

A Qualitative Study of Public Health and Policy Implications of Street Begging in Nigeria

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Abstract

Regardless of the reasons for making begging a vocation, the beggars were noted as constituting a significant population in most cities of Nigeria. They are consistently becoming an interesting phenomenon in every academic discourse. This study, as a modest complement to existing academic efforts, examined the development and public health implications of street begging. It is qualitative in nature, hence the adoption of in-depth and key informant interviews as well as non-participant observation data collection approach. It covered six purposively selected areas with appreciable numbers of beggars in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The investigated population from these settlements comprised 30 beggars, 16 staff of Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development, Ministry of Health, 2 journalists, and 7 residents of the areas where beggars' joints were located. The data collected was treated with content analysis. The results showed that some of the beggars have been in the act for more than 3 decades. They viewed begging as a legitimate occupation rather than a *nuisance* to the society. Relative deprivation led some people to adopt street begging as a means of making a livelihood. Recurring business failure influenced the incursion into begging as a *means* of survival. The development and public health implications of street begging come in the form of environmental nuisance and health hazards, poor image of human development index in the country to the outsiders. With incessant increase in their population, consistent reduction of the percentage of productive forces becomes the order of the day. This consequently implies a breakdown in social welfare system and vulnerable socio-environmental system where unsustainability thrives.

Introduction

The phenomenon of street begging is universal (al-Shuweikh, 2020), although it is significantly higher and varied in some parts of the countries than in others (Yusuf, 2017). Begging has been in existence since time immemorial. Religious texts demonstrate the existence of begging in the early years of creation. Street begging and homelessness are often regarded as anti-social behaviour by diverse stakeholders, including the media, politicians, traders, law enforcement officers and agencies, welfare and social service providers, and the general public (Tafadzwa, Bekezela, 2014). Menka and Tarique (2014) noted that begging is a social problem which poses a challenge to urban planners. Other countries, such as Nigeria, have invested millions of dollars in education as a way of empowering its population so that they do not become beggars (Onoyase, 2010). The implication of the act of begging is that one is incapable of fending for oneself – hence the need of other’s mercy for survival. Begging is an indicator of abject poverty (Seni, 2017; Ojo, Benson, 2017; Bukoye, 2015; Kennedy, Fitzpatrick, 2011). The presence of beggars is perceived to be indicative of larger social ills or issues and can cause others to avoid beggarinhabited areas (Clapper, 2012). Menka and Tarique (2014) also supported this position but added that other social ills such as stealing, violent and criminal behaviour are partial features of begging. Begging is commonly defined as an act of stopping people in the street to ask for assistance, e.g. in the form of food or money (Bose, Hwang, 2002; Collins, Blomley, 2003). It is a request directed to the rest of the society. In order to bring oneself out of misery and poverty. Ahamdi (2010) sees begging as a social problem with psychological consequences on the family members and the geographical and social structure of the urban areas.

Begging, thus, becomes a style of life for some people (Jelili, 2006) and a universal phenomenon causing highly visible socioeconomic and physical problems in most African cities. The street begging as a potential threat to the environmental, economic, and social survival of human societies is evident (Khan, Fahad, 2020; Salami, Olugbayo, 2013; Igbinovia, 1991; Aliyu, 2006). The appearance of beggars, who seem to spend most of their time in the streets and public spaces in many urban areas of Nigeria and in cities of some developing countries, has become nauseating. In the opinion of Gabriel et al. (2015), this situation was observed to be a reflection of urban complexities worldwide, which subsequently become a very common and familiar experience for a long time. In Nigeria, the population of beggars on the streets is growing rapidly. Not only have their numbers grown over the years, but their lifestyles and the display of overtly aggressive behaviour equally make them the subject of suspicion and hostility by both the public and the law enforcement agencies. Today, their presence is a serious problem that requires remedy and rehabilitation (Mesele, Addis, 2020; Gabriel, 2013).

The problem of begging is not peculiar to any part of the country. It is an urban problem noticeable in every urban centre of every country, including Nigeria. Moreover, the problem of begging is significantly higher in one part of the country than in the other. In a study carried out by Adedibu and Jelili (2011), for instance, the observed incidence of begging was reported to be about seven times that of Ibadan, while mendicancy of Enugu was observed to be one third of that of Ibadan. The general conclusion from the works by the experts on street begging is that

this practice has heavy presence in the cities. While appreciating this, it should be noted that health implications of street begging vis-à-vis the societal interactions still deserve academic attention. This is because previous studies on street begging have explored this phenomenon from the demographic (Namwata, 2012) and poverty (Adedibu, 1989) perspectives. Other research perspectives on street begging include the incidence and socio-economic dimensions (Menka, et al., 2014; Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009), the disability issues among the beggars (Tafadzwa, Bekezela, 2014), income and spending patterns (Bose and Hwang, 2002), politics and legal issues (Collins and Blomley, 2003), Islamic injunctions (Mudanssir, 2010), the package for controlling street begging and rehabilitating beggars and the physically challenged in Nigeria (Adedibu, Jelili, 2011), and the environmental and socio-economic dimensions of begging (Jelili, 2006). In spite of the all-encompassing perspective of the foregoing, the social and public health implications of street begging have not been addressed by the scholars in this field. The gap so created by the neglect of the previous scholars forms the focus of the present work, which is a qualitative study of street begging in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nigeria, aimed at establishing implications for the social and public health policies. To achieve this, the study examined the beggar's perception of street begging, the factors influencing the prevalence of street begging, the development and public health implications of street begging, as well as the strategies employed to combat street begging.

Methodology

Interview sessions were conducted with the street beggars found in the selected beggars' settlements in Abuja, FCT, as well as with some residents of the areas where the beggars' settlements were found. The interviews with the beggars were carried out with the assistance of a Hausa interpreter who was engaged as a field assistant in a given beggars' settlement. Those engaged in key informant interviews were the officials of the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEBP), National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCFWD), Health and Human Services Secretariat, Social Development Secretariat, Legal Services Secretariat, and Area Council Secretariat. Also included were the officials of a NonGovernmental Organisation on Rehabilitation of the Destitute. They were included as key informants because of the nature of their official responsibilities and their extensive professional experience. Interviews were also conducted by telephone with the journalists working with the daily newspapers in Nigeria. The participants in this form of interview were selected purposively from the correspondence offices of the newspapers, however, willingness to participate was the main criterion used to select them. Participant observation was easily carried out by the members of the community, while non-participant observation was used where an event was met through convenience sampling.

A total of 6 begging points were randomly selected from the Abuja FCT. These included 1. Dutse Alhaji area, 2. Karamajiji, 3. Gwarimpa, 4. Kado, 5. Garki, and 6. Utako. These begging points were just the places where the beggars sat permanently to conduct their begging business on a daily basis. They always move away to where they could lay down their heads for the nights in places which are located near their business settlement. From each of the begging points 5 beggars were sampled, making 30 interviewees altogether. Willingness to partake

in the study was the adopted criterion of participation. From the areas where the begging points were selected, involved in the interview sessions were also 7 residents, 16 officials from the Ministries, and 2 journalists (correspondents) of the daily Abuja newspapers. Content analysis was carried out of the information obtained from the in-depth interviews and documented in the observations. This involved direct extraction of information provided in the in-depth interviews. Verbatim quotations were utilized to illustrate some issues being discussed.

Results

Background information about the street beggars

In the course of this study 75 participants in total were interviewed: 50 beggars that cut across different tribes, religions, ethnicities, races, sexes, and ideology, selected from various areas in Abuja FCT, 16 staff members of Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development and of Ministry of Health, 2 Journalists, and 7 residents of the areas where beggars' joints were located. From among the interviewed beggars of Hausa and Yoruba stocks 10 could communicate in English and their local languages, 14 of them spoke pidgin and their local languages, 26 beggars understood only their local languages. Responses from the third category of beggars were achieved with the assistance of a Hausa interpreter who understood both English and Hausa languages. The Yoruba respondents among them were directly interviewed by the researcher in his mother tongue (provided they were willing to give information about their attitudes towards and perception of street begging as some of them were feeling shy). From among the 50 interviewed beggars 36 were female aged 9 to 60, 3 of them, aged 15 to 25, could speak English, 5 spoke pidgin, and 28 spoke Hausa only. There were 21 men aged 12 to 70 years, 7 of them spoke English, 9 used, pidgin and 5 understand only the Hausa language. There was joy visible in the faces of those who could communicate in languages other than their mother tongues.

Social and public health implications of the street beggars' perception of street begging

Every individual will want to play safe in any situation. Beggars in their own perception have a strong belief that they are choosing the right option to cater for their needs. Beggars view begging as a means of survival instead of involving themselves in illegal business and becoming hazardous to the society. Beggars are of the belief that begging is better than stealing. One of the beggars stressed further that "some of the thieves took to stealing as a result of poverty and deprivation, with other option available some wouldn't have taken to this. There are people among them who feel begging is too disgusting for them to venture into. Since stealing is usually done in the dark that will not be disgusting to them, but in my case, I will continue to beg for my needs till the time God will ask me to stop through the provision of a better source of income. So, to me, begging is still honourable when compared to stealing" (Female IDI/Beggar/48 years old/Dutse Alhaji, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Another beggar Said: “I met my parents in this begging activities, I was told that I was born into this means of livelihood. I don’t know of any other means of making a living than begging, hence my foray into it. For the past 33 years that I have been begging for living, I have stayed in cities like Kaduna, Kano, Ibadan, Ilorin, and Lagos. I have never felt disturbed in the act of begging for living. I left Lagos for Abuja FCT because of rowdy nature of Lagos and that life there is full of risk” (Male IDI/Beggar/59 years old/Garki, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Corroborating this further, another beggar said: “One of my uncles took to begging in his lifetime. Before his death he was always telling us stories about big cities like Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, Ibadan, etc. The excitement of lifestyles in the cities and what it means to be in the cities has ever remained irresistible to me. Then I believe it is only the act of begging that my uncle took to was what afforded him this opportunity. I then decided that I will take into begging so that I can achieve my desire for adventures just like my late uncle. Since my incursion into street begging I have surpassed my Uncle in terms of travelling in the course of begging. I have been to Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Benin City, Enugu, Onitsha, Awka, Akure, Abeokuta, and lastly Abuja FCT which I found more accommodating” (Male IDI/Beggar/33 years old/Gwarimpa, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

According to the words of another participant “street begging is normal if it is not turned into business venture. It is good to seek for help, most especially for the physically challenged ones like for immediate needs only. While it is a fact that Muslims are expected to give food to the poor and to offer the one who asks for something. However, professional begging is seeing as impairing human honor and virtue, shatters personality and leads to the exploitation of benevolent people’s pure feelings” (Female IDI/Beggar/62 years old/Maitama, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Still another participant saw begging as the modest form of letting the society know about the difficulties some people are facing. In his words, “everybody will be pretending as if things are normal, however, it is not. If I have enough (money) that can sustain me why will I need to take to begging? But begging becomes a necessity in the absence of nothing to rely on for sustenance” (Male IDI/Beggar/45 years old/Kado, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). It was equally revealed that “some people have the money to give out to the needy but there is no means of identifying the needy. It is only those on the street begging for living that these people can easily identify and assist. If they refused to come out and beg for help it means inability of the rich to have people to assist and denial of avenue for redistribution of societal wealth that will help to douse socio-economic tensions (Female IDI/Beggar/39 years old/Karamajiji, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Factors influencing the prevalence of street begging

Increasing incidence of street begging in Abuja FCT is connected to the socioeconomic reality and environmental conditions bedeviling people. Generally, the problem of street beggars and begging activities cannot be related to a single cause or one factor. Instead, it is a multi-dimensional cause, a combination of factors that often leads to an individual beggar’s ending up in the street. One beggar at Utako, Abuja FCT, revealed that after the death of his father, his mother could not cater for them and he resorted to begging to cater for the family with a hope that all will be well. According

to his words, “my mother had given birth to six of us. I am the secondlast child. Our mother could not afford to meet our family’s basic needs such as food, clothes, and some other domestic needs. With nonchalant attitude of our relatives about our welfare, I and my other brothers have no option but to take to begging as a way to support the family instead of joining bad gang or stealing” (Male IDI/Beggar/42 years old/Utako, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Another participant noted: “I became neglected because my mother got married to another man after my father’s death. The burden became unbearable when my mother’s new husband handed me over to somebody as a servant. I took to begging for my upkeep because the proceeds from services I was rendering to my master goes to my mother’s husband and the man was working me to death. I was still serving the man but moved around in the night to beg to feed myself. I have been on the street since I was barely eight years old. Although it has not been so easy, I manage to feed myself every time. Begging thus becomes viable alternative to stealing because I make money daily. I have trained myself not to take whatever insults coming from people into cognizance. I have witnessed lots of insults and abusive language but I pretend as if I do not understand because what actually matters to me is what I received from begging” (Male IDI/Beggar/51 years old/Wuse Zone 2, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

In another submission, a beggar noted: “I took my begging to the street when opportunity of having daily three square meals became difficult. Begging became a matter of necessity due to displacement caused by religious conflicts in the north-eastern part of the country. Everybody has to abandon all our possessions including the farmland, with difficulty in the camps where we were housed. I had no option than to take to begging. This town is the third I have visited since I left the (IDP) camp 6 years ago (2014)” (Male IDI/Beggar/67 years old/Karamajiji, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Another participant said: “there is no business I ventured into without running into debts. I have tried all sorts of businesses without success. The heavy indebtedness forced me to leave home. None of my people knows where I am presently. I refused to communicate home because of the fear that my whereabouts may be made known to my debtors. Having arrived Abuja, I could not venture into trading again and I don’t have the energy to take to carrying load (*mai kaya*). Begging thus remains the available option for me” (Male IDI/Beggar/42 years old/Garki, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Another beggar revealed: “I don’t have helpers or benefactors. I lost my parents in Maitatsine religious crises (of 1980s), since then I have been making ends meet in the beggars’ world. I started in the beggars’ world by guiding a blind beggar around in the course of street begging at tender age of 5 years. When the beggar became too feeble to cope, he returned back to his hometown in Nguru (Yobe State). I have guided up to 5 blind beggars before I decided to operate alone as a beggar. I have been in this business for more than 4 decades” (Male IDI/Beggar/54 years old/Dutse Alhaji, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). The difficulty in making ends meet during dry season explains why another participant ventured into begging as a supplement. He said: “I take to begging during off-farming season and return back to farm during farming season annually. I always use the proceeds from begging to buy necessary implements for farming and the remaining to take care of myself and my family” (Male IDI/Beggar/65 years old/Wuse Zone 2, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Insight into physical capability as a causal factor was equally stressed. One beggar explained: “My physique is

a disadvantage. In what ways do you think I can be useful to myself? I am not physically balanced and I was not trained in any form of skills and life must continue. As an individual that detests crime in whatever form, no option is opened to me other than begging for what I need for survival with physical disability” (Female IDI/Beggar/41years old/Gwagwalada, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

It was also stressed that “people come to beggars joint with food prepared inside the take-away packs, people do come with food items like *kosai* (bean cake). By nature of their appearance, the patrons cut across the poor, the rich, and not-very-rich, which implies that their needs and rationale for what they are giving out vary” (Male IDI/Trader at Dutse Alhaji/56 years old, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Medical condition as a factor was adduced by another participant: „I could see that majority of them took to begging because of medical challenge. Truly. some of them are not able in terms of physical strength. However, I still believe that there are things they could do for living rather than street begging but since they have chosen to take to begging there is nothing one can do about it” (Female IDI/Trader at Garki/41 years old, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Development and public health implications of street begging

The problem of begging is a social menace which has a negative implications not only for economies of the cities, social and physical environment but also for beggars themselves. The increasing population of beggars in Nigerian cities constitutes an eyesore for its environmental nuisance and health hazards, particularly carrying infectious and contagious diseases. The specific implications, according to one of the participants, are as follows: “Begging has serious implication for the city and national economy because beggars are not economically productive, they contribute nothing to the economy but succeeded in reducing the number of capable hands that would have brought about sustainable development. Their increasing numbers leads to nothing but social relegation of the city as well as stigmatization of the society where they are fund” (Male KII/Official of Health and Human Services Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

It was also stressed that “beggars represent a social threat to the society, especially in the cities. They portray a bad image to outsiders or strangers, while some criminals hid under the guise of beggars to perpetuate their evil deeds. They are at times used as instruments by mischief makers, who use them to vandalize public properties and utilities built with nation’s resources. The nefarious activities of those fake beggars, such as criminals, area boys and thugs, constitute one of the sources of civil unrest to the city dwellers” (Female IDI/Trader/56 years old/Resident of Maitama, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Another submission showed that “the city and national economy become retarded with considerable proportion of beggars’ population. Certain population of beggars is often perpetually sick. These ones always suffer from diseases, like cancerous growths on visible parts of their bodies, which they wear like a badge of honour as means of arousing sympathy and legitimatizing their acts in trade” (Male KII/Official of a Non-Governmental Organisation on Rehabilitation of Destitute, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

It was stressed further that “at most strategic roads, many (beggars) with some form of diseases are carried and put at the centre of the road with men and women with bowls in their hands

soliciting for help. They are controlled by godfathers who are entitled to a 'cut' of their money in return for 'protection'. The godfathers are also responsible for costuming, i.e. fake wounds on appropriate parts of your body; for the lame, wheelchairs, wheelbarrows or skateboards; for the blind, a child to lead you around and collect the day's earnings; and for young women, malnourished looking" (Female KII/Official of Health and Human Services Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Further clarification went as follows: "The mere visibility of these beggars on our street in recent time is becoming a nuisance, street begging is gradually becoming a potential threat to our societal fabric and eroding the idea of self-reliance in our nation. This is because begging is no longer limited to people who in one way or the other had physical challenges and are not capable of working to fend for themselves. Many young and energetic people now see begging as the most convenient and surest way of getting money instead of working to cater for themselves" (Female KII/Official of National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCFWD), Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Complementing the foregoing, another participant revealed in his interview that "street begging has brought about dependency syndrome on beggars because as soon as they get used to going out and getting what they need for their livelihood, then the question of thinking along the line of being useful to themselves and the society does not arise. When such people progress in life they will find it difficult to do any lawful trade or engage in any activity that can fetch them some money, then the obvious thing for them is fall prey to drug addiction in order to ward away frustration or else they join gangs of armed robbers, thefts, arsonists or religious misguided fanatics and this do not augur well for our national development" (Male KII/Official of Social Development Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). It was also stressed that "beggars are constituting a health hazard, which does not speak well about the nation, the squalors where beggars usually stay are always vulnerable to outbreak of epidemics and such disease is likely to spread to the larger community. The fear is this, communicable disease such as tuberculosis could spread through such places. With such occurrence, it is usually difficult for the appropriate authority to render necessary medical assistance to them since they are always wandering about (Male KII/Official of Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEBP), Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Another perspective revealed that "harsh weather conditions, including sunburn and colds during nights, are some of the challenges beggars experience on constant basis. This makes them vulnerable to illness. In some of our interactions with these beggars it was obvious that unhealthy urban environment in which these beggars live remains a major cause of health problems among them. Illnesses which beggars had suffered while begging on the streets includes malaria, diarrhea, coughing, and other respiratory diseases" (Female IDI/Resident of Maitama, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Further information asserted that "adverse weather conditions are unfavorable and associated with airborne diseases, including flu, cough, only to mention a few. Unhealthy lifestyles or behaviour might have direct or indirect consequences in the health and wellbeing of individual causing restlessness, accidents, and untimely deaths among others" (Male KII/Official of Health and Human Services Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Another participant revealed that "harassment from fellow beggars is not left out, they sometimes fight over spaces. Security agencies' harassment

is another area of concern, this often is sequel to the fact that there are restricted areas where beggars are banned from entering. In an attempt to seek for help and beg for alms, many of them ignorantly trespass into those areas. The only option available is for the security agents to swing into action through prompt and often temporary detention to serve as deterrence to others” (Male IDI/Resident of Utako/62 years old, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

It was also noted that “most often the female beggars are exposed to sexual abuse. As a result of this, some of them have been identified as victims of HIV/AIDS. The chances of contracting AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases are much higher for this set of people. As a consequence, those in this business and the rest of the population are at risk. Since women and young girls are the most vulnerable, chances are that they end up in unplanned pregnancies, as seen in the case of most female beggars across Abuja FCT. It was also observed that beggars among themselves are multiplying reproductively (unprotected sex resulting in pregnancy among other consequences) due to their exposure (nakedness) to one another even in the open or public hiding places they chose as home as a result of homelessness” (Male KII/Official of Social Development Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Another argument revealed that “increasing cases of most distressing and inhuman acts of trafficking in woman and children in the recent times have placed many beggars on the streets at risk of being kidnapped and forced into the prostitution by individuals. It has also been noticed that most male victims of kidnappers are ending up as instruments in the hands of criminals and robbers, while some fall victims of rituals” (Male KII/Official of Legal Services Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

It was also noted that “some of these beggars are into this business for long period of time, some were born into the business, and interactions with them and also documented information from researches on street begging have shown that if these people are unable to beg or prevented from begging, either by law or government policy, they would resort to illegal activities. The commonest crime being eyed by the beggars in the absence of opportunity for begging include workshop lifting, selling of Indian hemp, among other criminal activities. So, it is apparent that unsuspecting beggars are likely victims of illegal drug trafficking due to promises of better life by group of traffickers” (Male KII/Official of Area Council Secretariat, Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Further submission revealed that “street begging could be risky to life, especially in an area where there is heavy traffic, in areas like Zuba-Kubwa highway, Wuse, Jabi, Gwarimpa, Garki, and in other parts of Abuja. Beggars risk being run over by careless drivers. It is not unlikely that beggars constitute a great percentage of corpses occasionally found on the highways in Nigeria. Some beggars migrate from far and near places to settle down for begging in an area where they drew sympathy from people either through religion, cultural or ethnics beliefs. They migrate mostly in rickety vehicles or through trekking which mostly results in the accidents. Larger percentage of such victims remains unattended to because nobody was ready to take responsibility for the hospital bill and other expenses” (Female KII/Official of Social Development Secretariat of the FCT (Public Health Unit), Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Strategies employed to combat street begging

The reality of antithetical stance of street begging has made the stakeholders to embark on several approaches to curb its devastating effect. These approaches are similar in certain instances and varied in another, but all were aimed at eliminating street begging and its negative effect on social and economic development of the society. For example, a participant in the study revealed that “in Lagos State, a rehabilitation centre was established at Majidun in Ikorodu and Karamajiji disability colony, as well as Bwari Rehabilitation Centre in Abuja FCT, where the destitute were being kept. However, information has it that beggars were taken to rehabilitation homes not to take care of them but just to get rid of them from the street. The former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan rolled out the 64 newly completed and furnished Almajiri Model Schools in 2013 across the states of Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo, Rivers, Kogi, Niger, Katsina, Taraba, and Nasarawa states in order to address the out-of-school children syndrome that is also impeding the growth of the economy. Barely three years after, the *almajiris* (out of school child beggars) abandoned the schools and went back to the streets in search of free money despite the federal government intervention. In spite of the economic recession and the outcome of previous efforts, government is not resting on its oars on the need to take these beggars off the road again” (Male KII/Official of Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEBP), Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Specific contribution of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on this matter were equally stressed: “Pockets of non-governmental organisations are equally trying to assist these beggars, but funding capacity of some of them could not permit total removal of these people from the street without the support of the governments. So, the role of NGOs in this case is utterly limited to provision of basic needs, which cut across issues of health talk, basic healthcare services, and clothing etc.” (Male KII/Official of Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEBP), Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Using his experience of stark reality in contemporary rehabilitation homes in the country, another participant pointed out that “the existing rehabilitation homes in Nigeria are mockery and insult to human dignity because they lack basic necessities of life and therefore do not implement any an effective strategy for curbing street begging. The rehabilitation processes in Lagos State took another dimension where Lagos State government tried to reconcile the destitute with their families by sending social workers to their states of origin to trace their homes before sending them back. And this has yielded some results because substantial proportions of the beggars have been sent Home” (Male KII/Official of National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCFWD), Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

According to the words of another participant, “state governments in Northern part of the country have tried to use the specific peculiarity of their environment to deal with the issue of street begging within their enclaves. For instance, Kano State government anchored its strategy of dealing with street begging on provision of food for students in the Islamic Schools. This was pilot tested in three local government areas, namely Warawa, Makoda and Ajingi, for a period of one year. The effect of this was reported by scholars to have brought to an end the cases of street begging among children in these local government areas” (Female KII/Journalist (Daily

Newspaper Correspondent), Abuja FCT, Nigeria). It was also noted that „the strategy of dealing with street begging by Jigawa State government was centred on reducing poverty to the barest minimum. Just as it has been widely reported by the mass media, Jigawa State government has the vision of putting in place a social welfare programme of N7,000 monthly survival allowance for the physically disabled in the state to alleviate their plight and keep them off the street” (Male KII/Journalist (Daily Newspaper Correspondent), Abuja FCT, Nigeria). Another participant revealed that “the federal government has at one time or the other sent law enforcement agents to rid the streets of beggars and kept them in the existing rehabilitation centres. Some state governments have followed suit. In May 2007, the Kwara State government under the leadership of Dr Bukola Saraki banned street begging and applied N5, 000 or three months’ imprisonment or both as the case may be as penalty for breaking the law. In some states where these beggars are seen freely moving round, there are always specific areas (like Government Reservation Areas/Estates) they are forbidden to enter” (Female KII/Journalist (Daily Newspaper Correspondent), Abuja FCT, Nigeria).

Issues and events noted through observation

Street beggars, including children, the aged, women and men, the disabled, are conspicuous in the streets and public areas begging for alms. Some beggars are blind, some are crippled, deaf/dumb, but there are also beggars without physical disability. They cut across both genders but female beggars, children and adolescent beggars were in sizeable proportion in the study settings. They are mostly between 5–45 years of age, they regularly move in groups of 5–10 with plates or bowls in hands, having un-kept hair, blistered lips, dirty fingers, bare and broken feet, tattered clothes. Common beggars have locations where they resume daily, they are always prompt and punctual, they set out to city centres early before workers set out for economic transactions of the day.

Different categories of beggars are conspicuous in motor parks, religious worship areas, markets, road intersections, venues of ceremonies, among other public places. Many of them were discovered to have migrated from neighbouring countries. The highest incidence of street begging tended to be in the early part of the morning and from late morning to early afternoon, when commuters were in less of a hurry to get to work or return home after a long working day. The beggars in some areas have devised the system of moving round the metropolis in the morning and coming back to converge at places identified as safe haven in the evening to evade harassment of the law enforcement agents as well as that of the Federal Capital Territory administration. The beggars joints are always littered with nylon and papers of what they consumed over the day. Items given to the beggars are not limited to money, they also include food items, such as rice packed in disposable take-away containers. Food items are sometimes presented inside black nylon, gifts presented occasionally include salt and granulated sugar packed in nylon bags.

Discussion

The findings from this study reveal that beggars spend most of their time in the streets and public spaces in many urban areas of Nigeria and in cities of some developing countries, that their constant

appearance in public places is fast becoming nauseating, and that this situation is a reflection of urban complexities worldwide. Our findings totally corroborated the position of Gabriel et al. (2015). These findings also aligned with the views of some previous scholars who maintained that the menace of street begging as a potential threat to the environmental, economic, and social survival of human societies is evident (Igbinovia, 1991; Aliyu, 2006), that the people who engaged in begging recognized it to be a “problem”, due to its harsh, humiliating, and frustrating nature (Lynch, 2005). In a similar vein as Jelili (2006), this study discovered that begging has become a global phenomenon which threatens the environment, economic and social survival of humanity. Other points of meeting between the existing literature and the findings of this study is that different categories of beggars are conspicuous in motor parks, religious worship areas, markets, road intersections, venues of ceremonies, among other public places (Jelili, 2006), that the problem of begging was attributed to a number of factors such as poverty (Jelili, 2006; Adedibu, 1989), religion (Hanchao, 1999), physical disability (Jelili, 2006; Adedibu, 1989), and culture (Jelili, 2006). Poverty and physical disability were the most visible factors responsible for street begging in Nigeria (Hanchao, 1999). Therefore, in order to meet their basic needs, some of the poverty-stricken people resort to begging as the sole means of livelihood. Also, it is empirically evidenced that physically disabled people constitute the bulk of the identified beggars in Nigeria (Ogunkan, 2009; Jelili, 2006).

Rapid urbanization and high density of the Nigerian population have caused problems such as suburbanization, hidden unemployment, false jobs, and the development of social problems such as begging in city environments. Since slum dwellers, rural migrants and some refugees are mostly poor and unemployed, some of them make a living by engaging in illegal activities such as theft or smuggling, while some others who suffer from severe fanatical poverty resort to begging. As the population of those involved in begging in the streets continues to be on the increase, the country begins to lose a number of people who otherwise would have contributed to its economic development. This is because they are not economically productive and contribute nothing to the country’s economy. As a result of this, the national economy becomes slow in developmental processes because a considerable proportion of beggars are not economically productive in any possible way, thereby depending on the already overstretched workforce. They rather become nuisance to the society by causing discomfort on major roads and in other public places. They obstruct traffic and human free flow and also generate dirty materials – either as waste or as part of their belongings – in their regular routes and stations. Abuja, being the Federal Capital of Nigeria, has the role of showcasing the inherent beauty of the country. It is therefore supposed to be kept clean, made free from all maladies but is faced with the problem of street beggars. The beggars show bad images to outsiders and strangers, especially private investors. They are at times used by politicians as instruments to vandalize public properties and utilities built with nation’s resources without realizing the outcomes of such acts.

“Poverty” as one of the factors that pushed people into begging and the rate of its occurrence was exposed in several studies which showed the perpetuation of poverty in various communities and the eventual transformation of poverty into a kind of subculture. Evidence of this emanated

from the statement of one of the beggars that he was born into the act of begging. Others narrated that their relations made them took to begging at one point in time. The implication of this is that the poor have ended up being trapped by their poverty, hence their inability to think of any novel idea that would enhance their sustenance other than begging in the streets. With poverty as a sub-culture, people found it difficult to manage risk, they have failed to see „risk as a way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty”. Failure to take risk has entrenched and sustained their status of people with low level of education, low self-esteem, poor health, lack of skills, absence of support mechanism, remoteness from market, lack of physical asset or borrowing power, malnourishment, hence the difficulty to triumph over poverty. As a result, the poor are trapped in their situation with little chance of escaping it. This vicious circle of poverty is maintained across generations. Therefore, in order for the poor to meet their basic needs, they have to resort into begging.

Conclusions

It is apparent that begging has become a social deviance in Nigeria because it contradicts the norms and values of the society. Beggars continue to plague the commercial centres, major roads and streets in the course of pursuance of their chosen means of livelihood. Similarly, begging across the streets of Nigeria tends to be worrisome, thus demanding continuous attention despite the earlier efforts of the government and the media to tackle the problem. All efforts to solve this problem have proved futile as beggars are on the rise in population and can be seen in public places, commercial centres, and neighborhoods – even worse – on commercial vehicles. The study found that a large number of street beggars feel indifferent towards begging, hence their continued involvement in begging activities as their major means of livelihood. Begging thus flourishes because people tend to be generous. A fact that cannot be denied is that begging will continue to thrive if nothing is done to curb this menace. Curbing the menace, however, depends on how cities and public places are organized. A less organized commercial or public place, where informal activities are predominant, tends to attract more beggars who demonstrate their poverty and relative deprivation in whatever way they can as major causes of act of begging. Continuous absence of any means of livelihood will encourage many people to resort to the begging life. In line with the existing format, some may enter into the act temporarily while others may engage in it permanently. Nevertheless, it is observable that begging activities have attracted substantial proportions of people in urban centres. The act possesses the psychological effect of stripping persons of their self-respect and dignity. In this regard, it appears that the factors that lead someone to engage in begging tend to be the very factors that actually reinforce such a practice. From observations and interviews it is apparent that the participants continue to beg because the factors that facilitate this practice (i.e. unemployment, poor educational level, disrupted family backgrounds) remain unalleviated, therefore continuously supporting the practice of begging. Necessary measures like awareness programmes, among others, need to be conducted for the poor in order to help them realize how shameful it is to beg.

Recommendations

The following accommodations were generated from the study as steps towards curbing the menace which street begging constitutes:

1. Poverty alleviation programmes should be established that would have direct bearing on beggars and different categories of the needy. Sustainable and effective rehabilitation schemes should be implemented that aiming at reducing begging among the poverty ridden able-bodied people, especially women, who are not catered for.
2. Other religious groups (Christians and other religious bodies) can also function by constituting themselves as NGOs and establish committees to donate a certain percentage of their revenues to charity services, especially to those who genuinely deserve such service or help. They could have their own rehabilitation schemes/centres separately or jointly with similar religious bodies.
3. Islamic groups, especially in the North, should advise strongly their people who have their children and wards in different Qur'anic schools and those willing to do so, that they should see the upbringing and education of their children as their social responsibility. As a matter of fact, they should see the help coming to any Qur'anic schools or similar organizations as a privilege.
4. Street begging deserve a collaboration of the government, Nigerian populace, counselors, philanthropists, and NGOs in order to fight poverty and provide mass and free education devoid of any form of discomfort.
5. The workshops can be planned for beggars in all states intimating them on the need to be off the streets, inviting resource persons to teach various trades and liaising with the federal, state, and local governments to provide funds for a takeoff projects such as shoemaking, weaving, soap making etc.
6. There should be a special department for the destitute in the Ministry of Social Welfare, funded by Government in order to organize and manage rehabilitation centres in all the states. The rehabilitation centres should serve three main functions such as physical restoration, educational rehabilitation, and psychosocial rehabilitation.

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