



STREET BEGGING IN THE TAMALE METROPOLIS: EVOLUTION, DIMENSIONS AND EFFECTS

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Abstract

Begging on the streets in the Tamale metropolis has metamorphosed over the years with most beggars employing various strategies including using children as aides/guides while others disguise and exaggerate their physical conditions to use as baits to attract sympathy and alms. The objective of this paper is to explore the evolution, the dynamics, dimension and effects of street begging on pedestrians/society, the beggars and the children they use as aids. The participants were beggars especially those who use children to beg. Others were key informants from Tamale Metropolitan Assembly and Department of Children and members of the public (almsgivers and non-givers) and diviners who prescribe the sort of alms people should give. The study used the mixed methods though largely qualitative in nature and data was analysed both manually (content analysis) and with the help of computer software (SPSS version 20). Purposive, convenience/accidental sample techniques were used to select the respondents. The study revealed that disability, poverty and cultural beliefs were the main underlying factors which compelled individuals to resort to begging. Beggars saw themselves as incapable and therefore deserved public sympathy. Hired children accepted begging since they earned a living from it through the motivations and "payments". Children of relatives under the care of adult beggars enjoy fewer benefits as compared to biological children. From this study, not all almsgivers gave to improve a beggar's life but to solve their own problems. The beggars in this study were not aware that begging was illegal in Ghana, punishable by law

Keywords: Street begging, alms giving, child beggars, evolution, effects

Introduction

Begging is an act of taking alms by poor or vulnerable people from individuals who sympathise with their condition. It is an age-old practice in Africa and many parts of the world. Begging is one of the means devised by some individuals especially, the poor and the vulnerable as a survival strategy. Street beggars here refers to individuals, including children, elderly people, those with disabilities, poor women who deliver twins, quadruplets and in some instances, families, who normally beg for a living from the streets or public spaces such as shopping areas, churches, and

mosques by openly asking people for money and food. Begging could also take the form of "panhandling", a situation where poor people (the needy) openly ask for material benefits (usually money) from other people (well-to-do) (Frederick, A., Joseph, D., & Srivastava, H., 2016). As defined by Demezowu (2003), begging is a method of earning one's living from the income obtained from other sectors of society using age, health and economic conditions as a means of gaining sympathy.

The overall objective of this paper is to explore the evolution of begging and the modus operandi that beggars now employ to attract sympathy to earn them more alms. This article focuses on detailed ethnography of street begging in the Tamale Metropolitan area.

The specific objectives of the papers are: i) to explore the sociocultural and religious context of street begging, ii) to examine the modus operandi of beggars to attract the attention and sympathy of people (public), iii) to gauge their earnings from begging, iv) to analyse the gender dimension of strategies used in begging, and finally v) examine the effects of begging on the child aids, the beggars and society.

The study area and Data collection Methods

The study area

Tamale is the regional capital of the Northern region of Ghana; it is also the only metropolis in the northern sector of the country. Tamale is an old administrative capital which has evolved over the years to attain its present state of development.

Tamale is one of the most populous cities in Ghana with a population of 371,351 captured in the 2010 Population Census results (GSS, 2010). It has a wider emerging middle-class population that has come along with an increase in their consumption of various goods and services leading to the establishment of several banks, shopping malls and other service outlets such as laundry services, fast foods joints, night clubs and even gyms. Retail businesses cover a greater part of economic activities in the Metropolis with an extensive transport system leading to any destination within and out of Ghana and an expanded air transport to all the major cities in Ghana.

Data collection Methods

Data for this article was collected in the Tamale Metropolis in two phases. The first phase began in February 2019 and lasted for four months. During this period, the researchers identified and interacted with street beggars throughout the metropolis. Their major place of concentration is between the two main traffic lights in Tamale, stretching from Standard Chartered Bank –Vodafone Office cross road to the end of Taxi rank. This area is popularly known as “*barimansi* Line” which literally means beggars’ line. This is the place where the majority

of the infirm, the aged and the disabled beggars are found. Many of them are also located around the Central Mosque and known as Zjaamiu. Apart from these, there are also mobile beggars, moving from shop to shop, lorry stations, on traffic light inter sections and along the pedestrian walkways.

Due to the fluid nature of the beggars’ movement; the fact that some of them move from one place to another, it was prudent to carry out one time interview exercise to avoid duplication. To this end, 100 enumerators carefully recruited and trained were later deployed to various parts of the metropolis to interview various categories of beggars; women, and men, and beggars with disabilities. They were tasked to interview at least two beggars each in order to save time and to avoid crisscrossing to engage those who have been already interviewed. Approximately 215 responses were received, but selected 200 which were fully completed interviews. In addition to these, 10 beggars, five men and five women were identified and followed up to their homes to do further interviews and observations. We observed their physical conditions, how they behave when a vehicle approaches them, their housing condition, and the properties they acquired. We also interviewed seven diviners and mallams and eight people who have used their services before. These categories of people were interviewed because they were the ones who prescribed the sort of alms and various items that people should give to beggars to get blessings from Allah, to get what they are seeking to have in life, and advert calamities.

Results and Discussions

Sociocultural and Religious Context of begging ***Sociocultural***

The people of Tamale, Dagombas like many other Africans believe in spirits, destiny, the devils, superstitions, divination, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. These can harm or make someone successful. As such, people seek protection against the evil ones or use them for their own benefits or progress. People also belief that diviners or soothsayers can advise them to be successful in their endeavours or help them out of their misfortunes. Therefore, in looking for marriage, children, success in business, promotion, leadership positions, seeking protection against enemies, and

all aspects of life, some people go to diviners and mallams to seek help. The mallams and diviners often ask their clients to perform certain rituals to enhance their chances of success. The rituals could be a mixture of grains, money, certain colour of material, fowls, fresh milk, etc, to be given to beggars. Others may place some of these items on crossroads, on the road or in the market depending on the advice of the diviner.

As one of the interviewees put it;

“In searching for success in their daily life, in seeking for protection against bad people and evil spirits, in looking for chieftaincy positions and promotions, in looking for a suitable partner and even in embarking on a trip or business venture, people go to mallams, diviners or soothsayers to find the way forward and to be successful. Depending on the people’s peculiar circumstance, the soothsayer may direct them to perform certain rituals and most of these rituals are given to beggars”.

Religious context

Alms giving is practised among many societies and not particularly Christian or Muslim philanthropic communities (Weiss, 2007). It is a private act of compassion found all over the world. Christian and Muslim societies have much in common regarding the act of giving alms as encouraged in their teachings and practices. Almsgiving is recommended but not obligatory as it is given out of compassion and piety. Both Christian and Islamic doctrines encourage almsgiving. Whereas the mandatory aspect of almsgiving is not as visible in Christian doctrines, Islam makes a normative distinction between obligatory and voluntary alms (Weiss, 2007). However, though alms giving is an obligation that constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam, it is difficult to present a clear-cut definition. The main reason for the ambiguity of the term is that there are two ways in which almsgiving is interpreted in Islam, namely as zakāt or obligatory alms, and sadaqa (“sara”) or voluntary alms. Zakāt is commonly defined as a form of charity, almsgiving, donation, or contribution, but when these activities are arbitrary and voluntary actions, they are merely regarded as sadaqa (alms).

One must further distinguish between the moral obligation and the pious act when one discusses the difference between the two kinds of almsgiving in Islam. Zakāt is a moral obligation and becomes a tax for the Muslims in an Islamic state whereas sadaqa is a pious act by an individual and never has any collective connotations. However, zakāt is paid through the state, never as a tax to the state, i.e., the role of the state is to monitor the distribution of zakāt but the state may not itself use the incomes of zakāt for any purpose not specified in the Qur’ān. A common interpretation among Muslim jurists-cum-scholars is that 2½% of one’s income and wealth (and between 5 and 10% of one’s harvest) should be given to the poor and needy as zakāt (Weiss, 2007). In Christendom, alms giving is usually featured as an exchange of material for spiritual gifts whereby the food or money given by the rich are reciprocated by the prayers of the poor.

Poverty and break down of family support system

Poverty is one of the reasons why people resort to begging as indicated by 80% of the respondents. It is estimated that about 40% of Ghanaians are poor, having incomes below the poverty line and struggling to meet basic human needs (GSS, 2008). This corroborates the findings of Abebe (2008) that many people are poor because they have no family support and care. It is also attributed to population expansion, extended families are no longer supportive of other family members. As a result, many people are unable to go through formal education or get a proper profession that can take care of themselves and their families. Others are simply lazy – they have parents, education, the means and knowledge but are too lazy to work.

The study reveals that 65% of the respondents indicated that they are begging because of poverty. They attributed that to their physical infirmity, resulting in lack of skills to engage in meaningful employment. Thus, their inability to afford basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, electricity, water, mobility aids, housing, and transportation. It also affects parents’ ability to care for their children and influences their family relationships positively (Abebe, 2008; Kassah, 2008a; 2008b).

The study reveals that, as a result of poverty, some parents in search of means to make ends meet, simply give out some of their children to well-to-do

family members and other people to take care of them. The majority (65%) of the participants in this study indicated that they prefer begging with their children to putting the burden on other family members.

According to the beggars, they are unable to satisfy their basic needs without external assistance (from well-to-do benevolent individuals in society). This, according to the beggars, compels them to beg on the streets. It is true that people are not the same in terms of capabilities and access to resources. This is the foundation grounds why religion (as it greatly shapes and influences human nature) encourages its followers to work hard in order to extricate themselves from poverty. Religion makes provision for poor individuals to beg for what can cater for them for a day. It also encourages its followers to share with the less privileged in society. This premise laid the corner stone for most individuals to beg (Abebe, 2008; Kassah, 2008a). They claim that they beg because the religion approves begging as they are vulnerable under certain conditions. Therefore, religion allowing poor people to beg is another factor accountable for why some individuals engage in begging. Poverty combined with insufficient or no extended family support compels able bodied people to beg on the streets as revealed by 24% and 23.5% respectively of the respondents. Individuals stricken by poverty often use their condition to draw the sympathy of the general public, sometimes singing religious songs to beg for alms.

As one of the beggars indicated

“I do not beg in order to become rich. I beg simply to meet my daily sustenance, which is to get what will take care of us (aide included) today” (Mma Sana).

Another beggar says that

“To me, it’s a shame that some individuals have turned themselves to be beggars for life. It’s a shame. As a muslim, I know that it is forbidden to resign oneself to begging in order to be rich. Because of this, I only beg small and when I get what I believe can cater for me and something small for my aide (motivation), I go home. Sometimes I receive alms from only one person and once it is enough to take care of my food supply, I and my aide return home” (Afa Adam).

Another male beggar contends that

“Begging is only to meet food supply. However, some of us have used it to accumulate material wealth. I do not see why they should still be begging but they are always here every day begging for alms. As for me, I beg ones in a week and that is only Friday. Whatever I get, I manage it through the week till the next Friday” (Afa Sule).

All the respondents indicated that they were poor. Their poverty can be termed as a relative one based on what they need. Each respondent confirmed to either reside with family members or in a rented accommodation. They only beg to compliment what family and friends offer them which in the long run will enrich them more than the benevolent giver. With regards to what influences their begging greatly, over 84% of the beggars said economic pressure necessitates their begging.

Social and cultural reasons

Furthermore, another reason why individuals beg is cultural beliefs/myths (16%). Culture plays an important role as far as the evolution of society and ethnic groups are concerned. It informs dressing, values and mores and guides behaviours as well. It shapes the way individuals should be brought up as well as guidelines for nurturing the young. Because of this, certain beliefs are attached to some mishaps such as how twins, triplets and quadruplets should be respected and treated with utmost care and attention. The belief is that these children are spirit children and therefore their desires need to be fulfilled. Due to limited knowledge of some families, twins who frequently fall sick are deemed as having interest in being used to beg else they will continue to fall sick or when the parents refuse, misfortune may befall the family or the family may continue to wallow in perpetual poverty and misery. This is usually revealed through a diviner after consultations by the family to know the cause of a particular continuous crying/sickness. This group of beggars (who beg due to cultural belief/myth) confirm that culture as a factor has greatly influenced their begging as they each once had a decent activity going on (shea processing, farming, trading or business). This is slightly not different from that of a study by Wedadu (2013) in which majority of women with twins/triplets justify their begging citing cultural norms and beliefs as

reasons. Even in this 21st century where biomedicine has taken over the herbs and traditional modes of treatment, people still believe in the myth of undertaking certain acts which they believe will result in improving a child's health in spite of all the debunking campaigns of certain outmoded cultural notions. This clearly shows how the belief in culture/myth is still prevalent in the Tamale metropolis. One of such ill-fated mothers reveals how she was pushed into begging. She said:

"I was washing one morning when I was stung by a scorpion. I tried several medicines but the pain was not subsiding. I wailed throughout that day. So my husband was asked to consult a diviner to know the cause of these misfortunes. He left for the diviner's place in another village and returned in the evening only to inform me that those misfortunes were caused by evil spirits of the twins and that unless I take them into begging, the misfortunes would not stop. He added that the children will also fall sick and may die if I do not use them to beg".

Analyses of the data reveals that almost all the respondents do not find anything wrong with begging. They claim that since it is what sustains them and helps them to meet their daily sustenance, they do not see it to be anything odd but a normal engagement for individuals like themselves. Those who claimed to see this activity as normal asserted that without begging, they would not have anything to hang on to and might have ended up being totally poorer than they currently are. From the words of a 50-year-old male beggar

"I feel good begging because it solves our problems. Through begging, I am able to pay my children's school fees and also send them to workshops".

However, about 35% claimed that begging for whatever reason is degrading whatsoever. A follow up question reveals that beggars are not respected in the society. One of the beggars indicated that *"Once a beggar, you are discriminated against even from participating in community meetings or any other decision-making process"*. Additionally, this category of respondents revealed that they hope to quit begging one day. Upon probing further, it

was found that they went into begging as a result of a cultural belief or myth. One of the reasons was that, upon delivering twins or triplets, the diviners advised them to go into begging in order to save the lives of the twins or triplets and also to avert misfortunes in the family.

A study by Wedadu (2013) revealed that begging in Ghana and in particular Tamale, is largely regulated and influenced by social norms (values) rooted in religion and culture. Like many problems embedded in societal norms and values, begging as it manifests in Tamale is multifaceted. In Ghana, begging is recognized as a problem by the state as reflected in the legal framework of the country; Beggars and Destitute Decree 1969-National Liberation Council Decree (cited in Wedadu, 2013). However, at the societal level (generally perceived to be devaluing, stigmatizing and unacceptable), begging appears to be permissible (at least) for a certain group of people. For instance, it is seen as a legitimate activity for the most vulnerable (the poorest, the aged and the disabled) in the society. People with disability are usually those who are deaf, dumb, blinded, crippled and mentally retarded (Abebe, 2008). Observations have revealed however that it is not only these groups of people considered to be vulnerable that engage in begging. It is practiced by various kinds of people including the abled bodied, for different reasons. In fact, the reasons people offer money or alms to beggars vary; for example, there are those who give alms out of pity for the beggars and those who offer the alms and expect spiritual rewards. Whatever the reasons, the acts of begging and giving alms to beggars appear to be guided by certain key norms and values rooted in religion and culture. Consequently, despite the fact that by law it is illegal to engage or even involve children in begging, the act is tolerated and 'legitimized' by cultural and religious beliefs of the society.

Tamale metropolis is predominantly a Muslim society and as such the conduct and behaviours of the people are to a large extent regulated by Islamic values and moral ethos (Wedadu, 2013). In principle, Islam allows 'controlled begging' (Quran, 9:60). Thus, the very needy who have no alternative source of livelihood are allowed to beg for what they need to survive for just a day. These people are however encouraged to wean themselves off begging as early as possible as it dehumanizes

and lowers the status of a Muslim. Muslims are encouraged to strive and work hard to obtain their means of livelihood. They are also encouraged to support (in kind or cash) the needy, poor and destitute in the society in order to obtain reward from Allah. Therefore, Islam accepts begging as a last resort and preserve of the disabled, vulnerable and the extremely poverty-stricken persons in society. The practical difficulty here is that this daily restriction cannot be enforced given the nature of the act and the society. Furthermore, who determines who is vulnerable, destitute or extremely needy and as such qualified to beg. Finally, it is difficult for people to cease begging after earning their daily survival needs as stipulated by Islam. The expectation is that the Muslim would always be guided to comply with Allah's directive and to accept laws and regulations. This act of submission to the Will, guidance and regulations of Allah was expected to serve as checks and balances for Muslims who would engage in begging as a last resort. Unfortunately, what was instituted and tolerated but regulated to solve some societal problems has rather become a nuisance to society due to the greed of people.

Aside the tenets of Islam, which allow for the destitute in society to seek for alms in order to meet their daily survival needs, other traditional (cultural) norms and beliefs also contribute to

people engaging in begging in the Tamale metropolis. The majority of beggars (both the disabled and the abled) justify the act of begging on the basis of Islamic teachings (alms giving; Sara in the native language) although others (mothers with twins/triplets) cite beliefs embedded in the tradition and culture of the society. Even those who give alms to the beggars have these beliefs (Wedadu, 2013).

Alms givers in the Tamale metropolis also vary usually, depending on the rationale behind the offerings. Some alms givers consider giving alms as part of a religious duty. This group of people give alms of any amount, relative to what they have (income), to any disabled and vulnerable persons seeking for financial and material assistance in order to fulfil religious obligations of catering for the poor and the destitute. Based on the religious requirements of alms giving, beggars may be profiled into genuine and fraudulent ones. There are also those who give alms (Sara) in order to avert misfortunes or to increase fortunes. The rationale behind the offerings of this group of people is rooted in the teachings and directives of some diviner, fortune tellers, herbalists or soothsayers sometimes referred to collectively as 'mallams'. Perhaps, it is vital to clarify some issues or misconceptions about the word 'mallams'.

Table 1: Typology of Beggars in the Metropolis

Categories of beggars	Age Range	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%	
People with disabilities	Age	18-40	5	2.5%	5	2.5%	10	5%
		41-60	10	5%	18	9%	28	14%
		61+	12	6%	22	11%	34	17%
	Total	27	13.5%	45	22.5%	72	36%	
Sociocultural and religious	Age	18-40	3	1.5%	5	2.5%	8	4%
		41-60	5	2.5%	9	4.5%	14	7%
		61+	5	2.5%	6	3%	11	5.5%
	Total	13	6.5%	20	10%	33	16.5%	
Lack of Family support	Age	18-40	4	2%	6	3%	10	5%
		41-60	6	3%	9	4.5%	15	7.5%
		61+	9	4.5%	13	6.5%	22	11%
	Total	19	9.5%	28	14%	47	23.5%	
Poverty and deprivation	Age	18-40	7	3.5%	3	1.5%	10	5%
		41-60	12	6%	6	3%	18	9%
		61+	6	3%	14	7%	20	10%
	Total	25	12.5%	23	11.5%	48	24%	
Grand total		84	42%	116	58%	200	100%	

Sources: Field Notes

The modus operandi of beggars to attract the attention and sympathy of people (public)

The beggars have studied the situation and the sociocultural and religious environment of the place over decades and have devised various strategies to attract the attention of the people to get alms. Most of them sit around big mosques, at lorry stations, at traffic lights, and other public open spaces. Others simply move from house to house, walk along the street, move around in the market and lorry stations, while others use Monday and Fridays and festive days.

Days of Begging

Traditionally, certain days were acknowledged to be suitable for begging and alms giving. It is generally believed that Mondays and Fridays are good for these. Begging was done on these days. Apart from these days, Tuesdays and Thursdays were next in terms of suitability for begging. However, most beggars now beg as full-time beggars in the metropolis and every day of the week is a working day for majority of the beggars.

At *Barimansi* line in Tamale, beggars are found throughout the day and sometimes at night. As one of the beggars indicated “*People who give alms are aware that we are here. So, they come and give us*

alms. They can come at any time. Some of the politicians and big men and women prefer giving alms directed by diviners and mallams in the dark; at night, late evening or at dawn to avoid being seen. We are always present to get these alms”.

This confirms the claim of Frimpong (2014) that beggars are the most punctual and diligent “civil” workers in Ghana. The study reveals that, some beggars usually begin work as early as 5:00 am, especially around the various bus terminals and close by 6:00pm (91 hours per week). They work from Monday to Sunday, barely missing a day in the job (Frimpong, 2014). In fact, most of these beggars beg not because they are in need but because they have come to accept it as a profession. No matter the amount of money these beggars make in a day, they will continue to beg (Frimpong, 2014). Therefore, it is safe to say that the beggars are just exploiting the benevolence of the people of the metropolis and the weaknesses in Ghana’s laws. Obviously, the streets, bus terminals and other targeted places shall continue to be their enterprises for many years to come because these beggars simply do not retire; they die on the job (begging). The older they get, the better it is for their business because people are likely to have compassion for older beggars.

Begging strategies: attracting public sympathy and attention

Beggars employ various strategies to attract alms from the public. Figure 1 below shows the various ways and strategies used by the beggars.

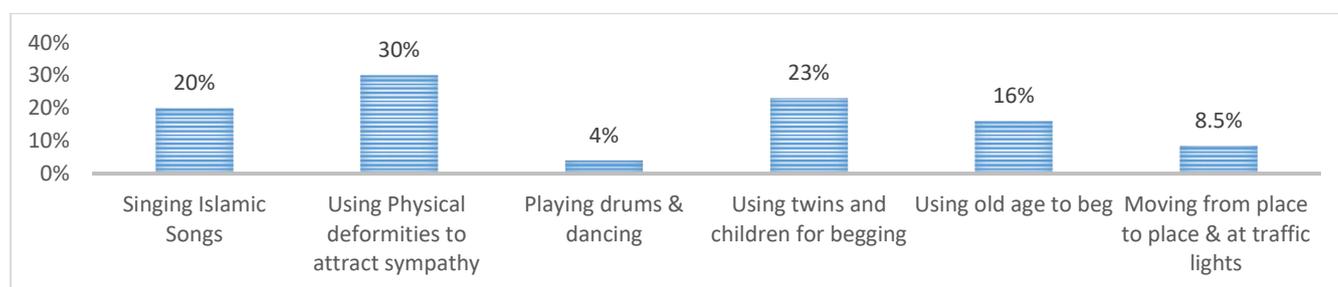


Figure 1: Strategies used by beggars

From Figure 1, it is clear that 30% of the beggars use their physical deformities to attract public sympathy, while 20% sing Islamic songs and

prayers to get alms. As little as 3% dance as a means of attracting public sympathy for alms.

Globally, the strategies beggars use to attract sympathy and attention of the public to give alms

are numerous. One of the strategies is to approach an individual seeking help carrying a child (often in tattered clothing and bare footed) or baby (with unkempt hair and pale looks) who may even be rented for credibility in case of women beggars. Another is using the physical traits of disability; this cuts across the spectrum of beggars. In Ghana, specifically Tamale metropolis, it is common to see women begging with babies at their backs or clinging on their sides. The ages of child aides involved in begging range between 4 and 16 years old (with 4 -10 years preferred) whereas those of adult beggars range from 35 to 60 years (Wedadu, 2013). It was observed that there were fewer girls than boys within the 12 - 14 age bracket. Interestingly, the beggars use the presence of these little child aides (4 – 10 years olds) to attract sympathy and gain alms (money) from the public. As a result, most beggars usually change child aides; weaning out the older (11 – 16 years olds) ones and introducing younger (4 – 10 years olds) ones to continue to attract sympathy from the public. Interviews with the adult beggars revealed that on average, some have changed 5 aides since the start of their begging, with the average exit point for child aides being 14 years (Wedadu, 2013). The sight of a child with a beggar easily portrays an image of extreme vulnerability, thus pushing more people to support them. Able-bodied beggars and grown-up child aides are not able to elicit public sympathy; they are considered undeserving of support because they are seen as being capable of working to earn a decent living both for themselves and for their vulnerable and disabled counterparts. This is the major reason adolescent child aides quit (willingly or forced) the activity (begging) for other economic and productive ventures.

Some beggars also use religion (Islam) to attract public attention. They approach people with religious incantations; invoking the blessings of God before and after the receipt of money or other forms of support from potential donors (Wedadu, 2013).

Drawing public attention in order to gain sympathy for alms

The ability of an individual beggar to seek the attention of the public is an important aspect of begging. As a “hardworking beggar”, one needs to innovate ways of drawing attention and sympathy

to oneself to be offered alms. Due to this, some beggars have used their economic gains meant for food and other necessities of life to purchase megaphones in order to amplify their attention seeking mechanisms.

Individual adult beggars in the metropolis have varied ways of attracting and drawing attention to themselves for alms. According to this study, 47% of the participants attested to offering prayers and blessings to passers-by in order to draw their attention and sympathy. This category of beggars mainly composed of some of the disabled beggars who are usually directed and informed of the presence of people (and sometimes when a car stops to obey traffic) for the adult partner to offer prayers and blessings (this is usually in the case of the blind). However, some of them also revealed that their old age which is also visible to the public contributes to attract public sympathy towards them. Others (4%) openly ask for alms without recourse to the offering of any blessings prior to being offered alms. Observations showed that they mostly constitute the able-bodied beggars who manage to use the presence of a child to outsmart innocent almsgivers. However, they reciprocate the kind gesture upon receipt of alms by offering blessings to the donor. This confirms the findings of the Accra Mail newspaper that “begging is a lucrative business” as the author of the article claimed that beggars make good money even on a bad day. The able-bodied realising this lucrative non-taxable income drift into begging. Other beggars simply show their begging bowls (7%) to any passer-by to attract their attention while mothers with their twins and triplets on the other hand use the presence of their children (16%) to gain sympathy and hence gain alms. The children (twins or triplets) seen in their uniform (as they are usually uniformly dressed from head to toe) help to draw attention. Some of the mothers according to the results of the data gathered, do this by “advertising” the gender of their children. Any potential almsgiver who is directed to offer alms to a particular gender then falls prey to them. Pagwuni, a mother with triplets explains how she uses her triplets to gain alms; “*If someone is passing and holding something I suspect is alms, I tell him/her I am a begging mother with triplets who are all males*”. She further reveals that because of the presence of the male triplet, alms

are usually brought to their home and given to her husband in their absence.

Irrespective of how the beggars draw attention and sympathy to themselves for alms, the public has got different views and feelings towards them (the adult beggars with children, twins/triplets). According to Wedadu (2013), beggars see themselves as “deserving support in the form of alms but to others they are simply a body of nuisance that need to be ridden off the streets”. When asked about how the public feels about their engagement in begging, the results gained according to the beggars’ perception showed that 31% of the public view their begging to be normal in their opinion with 8% who feel bad about beggars and begging, 20% sees it to be disgusting while 27% sympathizes with them. This revealed further that it is usually the visibly disabled beggars and those with children (twins and triplets) who are being sympathized with most by the public. This is slightly not different from the findings of Wedadu (2013) and Osiki (1999). that physical evidence of vulnerability attracts more sympathy to beggars and hence more alms. The able-bodied beggars are seen to be worrying and disgusting since they “can go into a decent income earning activity/training” rather than begging.

The study found that 23% of the beggars used children either as an aide/guide or assist in carrying a twin/triplet children for the purpose of begging. The length of begging with children ranged between one (1) to more than ten (10) years. Those who were engaged in the activity for cultural myths were those who begged least with a child/children who fall between 1-3 years category whereas the disabled beggars begged with children for as long as they have been begging. However, they are not tied to only one child as an aide/guide but change their aides for a variety of reasons. These children used as aides perform other roles in the activity as far as the attraction of almsgiving is concerned. Their presence alone draws sympathy as people feel bad when they see children engaged in begging or used as aides as it portrays extreme vulnerability. Therefore, some people offer alms to certain beggars not for the beggar but out of sympathy for the child being used. This however is one of the reasons which influences beggars to go in for younger children over adults. The children also run other errands for their adult “partners” or parents such as buying food, carrying and caring for the

young ones (in the case of twins/triplets) as well as leading the way. The beggars further revealed that their preferred age of children to use as guides/aides varies in terms of age and gender. In all, 38% of the beggars prefer their aides to be between 4 -7 years old while 19% prefer their aides to be between 8-10 years and 4% prefer the age cohort of 11-14. According to their various responses, children between 4-7 years are very obedient and trustworthy. They do whatever they are asked to do and obey commands. They do not need extravagant motivation to influence their aide-ship. The 8-10 age cohorts behave the same way as those of the 4-7 age group but slightly developed than the former and can run other errands aside being only a guide. They understand the risks associated with begging on the road and direct their adults accordingly. The last category (11-14 age group) as the least preferred age group understands the dynamics of begging and therefore hate it to some extent especially when the motivation behind their aide-ship is low. They resort to pilfering (the daily proceeds) especially where the adult partner is blind. They are also less preferred because they expect a higher motivation before they will usually guide.

Earnings from Begging

Begging is more or less an economic venture, where those engaged in it are expected to earn some income for their living. Be it due to disability, economic (poverty) or cultural reason, it is directed towards income earning. Beggars earn monetary and material income in order to satisfy their needs. The average daily earnings of the beggars vary in terms of level of their vulnerability, reason for begging, presence of begging partners (child/children) and the location or place where they ply their trade. The results show that 41% of the beggars’ daily earning was between GH¢10 and GH¢15 (1.4 to 2.1 USA dollars). The study results also showed that 34% of the beggars claimed they earn an average income of GH¢16 – GH¢20, while 9% mentioned between GH¢30 and GH¢50 as their daily earnings. The rest (25%) claimed they earn more than GH¢50 daily.

However, begging is lucrative on some special days and occasion. These include, Fridays, market days, Ramadan (muslims fasting month) and “sallah” days or festivals (Eidul Fitr and Eidul Adha). With regards to days in terms of prospects, 61% specified

Friday, 16% indicated Monday, while 12% mentioned all the days. Fridays are high income earning days because they are days of the Muslim Jumah prayers. Muslims observe this prayer weekly. Unlike the daily prayer, the Jumah prayer attracts large congregations and beggars normally take advantage of the congregation to solicit for alms. Muslims believe that giving alms to the poor can increase their blessings and faith. Some give alms with the belief that Allah will increase their wealth and health. Based on the amount of prospects received, beggars also attested that Mondays are also good days, next to Fridays. Apart from these “prospective” days, festive seasons are also the times that beggars claim that their average earnings reach its apex. According to them, during Ramadan, they receive various types of alms comprising: money, food grains; rice, corn, sorghum and fabrics among others.

Political election years were also mentioned as one of the lucrative seasons. This is the period most candidates and their supporters give alms to receive blessings to enhance their chances of victory at the elections. As one of the beggars puts it “elections year is the season you would not regret for being a beggar. We get cash donations, fowls, sheep, clothing etc”.

Gender Dimension of Strategies used in begging

With regards to the gender dimension of the strategies used by beggars, the study found that more men (32) than women (8) use Islamic songs to attract the public’s attention. Generally, men dominate in using Islamic songs, playing drums and dancing, using old age and moving around to beg, while women dominate in the use of physical deformities and using twins and children for begging. See Figure 2 for details

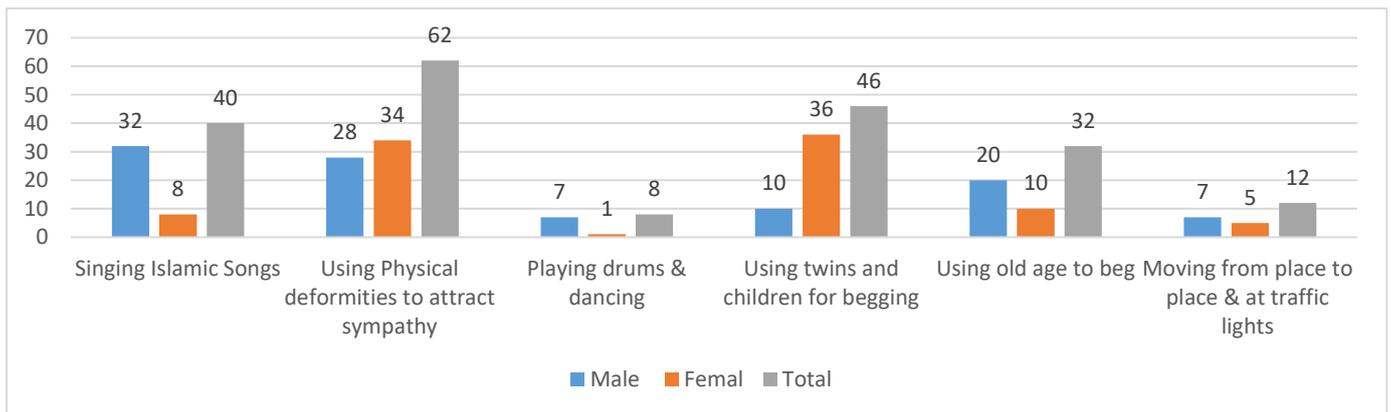


Figure 2: Gender Dimension of Beggars

All the adult beggars interviewed have a certain gender preference in relation to their perception of what constitutes gender roles. Unlike Wedadu’s (2013) study of children in child-adult partnerships for begging in Tamale, this study revealed that aside the consideration of age in terms of selecting an aide, female gender is preferred. The female aide preference constituted 44% as against the male child aide preference of 28%. The female aides were preferred over their male aide counterparts for several reasons. The study revealed that female aides are more sympathetic to their “adult partners” than the male aides in discharging their duties as aides. Another reason is that, mothers of twins and

triplets indicated that the female aides help in carrying one of a twin or triplet whereas a male child cannot perform that role. Other participant beggars were also of the view that the female aides do perform other roles outside begging such as helping in cooking and performing other household chores and are easy to control than the male aides.

Effects of begging

The act of begging has far reaching physical, emotional, psychological and mental effects on the future and lives of children used as guides. It has been reported in some parts of the world that child aides do not have proper shelter, adequate food and

access to healthcare (Anupma, 2014). Even though not yet revealed in Ghana, many of the gangs which run networks of forced begging have heavy drug involvement and thus, the children under their control are often turned into drug addicts in order to have perpetual control over the children.

Anupma, (2014) reported that children who beg and those used as aides have little hope for the future; they have little or no knowledge of their rights leaving them susceptible to exploitation. Furthermore, the conditions in which begging takes place commonly exposes the children to physical and verbal abuse, including sexual victimization and public brutality (Anupma, 2014). They are also prone to a variety of road accidents; they stand the risk of being knocked down by a vehicle or motor cycle. Due to the severity of the issues raised above, coupled with the low self-esteem exhibited by these children in later years, many organizations like the US Aid have openly called for religious (Islam) leaders to outwardly condemn begging.

Schooling which provides a brighter future for development is denied the child aides in the name of begging (either on their own or coerced). Schooling has direct effects on academic and economic achievements, acquisition of literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge which are of vital importance in later years. Arthur (2013) asserts that the establishment and acquired experience during the early childhood development is very important in affecting and shaping the long-term cognitive and socio-economic development of children and society in general in later years. Accordingly, education is considered one of the major components of the human capital. It plays an important role in fostering economic growth and enriching the overall quality of life. The developed economies invested so much in educating their children and most of the middle income and some low-income countries have also succeeded in enrolling a high percentage of their children into schools. On the flip side, some of the developing countries are still struggling to provide basic education to an appreciable number of their children. In fact, several researches on economic growth have established a close correlation between economic performance of a country and the literacy rate of its population and yet, majority of these child aides are not offered education in the Tamale metropolis.

Are children used as aides/guides trained to be beggars?

As indicated earlier, 23% of the beggars used children either to beg or as guides or aides. This act could be beneficial to the beggar but detrimental to the child's development. Children in African homes are said to be gifts or blessings from God because it is the child who would continue the family tree while at the same time bringing unity and happiness to Ghanaian homes. Achonga (2010), asserts that child birth is a cherished moment in families such that couples who fail to get one are negatively branded. This is however true of all ethnic groups in Ghana. However, poverty, disability and other socio-cultural factors compel beggars to use their children for begging. This could be regarded as child abuse or child labour (Agya, 2008). A child who ought to have been the source of happiness has become a bread winner for some individuals at a tender age when they should have been catered for and given the best of childhood training.

Analyses of the data shows that beggars used their children for their businesses. The children are used as guides for the blind and the aged to direct them daily to and from town to carry out begging activities. The results show that 57% of the children used in begging are owned (biological child) by the adult beggars while 43% are non-biological children. The non-biological children used in begging comprised of children who are either relatives (25%) or hired (16%) for the purpose of begging. Children are related to their adult partners as grandchildren, an uncle or aunt. The hired children are either a child of another beggar or a nearby neighbour's child (Agya, 2008).

The study reveals that children are used for begging against their will and this could constitute child labour. For ethical reasons, the research did not interview children, but the beggars indicated that some of the children do not like being used as beggars. According to one of the beggars, his child aide always gave excuses and complained of tiredness for walking around the streets with him to beg. He further indicated that the child complained of being humiliated or ignored, but he does not see that to be anything. Another beggar indicated that sometimes he has to force his child to accompany him. "He feels discouraged and ashamed but he has to continue because, I get him money to support

himself". He further indicated that the child is also able to get money and foodstuff for his parents every month to help support the family".

This study revealed that several factors constitute reasons why children used as aides participate in begging. They are either persuaded to participate willingly or coerced into participation. The results revealed that 20% of the children used as aides/guides in begging participate willingly while a corresponding 80% are forced to participate against their will. Motivation plays an important role in influencing individuals, and so that is what the adult beggars use in persuading their "child partners" to participate willingly. According to the 84% of the adult beggars interviewed, the major source of their motivation to the children is that they always share part of the proceeds/benefits with the child aides both financially and materially. About 45% of the beggars attested that they give their aides some money during the day (for lunch) as well as at the end of the day, while 48% claimed they buy material gifts for their aides (aside the money they give to them) such as clothing, sandals etc. All these serve as major forms of motivation to influence children to participate willingly devoid of coercion (Agya, 2008).

On the other hand, children who unwillingly participate are usually threatened with starvation and severing of all links with their partners (parents, relatives or "masters"). Due to their youthful ages, coupled with their inability to live independent lives without any parental/adult care, they unwillingly undertake this job. Another reason as revealed was that, the child aide stands to lose if the parents are unable to make a daily income since their basic needs will be forfeited for food supplement as a punishment. It is therefore true that many of the children used as aides were subjected to some degree of compulsion and some form of abuse.

The data further revealed that 28% of the beggars indicated that they had never changed aides/guides, while 48% said their aides stopped all by themselves without their approval. Some of the children (mostly the grown-up aides) stopped to undergo an apprenticeship/vocational training with the approval of their parents/partners. This is due to the fact that, with their age, almsgivers saw it odd with a grown-up child begging as an aide. Another reason why the parents replaced them was that,

their presence resulted in low prospects (benefits) from almsgivers.

However, only 15% of the child aides attended school. Therefore, their adult partners or parents had two aides and used interchangeably. An aide usually the older one accompanied the adult beggar together with the younger one to their begging location before leaving for school to return after school hours to also participate. They hardly aided their adult partners in their school uniforms because according to them (child aides), their adult partners preferred them to appear shabbily dressed and with a haggard look like someone vulnerable and in real need.

In spite of some of the children participating willingly as aides and those forced to participate, 87% of the adult beggars claimed they did not groom their children to become beggars. They are merely helping them in their search for survival and will therefore not want any of their aides to take after them as beggars in future. According to them, begging is a shameful and degrading activity as beggars are stigmatized and abused daily with no iota of respect for them as the public believes that their (beggars) very survival depends on them. This corroborates Wedadu's (2013) findings that as child aide beggars grow, they pull out of begging.

Risks associated with begging

Begging as a survival mechanism for the majority of beggars has its associated effects on both the beggars and their child aides or guides. Even though, beggars are able to make a living out of it, it affects their lifestyle disproportionately with regards to how society perceives them. Begging in itself has its own associated challenges as indicated by some of the beggars. These challenges according to them include, getting knocked down by vehicles, verbal abuse from some people, disrespect, discrimination/stigmatization, given bad alms is not useful and being exposed to the weather conditions (hamattan, scorching sun, rain).

The beggars, especially, those who beg at the street lights or move from place to place indicated that road related accidents is one of their main challenges especially the blind, mothers with children (twins/triplets with a care-taker) and those in wheel chairs (amputee and the crippled).

A significant number of the beggars grieved that another of their great challenges is "bad alms".

“Bad alms” according to them is a type of alms which is a combination of both benevolent and malevolent gifts. They usually come either in the form of monetary gifts, materials, grains or a mixture of all the above. The gifts as explained by the beggars come in a well packaged form in black polythene and once given out, the givers quickly leave the scene before being identified as giver of whatever gift. According to them, sometimes live and dangerous reptiles like snakes are found in their gifts. Some of the bad alms also include amulets, bangles, rings, and pebbles, pieces of iron, beads, and objects that have no value. This is more challenging especially the blind who cannot see what is being offered and the child aide may be too naïve to know the kind of gift received. Some almsgivers too often offer certain alms to them with a lot of religious writings on fabric (red, white and black) together with “maasa” and some money. They usually do not know what omen is associated with such gifts and therefore their lives are at stake in relation to the receipt of such alms.

Aside the anthropogenic risks and challenges beggars and their child aides are exposed to daily, natural factors such as the weather also posed a challenge to them. Beggars are no exception to the harsh weather conditions of the region and the metropolis specifically. The adult beggars lamented that during harmattan, (i.e. the dry desert winds or North-Eastern Trade Winds) which annually blows sand from the Sahara and turn the metropolitan area of Tamale or any other town, village or hamlet in the savannah, into an extremely dusty place (Holger, 2007) makes them susceptible to the severe dusty winds together with the scorching sun as they have no guaranteed shelter to protect themselves. Begging mothers (with babies, children or child aides) are openly exposed to this sickening weather because of survival. It is however, equally the same in the rainy season. With no roofs over their heads, they suffer frequently from the unexpected rains. Due to these weather factors, majority of them confessed that, the weather is a challenge which results in low earnings for them as they cannot operate early morning (due to the severe cold from the hamattan winds) as well as usually having to leave for their various habitats when there are signs of impending rains. According to them, weather conditions is one of the factors that results in the sickness of their children, aides or

themselves because they spend a greater part of their time exposed to the vagaries of the weather. However, these risks and associated challenges have resulted in the ill-health of 52% of the respondents interviewed (between 0-5 months), 28% being sick a year ago and 3% in the last three years. With this, 48% went to a drug store for prescription and 16% engaged in self-medication.

The study also revealed the relationship among beggars and their relatives. Among them (beggars) 80% think they lived in harmony with their fellow beggars as they were able to tolerate each other’s dissenting views with 96% living a cordial relationship with their family members except a few (4%) who hated their idea of begging as they assume they were tarnishing the hard-earned reputation of the whole family.

Just as any work is associated with stress, so does begging. Beggars moving to and fro get worn out by the time they get home. Because of the stress and tiredness, 33% of them used ointments all over their body in order to be relieved of pain. A further 12% attested to taking pain killers before reclining to bed while 44% of the beggars do nothing.

Conclusions

Begging as a survival strategy is motivated by sociocultural and religious conditions as well as weak family support systems and poverty. The sociocultural environment where people constantly seek solutions to their social, economic and daily life endeavours from diviners and mallams fuels the proliferation of beggars. People constantly give gifts to the beggars in the form of rituals based upon the advice of the diviners.

Islam and Christianity also entreat their followers to give a hand of support to the needy and the poor in society. Beggars who parade themselves around are easy targeted beneficiaries of this support. The weak family support system due to economic hardships and poverty also lead to the proliferation of beggars in the Tamale metropolis.

Beggars devised several strategies to get alms from the public. The physically weak people and those with disabilities often confine themselves to particular locations such as the vicinities of mosques, at lorry stations, while twins’ mothers, and blind persons often walk around to beg.

Beggars earn income to enable them survive but the social cost of this is very devastating. They often face public scorn, humiliation and insults. They are exposed to the risk of accidents, and bad weather conditions. They also fall sick due to walking long distances. Those who use children expose them to child labour and denial of formal education.

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