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Analysis of the outcomes of street begging as a means of livelihood coping strategy among beggars in Ilorin Metropolis

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Abstract

The study examined economic benefits and the health implications associated with the street begging in Ilorin Metropolis. The research is based on data collected through two-stage sampling procedures from 96 street beggars drawn equally from the four selected sites in the study areas using interview schedule and focus group discussion. These interviews elicited information about street beggar's activities, experiences, opinions and feelings concerning their operations, economic benefits and health challenges. The data used for the study were generated from primary sources. The Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics on SPSS software. The mean age of the respondents was 29 years and majority (76%) did not have formal education. Street begging was dominated by males

(53%). The reasons for their involvement in street begging as an occupation include unemployment, poverty and economic consideration. The study further reveals that majority of beggars are exposed daily to a numerous life-threatening health problem which might lead to their untimely death. The study concluded that most of the beggars were exposed to environmental and health hazards which could lead to health problems in the cause of their daily activities. Therefore, policy measures that would enhance the capacity of these beggars along entrepreneurship should be encouraged in a bid to taking these beggars off the street and helping them lead a meaningful life.

Keywords: Begging sites, Health, Beggars, Unemployment, Poverty

Introduction

Migration of rural dwellers to urban cities has led to population explosion which in turn resulted into increase in street begging and also creates a large pool of unemployed and underemployed people in the society. In the past few decades, the process of urbanization has accelerated mainly in cities coping with informal hyper, most of which are located in sub-Saharan Africa (UN-Habitat, 2010). These cities are characterized by an economy heavily dependent on the informal sector and very extensive poverty (Owusu-Sekyere, 2014) [8]. The high concentration of people in the emerging urban centres in the developing world has two implications: it leads to increase in street begging and also creates a large pool of unemployed and underemployed residents with few alternative means of earning a living. The rise in the unemployment rate in Nigeria has led some youths in rural and urban areas to engage in street begging as a means of survival.

One social problem that has been an age-long issue, and serious concern to well-meaning Nigerians is street begging. The problem of begging is widespread in Nigeria and seen as global problem. Broun (2010) [3] said begging as an antisocial behaviour observed in almost all nations of the world especially in developing nations. It involves asking for what the beggar does not have. Street begging anywhere is a national disease that eats into the fabrics of the social, economic, religion, political and educational structures. In other words, it is apparently an indictment on the quality of governance in many societies

(Usoro, 2007)^[9]. In Nigeria, the history of the street begging is uncertain but it is known that street begging has been in existence even before the country gained her independence. According to the Amman (2009)^[11] “Mabaretas” who are professional beggars contributed immensely to the widespread of begging in Nigeria. “Mabarates” are those that live by asking people for money. Begging is the practice of imploring others to grant a favour, which could be in form of gift like money, clothes or food with no expectation of reciprocation or refund. Street begging is defined as the act of requesting for money, food or other forms of favour without an exchange in a public place and in the street where people frequently pass by.

The proliferation of beggars on the streets in Nigeria since the early 1990s represents one of the most visible consequences of the deep economic crisis the country has been suffering. These beggars represent a menace to the society as many are seen obstructing vehicular movements on the roads across cities in Nigeria. For many of these vulnerable group, street begging serves as their only source of income. Literature has shown that many of these beggars work under unhygienic condition which exposes them to health-related problems. Owusu-Sekyere (2014)^[8] was of opinion that beggars work in the area of fleas and offensive odours, sits and eats along waste disposal sites with the lack of proper protective devices which have adverse effect on their health life. Furthermore, these beggars are exposed to health hazards which comprise of infection, chemical hazards, musculoskeletal damage, mechanical trauma, and emotional distress.

However, it is imperative to state that the increasing incidence of beggars in Nigerian cities is not only due to poverty and physical disability but also to the fact that majority of the beggars are satisfied with the “job” (Jones, 2013)^[6]. Some have become very rich from begging that they have acquired buses and houses, yet they always appear wretched so as to draw sympathy from the general public. The Presence of fake beggars and begging criminals has not helped the situation and may be dangerous to the society. Despite the danger posed by begging to the socioeconomic development of Nigerian urban centres like Ilorin, it is unfortunate that much research works have not been directed towards addressing the problem of begging in Nigerian cities. Although, there exist few studies on street begging as economic activities, with no attention paid to the health risks associated with it in the study area in view of the fact that beggars live and work in unhygienic conditions and the nature of their occupation exposes them to hazards that may lead to the spread of various health challenges. Hence, the study examined street begging as a source of wealth or death?

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. describe the socioeconomic characteristics of street beggars;
2. Examine the economic benefits of street begging; and to
3. assess the health implications associated with waste scavenging.

Methodology

The study was carried out within Ilorin metropolis. To achieve the objectives of the study, four Begging sites were randomly selected in Offa garage, Challenge, Koro-afaju and Geri-alimi area in Ilorin Metropolis.

Purposive sampling was employed in identifying those who were directly involved in the process. The research is based on data collected through two-stage sampling procedures from 92 street beggars drawn equally from the four selected street begging sites in the study area using interview schedule. Focus group discussion was used to measure quantitative data.

The data from the survey was analysed using SPSS. Street beggars’ demographic characteristics that were examined in the study include religion, age, ethnicity, income, marital status, educational qualification and working hours. respondents were asked to mention reason for entry into the job and some of the risks they had suffered repeatedly in the last twelve months preceding the study in their daily job. Lastly, three focus group discussions were held at three out of the four begging sites used in the study.

Reason for entry into the begging job was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale comprising of strongly agreed (5), agreed (4), neutral (3), disagreed (2), and strongly disagreed (1). The index was the sum on the scores of all 7 questions which the respondents were asked with minimum score being 7 and maximum score being 35. Mean was used to rank the reasons for entry into the begging job in descending order of importance. Perceived health related problems were measured using 3-point scale comprising always occurred (2) occasionally occurred (1) and not occurred (0). The index was the sum on the scores of all 8 questions which the respondents were asked with minimum score being 0 and maximum score being 16. Mean was used to rank perceived health related problems in descending order of occurrence.

Results and discussion

Socioeconomic characteristics

The results from table 1 revealed the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents. From the table, it was observed that majority (30%) were within the age bracket 21 – 30 years. The findings imply that young people of school age were into street begging despite the risks involved in the job.

One of the respondents from Koro afaju in focus group discussion said that *“I grew up not knowing who my parents were so I had no one to sponsor me though I desired to be in school. I hope to save the money I make from street begging to get myself back to school, feed myself and have some basic necessities of life.”* The above disclose the reasons for begging in the street at such a young age as a means for survival. Male (53%) dominated the business of street begging. Table 1 further shows that 46% of the street beggars were married, the rest were either single who have never been married, separated or divorced and widowed (54%). This is supported by the following statement from a woman at Geri-Alimi: *“Most women working here are either divorced or separated with no husband or family to support us. We struggle on our own to feed ourselves and the children and send them to school from the money we make from this business.”*

Nigeria has earlier been identified to comprise of three main ethnic groups which include Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The ethnic group of street beggars is important most especially since they have in the past been identified to be migrants who are out to make a living in the city (Benson and Vanqa-Mgijima, 2010)^[2]. It can be deduced from table 1 that Hausas/Fulani (59%) who are migrants from the northern part of Nigeria have the largest representation among street

beggars in the study area. This result corroborates the findings of Haruna (2013)^[5] that majority of street beggars in Lagos State were Hausas.

Table 1 further shows that 76% of street beggars have no formal education. Despite the fact that more than two-third half were not educated, we found out that some (8%) are educated up to completing secondary school certificate examinations. Also, about 33% of the street beggars were able-bodied people with no single disability. One of the identified beggars through focus group discussion said: *“What shall we do? No work for us anywhere, no one to help us, not even the government. We have been denied employment from places. With children in the house to feed, we have no choice than to call out for help instead of giving up on life.”*

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Classes of beggars		
Deaf and dumb	6	6%
Deaf	3	3%
Cripple/leper	16	17%
Blind	13	14%
Mentally sick e.g., imbecile	11	11%
Immigrant	15	16%
Able bodied persons	32	33%
Age		
1 – 10 years	13	14%
11 – 20 years	9	9%
21 – 30 years	29	30%
31 – 40 years	18	19%
41 – 50 years	8	8%
51 – 60 years	12	13%
61 years and above	7	7%
Religion		
Christianity	29	30%
Islam	67	70%
Educational Background		
No formal Education	73	76%
Primary Education	15	16%
Secondary Education	8	8%
Sex		
Male	51	53%
Female	45	47%
Marital Status		
Married	44	46%
Single	39	41%
Widowed	9	9%
Divorced/Separated	4	4%
Ethnicity		
Hausa/Fulani	57	59%
Yoruba	24	25%
Igbo	4	4%
Others	11	12%
Total	96	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Reasons for engaging in street begging

This section examines the reasons for street begging. The primary reasons are: to get out of poverty (88%); ability to take care of family (84%); and unemployment (79%) and they ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. These necessitated their need to seek for ways of making a living through begging on the street. In addition to unemployed migrants,

there are also street beggars who had been employed but due to loss of employment had to look for a way of getting a job. The finding indicated that some of the beggars were into it for economic reason so that they could satisfy their basic needs. The implication of this is that majority were into street begging business not because of the interest in the job but due to joblessness, the necessities laid upon them to care for their family, and the need to make ends meet. It is also being used as a means of getting out of poverty. These findings corroborated the findings of Ogunkan and Fawole (2009)^[7] that street beggars are in the occupation, not by choice, but due to the increased levels of unemployment and poverty ravaging the nooks and crannies of the country.

Table 2: Reasons for engaging in street begging

Reasons for begging	Percentages	Ranking
To get out of poverty	88%	1 st
Ability to take care of my family	84%	2 nd
Unemployment	79%	3 rd
That's what my parent does, I have no choice	69%	4 th
No certificate to do other job	68%	5 th
Loss of job due to retrenchment	56%	6 th
Inadequate access to credit facilities	55%	7 th
I enjoy doing it	49%	8 th
It's very lucrative	44%	9 th
I can be on my own	27%	10 th

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Perceived health related problems among street beggars

The result from table 3 further reveals that majority (80.2%) of the beggars are exposed daily to a numerous life-threatening health problem which might result to death as they walk round the streets begging for money. Street begging has some detrimental effects on the health of the beggars in descending order of their severity. The most prevalence was the headaches which occurred as a result of working in the sun (89%). This was followed by minor injuries from stepping on broken bottles or sharp objects (84%), eye irritation (81%); minor injuries (77%), backaches from bending down most of the time (66%), and respiratory diseases which include coughing and sneezing (62%) and they ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th respectively.

The result implied that street beggars in the study area were exposed to various environmental hazards arising from their daily activities such as respiratory diseases which occurred as a result of exposure to dust and hazardous compounds, accidental injuries resulting from standing by the road side and getting exposed to car and motorcycle crash. This assertion is in line with Ogunkan and Fawole (2009)^[7] who claimed that beggars are usually exposed to minor injuries from stepping on broken bottles or sharp objects. Despite the seriousness of the health hazards outlined, most of the beggars overlook them since their major focus is on making ends meet which they seem not to have an alternative for. Although, their non-challant attitude might be as a result of inadequate knowledge of the health-related information or cost of securing medical attention. Therefore, it is worthy of note to say that as beggars in the study area struggle to make a living through begging, they are also exposed to health problems that have impending danger on their economic activity.

Table 3: Perceived health related problems among street beggars

Health problems	Percentages	Rank
Headaches from working in the sun	89%	1 st
Minor injuries from stepping on broken bottles or sharp objects in the refuse	84%	2 nd
Eye irritation	81%	3 rd
Minor injuries	77%	4 th
Back and leg pains	66%	5 th
Respiratory diseases	62%	6 th
Skin disease and blood infections	33%	7 th
Poisoning and chemical burns	27%	8 th

Mean percentage= 64.2%

Conclusion and recommendations

Street begging arises mainly due to the high level of unemployment that characterizes the nation's economy on one hand, and the income earned as well as poverty on the other hand. Street begging as an informal activity has employed a number of unemployed people. The reality from this study is that as street beggars beg persuasively for money in a bid to make ends meet and get out of poverty, they are also exposed to a countless number of health-related problems which might lead to death. This situation needs to be of utmost concern to every stakeholder in the areas of occupational safety.

In lieu of the foregoing, the paper recommends that given the environmental and health hazards associated with street begging, policy measures that would enhance the capacity of these beggars along entrepreneurship should be encouraged in a bid to take these beggars off the street and help them lead a meaningful life. In essence, these beggars need to be targeted in federal government social intervention programmes.

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