EFFECTS OF STREET BEGGING ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract
The presence of beggars both children and adults at every public place, places of worships, filling stations, restaurants, super markets is becoming a matter of concern to every serious minded Nigerian. It is not only the nuisance of the begging that is becoming a matter of concern rather the grave negative psychological, social, economic, health and environmental consequences that come about as a result of the phenomena. A part from this negative effects of street begging on Nigerian National Development is the issue of religious crisis that has been engaging parts of the country to which some have been attributed to the products of the almajiri system of education where migrants Islamic scholars leave there villages for urban centers during dry season with a number of children who are suppose to learn in the cities but have to fend for themselves in terms of feeding, clothing and even pocket money. Such children’s have been raw materials recruited by faceless and selfish individuals to perpetuate religious crisis. Counselling as a helping profession can use the behaviour modification technique to restructure the thinking of such Qur’anic teachers. The paper recommended amongst other things, that the governments at various levels should partner with the higher Islamic scholars who are revered by these scholars in the villages and who are in the habit of bringing such children to cities for scholarship to desist. All muslim sects leaders should be directly involved in a conference that will brainstorm on the negative consequences of street begging and such teachers be given the mandate to implement what ever decision the conference comes up with.

Introduction
Every human society have witnessed the phenomena of street begging at one time or the other and has lingered on with some it died away in others or it is at its barest minimum depending on the circumstances of starting the begging which could be as a result of human or natural disasters; in form of wars, famine, flood or earthquakes which disposes people of there livelihood- do compel some surviving victims to engage in a temporary but often dehumanizing begging with a view to keeping body and soul together. To some after rehabilitation the begging ends while others could go on it for life.

Street begging as defined by Mortimer (2005) is asking for money without as exchange of services in a public place. It is sometimes a syndrome as it exists in association with other things. The Nigerian National Planning Commission (2005:34) observed that street beggars like other poor people manifest; joblessness, over-indebtedness, economic dependence, lack of freedom, inability to provide basic needs of life for self and family, lack of access to land and credit and inability to save own assets. Poor people tend to live
in dirty localities that put significant pressure on the physical contributing to environmental degradation.

Obidoa, Eze and Okide (2007), asserted that street begging in Nigeria is often associated with child begging which according to National Planning Commission and UNICEF (2001) has grave negative psychological, social and health consequences. The identified three categories of child beggars in urban areas are thus; those who lead disabled or sick parents or relatives, those who beg entirely on their own; and those who act as front for parents, especially mothers who are usually hidden from public view but supervise them from distance. These children they say, come from the poorest of the poor families, sleep in streets or with their accompanying adults in spontaneous beggars colonies in cities. The children are exposed to high risk or accidents in heavy traffic when they beg, constant abuse and aggression from general public, being co-opted into dubious criminal acts, such as stealing, pick pocketing, drug abuse/peddling, homosexuality, errand boys and girls, prostitution and so many other vices prevalent in the society.

The foregoing is a generalized dimension of street begging, for according to Khalid (1995), but begging as an occupation, a permanent means of livelihood involving large number of people, men and women able and disabled, seem to be a phenomena peculiar to Hausa ethnic group of Northern Nigeria. The beggars are seen in every nook and corner of our major towns and cities, at public offices building, motor parks, markets, streets etc. Their activities are not restricted to the northern cities of Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Bauchi or Hadeyija; they are also seen in the southern and traditionally non Hausa-muslim cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Port-Harcourt, Enugu, Aba and Calabar. Even more offensive to the eyes of Hausa men and indeed, Nigerian muslim is the sight of large body of young children on the streets, wearing hungry faces and looking rough and dirty. They roam the neighborhood, door to door, and often wait patiently for remnants of food to be thrown at them in public places such as hotels and restaurants. Considering the background so far this paper discussed the effects of street begging on National Development which entails the socio economic well being of citizens, agriculture rural development, education and critical infrastructure etc. as Nigeria matches through her journey after 50 years of independence a developing nation where all citizens are expected to enjoy a free and healthy life in a safe environment, what Guidance can and Counselling as an educational service then do to salvage this situation, where a great
number of citizens are roaming the street to beg for what to eat which is either by commission or omission of certain fundamentals of life.

**Perceived Genesis of Street Begging**

In the muslim northern states of Nigeria where street begging phenomena is becoming a syndrome; the argument of the perpetrators of the act is that, begging has its roots from the time of the migration of the prophet of Islam from Mecca to Medina, those that emigrated with prophet to Medina were referred Muhajiran (emigrants) and those that were met in Medina were referred to Ansar (helpers). The term “Almajiri” is a Hausa word for pupil or students which is derived from an Arabic term “Al-muhajir” meaning the migrants. Khalid (1995) opined that since the prophet of Islam was known to have admonished the muslims to travel in search of knowledge and wisdom “even up to the great walls of china”, these who responded to this percept are to this day referred to as al-muhajirun or emigrants. In its usage, therefore the word means those who left there towns or villages, parents, friends and relations in search of religious knowledge and scholarship.

The identified notion is what made some Islamic scholars to travel with a group of children from villages to towns in search of knowledge and scholarship during the dry session when farmers are at home and for such children to fend for themselves as emigrants in relation to the earlier notions emigrants from mecca to medina. The idea that such children has to feed themselves, cloth and find little pocket through begging in what is most disturbing to any mindful muslim, for it is not an injunction of the religion for the children to be engaged in such activities.

**Effects of Street Begging on National Development**

Obidoa, Eze and Okiche (2007) asserted that the incidence of street begging is lower in southern Nigeria than the north suggestive of cultural dimension to the problem. For southerners, begging is an aberration except in Yoruba land where mothers of twin babies are suppose to beg for sometime. Where there is a beggar, there is a giver and for religious reasons, several Nigerians gives alms to the poor. The Almajirai system in the muslim north creates the largest category of beggars in the country. Hunger engaging in deviant behaviours such as theft, thuggery and randalism are listed as some of the vices associated with this system.

Apart from children roaming streets to beg in the name of coming to cities to look for knowledge, there are other categories of street beggars who constitute a menace to the
society such you find every where, at the filling stations, food restaurants, super markets, mosques and churches etc. This led Ammani (nd) to opine that, the population of beggars on our streets is growing exponentially. The menace of street begging is a potential threat to our very societal fabric in obvious. Many social communities have attributed this astronomical growth in street begging to poverty, real or imagined in the north. Is it ready as a result of poverty or due to the manipulation of sentiments by some vested interest groups.

So visible are these beggars on our street in recent time that one will agree that street begging is gradually becoming a potential threat to our societal fabric and eroding the idea of self reliance in our nation. Therefore the categories of beggars their the pupils carried to their point of begging, other comes in wheel chairs and yet others are on crutches or are aided by walking sticks. And now there are innovations: Some beggars are playing music to draw attention to themselves while at least one beggar is flying the flag of political party to make money from party sympathizers.

There are also mentally challenged who beg for alms, some rather menacingly or aggressively. Gone are the days when begging was perceived to be done by people who in one way or the other had physical challenges and are were not capable of working to fend for themselves. The trend has champed as some young and emergetic persons instead of working to carter for themselves, now see begging as the most convenient and surest way of getting money. The other category of persons who see begging as means of survive belong to the class of the physically challenged who as a result of societal neglect has no option than to depend on other people for their daily bread.

A major glaving effect of the menace of street begging is the dependency syndrome it causes on beggars because as soon one get used to going out and getting what he needs for his livelihood then the question of thinking along the line of being useful to himself and the society does not arise. It is such children that when they grow up and cannot do any lawful trade or engage in any activity that can fetch them some money, then the obvious thing for them is fall prey to drug addiction in order to ward away frustration or else they join gangs of armed robbers, thefts arsonists or religious misguided fanatics and this do not auger well for our national development.

The young pupils (almajirai) roaming streets are sometimes co-opted in mini jobs at residences, restaurants and other public places such as markets to hawk goods and to carry things on wheel barrows for people buying in markets which tantamounts to child
abuse/child labour which is a negation of United Nations chatter on rights of the child. Rogers and Staching (1985), observed that exploitative and abusive child labour occurs when a child is made to engage, on a regular basis in productive or income yielding activities for which the primary beneficiaries are persons other than themselves. Khalid (2006) have asserted from the findings of a research that, every member of the host community in the sample of his work, has reported that he has at one time or the other made use of the migrant pupils labour. As for the secluded urban women, whose children go to western type of school in the day, their dependence on almajirai (pupils) was considerable. Above all the pupils were subjected to what literally amounts to “forced labour” in which the benefit accrue to the malam (teacher) alone.

The issue of material deprivation apart from begging has more far reaching consequences on the pupils for as Khalid (1995) observed, in the process of begging, the child loses his dignity from the very start of his life, making him to develop a dependent mentality which invariably kills his intelligence and all capacities of initiatives. Few of the children would be lucky to turn half-backed catching up productive vocations at a later stage of their lives. Those who remain to cross the final hurdles would emerge with undesirable socio-economic status and some dose of fanaticism in them.

The presence of beggars on our street, our homes and public places is a clear manifestation of the injustice and in balances that define our economic system. There is clear indication of lack of redistribution of wealth in the society. Khalid (1995) opined that, what we have is a rudimentary, or arbitrary practice of charity and donation which altogether make a mockery of our collective existence. It is undesirable that a sizeable percentage of Hausa people, especially in the rural areas, are completely marginalized, and that such a situation tend to create beggars and social misfits. The result is the ever growing gap between the rich and poor, the frightening environment of poverty on the society and no con-comittant rise in corruption, crime and several discontent. Some writers believed that the religious riots which have erupted in or near major northern cities since 1980: Kano (1980), Kaduna (1982), Yola (1984), Maiduguri (1984), Gombe (1985) and Funtua (1991) and most recently Maiduguri (2009), Bauchi (2009) and Kano (2009) were the handwork of the products of the almajiri system.

A part from the child abusive labor issue, there is also the problem of such beggars constituting a health hazard, which does not say well about the nation, you find break out of epidemics at the various squalours where such beggars sleep and such disease often
spread to the larger community. The fear is this, communicable disease such as tuberculosis could spread through such places and the menace of HIV/AIDS which is already a health issue to the nation.

The issue of such groups becoming security risks is always there, because as a result of neglect if such individuals find a solace with a misguided religious teacher they could join him and wage a war on the nation or immediate community such as the matatsine sage in Kano 1980, the kala kato, the bulunkutu crisis and most recently the Boko haram in parts of Bauchi, Borno and Kano States. Many innocent lives and properties were lost through such crisis which is always a minus in our bid to move forward as a nation.

**Counselling Implications**

Counselling as an educational service is aimed at assisting individuals discover themselves, their worth, aptitudes, capabilities, weaknesses and through counselling to know the way to move forward in life to be useful to oneself and his community. It implies therefore that the values and relevance of counselling on the effect of street begging on national development cannot be contested. Tambawal (2009) observed that even in its embrayonic stage counselling was used by Frank Persons in the USA after the Second World War to alleviate the post war psychological trauma and the effect of joblessness that devastated Americans during the economic depression years.

To address the issue of street begging, counselling is replete with behavioural contingencies that can be used to modify maladaptive behaviour and maladaptive thoughts. The behaviour modification counselling is essentially a learning process in which the counsellor utilises a variety of learning theories in the process of assisting individual to acquire desirable behaviour that can solve his problem. Some of the assumptions of these techniques according to Egbule (2002) include:

1. Most human behaviour is learned at it is subject to change.
2. It is possible to modify and change human behaviour
3. Each individual have the potential to evaluate, plan and modify his behaviour.

Based on these premises, counselling can as a way of intervention appeal to the reason of the Qur’anic teachers (Mallams) who engage in this acts of using the pupils for street begging to see the dehumanizing conditions that such children are exposed to and suggest ways of engaging the children in a more meaningful skill acquisition programme within the locality the Qur’anic school is situated.
For the other category of street beggars, the physically challenged, the self-dehumanized beggars, counselling can assist by way of helping them change their behaviour by cognitive/insight learning which according to Ikejiaku and Ayebami (2006) is based on the fact that an individual’s thought process determines how he privately view a situation or event also the individuals attitudes towards a group of people (tribe or race), an institution, the value system he has developed. It is our thoughts processes that determine or modify how we behave in several ways. An individuals behaviour is influenced by internal mental process. This counselling would have to address so, as to restructure the thoughts and beliefs of such beggars.

By way of rehabilitation, counselling can partner with various governments, Federal, State and Local governments where according to Deng (2001), handicapped people who are in one way or the other disabled and cannot carter adequately for themselves or housed. They need special assistance from the government or other humanitarian organizations. Such people may include the blind, helpers or natural disaster victims.

These disabilities bring about traumatic psychological feelings. The form of separation and isolation suffered by those people requires some form of empathy which counselling can provide. Furthermore there is need for vocational rehabilitation for the individuals at the levels they are able to cope. They can be taught a variety of vocational skills which is a therapeutic way of restoring their sense of achievement, worth and dignity which they have lost because of their handicap. Counselling should help the disabled to accept their disability as a positive aspect of themselves. Further, the counsellor should help market the disabled to prospective employers as soon as they acquire employable skills.

**Recommendations**

From the foregoing discussion the paper adduced that street begging is a national menace which require the support and co-operation of all unsundry to checkmate, therefore this paper recommends as follows:

- For the almajirai group of beggars, government and traditional institutions at all levels should make attempts to identify the Qur’anic mallams involved and equally identify the higher teachers from which those directly involved derive their inspiration and the higher teachers be invited for a discussion on the menace of street begging and to carry them along in such suggestions and implementing possible solutions.
- The western type of schools i.e. primary and secondary schools operating in rural areas should be fashioned out in such a way that a lot of Qur’anic and Islamic knowledge are taught.

- Government should endeavour to identify all Qur’anic teachers in rural areas who have pupils under their tutelage whether migrant or not and build blocks of classes and possibly dormitories around their houses and make some provision of a skill acquisition programme around that school so that pupils can partake in after lessons and some financial benefit be attached to it.

- Religious preachers both in urban and rural areas should be encouraged to preach the ills of street begging.

- A committee of the Qur’anic teachers be mandated to arrange a conference to brainstorm on their own on the advantages and disadvantages of street begging and should be asked to proffer solutions to the problems. The same committee should be mandated to implement the discussions of the conference.

- Well known respected religious leaders across all Muslim sects should be directly involved on the issues of proffering solutions to street begging.

- The other category of street beggars, that is the physically challenged and others, government should have rehabilitation homes sincerely and honestly managed and any body who do not want to be part of it should be off the streets or be arrested.

- Government should identity needy persons through its welfare scheme by way of traditional institutions in each ward and make available to them the basic necessities of life which would curtail them from going to streets, public places, houses of influential people, etc. to beg.
References