

*Full Length Research Paper*

## The practice of Almajiri: Prospect and socio-medical challenges in Northern part of Nigeria

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**The main purpose of the study is to identify the practice of Almajiri: prospect and socio-medical challenges in Sabon Gari Local Government Area, Kaduna State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey method was adopted using a cluster and sampling method. Questionnaire was used to collect the data, from three hundred male Almajiri. The study revealed that most of the respondents were between the ages of 8-14 years while very few were 15 years and above. Also, majority of the respondents did not attend formal school. Parental belief, goals and poverty were found to be the major reasons for the practices of Almajiri. Most of the respondents spent their time begging for food to eat and money. Also, a majority of them defecate in the bush, which endangers the health of society by the spread of diseases. Hunger and tiredness were found to be a major complaint of the respondents, and sleeping in a congested room on a mat. Appropriate recommendations are finally offered in the areas of re-orientation programmes, general skill development, and modernization of teaching Qur'an.**

**Key words:** Almajiri, Mallam/Alaramma, begging, Qur'nic school.

### INTRODUCTION

Sabon Gari is one of the most recognized towns in the Northern part of Kaduna State, Nigeria that is committed to both western and Islamic education, with many higher institutions and tsangaya (place where Mallam/Alaramma teaches Qur'anic education). Today, Children are the future of the nation, without them the future of nation looks dim. The aim of the study is to evaluate the prospect and socio-medical challenges associated with the practice of Almajiri in Sabon Gari Local Government

Area, Kaduna State, Nigeria. According to United Nation Convention on Child Right, a child is any person below eighteen (18) years. The convention, which was held in 1989, set out various declarations that will improve the quality of life of children worldwide. Some states signed the declaration including Nigeria. Some of the rights set out at the declaration include the right to education, health care, love and care, adequate food and shelter and live in a clean environment (Babangida, 1993). Despite these

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rights, in almost every streets, corner, junctions (especially in the north), are young, homeless, poor, neglected and maltreated children seen roaming the streets begging for food and alms (Babangida, 1993). These young children are called the “Almajiri” (a student who leaves his parent for Qur’anic education). They come mostly from rural areas to urban centres for the purpose of acquiring Qur’anic education. They are sent to study Qur’an under the care of a Mallam (Teacher of the Qur’anic school) or Alamma (Teacher of the Qur’anic school who memorizes and writes all verses of the Quran) who mostly comes from other village (Garba, 1996). Today the word Almajiri in Hausa has gradually acquired a completely different meaning; it is more or less referred to as beggars roaming the streets in our towns and cities. They include young pupils who left the comfort and protection of their parents and relations at a very tender age for the purpose of Qur’anic education (Sa’id, 1992). The malam/Alamma is not responsible for feeding the Almajiris and therefore are forced to beg on the street. They depend on people for their food and other life needs (Ibrahim, 2008). In the course of begging on the streets, they are exposed to various forms of hazards and situations. They are victims of economic hardship, child neglect and abuse; all in the name of Qur’anic education (Salis, 1995). The practice of Almajiri is one of the major forms of child abuse in Northern Nigeria. The practice is denying our society from producing future professionals that will contribute to the development of our nation. The practice is common among polygamous, poor and uneducated families (Pervez, 2005). The Almajiris are under the care of their mallam even though he is not responsible for feeding them. The children move around from door to door, street to street begging for food and other necessities of life; they move either singly or in group. Some of them attach themselves to seller of food items like Massa (waina), beans cake (kosai) or groundnut cake (kuli), moving about looking for buyer who will share to them voluntarily (Babangida, 1993). The Almajiri school system is where Qur’anic religious knowledge is acquired. The school is usually situated either in the mosque premises or tsangaya. It could also be situated outside the mallam’s house either under shade with no definite classrooms built for shelter and no proper sitting and writing facilities available; they use slate as reading materials (Ya’u, 2001). Many Nigerians do not consider the practice of almajiri as a problem. This is because of economic hardship and people do not actually think about the future life of these children (Yuyasa, 2005). Mallams and Almajiris have the custom of traveling on tour during dry season; on reaching a town or city, they lodge for a period of time, they would go round the markets and houses with their rubber container begging for food to sustain themselves (Garba, 1996). The rise of street begging is because majority of Almajiris rely on begging for food and money at major streets and junctions where people gather for day to day activities. It has also been

observed that most of the beggars migrate to the city from rural areas for the purpose of life sustainability (Ibrahim 2008). Qur’anic schools lack sufficient opportunity or suitable environment for those who wish to learn Qur’an; Almajiris depend on begging to earn living (Garba, 1996). The environment under which the Almajiris learn is deplorably untidy. They learn while sitting on floor since most of the schools cannot even afford mats for them. They live mostly in a congested classroom. A school sometimes has an average population of 180 pupils under the control of one Mallam/Alamma; they use one local small class room which has normal capacity of 50 pupils or less for about 180 pupils (Sule, 1994).

The almajiris cannot even afford most health services; thus they receive no treatment for many ailments and injuries although some buy medicine to treat themselves. Even where there should be free hospitals and health services, because of their socially marginalized positions they cannot be treated (Pervez, 2005). The Almajiris in one way or other are endangering the health of the community by urinating and passing stools indiscriminately. This is because most of the almajiri schools do not have toilets and bathrooms (Kabir, 2002). Some Mallams/Alamma do not allow their children to mingle with the Almajiris to the extent that they allow their own children to attend formal school (Kabir, 2002; Report of Kano State committee on Almajiris, 2012). When such Almajiris return to their villages, they participate in the act of selling and taking drugs. The Almajiris are exploited by their mallams, which include going to farm, fetching water for his domestic use, collecting fire wood and sometimes bringing even part of what they get from begging (Sulaiman 1996). Also, the Almajiris hear all kinds of embarrassing words and the practice is damaging to both the psychological and physical development of a child (Report of Kano State Committee on Almajiris, 2012).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research design

A descriptive survey design was adopted in evaluation of Almajiri practices: prospects and socio-medical challenges in Northern part of Nigeria in SabonGari local Government Area, Kaduna State.

### Background of the study area

Sabon Gari is one of the local Government Area of Kaduna State. It is located in Northern part of the state. It has an estimated population of about 286,871 (Census, 2006). The inhabitants are mostly Hausa-Fulani with other mixed tribes; farming and transportation are their common occupations. Sabon Gari Local Government Area has about one hundred and fifty eight (105) Qur’anic schools, each school with an average of fifty (50) pupils (Almajiris).

### Study population

The target populations are all male Almajiris in Sabon Gari Local

Government Area, Kaduna State.

### Sample/sampling technique

Sabon Gari Local Government Area was clustered into the following districts: Main Sabon Gari, Jama'a, Hanwa, Muciya, Basawa and Bomo districts. From each district, two Qur'anic schools were selected, and from each school ten (50) Almajiris was selected using availability sampling technique.

### Population size

A total of three hundred (300) Almajiris were interviewed using structured questionnaire.

### Method of data collection

The method used for data collections is through interview read from questionnaire. This is because most of the Almajiris cannot read or write. Before interview, permission was obtained from Mallam/Alaramma of each tsangaya.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the research carried out, findings shows that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 8-14 years while a few of the respondents are 15 years and above. This shows that these pupils are exposed at very early tender stage of life to several hazards. They are denied of parental care and basic education. Majority of the respondents (72%) are Hausa/Fulani. This is because Almajiri practice is more common among Hausa/Fulani society. The surveys revealed that majority of the respondents (80%) do not have formal education, because their parents have sent them far away to study the Qur'anic education. Parental goals and poverty were found to be the reasons for sending them far away from home to study Qur'an. 58% of the respondents left home because of parental belief while 40% is due to poverty situation. The study also shows that 68% of the Almajiri interviewed, their parents have no formal system of education and they came from larger family with seven children and above, and most of the fathers are substantial farmers. This also makes the parents to send them far away from home so that the number of children to feed and cater for will reduce. Majority of the parents do not visit their children regularly so they do not know their children's condition. This could be due to poverty and the distance from where the parents are living to the place where the Tsangaya school is located.

99% of the respondents interviewed gets daily food from begging on the streets, (90%) eat food twice a day with carbohydrates as common type of food they consume. This predisposes them to malnutrition and several types of disease due to lack of nutrients required to build and repair their body system. This makes 50% of the respondents suffer from illnesses such as typhoid fever, malaria,

skin rashes, cholera and most of them are treated in a chemist, because they cannot afford hospital treatment. So they can only go to a chemist and receive treatment without an accurate diagnosis and wrong treatment may be given while some cannot even afford chemist due to insufficient resources. Hunger and tiredness were factors mostly complained by the respondents, in which 38% of the respondents complained of being tired all the time while 62% complained of hunger. This could be due to low energy derived from the little food consumed and dispensation of more energy in the course of begging up and down. 73% of the respondents lack access to water and bathroom in their schools; hence they take their bath once in a week. Sometimes, they bath in stagnant lake or rivers which could expose them to water born disease. The study also reveals that 95% of the respondents have no toilets facilities in their schools, and most of them defecate in the bush. The few toilets they have are only used by Alaramma. This exposes them to dangers and endangers the health of the public, because they pass stool in an open place which could lead to spread of diseases. 85% of the respondents get clothes from begging and most of them have only two clothes, one for normal day to day activities and the other for going to jum'at congregational prayers. These clothes are only washed when dirty. This is the reason why they are wearing very dirty clothes because they only wash them when they are dirty and the number of cloths is few. 74% of the respondents are living and sleeping in congested rooms, some on floor and mats; they have a population of more than fifteen Almajiri in a small rooms with a capacity of 4-7 individuals. This could lead to spread of communicable diseases like tuberculosis etc. In this study, it was observed that Almajiris are exploited by their Mallams/Alaramma as most (80%) of them fetch water and fire wood for their Mallam's domestic use. This is because Mallams are not given any salary or allowances by the government or parents, yet they are responsible for providing sleeping rooms for them. Therefore, Mallams/Alaramma use them to solve some of their needs. This makes the children complain of tiredness all the time and also predispose them to several diseases like common cold and accidents during the course of water conveyance to Mallam's/Alaramma's house. 88% of the respondents spend most of their time begging on streets. This exposes them to several hazards, as 30% of the respondents were once involved in one form of criminal offence like rape. Also 52% of the respondents confess that they abuse cigarette, glue and Indian hemp. This may affect their health status and may become nuisance to the society. The study reveals that 18% of the respondents miss their colleagues during the course of their begging activities. As much as 76% of the respondents are not visited by their parents; if they do at all, is once in a year. Some complain that they have not seen their parents for the past four to five years. This does not build a strong relationship between parents and their children, and

could make children to become a threat to the community.

## Conclusion

The research was conducted on Almajiri practices: prospects and socio-medical challenges in in Sabon Gari local Government Area Kaduna State, Northern Nigeria. From the data, the studies revealed that most of the respondents were children between the ages of 8 – 14 years. They come from poor and large families. Amajiris are exposed and exploited at very early stages of life to several forms of hazards. In their schools, there are no toilets, bathrooms, reading facilities, good environmental condition, medical care, access to electricity, water and living rooms. They are denied of basic education, parental care, love and support; their parents send them away and end begging on streets, houses, markets, food centres, going round bush plucking fruits and later become nuisance to the society. And their Mallams/Alaramma are not paid by the government or parents despite their critical condition of poverty. Qur'anic schools or tsangaya are neglected from system of education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should make Qur'anic schools, tsangaya and design curriculum to adopt formal system of education i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary education so that the teaching and learning of Qur'an could be part of our educational system. Mallams/Alaramma should have financial support from government or to have a specific scale salary or allowance. Government should aid tsangayas by providing toilets, bathrooms, boreholes, medical care centre and foods. This could reduce defecating in the bush, exposure to various form of diseases, menace of street begging etc.

There should be proper orientation programmes to be done that will enlighten the public on the aims of Almajiri. Religious orientations, seminars, conferences should be organized to the people to clarify the misinterpretation of the word "Almajiri" and its practice. General skill acquisition and development programmes should be enforced for the Mallam/Alaramma and Almajiris in their respective centres.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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