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**MEETING NEEDS THROUGH BEGGARY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE
USE OF BEGGING PROCEEDS IN IBADAN NORTH L.G.A., OYO STATE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract: *Begging is a global phenomenon and is one of the most conspicuous features of modern cities in developed and underdeveloped countries of the world. The incidence, and magnitude of the challenges it poses differ from place to place. In Nigeria, with a high poverty rate, the social practice of begging has become so complex that the understanding of its full ramification is now considered central to eradicating it. This study, investigated and documented the functions and pattern of use of begging proceeds among beggars in Ibadan. The Functionalist Theory was used as a theoretical springboard while a descriptive qualitative research design was adopted to guide the investigation. Primary data were generated through 19 In-depth and 2 Key Informant Interviews. Additional information was obtained through Observation. The study population was drawn from two purposively selected areas in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Bodija and Sabo, where begging activities were common. Participants included beggars, money-handlers, shop owners and traders. Data were interpreted through content analysis, and sometimes reported through direct quotation. The study showed that beggars depend on proceeds to satisfy socio-economic and psycho-social needs at three crucial levels: the individual, household and aspirational levels. Begging proceeds do not only provide day to day survival for beggars but also assist them in performing minor social roles and in satisfying higher economic and religious goals. The study concluded that the uses of proceeds would remain central to understanding why anti-begging policies have had limited success. It therefore recommends that needs considerations should feature more in strategies designed to control beggary among Nigerians.*

Keywords: Begging Proceeds; Livelihood Strategies; Needs; Poverty.

Introduction

The greatest challenge facing most sub-Saharan Africa countries in the 21st century is the problem of chronic poverty. While the causes of the problem are complex and marked with sharp variations across the sub-continent, the realities faced by most

people seemed to converge around hunger, ill-health, malnutrition, socio-political marginalisation, and unemployment, leading, perhaps, to other social problems such as petty theft, prostitution, assault, armed robbery, and violent conflict. Yet, others, in a bid to survive their socio-economic difficulties, choose to engage in marginal occupations, to which begging is a part.

In Nigeria, street begging has been a feature of the social landscape for some time now. In 1988, of the 450 million beggars and destitute that were estimated to be living across the world by the United Nations, 3 million were in Nigeria (Igbini, 1991). Later in 2003, a state-wide survey in Kano State, which covered 20 out of the State's 44 local government areas, revealed that close to 657,000 children were dependent on begging for survival (Bamidele, 2007). Other studies have also shown that the number of those involved in begging in Nigerian cities is high and increasing (Adedibu & Jelili, 2011; Adewuyi, 2000; Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009) as different categories of the population struggle to cope with worsening socio-economic conditions (Aderinto, Akinwale, Atere, & Oyenuka, 2007). In a bid to control this "social menace," city administrators often round-up beggars and deposit them at poorly maintained rehabilitation centres while some were shipped to their respective states of origin. Unfortunately, these strategies failed to keep beggars off the street on a permanent basis. Although no single explanation can account for this failure, some clarity on the functions served by begging proceeds can broaden our understanding of the continued street begging. As such, this study, with the broad objective to investigate the dimensions of the use/s of begging proceeds, attempted to document the ends served by income from begging. Not only would this investigation add to the growing knowledge on the dynamics of begging activities in developing countries, it would also suggest ways through which such knowledge may assist in the process of developing sustainable programmes to discourage the practice among Nigerians.

Literature Review

Street begging is common in most societies, rich or poor, contemporary or ancient. The continued existence of pauper or the acutely impoverished has always guaranteed the continued presence of alms-dependent individuals and households. In Europe and America for instance, beggars were constitutive scenery of Industrial Europe and post-Civil War America (Simpson, 1954; Stanley, 1992). In both societies, many Christians believed in the eternal value of charity and alms-giving, although beggars were often a sub-group of homeless people or vagrants. Within eighteenth-century British society, beggary was practised with great finesse, involving donors who were expected to give reassuring with candour and sympathy, and a receiver who combined the role of "deserving poor" with a sense of self-awareness in order to be able to beg profitably and escape from the claws of the many vagrancy laws that were being applied at the time (Hitchcock, 2005). Also in Dublin (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1978), Shanghai (Lu, 1999), India and Bangladesh (Massey, Rafique, & Seeley, 2010), Cali (Bromley, 1981), and other cities across the world, beggars were documented to have formed a distinct and widely recognised group of impoverished individuals in urban settings. Today, begging is one of those practices that centuries of modernisation have not been able to eradicate; a

phenomenal reflection of the general law of human society that no political economy or religious culture has been able to eliminate (Deems, 1883).

The situation in Nigeria, with regards to the culture of begging, is not dissimilar to what obtains in other societies. In the 19th Century, beggary was documented as a manifestation of poverty (Iliffe, 1984) or some form of unequal structural arrangement within some ethnic communities in Nigeria, particularly the Hausa (Adewuyi, 2000). Since independence however, a mixture of political, social, economic, demographic and policy changes have contributed to the surge in begging activities. There is hardly a city in Nigeria that cannot boast of legions of beggars within its boundary, and, within each, the institution of begging is sustained by different categories of the Nigerian poor, able or disabled, women, children, adults, elderly and even foreigners. Concentration of begging activities in Nigerian cities is usually determined by land use, with bus stops, religious centres, traffic stops, motor parks, markets and street junctions being the most popular spots (Ogunkan & Jelili, 2010).

As both a complex and dynamic reality, the main actors are of different types. Adewuyi (2007) identified at least four broad groups: compulsive, ceremonial, disabled and generic beggars. Compulsive beggars engage in beggary on temporary basis and primarily beg because of their poor economic situation. *Fine baras*, trick-stars and unsolicited menial workers are all examples of compulsive beggars. Ceremonial beggars included mothers of twin children, rag-day beggars, eulogist, masquerades, officials of the shrines and others who beg because certain cultural beliefs demanded it. Disabled beggars form another category due to the limitations imposed on them by physical or mental infirmities. Meanwhile, generic beggars were constituted by pupil beggars (*Almajirai*), adult Hausa and female beggars. Although this categorisation may have some utility, it is too restrictive and may give a too narrow view of beggars in Nigeria: for example, ceremonial beggars seem to be restricted to the South-Western Nigeria while the so-called generic beggars appear to be limited to the Hausa. Other schemes of categorisation can be found in Igbinovia (1991) who identified five groups viz. women, child, immigrant, disabled and executive beggars. Igbinovia's scheme appears more appropriate but he also failed to consider the elderly as a distinct class of beggars within the Nigerian society.

Unlike other countries where the practice was seen as an activity engaged in by individuals (Bromley, 1981), begging is a relatively organised activity in Nigeria (Adewuyi, 2000). The high level of organisation of begging activities in Nigeria is historical and may not be unlinked to the migratory tendencies of the Hausa who had dominated the begging profession for decades. In Lagos for instance, popular beggars' colony existed in Kano Street in Ebute Metta. Besides, when people migrate out of their territories, like Hausa beggars who migrated regularly from the North to the Eastern and to the South-Western part of the country in high numbers, a form of organisation is bound to emerge over a long period of time.

Although most Nigerians are liberal to beggars, there are many others who view it less favourably, especially public administrators who commonly describe it as nuisance and have, in response, formulated and implemented laws to eradicate it since the colonial period, starting from 1908 with Immigrant Paupers' Ordinance and the Vagrants' Ordinance in 1911 (Adewuyi, 2007). From 1940 till 1960, colonial administration used

three methods to control begging in Lagos: rehabilitation/welfare home, deportation/repatriation, and imprisonment (Decker, 2010). Later in 1965, the Abraham Ordia Commission, following a large scale survey of beggars in Lagos, recommended repatriation which was religiously implemented. In the 1970s, rehabilitation centres were established in Enugu, Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos and Sokoto – apparently in preparation for the Festival of African Culture (FESTAC) of 1977 (Aderinto, et al., 2007). Traces of anti-begging provisions were also found in of the Federal Constitution of 1979 while influx of foreign beggars was checked the federal government through the Expulsion Order of January 1983 and April 1985. In recent years, public policy on begging has been cosmetic and in South-Western states where successive governments showed interest in its eradication, the colonial option of deportation and rehabilitation remain dominant.

Regrettably, beggars often flocked into the cities as soon as enforcement relaxed while rehabilitation centres failed to achieve their aims due to poor management and inhumane condition of life “within the walls,” sometimes leading inmates to seek means of escaping the rehab facilities (Onoyase, 2010). None of these policies was able to dissuade people from taking to the streets on a permanent basis. This throws up the challenge of the need to find other workable strategies that may assist to savage the situation.

Nature of Begging Proceeds

Proceeds from begging may be in monetary and non-monetary forms. In their day to day practice, beggars receive food, clothing, beddings, bowls, and other non-monetary goods and monetary gifts from donors. Beggars may use proceeds to satisfy diverse ends, depending on its form, the condition of the individual beggar involved and the social context within which s/he is operating. For instance, the use to which monetary proceeds will be put surely differs from what non-monetary proceeds will be used for. Although the scope of this research was restricted to monetary proceeds, it does not mean that both types are independent of each other. At times, beggars may decide to convert non-monetary proceeds like food items and clothing to monetary forms depending on what was perceived to be the priority at any particular point of time. This had been shown to be the case in a study carried out by Massey et al. (2010) in India and Bangladesh where it was found out that beggars from rural areas often sell non-monetary alms at local markets in order to raise needed household cash or to reduce the burden of transporting heavy loads of foodstuffs from the cities.

Beggars form a substantial part of the extremely poor population who depend on proceeds to meet critical needs. In the United States and Canada, where begging is mostly associated with homelessness, drug addiction, street drinking, and mental illness, the use of begging proceeds revolves around the purchase hard drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol (CRISIS, 2003; Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2008). Another survey in Canada also revealed that some beggars use their income to make direct purchases for food, house rents and inter-city transportation or to support friends (Streets to Homes, 2008). However, the utility of proceeds can be very dynamic in developing countries where poverty is the most common denominator for most beggars.

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In the Indian and Bangladeshi study cited earlier, Massey et al. (2010) discovered that beggars sometimes plan to use their proceeds to meet daily household expenses and educational costs, or to make more substantial purchases, for instance, of land for economic improvement, and to recover losses from crop damage from natural calamities. In those countries, begging proceeds are significant parts of household income on which the well-being outcome of many people depended. In the Colombian city of Cali, the presence of a badly disfigured (or disabled) person in the household constitutes an asset to poor families because such householder may earn more than the entire household put together (Bromley, 1981). Proceeds from such householders go a long way in alleviating the suffering of not only the beggars themselves but also of other members of the family. In poor societies, more ambitious hypothesis of uses of proceeds has been suggested; for instance, some scholars think that begging “may be a precursor to another, more permanent way of making living” (Massey, et al., 2010, p. 65), and an important source of capital formation for poor people. In fact, this hypothesis had realistic import in Shanghai where:

Some thrifty and shrewd beggars were able to save enough capital to open their own businesses such as a sesame-cake store or a barber shop, or to become street peddlers selling small commodities such as sweet potatoes or fried dough sticks. Some beggars managed to spin yarn or make toys at home to sell (Lu, 1999, p. 9).

In Nigeria, while much has not been done in relation to the use of begging proceeds, studies have shown that a lot of adult beggars in the country were married and most were also documented to have many dependants, children and wives being the most common (Aderinto, et al., 2007; Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009). Perceptibly, these beggars have stronger family ties than those in developed societies who were mostly individuals engaging in beggary to feed personal habit or just to survive. Among those with family linkages, income from begging is expected to be spent on several things, ranging from food, to clothing, rents, and school fees. But more importantly is the fact that those who perceive begging as form of job may have even bigger plans for their earning or may already be *using* their begging proceeds to accomplish a range of other complex ends. Understanding the various uses of monetary proceeds and the narratives surrounding them are as important to capturing the dynamics of begging as other aspects of the phenomenon that had already been examined in the past.

Theoretical Framework: Merton’s Functionalism

Merton’s perspective on functionalism belongs to the general tradition of socio-anthropological theory of structural-functionalism. The central proposition of traditional functionalism is that the human society operates in a coherent form, and fundamentally bounded to function like an organism in which its various parts, such as social structures, institutions, practices and beliefs, work together in an integrative manner in order to maintain and sustain it (Maryanski & Turner, 2000; Wikipedia, 2011). Merton’s version of functionalism was an improvement on this general functionalist perspective.

His starting point was to re-visit three interrelated criticisms that had been leveled against traditional functionalism by many sociological theorists, particularly the idea of the functional unity of the society, universal functionalism, and structural indispensability (Ritzer, 2008). Rejecting the idea of the unity of the society, which states that all social structures are functional for the society as whole as well as for individuals, Merton argued that the complexity of modern society does not permit us to make such conclusion because some structures work antithetically rather than being integrative. On the idea of universal functionalism, he maintained that not all structures or social institutions have positive functions as traditional functionalism would have us believe. Finally, Merton denounced the indispensability hypothesis that is found in the work of scholars like Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore who claimed that stratification was a “functional necessity” for human societies. For Merton, to claim that social systems are indispensable in a society even when they are obviously dysfunctional is dogmatic and it forecloses the possibility of alternatively more functional systems.

Merton’s reconstruction of functionalism extended the conceptual basis of the theory with important ideas, including function and dysfunction, net balance, levels of functional analysis, and manifest and latent functions. Instead of assuming that a particular social practice has positive function for society, Merton argued for the idea of dual consequences, saying that practices usually have functional and dysfunctional consequences. To determine the extent of “functionality” of a practice, Merton introduced the concept of net balance in which he required that we weigh its function and dysfunction against one another. He however admitted that it was impossible to objectively determine which overweighs the other (Ritzer, 2008, p. 225). The reason for this difficulty to objectively weigh function against dysfunction, says Merton, is not unconnected to the obsession of traditional functionalism with large-scale, macro structures.

Using the notion of “levels of functional analysis,” Merton theorised that researchers may focus on the function of a particular social practice for other specified structures, an institution or a group. As explicated by George Ritzer (2008, p. 255), instead of focusing on the function of, say, the institution of slavery, there is need to “differentiate several levels of analysis and ask about the function and dysfunction of slavery for black families, white families, black political organizations, white political organization, and so forth.” In other words, Merton’s functionalism provides for functional analysis at both macro and the micro levels. Manifest and latent functions are two other concepts that are contained in Merton’s functionalism. Whereas “manifest function” refers to the intended function (or consequence) of social practice, “latent function” is unintended.

Merton’s functionalism permits us to examine the function of begging at the micro level, especially for the actors involved in it, and others who may benefit from it indirectly. Determining the extent of “functionality” is much easier, and apparently theoretically appropriate to assume so, because it is possible to assess, relatively, the function and dysfunction of begging proceeds for beggars, and also decide on its net balance. For example, it may be reasoned that a social actor who would have otherwise been worse-off without beggary would seem to think of begging proceeds to be functional, and would, as such, consider begging for alms functional than dysfunctional

TABLE 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Beggars

| Variable | CATEGORY | N=21 |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------|
| Age | <i>Youth</i> | 5 |
| | <i>Middle Aged</i> | 8 |
| | <i>Elderly</i> | 8 |
| Sex | <i>Male</i> | 17 |
| | <i>Female</i> | 4 |
| Ethnicity | <i>Hausa</i> | 19 |
| | <i>Yoruba</i> | 2 |
| Religious Affiliation | <i>Islam</i> | 19 |
| | <i>Christianity</i> | 2 |
| Marital Status | <i>Married</i> | 15 |
| | <i>Single</i> | 2 |
| | <i>Widowed</i> | 3 |
| | <i>Separated</i> | 1 |
| Physical Condition | <i>Able-bodied</i> | 11 |
| | <i>Handicapped</i> | 10 |
| Status of Residency | <i>Temporary</i> | 20 |
| | <i>Permanent</i> | 1 |

As shown in Table 1, the age categories of the respondents reflect almost equal counts even though male participants dominated. Suffice it to note that use of the age categorisation above was based on observation of physical appearance and a deduction about the probable range of the ages of the beggars, most of whom could not state how old they were. Also, the dominance of male participants was most probably a fall-out of the non-rigid sampling technique that was employed although similar gender representation among Nigerian beggars was observed in previous studies (Adedibu & Jelili, 2011; Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009).

On the ethnic composition of the beggars, most of the participants were of the Hausa stock. This was not surprising at all given the fact the entire literature on the beggars of Nigeria all shared the view that the highest prevalence of begging was among the Hausa people¹. The religious affiliation was a mirror of the ethnic composition of the beggars who were mostly Muslims, the adherents of Islam which is the dominant religion among the Hausa people. Only two (2) of the participants were Christians.

The marital status of the beggars indicated that majority were married: 15 of a total of 21 while the rest were found to be widowed or single. However, the married participants refused to provide specifics on their families, though some of the married

¹ Except of course in few cases where the studies were targeted at a particular group of beggars within a particular geographical location in the country. Aderinto, et al., (2007) was an example of such targeted study.

males mentioned that they have more than one wife and many children. Physical disability was also observed among participants that were beggars, most of who were cripples while few were blinds. None showed any sign of mental impairment. Regardless of their disability, all the participants appeared competent enough to provide reliable responses to the questions asked.

The beggars were asked about their residency status in Ibadan (whether they were permanent or temporary residents). Overall, the beggars were temporary residents of Ibadan, staying not more than three to six months at a time and it appeared that their main reason for coming to Ibadan was to beg. This is not peculiar to Ibadan alone as migratory begging had been found to be very common among the poor in many cities across the world. In Dublin (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1978), Cali (Bromley, 1981), across Indian and Bangladeshi cities (Beggars of Hyderabad, n.d.; Massey, et al., 2010), and in several other places, studies have shown that poor and struggling householders travel long distances to beg for alms in the cities. These migratory beggars often return to their various communities after a few months although some have been found to spend only a couple of weeks at a time in any one city (Bromley, 1981). The states of origin of the beggars were diverse, but most were from the northern part of the country.

The Use of Begging Proceeds

The function of the social practice of begging to beggars and the utility of the proceeds from the occupation can only be captured if the whole gamut of its uses is well understood. In doing this, the expectation would be that the researcher will have details of how much is earned by beggars on a day to day basis. Unfortunately, such data is not available for all the participants in this study because most of them were reluctant to divulge information on their earnings. Moreover, those who openly discussed their earnings provided grossly underestimated figures. As one participant was quick to emphasise by analogy:

...Can you see those market people: as they are standing very close to one another, that Kola-nut seller will never say to the shoe seller "Ah! This ₦5...this is how much I have sold today o!" And neither will the shoe seller tell the other person that he had sold up to a ₦100 today...So nobody will make money and say this is how much I made.

IDI/Male/Beggar/Middle Aged/Yoruba/Bodija

Such hesitancy is not new to some of the scholars that have researched aspects of the income of beggars in Nigeria. For instance, Adewuyi, while studying beggary among the Hausa, commented that not only did beggars lack record-keeping skills to track their earnings they also "kept such information to their chest. Fears of theft, [probability of] falling receipts and rising cost of living further rationalised this secretiveness" (2007, p. 433). Hence, most researchers have relied on estimates when the income of beggars was under analysis. In some studies, estimates may range from a maximum of ₦1000 (Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009) to ₦2000 (Aderinto, et al., 2007) per day. The analysis in this chapter also relied on this estimation and on the assumption that proceeds from begging may sometimes be quite substantial.

Results showed that begging proceeds were utilised to meet critical needs. These needs were analysed at the individual, household and aspirational levels and categorised as primary, secondary and tertiary uses. At each of these levels, beggars strived to meet a range of needs, from the usual, conventional to the unusual, unconventional ones.

Primary Uses (Individual Level)

At the individual level, beggars depended on their proceeds in order to survive from one day to the next. The primary uses of proceed were directly linked to the wellbeing of individual beggars on the street. Here, food ranked highest because it was reported by the beggars to be an integral aspect of their daily survival. For those who do not have the advantage of residing at special shelters where beggars were found in large groups, thereby attracting food donors on a regular basis (as was observed to be the case at Sabo), being in possession of disposable cash for buying food is very important. In a large market such as Bodija, some beggars often eat on credit in the morning whenever business was not good. However, the credit worthiness of a beggar that decides to step-up to food-vendors without money in-hand was dependent on personal integrity, and on whether the vendor believed that the beggar will realise some money before the end of the day. As one participant explained:

Since I came into the market today, I already drank tea and I have also eaten rice but yet to pay...I told them to come back for the money. And they know that I cannot run away because give or take, I have spent about six months to a year in this market.

IDI/Male/Beggar/Middle Aged/Yoruba/Bodija

The necessity of having some cash in one's possession in order to meet his/her food needs on a daily basis was also voiced by another beggar who said that:

I feed myself – I will buy in the morning, buy in the afternoon and in the night, all out of what I earn from begging.

IDI/Male/Beggar/Youth/Yoruba/Bodija

Also at the individual level, the participants reported that income was spent on house-rent from time to time. Shelter is a significant aspect of human livelihood and surviving in a major city like Ibadan, as in most other cities of the world, requires that an individual has a safe place to sleep at the end of everyday's work. This need is even more crucial for the participants in this study since most of them were poor migratory beggars whose wants for accommodation in the city is temporal but very much liked to their individual survival.

Although the possible range of the living arrangements of all the beggars is not known, findings revealed that paid-accommodation and residency at beggars' shelter were common. With regards to the beggars at Sabo in particular, many of them reside in, and conduct their business around, a small shelter near the main road. While each resident was required to pay a certain amount at the shelter as tenement fee, a requirement that eats into their earnings just like their counterparts residing in paid-

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accommodation, living at the shelter seems more affordable financially. Describing the financial requirements at the Sabo shelter, one participant explained as follows:

We pay ₦200 for accommodation...it is not a house exactly but on the floor of the veranda of the shelter...Everyone pays ₦200 at the time of arrival and then subsequently, on Fridays, we pay ₦50. If you buy bulky items like plantain or other produce with the intention of storing it at the shelter before departures [that is to the North], a one-time payment of ₦500 is also charged.

IDI/Female/Beggar/Middle Aged/Hausa/Sabo

Apparently, having cash to spend on housing is important for the participant above and so is the case for many others as well. Although the shelter was built for free in order to prevent beggars from wandering the streets, those intending to use the shelter were expected to meet obligations that depended entirely on cash. In a month, a resident at the Sabo shelter pays at least ₦200 for space on the floor while those without money may be at the risk of exposure. For women and elderly beggars, the inability to secure a safe abode in the city can be a major source of vulnerability. As already shown in a study that was conducted in Indian and Bangladeshi cities, it was relatively easy for male beggars to secure accommodation or a place to live than their female counterparts who often plan specially for living their arrangements in the city ahead of the time of arrival (Massey, et al, 2010, p. 69).

At the individual level, other primary uses of begging proceeds, as reported by participants, covered health and clothing, and earnings were sometimes spent on the payment of utilities like water and laundry services. Suffice it to note that not all of these were equally needful for some beggars but for those really need them, choosing what to spend on at any particular point in time may involve a lot of thinking due to the limitedness of realisable income. For instance, commenting on the choice that must be made between feeding, medicine needs and the paltry sum he realises from begging, one participant stated that he made:

...₦500, ₦250, ₦300...Sometimes business is good but at other times I don't make up to that. We [referring to another friend who also begs] remove and keep some of this money so that it will be put to use when we are not feeling well so as to buy drugs...We slept here at Bodija yesterday and we've been able to make ₦20 this morning which we have already used it to eat.

IDI/Male/Beggar/Youth/Hausa/Bodija

Furthermore, while the appearance of a neatly clothed beggar may stir a feeling of suspicion from prospective donors, maintaining an acceptable level of social appearance and personal hygiene were cited by some beggars as reasons for expending so much on water and laundry. Some physically challenged beggars paid up to ₦100 in service charge for laundry and another ₦100 for purchasing water on a daily basis. What

these imply is that individual beggars are most probably in constant need of cash to survive and to achieve some level of individual wellbeing.

Secondary Uses (Household Level)

As noted in the first section of this chapter, most of the beggars in this research were married; some males have more than two (2) wives and majority of them mentioned that they have many children. The widows amongst the female beggars also claimed that they have up to 10 children to cater for. Explaining her situation, one widowed beggar had the following to say:

My husband is dead and he left me with 10 children. Whenever anybody returned from the village [to Ibadan] the list of items that were required by the children at the school is sent through them. So whatever savings I have on me is what I send home so that the child that the amount covered can return to school.

IDI/Female/Elderly/Hausa/Sabo

Hence, in addition to primary uses at the individual level, begging proceeds also have secondary function for beggars with dependants. They depend on it to meet household obligations, making familial responsibility an important consideration in the spending decisions of some beggars. Emphasising this consideration, a male beggar elaborates further:

...around this market, if you ask anyone how I move on Saturday, they will tell you: I leave this place around 12 in the afternoon, and return early in the morning on Sunday at around 8'o clock; check on the children and the little I have I give to their mother who sells worobo² at the front yard. This is better than not giving anything at all because if you don't, you risk being cursed...On such home visits, I also refund whatever she must have paid in my absence on school-related activities of the children from her meagre trade.

Asked why he feels this was important, he responded that:

...I do this not because of today but for the future so that one's children will not be on the street throwing stones. Whether I beg or not or whether it is suffering or not, in the future those children will be the ones to rescue us. Although, it is not all of one's children that will have compassion – there will be others who may distance themselves. But at the same time, some will be caring enough.

IDI/Male/Beggar/Middle Aged/Yoruba/Bodija

² Yoruba term for small items, usually sweets and biscuits mostly sold to children.

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The household consideration in the use of proceeds brings a number of issues into sharp focus, the most important of which concerns the claim that beggars lacked strong family ties. While researching the phenomenon of begging among the Hausa, Adewuyi (2007) had freely associated the high incidence within this group to weak family ties. But this may not be the case for many beggars whose involvement in begging was due in part to their commitment to family members. As reflected in how proceeds were used, rather than being a practice that individuals engage in order to satisfy personal needs alone, dependants are a major consideration for some beggars as well.

In the quotation above, it may also be deduced that some beggars in Nigeria are under pressure to perform their roles as bread winners at the household level. It may further be inferred that some individuals were convinced that the proceeds from begging was still a viable source of meeting familial and social expectations – e.g., that fathers were supposed to cater not only for themselves but for the household as well. Whether begging should be a socially approved means of adjusting to the father's role is probably a normative question that is yet to be systematically interrogated. However, the beggars in our study seemed to affirm the efficacy of begging proceeds to aid such adjustment.

In other words, despite the humiliation that many beggars face, and the harsh condition under which some of them operate, the urge (for some or the need for other beggars) to perform their share of household responsibilities was apparently even greater. This finding aligned closely with what other scholars had discovered in other cultures where a sudden halt in the flow of begging proceeds into the household may worsen the poverty condition of all householders – in spite of the fact that some householders were engaged in other income generating activities (Bromley, 1981; Massey, et al, 2010).

Tertiary Uses (Aspirational Level)

Apart from the primary and secondary uses of begging proceeds, which occurred respectively at the individual and household levels, some participants also used their income to meet aspirational needs. These kinds of needs were so referred to because they do not readily fall into what many would call *conventional usage* of begging proceeds. In fact, when some of these uses are ranked on the Maslowian hierarchy of needs, they might, in the estimation of many people, occupy the upper sections on the ranking scale. For example, no one ordinarily expects that a beggar would plan a marriage or a pilgrimage around the earnings from begging but some the participants in this study did.

According to an Informant at the Sabo shelter, a blind beggar was able to sponsor himself and a close friend, also a beggar, on the Islamic pilgrimage or *Hajj* some years ago. The beggar paid up ₦400,000 for the trip, about ₦200,000 per person. In another case at Bodija, male IDI participant revealed that he planned to save enough from his proceeds so that he will have enough for marriage. Yet another interesting tertiary use had to do with the payment of wages. In the words of one participant:

I have been buying cards [for mobile phone cards] and sending it home [to Sokoto]. They change the card to money when they receive it and then use it as I have directed...At times I direct them to...to pay the wages of labourers who help to work my farm. At other times, I tell them to use to solve problems at home.

IDI/Male/Beggar/Elderly/Hausa/Bodija

The participant in the quotation above has more than 10 years of begging experience in Ibadan and it has been his rituals since the first year to leave his farm in Sokoto State during dry season to return when seasonal rains begin. This is in line with what was shared by another participant from Kebbi State who in addition to ordering his children to pay outstanding fees at school also directed them to hire extra labour for farm clearing with some of the proceeds he had sent. While the Hausa people have engaged in short-term migration to Ibadan for a long time as a way of augmenting their sources of income during off-farm periods (Cohen, 1969, as cited in Aderinto, et al., 2007), the interesting point to note in this finding is that begging proceeds represent an important aspect of re-current budgetary expenditure for beggars who have multiple livelihood sources.

Patterns of Use and the Social Function of Begging

Using Merton's idea of *levels of functional analysis*, comprehending the dynamics of the utility of begging proceeds becomes almost instantaneous. The micro-sociological analysis of the function of begging had indeed shown that beggars handled complex real life situations with, and erect plans of unimaginable magnitude on their proceeds. At the individual, household and aspirational levels, they tended to struggle to maintain some degree of coherence in their lives and make reasoned decisions that may be ignored in large scale macro analysis of begging. Without denying the value of past research that were based on more general macro theory of functionalism (*see* Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009), the approach in this study called attention to the fact that beggars depend on their proceeds to solve an array of problems that may be disaggregated and elaborated upon. With the analysis of begging at the micro level, one may also begin to understand why the occupation had continue to attract a lot of those who could not take up other kinds of work due to age or physical disability. Moreover, the fact that income from beggary also served aspirational or highly esteemed religious and socio-economic ends points to the fact that Merton's levels of functional analysis hold great promises for grasping the intricacies of the social practice of begging.

With the exception of studies such as Massey, et al., (2010) in which the authors applied the livelihood approach to begging in India and Bangladesh and found that some people beg in order to make bulk purchases and buy lands in the rural areas, it would be extremely difficult to capture the complexity of how proceeds are used without the aid of a microscopic theory like Merton's functionalism.

Begging proceeds met obviously intended functions of enabling individual beggars to survive from day to day and also improved their capability to function as parents within the home environment. Additionally, albeit probably unintended, using proceeds to satisfy higher economic and religious goals were also important functions of the latent variant that Merton's functionalist perspective suggested to be inherent in any social practice, culture or organisation. However, contrary to what the result appeared to be suggesting, we must be careful not to conclude hastily that begging proceeds will always be functional for beggars. As Merton propositioned, almost all social institutions and practices have their own dysfunctions. In the present case, not only would begging proceeds attract new entrants into the business, thereby sustaining a practice that may lower people's self-esteem, the fact that people may earn livelihood through beggary

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would probably prevent some individuals from engaging in other more economically and socially rewarding and less humiliating activities.

Nevertheless, it will be difficult to deny the counter-balancing functions of begging proceeds in highly unequal and poverty-stricken society, especially when our analysis is directed at the beggars themselves. While granting that it may have some unwanted consequences, at the macro and micro levels of the society, the net-balance of begging proceeds for beggars in particular would most probably be that it has more functions than dysfunctions. This would probably remain so for a long time to come if the social contradictions that prevent women, children, aged, disabled and some able-bodied individuals from accessing other livelihood sources continue to exist in the society.

Cross-Cultural Comparison of Uses and its Policy Implication

In developed countries, the prevalent view, as pointed out in the literature review, was that beggars generally use their proceeds to buy drugs and alcohol (CRISIS, 2003; Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2008; Streets to Homes, 2008) and this has been the main reason for the continued application of criminal enforcement strategies in tackling begging. That view departs greatly from the prevailing uses that were observed among the participants of this study. This observation has important implications for how the phenomenon of begging should be addressed in Nigeria and other less developed countries where official disposition to beggars is gradually becoming repressive – in Lagos for example.

Suffice it to note that this observation was not meant to deduce that beggars in Nigeria did not have “habits” of their own. In fact, one of the participants in this study was observed to be in possession of at least a pack of cigarette during separate interview sessions. Moreover, a keen observer along the streets across Nigerian cities may have bumped into a beggar that was obviously drunk while pleadingly soliciting for spare change. However, to overlay this criminological view in this particular culture would be to risk inexactitude in reporting the complexity of the reality that many beggars were facing. Therefore, while the picture painted in the developed countries of the North may have been a “close-to-the-truth” representation of that society, an account that ignores the practical diversity of the use of begging proceeds among beggars in Nigeria will be partial and may run the risk of being accused of superficiality.

Conclusion

This study has shown that begging is a very complex phenomenon which, in order to be understood, must sometimes be analysed at different levels. Based on our examination of the functions of begging proceeds at the micro-level, it is evident that the range of the use of income from beggary transcends mere personal survival to include unconventional or higher-order uses. It was found out that the use of income from begging occurs at three important levels: individual, household and aspirational levels. First, individual-level utility of proceeds was observed to be linked to personal survival of beggars from day to day. Monies from the “occupation” were used to meet the primary or personal needs of food, shelter, medicine, water and laundry. Most of them maintained that it would be difficult to survive on the street without the generous donation from people. Second, the fact that the proportion of married participants in the study was high seemed to be an important factor in the “use” decision of beggars at the household level.

Contrary to the situation in the developed countries where beggars were mainly individual with weak family ties – caring for themselves alone – a view that some scholars have also argued to be representative of Nigerian beggars as well, some participants of this study appeared to be committed to their families as suggested by their secondary use of begging proceeds. Some beggars in Nigeria catered for the needs of their wives, children and other dependants. In fact, the need to fit into social roles – such as father's or mother's – and the urge to perform accompanying role responsibilities were, for some, a major consideration for earning cash through beggary. Beggars with families depended on the income from beggary to pay school fees, maintain their homes and cater for other challenges that were occurring at the level of the household. Third, and finally, proceeds were employed to meet aspirational needs. Also tagged tertiary uses, aspirational-level utility served unconventional, high ranking needs such as pilgrimage. It also formed a substantial aspect of farm expenditure for beggars that owned farmable lands – e.g. payment of the salaries of farm labourers.

The narratives from this qualitative study further affirmed that begging is indeed a livelihood strategy for members of poor households in developing countries and are indicative of some of the most important reason why anti-begging strategies have, so far, failed to reduce beggary in any decisive way. As such, livelihood analysis must increasingly feature in strategies meant to curb begging. For example, special low-interest micro-credit programmes can target farmer-cum-seasonal beggars, particularly those found to be dependent on begging proceeds for meeting the cost of preparing farmlands at the beginning of every planting season. This will go a long way in reducing the number of beggars in Nigerian cities. It can also contribute to the improvement of the lives of beggars and their dependants while also promoting food security at the local and national levels. When these strategies are integrated into, and vigorously pursued in national poverty eradication campaigns at the macro-level, we will have kick-start a process that will assist some of the extremely groups within the society to escape chronic impoverishment.

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