

Article

Incidence and socio-economic dimensions of begging in Nigerian cities: The case of Ogbomoso

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This study is an empirical report of the incidence and dimension of begging in Nigerian cities with Ogbomoso as a case study. The enumeration of beggars was conducted on different weekdays at different wards in Ogbomoso Township to obtain data on incidence of begging while questionnaires were administered on randomly selected beggars to obtain information on their socio - cultural and socio - economic characteristics. The data, presented in percentages revealed high incidence of begging on Monday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The socio economic Characteristics of beggars reflect that begging is more pronounced among male, married, illiterates and the aged, while the socio – cultural characteristics revealed that begging is prevalent among Muslim Hausas. Recommendations were offered, based on the findings of the study, to address the problem of begging in the study area and by extension in Nigerian cities

Key words: Panhandling, sponging, mendicancy, vagrants, cyber begging, professional beggars.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent times, increasing academics attention has been directed to the problem of begging (Adedibu, 1989; Okoli, 1993; Hanchao, 1999; Smith, 2005; Jelili, 2006; Ogunkan, 2009). The major thrust of these works is that begging has become a global phenomenon which threatens the environmental, economic and social survival of humanity.

The problem of begging has arrested the attentions of governments of various countries, particularly the advanced countries of the world (Ogunkan, 2009). For instance, in Canada, the Province of Ontario introduced its safe street act in 1999 to restrict specific kinds of begging especially certain narrowly defined cases of aggressive or abusive begging (Wikipedia, 2009). In United Kingdom, begging has been restricted in British Columbia and in London underground system while it has been banned in some larger cities of United States such as Chicago, Illinois, Santa Cruz CA, San Francisco CA. In most, if not all US jurisdictions beggars can be arrested and jailed under vagrancy law (wikipedia, 2009).

In Nigeria, Lagos state government also made efforts

tackle the problem of begging by building rehabilitation centres to cater for beggars (Okoli, 2009).

However, these governmental efforts to curb the menace of begging have not been effective and rarely dissuade the beggars and the constitutionality of bans on begging has not been fully established by case law (Wikipedia, 2009).

Although, the problem of begging is a worldwide phenomenon, it is more pronounced in the third world countries (Adedibu, 1989). This is true of Nigeria where different categories of beggars are conspicuously found in motor parks, religious worship, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies among other public places begging for alms (Jelili, 2006).

Scholars have attributed the problem of begging to a number of factors such as poverty (Adedibu, 1989; NCFWD, 2001; Jelili, 2006) religion (Hanchao, 1999) physical disability (Fabregas, 1971; Adedibu, 1989; Jelili, 2006) and culture (Adedibu, 1989, Jelili, 2006). However, of all those identified factors, poverty and physical disability are most visible in Nigeria (Jelili, 2006). For instance, an estimate by World Bank indicates that over 45% of the country's population live below poverty level while about two thirds (2/3) of this group are extremely poor. Therefore, in order to meet their basic needs, some

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of the poverty stricken people resort into begging as a major means of livelihood. Also from empirical evidences, physically disabled beggars constitute the bulk of identified beggars in Nigeria (Jelili, 2006; Ogunkan, 2009).

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" (Jelili, 2006). 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 (KSRB, 1997). The Presence of fake beggars and begging criminals has not helped the situation and may be dangerous to the society.

Despite the danger poised by begging to the socio-economic development of Nigerian urban centres like Ogbomoso, it is unfortunate that much research works have not been directed towards addressing the problem of begging in Nigerian cities. This is the focus of this study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to investigate the incidence of begging in the study area. It also intends to examine the socio – economic implications of begging with a view to suggesting measures to reduce the incidence of begging in Ogbomoso.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Begging has been variously conceptualized by scholars to reflect different ways reasons for begging. In the words of Jelili (2006) "to beg" is to simply ask people for money, food, clothes etc as a gift or charity. He conceptualizes begging to involve not only individuals but organizations or countries.

In Wikipedia (2009), begging is presented as requesting something in a supplicating manner with the implication that person who is begging will suffer emotional and or physical harm. Like Jelili (2006), Wikipedia (2009) also agrees that the term is applicable not only to individuals but to groups.

Some scholars use the term mendicancy, vagrancy (Hanchao, 1999), panhandling, sponging (Wikipedia, 2009) to reflect means and reasons for begging. While panhandling and sponging are synonymous with street begging, mendicancy and vagrancy connote more than street begging. Mendicancy refers to an act of begging usually associated with religious belief, vagrancy is used to describe the begging activities of jobless, homeless, and wanderers or vagabond (Hanchao, 1999). whatever term used: street begging, panhandling, sponging (Wikipedia, 2009), mendicancy or vagrancy (Hanchao, 1999), it has its root in the general idea of asking people for money, food, clothes etc.

The problem of begging is a universal phenomenon which has generated issues both in developed and developing countries but it is prevalent and least attended to in developing countries (Adedibu, 1989). The situation in Nigeria is appreciated with different categories of beggars found at motor parks, religious worship centres, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies and worst still on the campuses (Jelili, 2006).

The problems of begging in the third worlds are similar and a thorough knowledge of one may lead to understanding of the situation in another (Adedibu, 1989). For example, the situation in Nigeria and Mexico reveal similarities in problems and reasons for begging (Fabregas, 1971; Adedibu, 1989).

A considerable number of factors have been identified by different schools of thought in begging as influencing begging in cities. These factors identified at different times and in different localities are closely related to one another (Jelili, 2006).

In China, a Chinese Shanghai based Christian Organisation identified five major factors influencing begging as: national disaster; civil war; handicaps and diseases; bad habits, and family heritage (Hanchao Lu, 1999), while Jiang and Wu (1933) observe such factors as uncontrolled rural – urban migration; national disaster; war banditry; bankruptcy; unemployment; disabilities; dysfunctional family and so on may lead to begging.

In Mexico, begging is seen as a result of economic necessity and as a traditional activity associated with the city's religion and political life (Adedibu, 1989). Fabregas (1971) in his research identified reasons for begging as physical deformities or incapacitation, medical illness, laziness, psychiatric disabilities and old age.

In Nigeria, Adedibu (1989) identifies thirteen closely related factors influencing begging in Nigerian cities. These include: physical disability, unemployment, religious belief, old age, lack of caring relatives, and lack of rehabilitation centre. Others are poverty, uncontrolled migration, lack of education, place of origin, lack of adequate residence accident, and acceptability of begging in society. Jelili (2006) identifies physical disability, unemployment, and old age as factors influencing begging.

NCFWD (2001) also identifies six reasons for begging. These are lack of parental / guardian support, lack of parental / guardian neglect, poverty, disability, socio - cultural misconception, and lack of parental education.

A close examination of these factors reveals that they appear similar and one or more of them may be reason(s) for taking to begging. However, these vary among beggars to reflect different categories of beggars.

Scholars have made suggestions in combating the menace of begging in cities of Nigeria in particular and third world countries in general. While Okediji and Sofolu (1972) suggest rehabilitation, Adedibu makes case for anti begging regulations, shelter and productive employment in the cities. Oladepo (2006) canvasses for the involvement of government and non government agencies

in tackling the problem of begging. Jelili (2006) makes an all embracing suggestions as he calls on government, corporate organizations, individuals, religious groups and community associations to rise together and tackle the menace of begging. Ogunkan (2009) emphasizes the roles of individuals and mass media in educating and sensitizing the public on the negative consequences of begging.

While, those suggestions are laudable, the achievements recorded in implementing them are minimal. This is because begging has taken a new dimension. Rather than seeing begging as a product of chronic poverty or physical handicap, some people take begging as a profession – a means of earning livelihood.

Begging has gone beyond seeing pitiable wretched, poverty ridden and physically handicapped street person begging for alms to survive. It has also involved a well dressed, able bodied men and women in street and at public places using different style to beg for alms. Jelili (2006) observes that these people have relatively stable and family ties but see begging as a profitable business or profession. Some have even gone to the extent of creating a personal websites to beg for alms (Ogunkan, 2009).

Internet begging, cyber – begging or internet panhandling is the online version of traditional begging (wikipedia, 2009). With hundreds of internet begging sites on line, it has become common practice for web beggars to register and own the domain name of their websites. Using free to inexpensive hosting services, internet beggars ask the public for help with many needs including breast augmentation, cancer treatment, new car, preventing personal homelessness and medical bills. Internet sites such as Savekarlyn.com, Avirginplea.com, one red paper clip, the million Dollar homepage are few of internet begging sites. While many of these internet begging websites appear to be as a result of an individual genuine need for attention or help, majority of them are as a result of earning a living through more convenience means.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociologists develop theories to explain social phenomena. Theory is a mental exercise that usually helps or guides to explain the reasons for a phenomenon or an event. It is therefore imperative, to employ theoretical explanation of begging as a social phenomenon.

The Functionalists emphasize the way parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability. They view society as a vast networks of connected parts which helps to maintain the system as a whole (Wikipedia, 2009). Functionalists hold that for an aspect of social life to be passed from generation to generation, it must have been contributing to society's stability or promote value consensus among members of a society (Schaefer, 2004).

Articulating the Functionalists view, Ogunkan (2009)

observes that begging performs some identifiable functions to the stability of the society. The existence of beggars helps the society to “fulfill” social, religious and economic obligations. For instance, some beggars device entertaining method to beg as such they are seen “entertaining” guests at functions. The existence of beggars also guarantees the higher status of the more affluent within the relatively hierarchical society.

In almost all religions of the world, alms giving is encouraged, the presence of beggars help in fulfilling this religious obligation. The existence of beggars also creates job opportunity not only for beggars but also for welfare care workers, public health experts in the rehabilitation of beggars.

Jelili (2006) refutes these explanations. He believes that begging does not contribute to the stability of the society but rather it constitutes environmental and societal nuisance to the society. Not only is that, begging also a threat to city or national economy.

In spite of these submissions, functionalists believe that begging does perform certain function that society seems need. However, they do not make judgement that begging is desirable form of social behaviour but seek to explain how an aspect of society that is so condemned and looked down upon can survive from generation to generation (Ogunkan, 2009).

The theory of “vicious circle of poverty” is another theory that enhances our understanding of the continued existence of beggars. Originally conceived by the earliest development economists, the theory seeks to explain the persistence of poverty in the society especially in the developing countries.

The concept of vicious circle of poverty was overshadowed and relegated to the background by Marxists but was recently and eloquently reinvented by the World Bank, in its 2000 world Development Report on poverty. This report emphasizes the people's inability to manage risk rather than their attitude to risk as a way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty.

Mosly and Verschour (2001) Identify such attributes of poverty which make escape difficult as poor health, lack of skill, lack of self confidence or support mechanism, remoteness from market and institute, lack of physical asset or borrowing power, malnourishments or the combination of the above.

As a result, the poor are trapped in the situation with little chance of escape such that in a vicious process, poverty is maintained among the poor across the generation. In order to meet their basic needs, the poor, therefore, result into begging (Jelili, 2006). The vicious circle of poverty helps to explain the existence of begging across the generations.

METHODOLOGY

Primary and secondary data were utilized in the study. Two sets of primary data were collected for the study. The first data on the incidence of beggars across the twenty wards of Ogbomosho

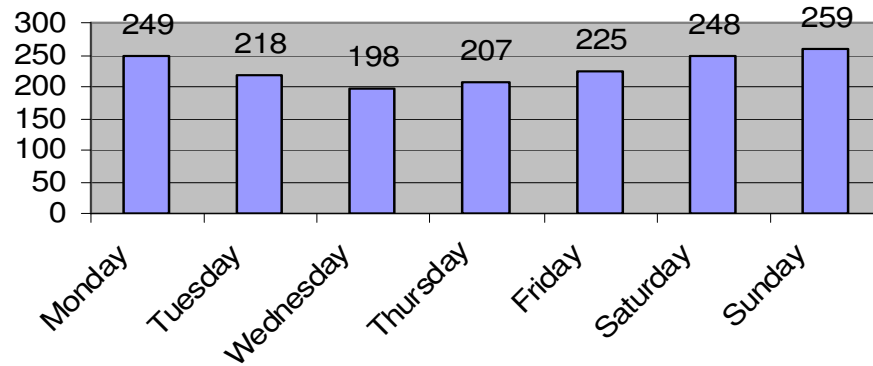


Figure 1. Daily incidence of begging in Ogbomosho.

Table 1. Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	68	62.4
Female	41	37.6
Total	109	100

Township (Ogbomosho North and South) was obtained through direct counting of beggars. This involved reaching the identified beggars routes and stations where they were counted. The survey and counting were done in all wards in the city at the same time with the help of research trained assistants. The idea of counting at the same time was to avoid double counting.

The second set of data was derived through questionnaires administration. The questionnaires were administered on beggars in the wards with high incidence of beggars. The earlier identified through direct counting of beggars. The questionnaires were administered on the randomly selected beggars in each of such identified wards.

The secondary data obtained from textbooks, journals, internet materials, past thesis and other relevant documents on the subject matter, catered for the literature review, theoretical frameworks as well as other pertinent information needed for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result and discussions of the findings of this study shall be presented in three sub headings: the incidence of begging in Ogbomosho, the socio - economics characteristics of beggars in Ogbomosho and the socio-cultural characteristics of beggars in Ogbomosho.

Incidence of begging in Ogbomosho

In this sub - section of analysis, the prevalence of begging at different days of the week were analyzed.

The daily variation of incidence of begging is relatively higher on Monday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday while it is lower on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (Figure 1). The high incidence on Friday and Sunday has religious

Table 2. Age distribution of beggars.

Age group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 - 18	02	1.8
19 - 39	29	26.6
40 - 59	36	33.0
60 and above	42	37.8
Total	109	100

undertone and may not be unconnected with Jumat and Sunday services on Friday and Sunday respectively. The high incidence of begging on Saturday suggests the influx of part time beggars from and outside Ogbomosho while that of Monday is, perhaps, connected with professionalism of begging in Ogbomosho as Monday is taken serious as working day by virtually every individual.

Socio - economic characteristics of beggars in Ogbomosho

This sub - section of analysis deals with such variables as gender, age, marital status, educational level, income, and household size of beggars in Ogbomosho.

Table 1 shows that 62.4% of the sampled beggars are male while 37.6% are female. This is the reflection that begging is more of male than female. This has a negative implication for city's economy as men are culturally placed as family benefactors.

As reflected in Table 2, 37.8% of the sampled beggars are above 60 years of age, 33% are 40 - 59 years while the young population age group of 19 - 39 years is 26.6% and teenagers account for 1.8%. It can, therefore, be deduced that aged people constitute the high proportion of beggars in Ogbomosho.

Table 3 reflects that begging is more of married (81.6%) than single (18.3%). This is an indication that that poverty and need to provide for the family form parts of the major reasons for begging in Ogbomosho.

As reflected by Table 4, begging is more pronounced

Table 3. Marital status of beggars.

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	20	18.3
Married	89	81.6
Total	109	100

Table 4. Educational level of beggars.

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No formal education	90	82.6
Primary school	14	12.8
Secondary school	04	1.8
Tertiary	01	0.9
Total	109	100

Table 5. Household size of beggars.

Household size	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 - 3	25	22.9
4 - 7	30	27.5
8 - 10	40	36.7
11 and above	14	12.8
Total	109	100

Table 6. Income distribution of beggars.

Income group (N)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
01 - 200	23	21.2
201 - 400	59	54.1
401 - 600	25	22.9
601 - 800	01	0.9
801 - 1000	01	0.9
Total	109	100

amidst illiterates as 82.6% of beggars in Ogbomoso have informal education. This is followed by those with Primary education (12.8%) and secondary education (1.8%) while those with tertiary education are 0.9%.

Regarding the beggars' household size, the findings revealed that largest proportion (36.7%) have household size between 8 - 10, 27.5% have 4 - 7 household members, 22.9% of them have household size of 1 - 3 members while 12.8% have household members of 11 and above (Table 5).

From the findings, it was reflected that a large population of beggars in Ogbomoso belong to low income group. For instance, 79% of beggars in Ogbomoso realize between ₦1- ₦400 daily, while 25% realize ₦401-₦600 daily. The least population of beggars (1.8%) earn ₦601 and above as daily income (Table 6).

Socio – cultural characteristics of beggars in Ogbomoso

In this sub-section, the socio-cultural variables of beggars in term of home town, tribe and religion were analyzed.

It was observed from Table 7, that majority of beggars (83.4%) are immigrants who came to live in Ogbomoso. Beggars who are indigenes of Ogbomoso constitute 16.5% of beggars in Ogbomoso. Majority of immigrant beggars (60.6%) are Northerners.

Majority of beggars in Ogbomoso are Hausas (60.5%), Yoruba beggars have the proportion of 37.6% while Ibo beggars recorded insignificant proportion of 1.8%. From this finding, it could be deduced that majority of beggars in Ogbomoso are of Hausa origin. This support the general belief that majority of beggars in Nigerian cities are northerners (Table 8).

Table 9 reveals that 84.4% of the beggars in Ogbomoso are Muslims as against 15.6% who are Christians. This distribution could be adduced to the fact, as reflected in Table 8, that majority of beggars in Ogbomoso are Hausas who invariably are Muslims and to the general belief that the doctrine of Islam directly or indirectly encourages begging.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered as ways of reducing the incidence of begging in the study area and by extension, in the Nigerian society.

The study has confirmed that lack of education is an important factor that influences begging. The enforcement of education opportunity is considered essential to tackle the menace of begging. Government should, therefore, improve the educational infrastructure by introducing measures to ensure that all children of relevant ages are included in the compulsory education and that education is provided virtually free of charge.

This will assist to keep child beggars off the street. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education represents a positive step in this direction but the effect of over politization and corruption on the programme should be addressed.

The impact of poverty on begging, is by no means, a push over, therefore, government should measure to improve the socio-economic security of low income families by transferring resources to the poor through direct assistance programme with emphasis on high risk groups.

The relationship between begging and religion has also been established by the study. The religious leaders are, therefore, encouraged to preach against begging and to teach their subjects the dignity of engaging in the productive components of the economy.

Furthermore, the overall legislative framework for prescription of begging should be put in place not only that,

Table 7. Home town of beggars.

Home town	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Towns in Ogbomoso	18	16.5
Towns outside Ogbomoso but n south Nigeria	25	22.9
Towns outside south Nigeria	66	60.6
Total	109	100

Table 8. Tribe of beggars.

Tribe	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yoruba	41	37.6
Hausa	66	60.5
Ibo	02	1.8
Total	109	100

Table 9. Religion of beggars

Religion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Islamic	92	84.4
Christianity	17	15.6
Total	109	100

the government should meet up with challenges of effective enforcement of these legislations.

Lastly, government, non – governmental organizations, religious bodies, mass media, and individuals should be motivated to embark on public enlightenment on the negative consequences of begging on environmental and socio-economic survival of individuals and the nation at large.

While it could be stated that the recommendations mentioned in this work are by no means, exhaustive, it is highly suggested that they can go a long way in addressing the problem of begging in Nigerian cities.

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