

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF STREET BEGGING AMONG CHILDREN IN SULEJA, NIGER STATE NIGERIA.**

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### **Abstract**

*The study was carried out to examine street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis and the research objectives for this study are to identify the rate of street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis, and also to examine the factors responsible for street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis, and equally to identify the effect of street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis, and finally to explore the various strategies of managing street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis. Several literatures that is related to this study were also reviewed. 133 respondents ( children) within the Sulejas were given questionnaire to fill with the assistance of interpreters to gather data based on the research objectives. One of the conclusions of the study is that indicated poverty, low-self-esteem, religious misunderstanding, and illiteracy are major reasons for street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis and the country at large.*

**Keywords:** Street begging, poverty, children, socio-economic effects.

### **Introduction**

Street begging is one of the most severe social problems that have, over time, attracted global attention. The street beggar is an individual such as children, elderly, disabled people, and families who usually solicit for money or assistance in public spaces such as shopping areas, banks, public offices, churches, mosques, and busy streets, among others. Although this problem has generated issues both in developed and developing countries of the world, it is more prevalent and least attended-to in the developing countries. The presence of beggars in the streets of urban areas of developing countries is recognized to be a severe problem that requires an urgent redress; their lifestyles and the display of overtly aggressive behavior make them subjects of suspicion and hostility by the public, and law enforcement agencies in particular (Namwata, Mgabo, and Dimoso, 2011).

In Nigeria, the culture of begging is fast becoming a social influence too strong to be ignored as the number of alms-dependent persons in the country has been increasing progressively since the 1980s (Aderinto, Akinwale, Atere, and Oyenuga, 2007). Though street begging, by definition in constitutional law and criminal code, is a deviation from what Nigeria and the majority of her citizens defined as right (Adewuyi, 2000), the severity and widespread nature of this phenomenon are daily exemplified by different categories of persons engaging in it (Fawole, Ogunkan, and Omuruan, 2011; Jelili, 2009). Indeed, the problem has reached an acute stage to the extent that it has continued to draw the attention of the government, the media, religious leaders, the general public and other stakeholders in the society.

Street begging has gone beyond seeing pitiable wretched, poverty-ridden and physically handicapped street persons soliciting alms to survive, as able-bodied men and women, who have refused to work for a living, are also involved in it by using different strategies to solicit alms from members of the public (Fawole, Ogunkan, and Omuruan, 2011). Begging has become a social institution, a commercial enterprise, and occupation for otherwise healthy citizens in society (Igbinovia, 1991). While some people take to begging as a permanent business, others see it as a temporary measure of escaping the contingent poverty conditions. Some other individuals engage in begging as a way of diverting the attention of the nearby people from all forms of the evil they may wish to perpetrate (Adedibu and Jelili, 2012).

In recent years, the attention of sociologists, psychologists, and social researchers has been on the menace of street begging, that has become part and parcel of the cultural landscape. According to Tipple (2013), the number of homeless people worldwide in 2012 is estimated in to be between 100 million to 1Billion. The Population of beggars who seem to pass most of their time on the streets and public areas in many states of the world has existed from time immemorial. In many urban areas due to poverty, failure in housing systems and insurgency, street beggars are found in public places such as recreational areas, worship centers, commercial centers worst still on campus begging for arms.

In Nigeria, the north-west geopolitical zone has the highest percentage of street beggars compare to other geopolitical zones, most of which depend on the street begging to survive (Ojo, 2017). Street beggars including children, the aged,

women, and men, disabled are conspicuously found in streets and public areas begging for alms. They are mostly between 5-45 years whom regularly move in groups of 5-10 with plates or bowls in their hands having un-kept hair, blistered lips, dirty fingers, bare and broken feet, tattered clothes engaging members of the public with enchanting songs and saluting alms singing in exchange for money food and items. While the disabled with kids leading the way soliciting for money, food, or anything from passersby.

The cankerworm of begging has become a socio-economic and physical problem for most cities in Nigeria both in the southern and northern region of the country. This circumstance has made the beggars take advantage of the urban area in the society, which they are now permanent residents (illegal or legal) in the locations. Studies have shown that even when these beggars are provided for and are taken away from the street via rehabilitation or legal enforcement one tends to encounter them on the street still again (Esan, 2009)

The menace of street begging among children in some area is associated with the growth of the cities, high-level of drought and famine occurring in their domain, which makes them, locate to find green pastures. Other factors include poverty and socio-economic problems of the family the children grew in and from (Ojo and Benson, 2017). Begging is an act done by requesting from person one encounters money, food, shelter to satisfy him/herself. Mudasir (2010) depicts that begging is a social problem that brings about development of inferiority complex in the children begging and also dent their family image. Brown (2010) depicts that begging is anti-social to almost all the nations of the world, most notably the emerging and developing nations of the country. However, this study focuses on the street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis.

### **Statement of the problem**

One social problem that has been an age-long issue and severe concern to well-meaning Nigerians is street begging. The problem of begging is widespread in Nigeria and seen as a global problem. Brown (2010) said begging is 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 or favor. Street begging anywhere is a national disease that eats into the fabrics of the social, economic, religious, political, and educational structures. In other words, it is an indictment on the quality of government in many societies (Usoro, 2007).

In Nigeria, the history of street begging is uncertain, but it is known that street begging had been in existence even before the country gained her independence. According to the Amman (2009), “Mabaratas” who are professional beggars contributed immensely to the widespread of begging in Nigeria. “Mabaratas” are those that live by asking people for money.

Begging has been prevalent since the existence of human civilization and has many different variables and causes within different cultural contexts. Begging has happened in most societies around the world, although its prevalence and exact form varied. Begging had noticed in Greece about 8th to sixth centuries ago among the early Middle Ages and the Byzantine era (Johnny, 2008). According to Alan (2010), the phenomenon of street children has been documented as far back as 1848.

In Nigeria, the Government also recently made efforts to tackle the problem of begging, by building rehabilitation centers to cater to beggars (Okoli, 2009). However, these governmental efforts to curb the menace of begging have not been practical and rarely dissuade the beggars. Moreover, the constitutionality of bans on begging has not been fully established by law cases (Petro, and Kombe, 2010).

In Nigeria, some government authorities, including FCT, made various efforts to tackle the problem by sending beggars back to their homes but without setting forth strategies to make street beggars attain necessities of life. As a result, many municipal authorities have been striving to control the influx of street beggars in the cities without success. A quick examination of these efforts indicates that most of them focused more on the symptoms rather than on prevention or eradication of the deeper structural causes of the problem (Olujimi, and Olamiju, 2011). Despite the menace of begging to the environment and socio-economic development of Nigerian urban centers, it is unfortunate that not much research works have been directed towards the rehabilitation of street beggars. This signals the need for more to be done to contain the situation comprehensively and sustainably.

The severe problem of begging is a common attribute in almost all urban area in Nigeria, even though it is significantly at an increasing rate in some other part of

the country (Namwata et al., 2010). The phenomenon of street begging is a problem due to the following factors which include poverty, religion, physical disability, culture, national disaster, civil war, bad habits, family heritage and psychiatric disabilities (Amman, 2006; Ogunkan&Fawole, 2009; Namwata et al., 2011). The problems above necessitate a need to carry out a study on the street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis.

### **The objective of the study**

This study intends to study the effect of street begging among children in Gwagwalada Metropolis. The specific objective of the study includes the following:

- I. To identify the rate of street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis.
- II. To examine the factors responsible for street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis
- III. To identify the effect of street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis
- IV. To explore the various strategies of managing street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Vicious circle theory**

The theory of Vicious Cycle of Poverty (Ragnar Nurske 1950), seeks to explain the persistence of poverty in society and indicates that poverty as a subculture, passes from one generation to another and becomes institutionalized amongst the poor. It is one of the characteristics which prepare the ground for the phenomenon of street begging. It emphasized the people's ability to manage risk rather than their attitude to risk as a way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Other attributes of poverty which make escape difficult are poor health, lack of skills, lack of self-confidence or support mechanism, remoteness from market, lack of physical asset or borrowing power, malnutrition, tendency towards indolence, lack of cognitive psyche, feeling of incapability, dependence on others, feeling of unworthiness or combination of the above (Ahmadi, 2003, Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009). As a result, the poor were trapped in the situation with little chance of escaping such that in a vicious process, poverty was maintained among the poor across the generations. The vicious cycle of poverty helps to explain the existence of begging across the generations (Jelili, 2009).

Begging develops in societies where there is not the appropriate job for the people with a particular profession or skill, and society cannot effectively solve the problems of the poor. However, there are mentalities and values dominating the society which consider the poor's low level of life as the result of their capability. In such conditions, begging is both a means for adaptation to the environment to survive and a reaction which the weak individual reveals against his/ her feeling of unworthiness in order to resist hopelessness. Hopelessness results from knowing the reality that achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society is impossible for them (Jelili 2009).

### **Functionalist theory**

Structural functionalism or simply functionalism (Talcott Parsons et al. 1979), sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole, and believes that society has evolved like organisms. This approach looks at both social structure and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions, and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole. In the most basic terms, it merely emphasizes "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system." For TalcottParsons, "structural-functionalism" came to describe a particular stage in the methodological development of social science, rather than a specific school of thought. The structural functionalism approach is a macro-sociological analysis, with a broad focus on social structures that shape society as a whole. (Ritzer, 2011).

The sociologist Talcott Parson popularised insight into functionalism, with emphasis on the nature of specific social structures such as roles, social systems, actions as a process in times and expenditure of effort or energy, personality, and interrelatedness of actions and structure (Ritzer, 2011). These roles are reinforced by cultural and situational expectations from children when viewed from the child labor phenomenon. Children engaged in child labor are performing some section of duty assigned to them by either the socio-cultural, economic, or political structures of their societies. Viewed from structuralism, therefore, the

notion of the socio-economic, political, and regulative ideals of the phenomenon could be explained in perceived “dysfunctional.”

### **Criticism of the functionalist theory**

In the 1960s, functionalism was criticized for being unable to account for social change, or for structural contradictions and conflict (and thus was often called "consensus theory"). Also, it ignores inequalities, including race, gender, class, which cause tension and conflict. The refutation of the second criticism of functionalism that it is static and has no concept of change has already been articulated above, concluding that while Parsons' theory allows for change, it is an orderly process of change (Parsons, 1961), a moving equilibrium. Therefore, referring to Parsons' theory of society as static is inaccurate. It does indeed emphasize equilibrium and the maintenance or quick return to social order, but this is a product of the time in which Parsons was writing (post-World War II, and the start of the cold war). Society was in upheaval and fear abounded. At the time, the social order was crucial, and this is reflected in Parsons' tendency to promote equilibrium and social order rather than social change.

Another criticism directed at functionalism is that it contains no sense of agency, that individuals are seen as puppets, acting as their role requires. Holm wood states that the most sophisticated forms of functionalism are based on "a highly developed concept of action," and as was explained above, Parsons took as his starting point the individual and their actions. His theory did not, however, articulate how these actors exercise their agency in opposition to the socialization and inculcation of accepted norms. As has been shown above, Merton addressed this limitation through his concept of deviance, and so it can be seen that functionalism allows for the agency. It cannot, however, explain why individuals choose to accept or reject the accepted norms, why and in what circumstances they choose to exercise their agency, and this does remain a considerable limitation of the theory.

Further criticisms have been leveled at functionalism by proponents of other social theories, particularly conflict theorists, Marxists, feminists, and postmodernists. Conflict theorists criticized functionalism's concept of systems as giving far too much weight to integration and consensus and neglecting independence and conflict. Lockwood, in line with conflict theory, suggested that Parsons' theory missed the concept of system contradiction. He did not account for those parts of the system that might have tendencies to mal-integration.

According to Lockwood, it was these tendencies that come to the surface as opposition and conflict among actors. However, Parsons thought that the issues of conflict and cooperation were very much intertwined and sought to account for both in his model. In this, however, he was limited by his analysis of an 'ideal type' of society, which was characterized by consensus. Merton, through his critique of functional unity, introduced into functionalism a precise analysis of tension and conflict. Merton's functionalist explanations of social phenomena continued to rest on the idea that society is primarily co-operative rather than conflicted, which differentiates Merton from conflict theorists.

This work will be linked to the theories of Vicious Circle and Functionalism theories. The reasons for linking this work to the above-stated theories are as follows:

The vicious cycle theory seeks to explain the perpetuation of poverty in communities and indicates that poverty as a subculture, passes from one generation to another and becomes institutionalized amongst the poor.

While the functionalist is of importance to this study because of its emphasis on the parts and structure of the society. Each part of the structure has a role to play for the survival of the whole system because of its interconnectedness. The failure of each part to perform the assigned role will lead to the dysfunction of the whole structure. The failure of the structures to perform gave birth to the social ill of street begging.

### **An overview of Street Begging in Nigeria**

Nigeria is the largest black African country with, according to a recent census, a population of about 150 million people. It is said that every fourth African is a Nigerian. There are several ethnic groups, but the three major tribes comprise the majority of the people: the Igbo in the East, the Yoruba in the West and the Hausa/Fulani in the North. Nigeria plays a leading role in determining the future of Africa both at the global and regional levels, apparently because of her size and resource endowments. Even in the face of these strengths, and with a reasonably acceptable census figure, there are no known statistics of street beggars in the country; however, according to the 2006 census, about 47% of the population is under 15 years old while about 3.5% is aged 65 years or over.

According to CRC definition (a person under 18 years), children represent over 50% of the population. The phenomenon of Street Begging in Nigeria results mainly from family breakdown, which is in turn linked to polygamy. In an



increasingly democratic society, the less privilege learns to survive on their own and in the process they are exploited through child labor and trafficking. Many take to the streets for refuge (Ebigbo, 2003).

Four main kinds of Street beggars are found in Nigeria: those who live and work on the street, (Beggars on the Street) and those who work on the streets full or part-time but who return to their homes each night (Beggars in the Street). Beggars of the streets this group of beggars lived and sleep on the streets and have loose family contacts. Beggars in this group usually spend some nights or days on the streets and very occasionally goes back home. Beggars of street families' people in the fourth group of beggars were born and raised on the streets. Most of them have parents who are beggars. These beggars and their parents engage in begging activities, and they are branded as beggars. A few are found in the southern cities although in a different form, usually as guides to physically challenged adults. In the East, a child aged 8 -9 years is found on the streets early, as fewer premiums are placed on education in comparison with trading activities (Ebigbo, P.O. 2003).

Furthermore, there is a new phenomenon of Street Beggars, which can better be described as 'Road Beggars.' These children and young adults under the guise of filling potholes on significant roads engage in begging. Apart from facing severe safety risks to themselves and other road users, they are part of organized long way robberies as they provide unsuspecting intelligence and sometimes plant sharp objects on the road to puncture and deflate vehicle tires and trap vehicles for easy plunder by the central armed robbers. They sometimes involve in petty stealing of such items as cell phones from passengers using the clear windscreens of trapped vehicles in a traffic jam as a result of bad roads (ACED, 2007).

There is another variant of the phenomenon known as street wandering boys and girls roaming the streets doing nothing serious. While it is hard to come by accurate national statistics on Street Beggars in Nigeria, available figures are often contested, and many are estimates or projected figures from other sources as opposed to figures derived from specific studies. A study conducted by a leading human rights expert in the country shows that homeless people were rare in the mid-eighties, there were an "estimated" 8000 of them by the early 1990s. By 1999, the less privilege was reported in over a hundred street locations in Lagos. This claim of 8000 was highly criticized as highly grossly under-

representative of the actual number on the Streets of Lagos State. This is against the backdrop of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) estimate that the less privileged in Nigeria constitutes over 6% of the world population figure of between 425 to 477 million. A significant percentage of the less privilege are mostly Street Beggars who are found in a rapidly urbanizing world (Basu and Tzannatos, 2003). Given these statistics, Street Beggars in Nigeria under any guise are in millions and are on the increase

### **Causes of Street Begging**

National Planning Commission (NPC) in 2004 noted that street beggars manifest in Joblessness, over-indebtedness, economic dependence, inability to provide basic needs for self and family, lack of access to land and credit facility, inability to save own assets, among others, Wolf (2005) reported that people who beg do so in order to meet subsistence needs while Quidix (2010) from his survey, revealed that 88% of his respondents indicated adequate nutritional needs, needs for accommodation 53%, Alcohol dependency 41%, healthcare 29%. One can deduce from this study that poverty is the main factor associated with street begging.

The poverty in Nigeria according to Elembah (2011) increased from 27% in 1980 to 66% in 1996, 1999 increased to 70%, by 2011 it was estimated that more than 85% of Nigerians live in poverty Elombah (2011) also said that, research carried out by an NGO called NAPED showed figures on the incidence of poverty in the six geopolitical zones in the country, which include from North-West 74% of the people are poor, and they live on less than one dollar a day; in the North-East the poverty rate is 78%; North-Central the poverty figure is 70%. By contrast in the South-West, the poverty rate is 28%, the South-South 30% while the South-East of Nigeria has a poverty rate of 23%. It could be vividly seen from the above that, the Northern part of the country has the most significant percentage of poverty rate; this has become a source of concern and worry in Nigeria.

Middle-aged and older people are seen reclining tiredly on mats spread in streets corner and are begging with no discrimination to gender.

### **Factors promoting street begging**

Scholars have identified several factors as responsible for the problem of street begging in society. Lynch (2005) recognizes begging as a complex and multi-faceted problem that is most often caused by multiple and interrelated individual and structural deprivations. He opines that there are clear causal and consequential correlates between begging, homelessness, poverty, mental illness, drug dependency, and inadequate access to housing, income, and health support services.

The National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (2001) identifies six reasons why people engage in begging in Nigeria to include: loss of parental/guardian support, parental/guardian neglect, poverty, disability, socio-cultural misconceptions and lack of parental education. Igbinovia (1991) also summarizes factors promoting street begging in Nigeria as: traditional and cultural factors, customs and religion, poverty and destitution, laziness and indolence, unemployment and the need to make a living or money, deformity and disability, desertion and lack of spouse or family care, inadequate and lack of rehabilitation and vocational centers, old age, an influx of illegal/destitute aliens. Adewuyi (2000) attributes some of the factors promoting the phenomenon of street begging in Northern Nigeria to include the traditional system of education, family problems, and the structure of traditional administration as interplayed by Arabic civilization, Westernization and colonialism. In an earlier study, Aliyu (1972) states that beggars in Nigeria are unfortunate victims of the rapidly changing society whose plight is stemming from significant disorientation in both social and cultural values.

To Demewozu (2005), poverty is the most frequent precipitant of the problem of begging in society. Beneath poverty lies the widespread scarcity of resources needed to lead a proper life and also, a socio-economic system that is becoming more concentrated with the evils of urbanization owing to migration and displacement of people, who have nowhere else to go but to the streets. Aderinto, Akinwale, Atere and Oyenuga (2007) asserted that the worsening economic condition in Nigeria has thrown up several socially disapproved survival mechanisms and deviant behaviors; one of which is street begging now engaged in by different categories of people, such as the area boys, the disabled and other vulnerable groups.

This increase in poverty is traceable to the failure of Structural Adjustment Programs, as well as the current worsening socio-economic conditions in the country (Okunmadewa, 2001).

According to the World Bank's (2000) estimates, over 45% of the Nigerian population live below the poverty level with about two-thirds (2/3) of this group being extremely poor. Although the studies conducted by the Federal Office of Statistics in Nigeria between 1980 and 1996 indicated that the problem of poverty was more pronounced among rural than urban dwellers. Recent trends in the country, however, suggest that urban poverty is increasingly becoming a problem (Fawole, Ogunkan,&Omoruan, 2011). Osagbemi and Adepetu (1999) indict modernization and western influence as factors promoting street begging in Nigeria. They observed that modernization is increasingly leading to the disappearance of the extended family support system, which in the past characterized most African societies. Consequently, the aged, the disabled, and even the disadvantaged youths are now the leading beggars of our time. This increasing urban living was accompanied by a marked increase in various forms of deviant behaviors, which include street begging.

Mijinyawa (2001) perceives begging as a derogatory habit brought about by the unrestricted movement of the *Almajiri* children, especially in the North, which is now associated with touting. Phelan, Bruce, Moore, &Estueve (1997) and Osiki (1999) have also attributed the problem of street begging to conditions that have sociological connotations like poverty, undereducation, underprivileged, and homelessness. Anderson (1961) identifies six significant conditions contributing to the problem of begging to include: unemployment and seasonal work, misfit of industry whether due to physical handicaps, mental deficiency, occupational diseases or lack of vocational training, defects of personality, family conflicts, misconduct and crime, racial or national discrimination in employment opportunities, and desire for new experiences. Moorthy(1959), as cited in Reddy (2013), identifies over-population, unprofitable methods of cultivation, debt, famine, floods, family breakdown, chronic diseases, unwillingness to work, as the predominant causes of begging. He opines that besides the problem being more urban, the act of begging has roots in the prevailing socio-economic conditions.

Adedibu and Jelili (2011) view urban land use activities as significantly influencing the spatial distribution of beggars in Nigerian cities as a result of the pleasant land uses for commercial, transport, and public uses. A less organized commercial or public area where informal activities are predominant tends to attract more beggars than an organized one. Hence, in Nigeria, begging activities is more concentrated in commercial, public, and high-density land use environments, which are features of the central areas and junctions of significant transport corridors.

In a study conducted in Australia, Cooke and Horn (2001) discover the reasons given by their respondents for engaging in begging behaviors to be related to their life histories and pressures their past disadvantage and trauma had placed upon them. Such pressures often lead to substance abuse, which, in turn, promote a chaotic lifestyle. Beggars covered in this particular study saw begging as a means of supplementing their income to feed their drug and alcohol habits, pay for temporary accommodation, as well as, meet their basic needs for food and drink.

### **Effects of Street Begging on National Security**

Street Begging is an environmental problem that affects the population of Nigerians especially the less privilege that requires urgent solution through welfare programs, Governments and NGOs to provide and cater for the less privileged, their families and needy homes. National security has been defined as the “aggregate of the security interest of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities, and institutions which inhabit the territory of Abuja Nigeria. Street Beggars in Nigeria have caused many challenges against national security. The cost of maintenance is prohibitive, which instead would have gone a long way to be useful in infrastructural development in some parts of the country

Today, one of the most significant menaces Abuja is facing, and in Nigeria at large is terrorism. Abuja is confronted with intimidation from Boko Haram, which accounted for more than 450 killings and destruction of national resources in Abuja and Nigeria at large (ALJAZEERA 1). These have bridged national security, Peace, safety of lives and properties are not guaranteed.

Most countries in Africa are grappling with the menace of Street beggars; Nigeria which has so far escaped macro level conflicts may not entirely survive the

menace of Street Beggars who constitute a population of rearmed robbers, thugs, and area boys and violent cultists . The increase of ethnos religious conflicts, bokoharam with the appearance of street gangs from Street beggars and other Manifestations of small violence is one of the most visible effects. Street beggars, street urchins, Almajirism, Boko Haram, child traders/laborers that invade Nigeria cities if not adequately addressed, will continue to remain a problem on national security,( Fawole 2012).

Street begging has fatal consequences. Street begging is an indictment on the quality of governance in many societies. Apart from the strain that is begging places on beggars, other factors impact negatively on their health and personality. These include Exploitation, sexual abuse, contact of HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Some female beggars end up with unplanned pregnancies. More so, due to poverty, many beggars in the street are at the risk of being kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Usoro et al. (2007) opined that many street beggars' risk being run over by careless drivers, and many are victims of police torture and brutality.

Also, street beggars could be willingly fooling in the hand of disgruntled individuals to ferment troubles in society. Many are found with dangerous weapons, many are lured into kidnapping business, and some are quickly recruited as armed robbers and other social miscreants (Nigeria News update, 2009).

### **Children's involvement in street begging**

Hagan and McCarthy (1997) submitted that globally, about 100 million children and adolescents live on the streets and engage in begging. In his description of the incidence of child begging in Nigeria, Igbinovia (1991) observes that child beggars are a growing phenomenon in Nigerian cities and towns. He avers that unlike some of their adult counterparts, child beggars often do not show any visible signs of physical and mental disabilities. They start begging at a relatively early age, usually between the ages of two and twelve years. This category of a beggar, according to Igbinovia, is mostly from poor homes, may have unwed mothers, may be orphans or escapees from motherless homes. Generally, they do not have any fixed homes; as a result, they sleep in public buildings, mosques, churches, cinema halls, abandoned buildings, and other institutions. Igbinovia (1991) articulates that many of the foreign child beggars in Nigeria, especially those from Chad and the Niger Republic, can speak the three main languages in

Nigeria; often, the language they employ usually depends on their perception of their would-be “donor-victims.”

The immigrant child beggars, Igbinovia observed, are more aggressive when soliciting alms than their Nigerian counterparts. In their desperation, they often embarrass their potential “victims” by pulling at their clothes, thereby importuning them. Ihejirika (2013) also observes that migrant beggars in Nigeria use their children to solicit alms to keep body and soul together.

Most of their children usually look dirty and unhealthy in their tattered dress and oily clothes. Adebola (2006) similarly contends that these street children are incredibly vulnerable to physical and emotional trauma with the adolescent girls among them most susceptible to sexual exploitation and exposure to a wide variety of highly infectious diseases.

Aderinto (1996) believes that the inability of parents to pay their children’s school fees and children’s consistent failure to adjust to the school system force some students to drop out of schools and gradually metamorphose into area boys, thereby engaging in street begging and other deviant acts. Odukoya (2009) traces the incidence of child begging in Nigeria to a very old cultural and religious practice in most parts of the country, in which children were often sent out by their parents, guardians, or caregivers to beg for alms and in some cases, where children acted as aides to adult beggars, who were blind or who pretended to be blind.

Child begging, according to Imam (1998), is much more widespread in the northern parts of the country where the Koranic system of education known as *Almajiranci* or *Almajiraiis* is widely practiced. Some abuses, according to Imam (1998), have, however, crept into this formerly lofty and notable religious, educational system. The teachers encourage their pupils or wards to beg for sustenance in the course of which they imbibe some terrible habits. The involvement of children in begging has been severely criticized even in the communities where the practice is rife (Imam, 1998).

In 2001, the Federal Office of Statistics in Nigeria also observed that the phenomenon of child begging is rapidly becoming prominent in some southern cities like Lagos and Ibadan. In some beggar enclaves in Lagos Mainland, hundreds of child beggars were observed to be living and sleeping in open

spaces with their families, where they eke out an existence from begging by playing an active role in wheedling sympathy money from passers-by. The Federal Office of Statistics (2001) further identifies the three categories of child beggars in the major urban centers in Nigeria to include those who lead blind parents or relatives, those who are encouraged to beg in order to support religious education, and those who act as fronts for parents, especially mothers who are usually hidden from public view but supervise them from a close distance. Odukoya (2009) notes that in some parts of Nigeria, women hired children from parents as begging baits from unsuspecting members of the public. Among the Yoruba of south-west Nigeria, "Ibeji" (twins) begging was a religious-based practice as part of traditional religion obligation. In the northern cities of Sokoto, Suleja, Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Yola, and Funtuwa, child begging was not just pervasive, but institutionalized (Odukoya, 2009).

According to Delap (2009), forced child begging exists in the broader context of child begging, which was highly regarded as an indictment that society fails to protect and nurture its children. It involves forcing boys and girls to beg through violence, the threat of violence, or other forms of physical or psychological coercion. This extreme form of abuse or exploitation and the current lack of action by the government to tackle it sensitively and effectively are particularly pathetic because the children involved are visible to everyone in the streets of cities around the world. Other research suggests that children are trafficked into begging in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America (US Departments of State, 2008; ILO, 2006).

### **The attitude of the public towards street begging**

Massey D. (2002) submitted that though there may be a less social stigma associated with begging in developing countries than in the West, people who beg are not usually accepted as equal citizens. Ramanathan (2008) claims that begging is viewed as an undesirable behavior and beggars are, most times, perceived as threatening in many parts of the world. Fabregas (1971) explains that begging in a south-eastern Mexican city is characterized as deviant behavior, an action of last resort because it implies an identity lacking self-regard and self-respect, relegating an individual to a degraded social position.



### **Socio-economic consequences of street begging**

In his submission on the harmful effects of street begging in Nigeria, Igbinovia (1991) laments that beggars constitute a social menace and parasite to the country, because they roam the streets, harass citizens, disrupt the free flow of traffic on the highways, and engage in various forms of crimes. Ndubuisi (1986) similarly posits that many of the beggars in Nigeria are carriers of terrible and contagious diseases and also pose serious health consequences to the citizenry. The beggars, according to him, do not only constitute a scourge to the Nigerian society, but also form the dregs of the Nigerian society. Salami and Olugbayo's (2013) study, among the international migrant beggars in Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria, has also confirmed that these beggars are potential agents of disease transmission from their home countries to the host country.

Adedibu (1989) claims that the potential threat of begging to the Nigerian society is evident in its negative implications on social, environmental and economic survival of the country because it constitutes an economic threat to the society as beggars are not economically productive. They merely contribute nothing to the national economy, and consequently, the economy was further retarded as a result of the considerable proportion of beggars' population depending on the already overstretched workforce. Reddy (2013) has similarly claimed that begging has become the mainstay for a quite large section of the population in India. He further avers that the more significant the chunk of the population involved in begging, the more substantial the burden on the working population and the lesser the usage of human resources for constructive human development.

In the same vein, Jelili (2009) reveals that the negative impacts of begging on social and physical environments are evident in the tendency of beggars to delay and obstruct the free flow of human and vehicular traffic and their high propensity to generate dirty materials, either as waste or as parts of their belonging. Also, the criminal activities of fake beggars, who are mostly criminals in disguise, constitute the social implications of begging in Nigerian cities. Indeed, Bambale (2008) observes that almajirai (child beggars) played negative roles during religious and ethnic conflicts in the northern parts of Nigeria. He further noted that this category of beggars usually transforms from mere street beggars to street gangs known as "Yandabas" in Kano state.

Ogunkan (2009) has also further noted that some beggars use insults, profanity, or veiled threats as a means of soliciting alms in aggressive panhandling. Meanwhile, Osa-Edoh and Ayano (2012) contended that it is a common practice in Nigeria for beggars to use posters or envelopes with pictures of terminally ill people to solicit money meant for their personal use. They also lament the deceptive activities of some self-acclaimed healers of people with a mental health condition, who are fond of using them to beg for money from the unsuspecting members of the public. On their part, Fawole, Ogunkan and Omuruan (2010) state that street begging is social deviance in Nigeria because it negates the norms, expectations, and values of the society. In Yoruba culture, for example, only hard work is highly valued; hence, begging in its absolute sense is not accessible, and beggars are usually looked down upon by others as belonging to a group of wretched persons in the society.

In his contribution on the negative implications of street begging in Nigeria, Olaniyi (2009) articulates that young children and teenagers were co-opted into street begging by old professional beggars who lured them with fabulous stories of the money-spinning advantages of the act. He further observes that in order to prick the conscience of alms-givers, some beggars routinely hire babies from nannies and day-care centers, and after that, disguise them as beggars on the street.

In Lagos, for instance, with a token of N500, some owners of daycare centers rent out children for at least four hours to women who disguise them as beggars in the streets. Indeed, con-men and child traffickers have transformed street begging in Nigeria into a lucrative export commodity (Olaniyi, 2009).

### **Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive survey design. This design seems to be the most appropriate to execute the effect of street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis. The study will make use of the primary source of data collection. Since this research is an empirical one, the data for this exercise was obtained from information gathered mainly from interviews and questionnaires. The sample space for this study comprises of (200) children within the age bracket of 6-17 years old. The children begging within Suleja Metropolis will be used for the study as the respondent. Due to the language

barrier, the study will make use of an enumerator that will be able to communicate well and draw out the needful response from the children. The sample unit will be about 133 using simple percentage.

The questionnaires will be designed and understandably to enhance the collection of the data needed. The questionnaire will be used to draw out unprocessed primary data, which are the objective position of the respondents. The questionnaire will have two sections: A and B. Section A will consist of the demographic data of the children which includes age, religion, and section B will be assessing the main reasons for street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis. Data collected were presented using a simple percentage and frequency tables. Responses given in the questionnaire were presented in the tabulation form. The data generated through the questionnaires were analyzed through the use of tables and percentages to enhance straightforward representation, classification, and interpretation of collected data. One hundred fifty respondents were used as the samples for this research.

### **Data Presentation**

The below tables consists of the data collected from the respondents in response to the administered questions the questionnaire by the researcher which was presented to children within Suleja township, and the number of the questionnaire given out were 133 but not all were returned, it was only one-hundred and twenty-four (124) that retrieved by to the researcher.

**Table 1: Age of Respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Below 10 yrs	19	15.3%
10-12yrs	33	26.6%
13-15yrs	32	25.8%
16-18yrs	40	32.3%
TOTAL	124	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 1 the table above shows that out of one hundred and twenty-four (124) respondents, 15.3% of them are between 6-9years, while 10-12 years of age make

26.6% with 33 children. Furthermore, 13-16 years are 32 children with 25.8%. Also, 40 of the respondents are 17 years old, with 32.3%, which is the highest. This indicates that the street beggars among the selected ages are mostly teenagers.

**Table 2: Religion**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Christianity	.....	
Muslim	124	100%
Others		
TOTAL	124	100%

**Source: Field survey, 2019**

Table 2, the above table, indicates the religious respondents among the children that street beg within the metropolis, are 100% Muslims with 124. This indicates that all the street beggars among children in Suleja metropolis are Muslims.

*Table 3 :Parent Marital Status*

<b>Parent Martial Status</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	28	12.9%
Married	70	76.6%
Divorced	25	10.5%
TOTAL	124	100%

**Source: Field survey, 2019**

Table 3, the table above shows the parent marital status of the children. Single Parent is 28 with 12.9%. While 70 of the children parents are married with 76.6%, also 25 of the respondent's parent were divorced, that indicates that 76.6% of the parent beggars among children are married.

Table 4: What is the nature of the disability

<b>Nature of disability</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Blind	14	9%
Deaf & dumb	4	3.9%
Others	6	7%
None of the above	100	80%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 4 the above table shows the nature of disability among the children, 100 children with 80% are healthy with no disability, while 14 children with 9% are blind, and only four respondents with 3.9% are deaf dumb. Also, six children have other related disability with 7%. What this implies, therefore, is that most of the destitute children on the street are healthy with no disability.

Table 5: Do you have relatives

<b>Do you have any relatives?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	91	72%
<b>No</b>	29	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Are you staying with your family?</b>		

<b>Yes</b>	26	20%
<b>No</b>	98	80%
<b>TOTAL</b>	124	100%

Source: Field Survey 2019

Table 5; the table above revealed that out of 124 respondents, 91 or 72% agree that they have relative or family, but only 29 or 28% revealed that they do not have relatives. Such indicates that most of them have family only a few of them are without family or relatives. On the other hand, 26 children with 20% admitted that they lived with their relatives, while 98 or 80% disclosed that they do not stay with their family. That shows that only 20% of them stays with their family, whereas 80% of street children do not.

*Table 6: Did your relatives approved your begging?*

<b>Do they approve your begging?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	106	94%
<b>No</b>	18	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	124	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 6; above table shows that about 106 children or 94% of them indicated that their families are in support of their begging on the street, while 18 or 6% said

that their families did not approve the exercise. That shows that most of the street beggars among children have their families support on begging.

*Table 7: Will you say your family are rich*

<b>Family status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Very rich</b>	.....	.....
<b>Rich</b>	-----	-----
<b>Very poor</b>	80	65%
<b>Poor</b>	44	35%
<b>TOTAL</b>	124	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 7; the table above revealed the family status of the respondents, with 80 or 65% of street children respond that their families are destitute, while 44 or 35% agree that their families are not very poor but needy. That shows that most of the street beggars among children are form, destitute relatives.

*Table 8: Why do you choose to beg?*

<b>Reason for begging</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Poor family Background</b>	60	60%
<b>Religious belief</b>	45	46%
<b>Others</b>	19	19.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	124	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 9; the table viewed the reasons that respondents frequently beg on the street. Out of 124 respondents, 60 or 60% of destitute indicated that they turned to beg due to low-income family background. However, 46% or 45 of the respondents say they are into begging because of the religious belief, but 19 or 19.4% of the respondents argued that they were on the street because of other personal reasons respectively. Thus, it indicated that most of the reason why people beg is because of poverty and religious belief.

*Table 9: Are you aware of the existence rehabilitation center in Suleja*

<b>Rehabilitation Centre</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	32	20%
<b>No</b>	92	80%
<b>TOTAL</b>	124	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 10; the table reveals that 32 or 20% of the respondent admitted that they have heard about the existence of a Rehabilitation Centre in Suleja. However, 92 or 80% of the respondent denied ever knowing the existence of rehabilitation Centre in Suleja.

*Table 10: What is people's reaction towards you*

<b>People reactions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Sympathetic</b>	40	30%
<b>Encouraging</b>	50	48.4%
<b>Discouraging</b>	30	20%
<b>Others</b>	4	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	124	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 11; the above table is concerned with the reaction of the general public towards destitute beggars in Suleja metropolis. The table revealed that out of 124 respondents 40 or 30% indicated that the general public always sympathizes with them, but 50 or 48.4% said that people attitude towards them always encourages them to continue begging because they give them alms. However, 30 or 20% of the respondent indicate that the attitude of the public to them is discouraging and sometimes heartbreaking. Similarly, 4 or 2% of the general public are showing other attitudes to them.

### **Discussion**

The result generated indicated that poverty, illiteracy, religious misunderstanding, and low-self-esteem are some of the reasons for street begging in Suleja Metropolis. Table eleven, depicted high level of poverty as one of the reasons for street begging among children in Suleja Metropolis, that study agree with the findings of Ojo& Titilayo (2017) and Usman (2015), that 60% of the



respondent subscribed to the factor as one major cause of street begging in major cities in Nigeria. The study of Salishu (2015) disagrees with the finding of the study that street begging is also caused by religious belief and doctrine, which the present study showed to be a factor that contributes to street begging. The study of Ojo & Titilayo (2017), agree with the findings that rehabilitation is one of the solutions to street begging in Metropolis of Suleja and Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The following are recommendation demand for the study;

1. The religious association should inform the parent and the guardian to educate their teenagers on the danger inherent in the act of street begging. These will aid to curb the problems of begging in the City.
2. The government should continuously organize seminars to all involved in the act of begging within the city and outside the city of Sokoto, to holistically reduce the menace in the entire state.
3. The government should build a rehabilitation center in all the local government in the state so, as to inform the parent and teenagers that could understand the dangers of getting involved in street begging.
4. The government should enact a policy to sanction street begging, and efforts should be put in place to ensure that such a policy has been implemented to the letter.

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