Security and Socio-economic Consequences of Street Begging in Nigerian Cities

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Abstract
Across the world, studies have established that begging is not only practice in developing countries, but, a universal phenomenon and a global urban problem in developed countries. Street begging poses significant security threats and socio-economic woes. A systematic approach was used to review related extant literature and security risk associated with begging explored. There is dearth in literature on the consequential effects of street begging on security, social vices and economic woes in Nigerian cities. The study showed that the major factors responsible for begging are poverty, disabilities, religion and cultural factors, natural calamities like floods, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, degenerative diseases, war, terrorism, insecurity and poor urban governance to provide social safety net for the poor among others. This study revealed that street beggars are found in major Nigerian cities such as Ibadan, Lagos, Ilorin, Ogbomosho, Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Sokoto, Katsina, Enugu, Abuja, Port Harcourt among others. Different categories of beggars have been exposed to ritual killings,
accidents, sexual abuse, and physical torture, perpetuate violence, terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, cattle rustling and other security threat and socio-economic vices. This study recommend that policymakers and other critical stakeholders in development should put in place empowerment and rehabilitation programmes for street beggars, as well as control of the influx of transnational beggars from neighbouring countries into Nigerian cities, thereby curbing the problem associated with insecurity, social vices and economic woes of street begging in Nigerian cities.

Keywords: Street begging; urban poverty; transnational beggars; insecurity; Nigeria.

Introduction

A street beggar is an individual such as children, elderly, disabled people, and families who normally found in public spaces such as shopping areas, banks, public offices, churches, mosques, busy streets, roadsides and intersections among others asking for alms (Adugna, 2006). Street begging is any systematic efforts and activities which involve soliciting for food, money, clothing and other materials objects to promote the sustenance and welfare of the beggars (Fatai, 2017). Street begging is view as a systematic effort because those who engage in begging are well-organized, using different tactics and strategies for enhancing sympathy from the general public, towards soliciting for alms. Though few people are being constrained to beg due to conditions beyond their control. These categories of beggars may not be happy to beg, but people know that, they need assistance at that point in time. Jelili (2009) categorized beggars into destitute and the jobless beggars, occasional and unprofessional beggars, wanderers, unskilled, uncatered for female beggars, criminals in disguise and old age beggars. Fatai (2017) categorized beggars into corporate beggars, part-time beggars, mobile, stationary, opportunist beggars among others.

Scholars across the globe have established that begging is not only practice in developing countries, but a universal phenomenon and a global urban problem in developed countries (Mortimer, 2005; Namwata, Mgabe, Dimoso, 2012; Al Helal and Kabir, 2013; International Labour Organization, 2014; Kongoley, 2017). Globally, street begging has been practiced with similar spatial pattern in the distribution of beggars and varied socio-economic and demographic characteristics of beggars. According to Smith
(2005), beggars were found in major public space in the United State of America, Britain, and other developed countries soliciting for alms (Smith, 2005; Fabriga, 1971). In the same vein, different categories of beggars including the poor, people with disabilities beggars, the homeless and professional beggars have been found in major areas, central business districts and commercial centres in Shanghai, China. Al Helal and Kabir (2013) have also found out that street beggars are found in city-centres, central business districts, rural-urban fringes and rural areas in Bangladesh. Street beggars in Tanzania also exhibit some inherent classifications as Namwata, Mgabo and Maseke (2012) have also categorised street beggars in Central Tanzania to include the beggars on the street, the beggars of the street, the beggars in the street and the beggars of street families. The beggars on the street spend most of the day on the streets begging for alms, they have permanent homes, usually maintain family ties or contacts, and do often return home in the evening to sleep. The beggars of the streets live and sleep on the streets and have loose family contacts and do occasionally go back home. The beggars in the streets are completely detached from, have abandoned or have been abandoned by their families and their immediate communities and have drifted into the begging life. The beggars of street families are beggars born and raised on the streets; most of them have parents who are beggars. Azam (2011), found out that in Pakistan, beggars have taken on the advantages of soliciting for alms to achieve other hidden and mischievous acts of drug and human trafficking, drug use, organ selling, child abuse, prostitution and terrorism.

There is a clear distinction between begging and the age-long tradition of Almajiri in the Northern Nigeria. There is general consensus among scholars on the definition of street begging. Begging is a testimony of perverted poverty and impoverishment and has always been a major way out for the helpless poor (Adedibu, 1989). This definition is not comprehensive enough, as not all beggars are poor or motivated into begging by poverty, and not all the poor are beggars (Jelili, 2006). Jelili (2006) defines begging as the act of asking people for money, food, and clothes among others as gifts or charity. He conceptualizes begging to involve not only individuals but also organizations or countries which he tags “corporate begging”. However, street and house to house begging are synonymous with street and house-to-house begging; it borders around such issues or related concepts as “panhandling” “mendicancy” and “vagrancy” which characterize city beggars. It is important to state that
while “street and house-to-house begging” which is the concern of this present study and “panhandling” are synonymous, and may represent the general idea of asking people for money, food among others, mendicancy and vagrancy connotes more than street begging (JELILI, 2009). Mendicancy, as an art of begging, is usually associated with religious members. Vagrancy, on the other hand, refers to begging activity of the jobless, homeless, and wanderers or vagabonds. It involves people who have been driven by natural disasters to leave home in search of richer areas as well as refugees (Hanchao Lu 1999) who become beggars in the new places they migrate to. Chukwulobe (2011) defines begging as an act of stopping people on the street to beg for assistance which could either be in the form of giving money or food.

Almajiri on the other hand is a system whereby young boys study under Islamic clerics which in the real sense is against the Arabic meaning of (Al-Muhajirun). Al-Muhajirun means a traveller who leaves his immediate environment to seek for Islamic knowledge for propagating the teaching and practices of Islam. The Al-Muhajirun are those who migrate in the search for knowledge and in turn graduate to be commander of Islamic knowledge and propagation of Islamic tenets and its teachings. It is also based on the tradition of the Noble Prophet Muhammed (SAW) to search for knowledge anywhere across the globe that will benefit humanity from cradle to grave as every of our action in course of Allah is a Jihad which all shall be rewarded according to our intentions. It was narrated in some Hadiths where Prophet Muhammed (SAW) said: Whoever travels to seek for knowledge, he is the path of Allah SWT till he returns (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2647): Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslin (Sunan Ibn Majah 224). The Almajirin system of education which supposed to be an avenue for transmission, cross-fertilization and propagation of Islamic knowledge has been compromised or bastardized in the northern Nigeria to beggars of food and other materials of basic necessities of life (Fatai, 2017). The practice of Almajiri thrives significantly and widely embraced by members of the communities in the Northern Nigeria, during the pre-colonial period in Northern Nigeria, especially among Muslims. The system was funded through numerous means such as the state treasury and 'zakkat' under the control of the emirs. Other sources of funding of the system were sadaqoh (almsgiving), wagf (endowment), the community, parents, and support from the teachers and students through farming that enhance the adoption
of practice of Almajiri in these schools (Danbuzu, 2012 & Bala, 2014). The system adopts flexible Islamic learning model, alongside with the wide range choice for students to learn other vocational skills, such as farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, tailoring among others and they don’t beg, because their basic needs are being provided (Danbuzu, 2012; Shittu & Olaofe, 2015; Ahmad, 2018).

The fall of Almajiri system of education could be associated to attempt by British to weakened the traditional system of governance in Northern Nigeria, abolished the state funding of Almajiri system of education. The British introduced western education with adequate funding, to replace the established system of Almajiri education. The popularization of western education at the expense of Almajiri system of education, makes Mallams to be unqualified for employment in western education, and thereby created a fertile ground for poverty. Mallam’s lost their jobs because they are not qualified to teach western education (Okonkwo, 2017). According to Obene (2012), poverty associated with loss of jobs of western education among mallams, loss of support from the government in funding Almajiri system of education, the Emir are helpless, increasing enrolment of pupil to take care of, as well as increasing level of poverty in the country are contributory factors responsible for the degeneration of the Almajiri system of education into socio-economic problems and security threats. The consequential effects of the weakened Almajiri system of education led to total abandonment by their parents and the society, mallams who supposed to take care and promote the welfare of the Almajiri, but now send them to street to solicit for foods in the morning, return back home to learn, go out for food in the afternoon, return back for learning and in the evening to search for food.

In the southwest Nigeria, beggars are found across major cities in public places with different strategies in soliciting for alms. Oyo State government only relocated street beggars from Sabo- Mokola round about to near settlements of Jembewon road and Oja-ba without any form of sustainable rehabilitation mechanisms and empowerment (Fatai, 2017). Street beggars in Ibadan metropolis have a well-structured administrative framework by forming strong social networking and committees such as welfare committee who protect the interest and promote the welfare of the beggars. The welfare committee ensures that all beggars return home on time from their respective place of begging. Disciplinary committee is
saddled with the responsibility of instilling the culture of discipline among beggars to ensure peaceful co-existence from their place of residence and their place of begging (Fatai, 2017). In the same vein, street beggars have developed themselves into association which may be call trade union (such as Blind Association of Nigeria). By this, every beggar has its own separate begging zone. In this respect, they may not allow outsiders to come to beg, unless they are able to build confidence in that person to be of good character. The author further revealed that street beggars see the business side of begging and perceive it as profession. Unless the root cause of begging which is poverty-driven is alleviated, there will be increased in the distribution of beggars in major public space in Nigerian cities.

There are limited studies on understanding security and socio-economic consequences of street begging. Numerous studies have been carried out by scholars in examining the socio-economic and cultural factors responsible for street begging in Nigerian cities (Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009; Jelili, 2009; Fawole et al., 2011; Ojedokun, 2015; Fatai, 2017). Fatai (2017), revealed that there is significant spatial variation in the distribution of street beggars by sex, age, marital status, educational qualification, religion, and ethnicity respectively in Ibadan Metropolis. Ojedokun (2015) examined the socio-demographic profile of transnational street beggars in Lagos and Ibadan. The study found out transnational street beggars contributed to the nation’s insecurity and other environmental and health problems. Fawole, Ogunkan, & Omoruan (2011) examined the sociological perspectives of street begging in Nigerian cities. The study established the relationship between begging and urban land use activities in influencing the spatial distribution of street beggars in Nigerian cities with favourable land use such as commercial, transport and public use. Okolie (2016) investigated the pattern of street begging in Enugu Metropolis. The study found out that group of beggars prefer market places; while those that beg alone prefer worship centres; while the physically-challenged beggars often led by other person prefer traffic intercessions. The study also established that nature of begging influences the preferred location of begging. However, there are limited studies to singly and holistically examine security and socio-economic consequences of street begging. These are the gaps in knowledge in which this present study intends to fill and thereby find answers to the following questions such as what are the factors responsible for street begging and what are the socio-economic and security consequences of street begging?.
Socio-Economic Conditions of Street Begging

In the context of socio-economic conditions, begging become last resort as there is wide gap between the rich and the poor. Factors such as inadequate sustainable development policy and institutional frameworks associated with bad governance, lack of accountability, transparency, political instability and political corruption are responsible for poverty leading to begging. The Nigeria economic models and political philosophies that make the rich getting richer, while the poor getting poorer, amassing the meager income of the poor and re-distribute to the rich as a result of exploitation of the poor masses create an enabling environment for begging (Fatai, 2017). Other factors responsible for street begging are natural calamities like floods, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, disabilities and degenerative diseases, war, terrorism, insecurity and lack of good governance to provide social safety net for the poor among others. This has led to the poorest of the poor engaging in begging as the only perceived-quick way to arrest poverty (Amman, 2006; Jelili, 2009; Ogunkan and Fawole, 2010). Jelili (2006) argued that poverty and physical disability are major factors causing begging in Nigeria. This is also buttressed by a report by World Bank (2017) who estimated that 60% of Nigeria population lives below poverty line 1.25 USD per day, therefore, beggars feel the only quick way they can survive in meeting their basic necessities of life is by soliciting for alms. The recent socio-economic imbalances in Nigeria have led to beggars seeing the business side of begging and see it as profession for livelihoods. There is also rural-urban of internal migration where the people move to urban centres where they perceived to be greater economic opportunities for a means of sustenance and transnational beggars from neighbouring African countries to Nigeria to solicit for alms (Ojedokun, 2015). Due to inability to live and meet up with expensive life-style at the city-centres, they thereby resort to begging as a means of survival and thereby constituting social, environmental and spatial nuisances and security threats.

Socio-economic and Security Consequences of Street Begging

The spread of begging in major cities, central business districts and other public places has increased exponentially especially in Nigerian cities with its attendant effects on the socio-economic, urban space and the environment (Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009; Fawole et al., 2010). The activities of beggars in public places using different strategies to draw
sympathy from the general public and their display of aggression and other forceful behavior in soliciting for alms. Street beggars have displayed different hostile behaviour, heinous and criminal activities, prostitution, ritual, kidnapping among other social vices associated street begging, as well as illegal and uncontrolled transnational migrant beggars from neighbouring countries not to contribute to the country’s socio-economic development but to engage in begging (Namwata, Mgabe, and Dimoso, 2011 and Ojedokun, 2015). The criminal activities of beggars have attracted the attention of law enforcement agencies in controlling their activities in public places.

Indeed, foreign nationals, particularly those from some neighbouring African countries, have been frequently linked to series of civil upheavals and ethno-religious crisis witnessed in some parts of Nigeria at different points in time (Onuoha, 2010; Salawu, 2010; Olaniyi, 2009; Adedokun, 2003). In the same vein, immigrants from neighbouring African countries are recruited into members of Boko Haram - the terrorist group that over the years have been constituting security threats through killings, bomb attacks, maiming, kidnapping and other criminal activities, especially in northern Nigeria (Okoli, 2013; Adepegba, 2012; Sambo, 2012). According to Adewuyi (2007), street beggars have been frequently linked to different criminal activities in major Nigerian cities such as Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Lagos, Enugu, Portharcourt, Aba and Calabar. Street beggars have contacted sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS as a result of illicit and unprotected sex, especially among female child beggars in Nigerian cities (FGN/UNICEF, 2010). In Jos metropolis, female beggars have been exposed to sexual abuse leading to unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion (Osagbemi, 2001).

Tambawal (2010), associated the menace of begging to alcohol and substance abuse, glue sniffing, prostitution, sexual abuse especially among female beggars and engaged criminal and other heinous activities. Many beggars in the streets risk being kidnapped and forced into the prostitution by individuals. Ojo and Benson (2017) found out street beggars in Ibadan Metropolis developed inferiority complex, lack of social interaction, loss of self-respect and dignity. Jelili (2009) revealed that street beggars obstruct easy flow of human and vehicular traffic that distort different socio-economic activities at the city centres. Sule-Kano (2000) associated numerous criminal activities especially among fake beggars in major cities in Nigeria. Fatai (2017) argues that series of inter-ethnic rivalry and religious
bigotry have been associated with the activities of Almajiri (child beggars) and their involvement into hooliganisms. Almajiri children are massively recruited into perpetuating violence and terrorism as they have large population force that can serve as enabling ground for their emergence and integration for security and defense threat. Almajiri children have huge population force that can serve as fertile ground for their massive recruitment into child soldiers and other forms of insecurity units in perpetuating violence and terrorism, thereby serving as potent ground for security threat in the society especially where the system is being practiced. Area boys street beggars in south west Nigeria are now use as agents of political thuggery and hooliganisms to perpetuate political violence. They engaged in oppression and physical assaults of opposition parties, electoral officials and engagement in electoral malpractices such as stealing of electoral boxes.

Young children have been forcefully recruited into begging by older professional beggars under perpetual slavery and threat to their life. Beggars have also adopted different unethical and illegal strategies such as hiring babies from nannies and day care centres and disguise them as beggars in public places. The babies are hired from day care, with the perception that babies will attract more sympathy from the general public and thereby record higher returns from begging Olaniyi (2009). The author argues that In Lagos, there have been reported cases of renting children with a sum of N500, from owners of day care centres for at least four hours to women who disguise them as beggars in the streets.

Olaniyi (2009) has linked numerous riots and civil unrest to beggars and street children who serves as foot soldiers. The crisis of Bonnke of 1991 and Maitatsine riots of 1981 perpetuated by crops of beggars in Kano Metropolis. Child beggars (Almajiri) have been involved in numerous thefts, stealing and looting of homes and shops in various parts of Kano State. In similar vein, Ogunkan (2009) found out that street beggars have adopted different aggressive and hostile behaviour such as insults, profanity, or veiled threats in soliciting for alms. Meanwhile, Osa-Edoh and Ayano (2012) argue that beggars in Nigerian cities adopt different deceit and tactics of posters, envelopes with pictures of terminally-ill people to beg for alms and divert the proceed from fraudulent acts into personal use. Street begging is a deviant behavior and socio-cultural milieu as the activities of soliciting for alms is against norms, culture and moral core value in Nigeria.
Recommendation and Conclusion

Urban scholars, policy makers, developmental experts and organizations, planners and other critical stakeholders in the development path need to be more aware about the dangers, untold hardships and consequential effects of street begging and come up with policy and strategies in effecting development programmes for finding sustainable solutions to the menace of begging. There are varied environmental, socio-economic, cultural, spatial and other contributory factors responsible for street begging. It has also been observed, that begging thrive in Nigerian cities as a result of perverted poverty and other socio-economic deprivation, cultural factors, spatial inequalities and poor urban governance. To this end, there is therefore the need to develop sustainable pro-poor programmes and policy interventions that will find lasting solutions to the challenges associated with street begging. Government and other critical stakeholders in development should concertedly break the cycle of poverty through provision of social safety net for poverty alleviation, vocational skills acquisition among able-bodied beggars; education services for the child beggars, street children and Almajiri; provision of health care service delivery for aged, beggars with disabilities among others. This will therefore reduce spatial-inequality in resources distribution and thereby bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Furthermore, there is need to adopt robust and holistic programmes. Specific policies and other legislative frameworks are needed in terms of age, sex, disability, and family-related issues to effectively address the begging problem. In this regard, responsive interventions are needed and rehabilitative solutions for each category of street beggars. In as much as begging activities constitute vices in the society, government and other stakeholders should create opportunities for street beggars to make a living in a legal, ethical and sustainably. There should be massive awareness and sensitization on cultural and attitudinal changes against begging, as well as enlightenment among religious bodies to control the erroneous belief of beggars who hide under the religious belief of helping the poor through almsgiving in soliciting for alms. This will thereby encourage street beggars to embrace decent, legal, ethical means of livelihoods, rather than seeing begging as a profession.

Systematic attempts and deliberate efforts should be made by government by promoting pro-poor policy to stimulate social welfare programmes and safety net thereby preventing the persons with
disabilities, the needy and the less-privilege to result to begging as a means of arresting poverty and livelihoods. These aforementioned recommendations need to be put in place for finding sustainable solutions to street begging which in the long run will address the insecurity, terrorism, crime and other socio-economic vices in Nigerian cities.

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**Psalm 4:1**

Quran: Sura 9:60


Ibn Majah 224

