

Effective Methods of Combating Street Begging in Nigeria as Perceived by Panhandlers

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ABSTRACT This investigation was set out to study Effective Methods of Combating Street Begging as perceived by the Panhandlers. Four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study made use of an instrument known as “Effective Methods of Combating Street Begging Questionnaire” (EMOCSBQ). The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.83 and was administered on a total of one hundred and seventy-five respondents made up of male and female, old and young, Moslem and non-Moslem and married and unmarried beggars. One hundred and forty subjects returned their copies showing eighty percent retrieval rate. The Z-test statistics was employed to analyse the data and the findings revealed that Rehabilitations centres, monthly survival allowance, Diverted Giving Scheme as well as provision of food for Islamic Schools are effective methods of curbing street begging.

INTRODUCTION

Begging is an age-long social problem in Nigeria. There aren't any current techniques for begging which have not been used for hundreds of years or are not based on older techniques that are adapted to modern technology (John 2006). John emphasized that what is known about beggars is largely from records of law enforcement, potential or rogue literature. As Maishanu (2006) puts it, the issue of street begging is more common among indigenes of the far North in general and those of Sokoto State in particular. The begging syndrome is not only that of young school boys going in the evenings to get their plates of food filled just for that evening and retire peacefully to their abodes but also that of adult destitutes from the state on the streets of all major towns and cities in the federation.

Teenage begging or Almajiris is very rampant in Kano state in spite of the efforts of the state governor. These teenage beggars attend school in the morning and take to the streets in the afternoon and evening for begging. According to Anthony (2007), Governor Ibrahim Shekarau had spent millions of naira to improve the Islamic schools. There are about thirty thousand Islamic schools in Kano and over one million students have enrolled in these schools. In the view of Galadanci (2007), Islam lays much emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge and encourages students to go out in search of knowledge and this explains why Muslim parents send their

children from different parts of the North to Kano state to learn Islamic and Arabic Education. Though Islam instructs followers to go and seek for knowledge far and near, it didn't say parents should neglect their children who are seeking this knowledge (Galadanci 2007). Since these parents do not make feeding arrangement for their children and the Malams (their teachers) are not rich enough to provide accommodation as well as food, these teenagers take to the streets as the last option.

Compulsory giving of alms or Zakat is the third pillar of Islam and the purpose is to help the less privileged. Rather than bridge the gap between the “haves” and “have not”, Zakat seems to be encouraging beggary. This is because a good number of able-bodied individuals take to begging in expectation of this kind of Islamic gesture. Other cities in Nigeria where beggars are constituting a menace are Lagos, Kaduna, Benin City, Enugu, in fact all major cities of Nigeria. As John (2006) puts it, begging is regarded as a traditional way of life in India and that Shiva, the Hindu god is believed to have run his household by panhandling. He emphasized that some Indians are even beggars for generations and continue their family tradition of begging. It was also reported that in Europe, women from poorer countries like Bulgaria are sent by organized gangs to solicit for alms in cities in Western Europe, such as Barcelona and the proceeds collected by gangs.

Also, Carter and Schafer (1998) revealed that

an average of 10 people are likely to be peddling on any given day in Melbourne (Australia) and that most people beg alone for relatively short periods. In North America and Canada specifically, there is a large number of beggars. They emphasized that residents and visitors to many urban centres encounter panhandlers every day and that a walk down a major street is very likely to result in at least one solicitation by someone seeking spare change. In the United States, Lee and Farrel (2003) studied panhandling among homeless people and discovered that most beggars are men with substance abuse or mental health difficulties and that the few female peddlers they observed do not have children in their care and are assumed to be single.

Effective Methods of Combating Street Begging

Several strategies have been employed by the government, corporate organisations and public spirited individuals both in Nigeria and abroad in order to combat this ugly situation.

Rehabilitation Centre

In Lagos state, there is a rehabilitation centre located at Majidun in Ikorodu, where about 4,000 destitutes have been kept. According to the editor (Tuesday Guardian 2007), beggars are taken to rehabilitation homes not to take care of them but just to get rid of them from the street. He pointed out that the existing rehabilitation homes are a mockery and insult to human dignity because they lack basic necessities of life and therefore not an effective strategy for curbing street begging. Akpobio et al. (2007) also pointed out that the Lagos State government has also tried to reconcile the destitute with their families by sending social workers to their states of origin to trace their homes before sending them back. And this has yielded some results because 40% of the beggars have been sent home.

Provision of Food for Students in Islamic Schools

As earlier mentioned, the basic reason for Almajiri begging in Kano is that the children have no alternative to feeding, therefore the Kano state government embarked on a pilot programme of providing food for the Islamic schools in three local government councils (Warawa, Makoda and Ajingi) for a period of one year. Anthony (2007)

reported that children from the local government areas stopped begging.

Monthly Survival Allowance

In line with the vision of the late Malam Aminu Kano, whose political ideology centred on reducing poverty to the barest minimum, the Jigawa state government has put in place a social welfare programme of N7,000.00 monthly survival allowance for the physically disabled in the state to alleviate their plight and keep them off the street.

The Federal government has at one time or the other sent law enforcement agents to rid the streets of beggars and kept them in existing rehabilitation centres which lack basic necessities of life and which negate the fundamental human rights of these citizens. The federal Government went a step further when it gave a directive compelling employers of labour to reserve at least 2% of their workforce for the disabled and this can be well implemented if a proper data base on the physically handicapped is provided.

Recently, precisely in May 2007, the Kwara state government banned street begging. This was under the leadership of Dr. Bukola Saraki. The objective was to stop street begging in its entirety and the penalty for breaking the law is N5, 000 or three months imprisonment or both as the case may be.

Diverted Giving Scheme (DGS)

Diverted giving scheme is a method used in encouraging people to put money in charity boxes placed in strategic places rather than putting the money in the hands of the beggars. The monies donated are then sent to welfare agencies to take care of the less privileged. Lynch (2004) pointed out that the DGS is in some cities in the United Kingdom such as Winchester, Liverpool, Brighton and Manchester and that the scheme has been greatly supported by the public as well as Law Enforcement Agents and has yielded some positive result. Peddling has been banned in some cities in the United States such as Chicago and Illinois, and there are signpost at regular intervals which remind people that begging is banned but this hardly dissuades the beggars' and has not in any way eliminated or even reduce the problem.

There is also a restriction on beggars at the London underground system.

Carter (2007) opined that bye-laws that

prohibit all forms of panhandling may reduce the frequency and shift the location of panhandling in the short term but that they will not in any way eliminate or even reduce the problem that drive people into the streets.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been defined operationally;

Street Begging: Street begging can be defined as an act of stopping people on the street to beg for assistance in the form of money or food.

Panhandlers: These are the individuals who beg and they include teenagers, the physically handicapped and destitutes.

Diverted Giving Scheme

This is a method of encouraging people to drop money in strategically located boxes instead of placing money in the hands of beggars and such monies are handed over to social welfare agencies for the upkeep of the needy.

Young Beggars: These are individuals whose age range from 6 to 21 years.

Old Beggars: These are beggars who are 22 years and above.

Statement of the Problem

The literature reviewed indicated that begging has been a social ill in Nigeria. Many a times, the government has resorted to the use of force in order to rid the streets of these panhandlers but all to no avail. This study is concerned about effective methods of checking street begging and the perception of the beggars themselves about the effectiveness of these strategies and these include rehabilitation centres, social welfare package, feeding students in Islamic schools and the Diverted Giving Schemes.

Research Questions

1. Is there any difference between male and female beggars in their perception of rehabilitation Centre as an effective method of combating street begging?
2. What is the difference between old and young beggars in their perception of provision of monthly survival allowance by the government as an effective method of combating street begging?

3. Is there any difference between Moslem and Non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the use of Diverted Giving Scheme as an effective method of combating street begging?
4. What is the difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools as an effective method of combating street begging?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female beggars in their perception of rehabilitation centre as an effective method of combating street begging.
2. There is no significant difference between old and young beggars in their perception of the provision of monthly survival allowance by the Government as an effective method of combating street begging.
3. There is no significant difference between Moslem and non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the Diverted Giving scheme as an effective method of combating street begging.
4. There is no significant difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools as an effective method of combating street begging.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The researcher adopted ex-post facto research design for the study. Asika (2002:24) argued that ex-post facto is a systematic empirical study in which the researcher does not in any way control or manipulate independent variables because the situation for the study already exists or has already taken place. The instrument used for the collection of data was tagged "Effective Method of Combating Street Begging Questionnaire (EMOCSBQ) and was made up of fifteen items. It has facial validity and a reliability coefficient of 0.83. This is an indication that the instrument is very reliable and suitable for data collection. The population of this study consisted of all street beggars in Nigeria. The researcher used the random sampling technique to select seven states, spread across northern and southern Nigeria that are prone to street begging.

A total of one hundred and seventy-five respondents (beggars) were randomly selected

for the study. The investigator made use of research Assistants to administer one hundred and seventy-five copies of the questionnaire on the respondents. One hundred and forty copies were retrieved showing 80% return rate. The research Assistants were selected on the basis of those who understand the language of the subjects so that they can interpret the questionnaire to them. The data collected from the administration of questionnaire were separated into male and female, married and unmarried, others were old and young and finally Moslem and non-Moslem beggars. The researcher then used the z-test statistics to determine whether there is significant difference in the perception of the panhandlers regarding effective methods of combating street begging in Nigeria.

RESULTS

The findings of the study have been reported in four tables as follows.

Research Question One

Is there any difference between male and female beggars in their perception of rehabilitation Centre as an effective method of combating street begging?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between male and female beggars in their perception of Rehabilitation centre as an effective method of combating street begging.

Research Question Two

What is the difference between old and young beggars in their perception of provision of monthly survival allowance by the government as an effective method of combating street begging?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between old and young beggars in their perception of provision of monthly survival allowance by the government as an effective method of combating street begging.

Research Question Three

Is there any difference between Moslem and non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the use of the Diverted Giving Scheme as an effective method of combating street begging?

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between Moslem and non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the use of the Diverted Giving Scheme as an effective method of combating street begging.

Research Question Four

What is the difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools as an effective method of combating street begging?

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools as an effective method of combating street begging.

Table 1 showed a difference in the mean perception of male and female beggars regarding rehabilitation centre as an effective method of combating street begging. The difference is not however significant because the calculated Z-value of 1.73 is lower than the critical Z-value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypotheses which states that there is no significant difference between male and female beggars in their perception of rehabilitating centre as an effective method of combating street begging is accepted.

The data in table 2 revealed a difference in the mean perception of old and young beggars concerning the provision of Monthly Survival Allowance as an effective method of combating street begging as not being significant. This is so because the calculated Z-value of 1.74 is less than the critical Z-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis is retained.

An inspection of table 3 showed that there is difference in the mean perception of Moslem and non-Moslem beggars as regards the use of Diverted Giving Scheme as an effective method of curbing street begging. But the difference is not significant as the calculated Z-value of 0.15 is less than the critical Z-value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypotheses which states that there is no significant difference between Moslem and non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the use of the Diverted Giving Scheme as an effective method of combating street begging is accepted.

The result on table 4 has indicated a difference in the mean perception of married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools as an effective method of combating street begging. The difference in

Table 1: Difference between male and female beggars in their perception of rehabilitation centre as an effective method of combating street begging using Z-test statistics.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Z-cal</i>	<i>Z-critical</i>	<i>Significant level</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Male	92	31.25	6.08	1.73	1.96	0.05	N.S
Female	48	29.97	6.21				

Table 2: Difference between old and young beggars in their perception of provision of monthly survival allowance by the government as an effective method of combating street begging using Z-test Statistics.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Z-cal</i>	<i>Z-critical</i>	<i>Significant level</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Old	91	26.25	6.08	1.74	1.96	0.05	N.S
Young	49	24.97	6.21				

Table 3: Difference between Moslem and non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the use of the diverted giving scheme as an effective method of combating street begging using Z-test statistics.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Z-cal</i>	<i>Z-critical</i>	<i>Significant level</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Moslem	95	28.60	5.95	0.15	1.96	0.05	N.S
Non- Moslem	45	28.30	3.75				

Table 4: Difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools using Z-test statistics.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Z-cal</i>	<i>Z-critical</i>	<i>Significant level</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Married	100	31.33	5.93	1.42	1.96	0.05	N.S
Unmarried	40	30.30	6.06				

the mean is not significant because the calculated Z-value of 1.42 is lower than the critical Z-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The investigation has revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female beggars in their perception of Rehabilitation centre as an effective method of combating street begging. This finding corroborates with Akpabio et al. (2007) who stressed the need for a rehabilitation centre and further pointed out that there is such centre at Ikorodu Lagos where about 4000 destitutes have been housed and this has helped to check street disorder to some extent. The study is however at variance with the view of the Editor (Guardian 2007) who emphasized that taking the needy to ill-equipped rehabilitation centre will not minimize the problem of street begging because sooner or later they will troop out to seek for their daily bread.

The study has also found out that there is no significant difference between old and young beggars in their perception of provision of

monthly survival allowance by the government as an effective method of curbing street begging. This finding gives credence to Lamido (2007) who opined that the provision of monthly Survival Allowance of N7,000 to the physically disabled in Jigawa state will alleviate their plight and help to keep them (beggars) off the street.

Furthermore, the present study has showed that there is no significant difference between Moslem and non-Moslem beggars in their perception of the use of the Diverted Giving Scheme as an effective method of combating street begging. This is in line with Lynch (2004) who argued that the Diverted Giving Scheme (DGS) is in use in some cities in the United Kingdom such as Winchester, Liverpool, Brighton and Manchester and that the scheme has been greatly supported by the public as well as Law Enforcement Agents and has yielded positive results.

The last finding of this study states that there is no significant difference between married and unmarried beggars in their perception of the provision of food for Islamic schools. This supports the view of Anthony (2007) who reported that children in Islamic Schools in three local areas of Kano who were provided food by the state government as part of a pilot programme have stopped begging.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn is that street begging has been an age-long problem in Nigeria and the efforts made by the government in several instances involved the use of Law Enforcement Agents to rid the streets of these destitutes. But this has often proved to be a short term solution. The researcher is fully convinced that if rehabilitation centres are in good condition, if monthly survival allowances could be provided by the government. If the Federal Government can shoulder the responsibilities of feeding students in Islamic schools (mostly in Kano State) and if the Diverted Giving scheme is introduced in Nigeria, street begging will be a thing of the past.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that other state governments should emulate the kind gesture of the Jigawa state governor and also give Survival Monthly Allowance to the needy.
2. Since rehabilitation centres are found to be good strategies of keeping peddlers off the street, the existing ones should be provided with basic necessities of life such as water and electricity so that inmates will feel comfortable.
3. The Federal Government should assist the Kano state Government and other states (where there are Islamic schools) in providing food for the students so that they will not take to the streets.

4. The Diverted Giving Scheme that is used in some cities in the United Kingdom and in some parts of Australia, should be introduced in Nigeria and the Social Welfare Agencies should be honest enough to utilize the money for the less privileged.

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