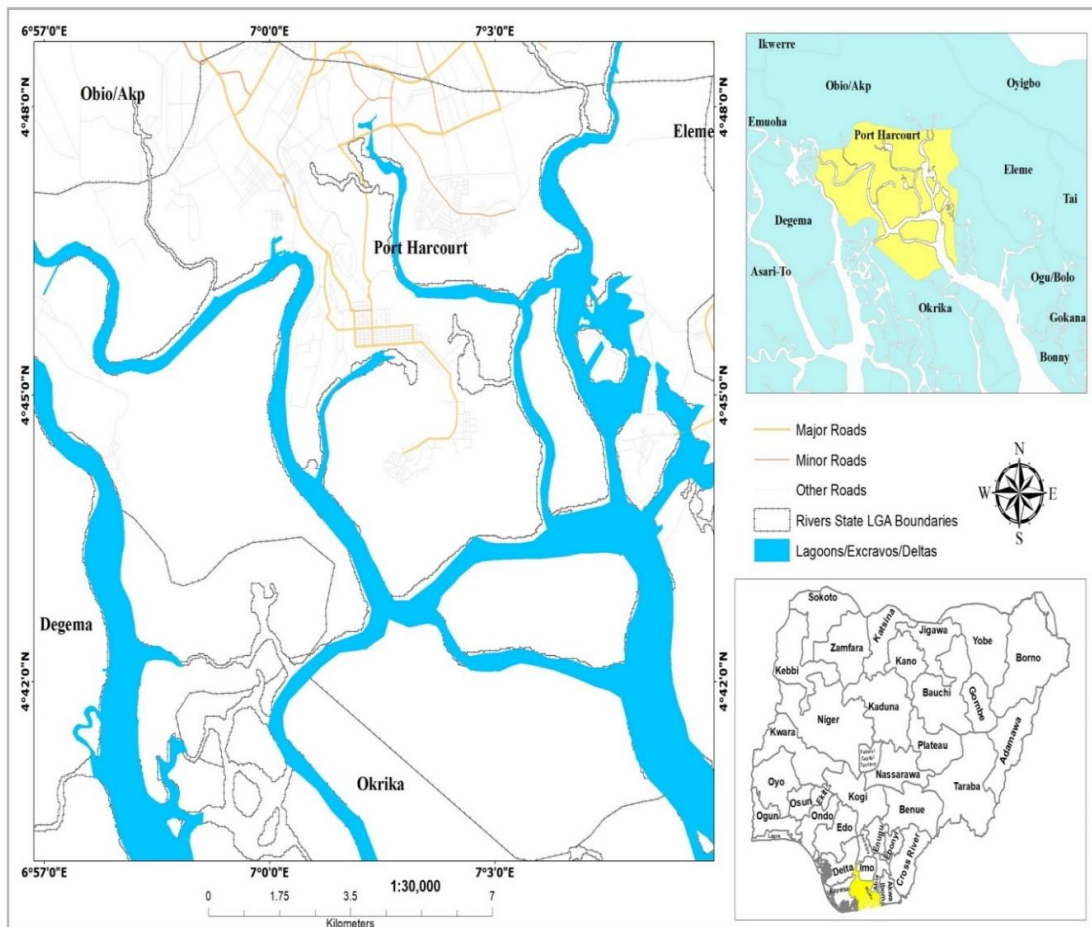


Fig. 1. Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State depicting the water bodies and landmass within Port Harcourt

Source: Joseph (GIS Specialist, JEI)

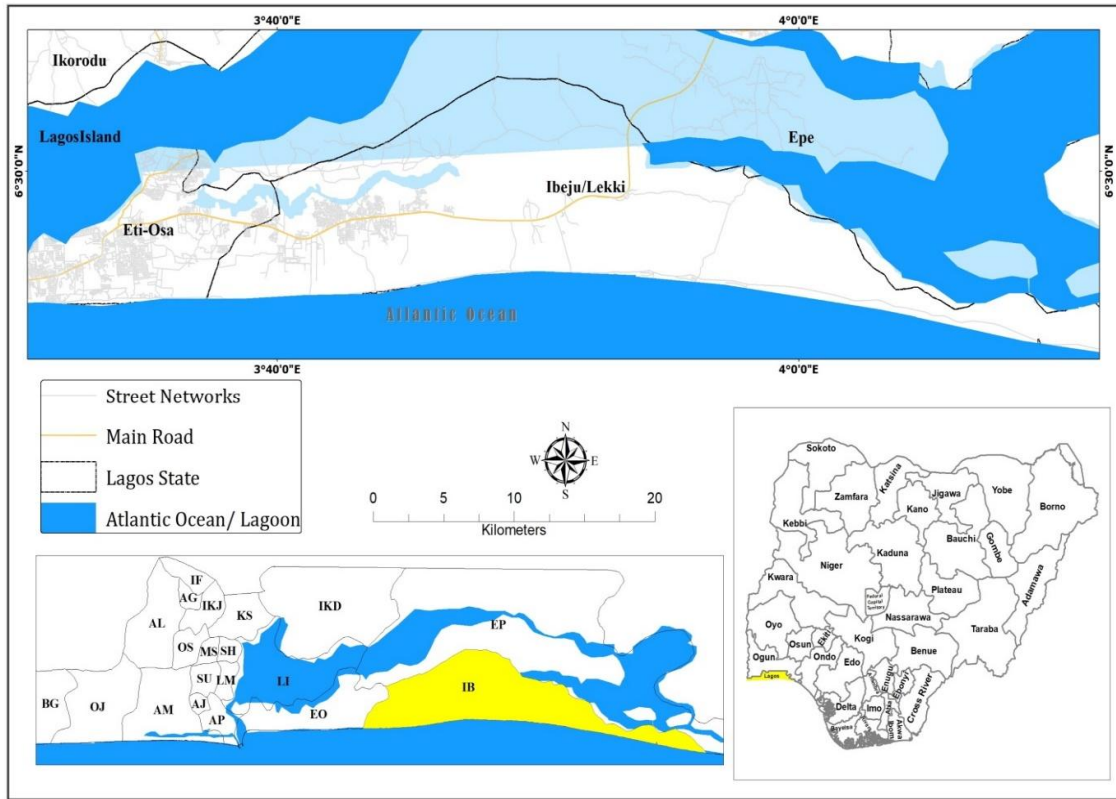


Fig. 2. Highbrow Lekki axis of Lagos State depicting the ocean and lagoon that borders the land mass

Source: Joseph (GIS Specialist, JEI)

lying planes generally less than 20 m above sea level and sloping gently in a north-south direction to the sea. It is a relatively flat terrain with a gradient of not more than 3%. Port Harcourt city is marked by very heavy rains during the rainy season and short dry seasons. This is typical of a tropical monsoon climate. Mostly, the months of December and January truly qualifies as dry season months in the city. The heaviest rainfalls in Port Harcourt are experienced during September and record an average of 367 mm of rain. December on average is the driest month of the year; with an average rainfall of 20 mm, thus harmattan which climatically influences many cities in West Africa, is less pronounced in Port Harcourt. The temperature throughout the year in the city is relatively constant, showing little variation throughout the year. The average temperature is typically between 25–28°C in the city.

Lagos is situated in the South-Western part of Nigeria, Lagos shares boundaries with Ogun

state on its northern and western axis. On the western axis of the State, it is bounded by the Republic of Benin. A natural boundary lies on its southern side, the Atlantic Ocean. Close to a quarter of Lagos State is made up of water bodies (See Fig. 2). Formation of tertiary beds from Benin stretches from as far as Calabar in the east, through Lagos State, onto the fringes of the Benin Republic. Currently the most populous state in the federation, the Lagos state regional master plan now puts the state's current population at 5,685,781. With an area of 3,577 square kilometres, the population density is 1,590 persons per square kilometre. The least populated local government is Ibeju Lekki at 0.4% of the entire population in the state, while Ojo Local Government ranks as the highest at 17.8% [14]. Lagos has a tropical wet and dry/savanna climate with a pronounced dry season in the low-sun months, no cold season, the wet season is in the high-sun months. Lagos is situated in or near the tropical dry forest biome. The mean annual temperature is 26.8



Fig. 3. Satellite Imagery of Otodo-gbame Community, Lekki before Demolition
Source: JEI

degrees Celsius. Average monthly temperatures vary by 3.45°C [14]. Lagoons, creeks and sand bars characterize the coastal plain upon which Lagos is situated. The soil has good potential for agriculture because it is not very high above sea level but the available arable land is little. The vegetation is majorly such as is consistent with swampy forest along the coastal belt and the dry lowland rain forests. Mangrove and other coastal vegetation are found in the swamp forests [14]. Satellite Imagery of Otodo Gbame before demolition is shown in Fig. 3.

3. RESULTS

Data analyzed here reflects the responses gotten from the respondents in the affected community. These respondents were selected based on availability, accessibility and the emotional state needed to answer questions relating to their home and life after being evicted. The column charts below were merged with the tables depicting the responses of respondents to certain questions. Certain pre and post-eviction questions were comparatively analysed and depicted in the column chart. Where appropriate, pie charts and bar charts were also used. The data was analysed in segments, each segment answering a specific research question and the conclusion derived afterwards.

3.1 Impact of Forced Eviction on Social Support System of the Affected Urban Community Dwellers

The results of the study on the impact of forced eviction on the social support system of affected urban community dwellers are shown in Figs. 4 to 8.

Fig. 4 compares the responses the respondents gave to the question of their pre-eviction and post-eviction relationship status. There was a significant drop in the percentage of married people before the eviction and after the eviction from 71% to 30%. The study also revealed a major rise in the percentage of separated people from 0% to 28%. Sadly, the number of widows more than doubled after eviction occurred than before eviction. The two case studies are similar in this regard.

Fig. 5 shows the respondents proximity to parents before eviction and after eviction. It was observed that there was a 27% decline in the number of respondents that lived close to their parents after forced eviction took place in Njemanze and Otodo gbame urban waterfront settlements.

Fig. 6 depicts the responses by respondents concerning their proximity to their siblings before

eviction and after eviction. It shows a significant 74% decline in the number of respondents who were living close to their siblings after eviction. The implication of this result is that majority of

urban waterfront dwellers forcefully evicted in Njemanze, Port Harcourt and Otodo Gbame, Lagos became separated from their siblings with all associated ethical and moral consequences.

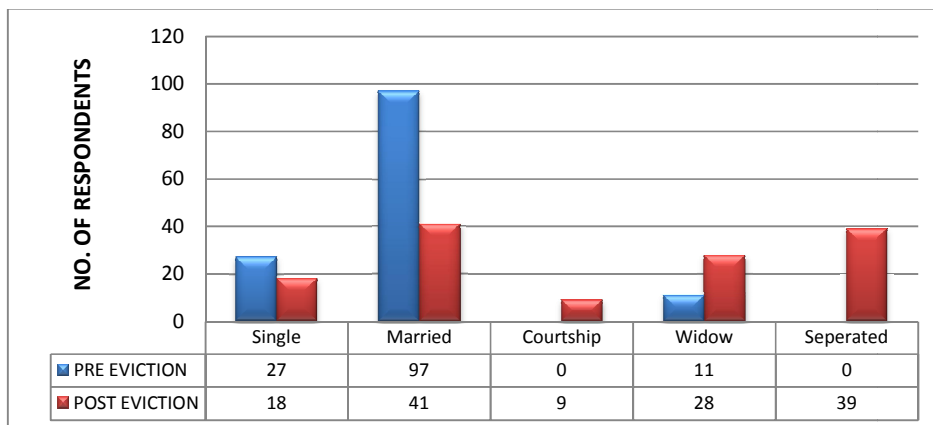


Fig. 4. Comparative analysis of pre-eviction and post-eviction relationship status of respondents

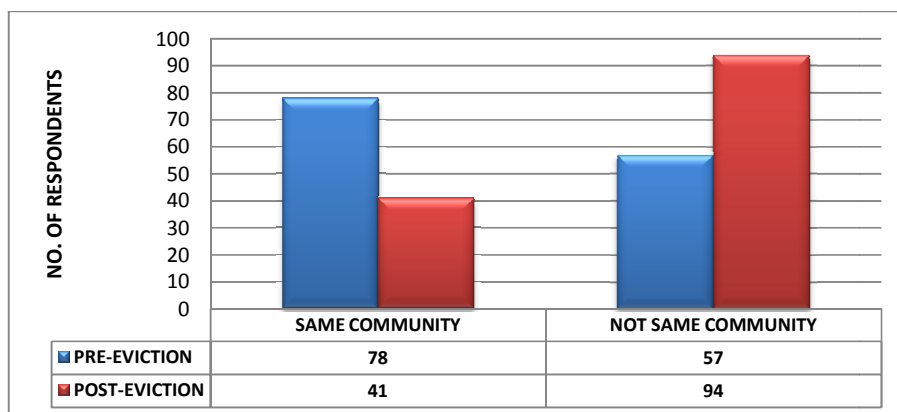


Fig. 5. Comparative analysis of pre-eviction and post-eviction proximity of respondents to parents

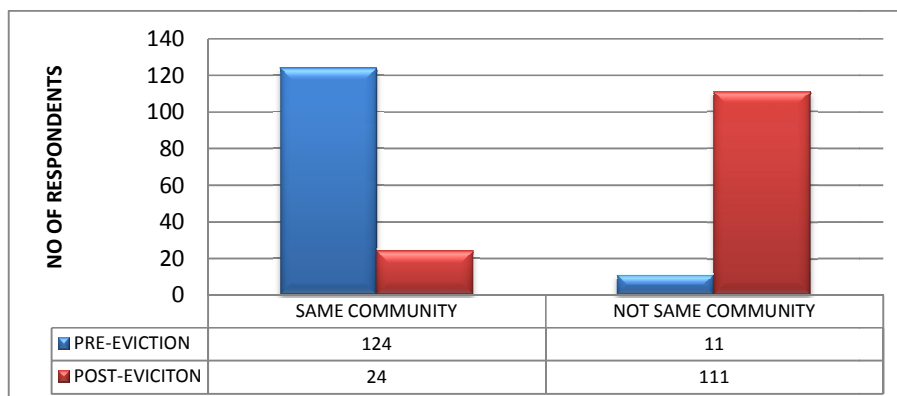


Fig. 6. Comparative analysis of pre-eviction and post-eviction proximity of respondents to siblings

Fig. 7 represents the number of respondents that had children born to them before eviction. 91% of the respondents acknowledged that they had children before the demolition of their community.

Fig. 8 compares the number of respondents who lived with their children in the same roof before eviction and revealed the situation after eviction. After eviction 53% of the respondents that previously had their children living with them reported that their children got separated from them post-eviction.

3.2 Impact of Forced Eviction on Formal Education of the Children in the Affected Urban Communities

Results on the impact of forced eviction on formal education of the children in the affected urban informal settlements are summarized in Figs. 9 and 10.

Fig. 9 depicts a comparative study of the impact of eviction on the ability of respondents' children to continue going to school immediately after the eviction and demolition of their homes. The number of children not in school after eviction increased by 82%.

Result in Fig. 10 reflects the length of time the children of respondents stayed away from school as a result of the forced eviction, before being able to continue their education. 42 respondents had their children stay away from school between one year and one year six months.

3.3 Impact of Forced Eviction on Housing and Security of the Evicted Urban Waterfront Community Dwellers

Figs. 11 to 14 reveals the impact of forced eviction on housing and security of the evicted urban waterfront community dwellers in the study area. Fig. 11 shows a pre eviction and post-eviction comparative study of respondents who were structure owners and tenants. After the eviction, only 3 respondents remained as structure owners while 132 respondents who were previously structure owners became tenants.

Fig. 12 shows the places respondents took immediate shelter upon the demolition of their urban waterfront community. 55% of respondents stated that they stayed in churches after their community was demolished.

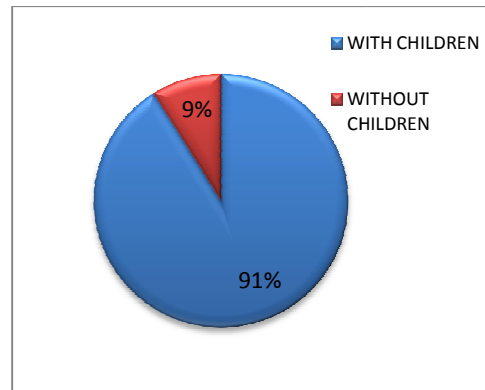


Fig. 7. Respondents with children or without children before eviction

Fig. 13 shows the length of time that elapsed before evicted respondents were able to get another place of their own. It took 69 respondents 1 year – 1 year 6 months to resettle in their places elsewhere with all the negative consequences.

Fig. 14 is a comparative column chart depicting respondents feeling of safety and security in the community of residence before eviction and after eviction. 15 respondents acknowledged feeling safe or very safe in the community of residence while the rest felt indifferent or unsafe.

4. PUBLIC POLICIES REGARDING FORCED EVICTIONS AND URBAN SLUM SETTLEMENTS IN NIGERIA

In discussing this subject, it is important to note that Nigeria has made some efforts in formulating policies to upgrade urban slum settlements despite being ranked third among the worse violators of housing rights by the Geneva-based COHRE [15]. The Nigerian authorities has overtime formulated some policies to realistically address the critical housing problems and urban developmental challenges like urban sprawl, slums/squatter settlements.

The major policies formulated includes the National Housing Policy of 1991 which was revised in 2006 and 2012; the Urban and Regional Planning Law of 1992; and the Urban Development Policy of 2012. The National Housing Policy of 2006 and 2012 has provisions for a number of strategies for the prevention of urban slums, improvement of existing squatter settlements or shanties and prevention of forced eviction. The policy statements are robust and proactive. Some sections of the policy require the

three tiers of government in Nigeria to provide residential layouts for new urban housing. The World Bank and United Nations promoted this policy in developing nations to ensure that the poor and low-income households have unhindered access to standard housing [16].

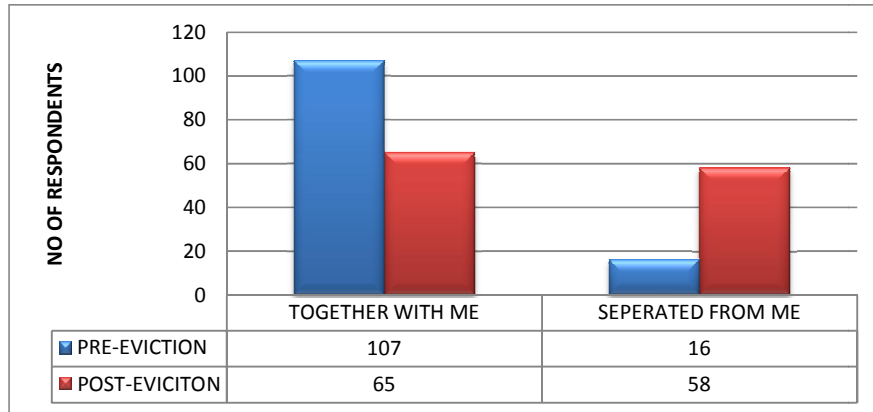


Fig. 8. Comparative analysis of proximity to children pre-eviction and post-eviction

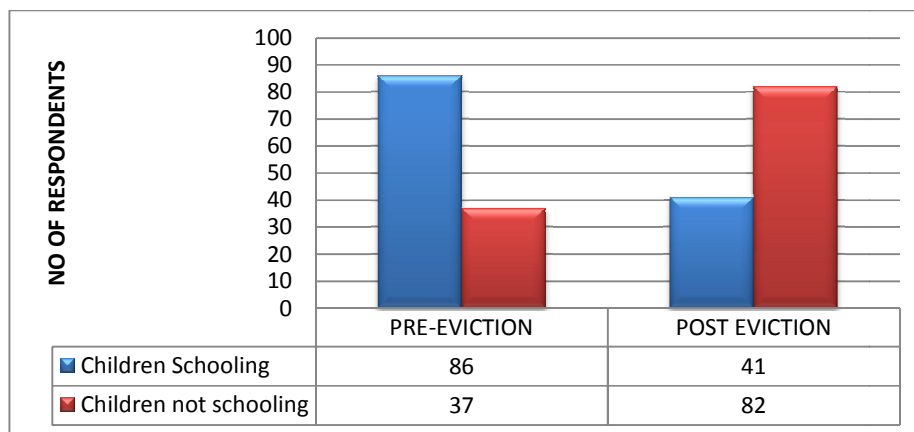


Fig. 9. Comparative analysis of the impact of eviction on the children schooling before eviction and immediately after eviction

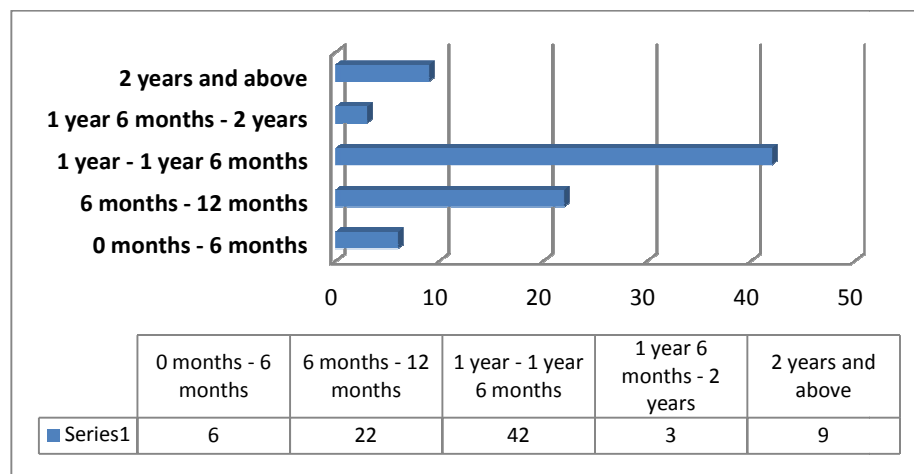


Fig. 10. Length of time children stayed without formal education post-eviction

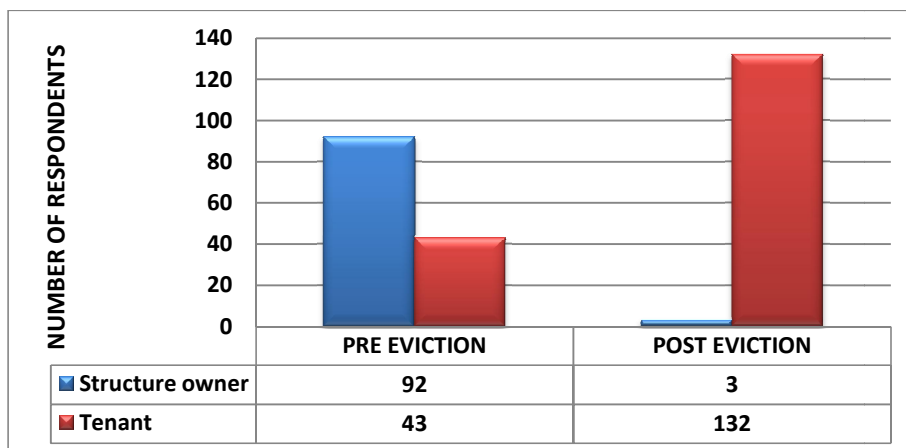


Fig. 11. Comparative chart showing number of respondents who were structures owners and tenants pre and post eviction

With regards to slum upgrading which was usually the excuse made by the Nigerian authorities in most forced evictions, the National Housing Policy of 2006 and 2012 and the Urban Development Policy of 2012 propose systematic upgrading and not eviction with its associated humanitarian consequences. This is otherwise described as the adaptive approach [17,18]. The expectation is that for the strategy to be successful, all the relevant government authorities or agencies must network and cooperate with international agencies, NGOs, CBOs, cooperative societies and indigenous private financial institutions to design and implement slum upgrading programmes.

however, plummeted to 30% post-eviction. Relatedly, the number of separated people increased by exactly 39% after eviction occurred. The questionnaire also revealed that forced eviction led to the number of respondents living with their parents to decline by 27% and caused a 74% decline in the number of respondents that live with their siblings. Out of the 135 respondents interviewed, 123 of them stated that they had children. 53% of this number, however, stated that after eviction they got separated from their children.

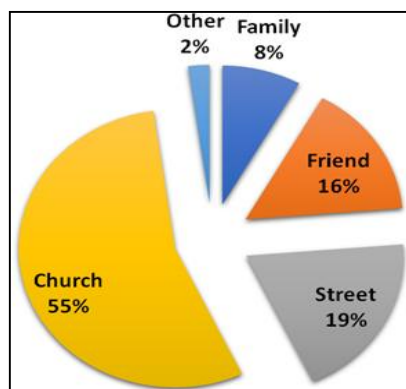


Fig. 12. Distribution of respondents according to temporary shelter after eviction

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that before eviction, 71% of the respondents were married. That number,

The findings are consistent with the study of Agbola and Jinadu [19] on the experiences of those evicted from Maroko, Lagos in 1990. Invariably, these findings reveal that the overall social support system that has the family unit as its major thrust diminished greatly as family members got separated and dispersed to diverse places in the search for shelter and livelihood. This is alarming because, forced eviction is a major stressor that acts upon the human emotions and in its nature, it effectively distorts or eliminates the social support system that serves as a major coping mechanism.

The findings revealed that forced eviction affects the formal education of a child and truncates it when it occurs. The number of children not in school doubled after the communities were demolished and out of that number 51% spent between 12 months to 18 months away from school before getting re-admitted into schools for the continuation of their formal education. Only 3 respondents were exempt. After the demolition of their communities, the percentage of tenants

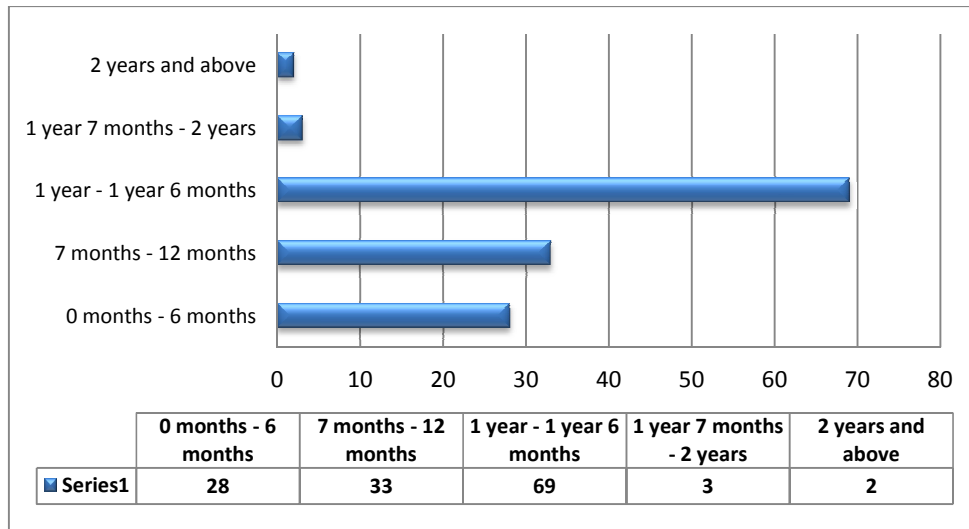


Fig. 13. Time elapsed before respondent could resettle in a place of their own

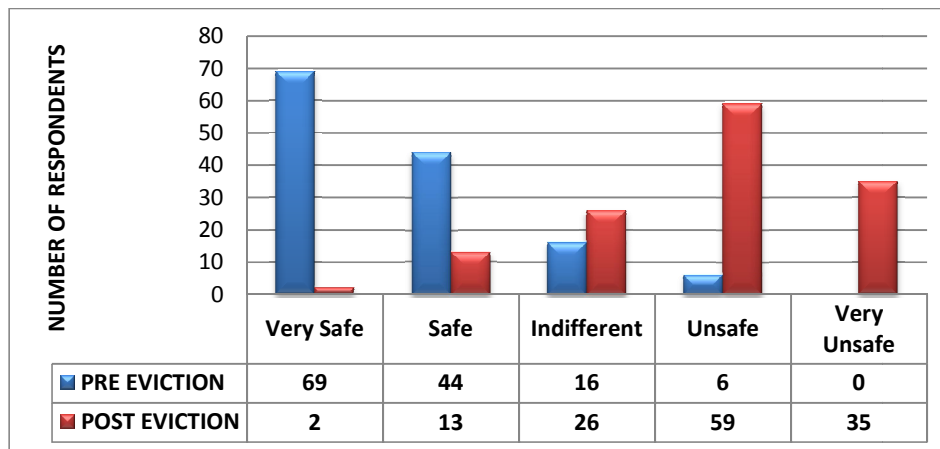


Fig. 14. Chart measuring respondents feeling of safety and security in community of residence before eviction and new community of residence

skyrocketed from 32% to 98%. Brickell et al. [20] enumerated the geographies of forced eviction and discovered that dispossession, violence and resistance tend to be associated with the eviction of urban informal settlements.

The question as to how forced eviction affected housing and security of these urban waterfront dwellers revealed interesting results. Fig. 13 provides an insight into this question as all structure owners except 3 respondents lost their structures. Immediately after eviction, 58% of the respondents had to sleep in nearby churches, while 19% loitered in the streets and slept in the open air at night. The remaining 26% found shelter amongst friends, family and other

alternatives. 6 months after demolition, 24% of respondents were able to get a place of their own, while over 50% of respondents stated that it took them between 12 months and 18 months to find another shelter of their own. The human rights violations and insecurities associated with forced evictions of urban informal settlements are enormous. Re-housing the victims of forced eviction should be paramount to government officials but studies have shown that these urban waterfront dwellers are thrown out of their homes and sometimes killed in the process. Emergency relief and access to alternative shelter, food, water, sanitation and health care are not considered by authorities particularly in the global south [21,15,22].

In terms of security and feelings of safety versus not being safe, while 19% of respondents stated indifference, 70% of respondents responded to feeling unsafe in varying degrees. This is in stark contrast to the way the respondents stated they felt in their communities before their homes were demolished and their communities disbanded. 84% of respondents stated that they felt safe in their communities' prior eviction.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an international outcry against forced eviction and the horrendous impact it has on its victims. It goes against the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), a treaty that Nigeria also signed up to uphold [23]. Without proper consultation, adequate compensation, and resettlement in a similar or better place, forced eviction constitutes a breach of fundamental human rights and leads to a humanitarian crisis. The people living in the urban waterfront communities or informal settlements have also built for themselves complex societal structures and systems necessary for survival. The practice of forceful means to evict waterfront dwellers from their houses has been recognized as one of the issues affecting waterfront occupants in Port Harcourt and Lagos. This approach has led to the loss of lives and properties. It has caused injuries to affected occupants, upset businesses from where some of the waterfront inhabitants earn their incomes and has the capacity to strengthen urban poverty. Furthermore, evictions of this nature are a clear sign of the failure of government authorities to engage with the occupants of urban waterfront in a discourse before their eviction. The forced evictions that have occurred in the two cities studied were carried out on short notices and in most instance, the affected residents were not compensated or resettled to alternative accommodation, where compensations were made, they are found to be inadequate.

Interestingly, the study revealed that most of the evicted urban waterfront dwellers who were originally owners of houses before eviction, lost their houses without compensation and the prevailing shelter post eviction became churches, the streets, friends houses and family houses in other parts of the city. This is at variance with situations in the developed countries where resettlement of affected residents was the

norm. The following recommendations are suggested:

- Provide emergency relief, including access to food, shelter, water, sanitation and health care services to all those affected by the demolitions.
- Ensure that women have equal access to all measures concerning compensation and provision of adequate housing.
- Adopt a moratorium on all evictions and demolitions in the waterfront areas until adequate safeguards are put in place to ensure that all evictions comply with international human rights standards.
- Develop a housing policy which protects and fulfils people's right to adequate housing and ending forced evictions, including women's rights. Guidelines for eviction should be based on the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement and must comply with international human rights law and standards.
- Legislate and enforce a clear prohibition on forced evictions.
- Government agencies should partner with slum dwellers, NGOs, CBOs, international agencies and local financial institutions in financing as well as implementation of slum upgrading programmes.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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