

Meaning, Reasons, Consequences and Legality of Street Begging in Nigeria

1. Introduction

One social problem that has been an age-long issues and serious concern to well meaning Nigerians is street begging. The problem of begging is widespread in Nigeria and seen as global problem. Broun (2010) said begging as an antisocial behavior observed in almost all nations of the world especially in developing nations. It involves asking for what the beggar does not have or favor. Street begging anywhere is a national disease that eats into the fabrics of the social, economic, religion, political and educational structures. In other words, it is apparently an indictment on the quality of government in many societies (Usoro, 2007).

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

Begging has been common since the existence of human civilization and has many different variables and causes within different cultural contexts. Begging has happened in most societies around the world, although its prevalence and exact form varied. Begging had been noticed in Greece about 8th to 6th centuries ago among the early Middle Ages and the byzantine era (Johnny, 2008).

According to Alan (2010), the phenomenon of street children has been documented as far back as 1848. In Soviet Russia, The issue of abandoned Children was documented between 1918 and 1920, while the industrial revolution in England has in the 1800s. It was at this time that street children became a feature of the streets of Dublin albeit at different times.

2. What Is Street Begging?

Begging is the practice of imploring others to grant a favor, which could be in the form of gift like money, clothes or food with no expectation of reciprocation or refund. Street begging is defined as the act of requesting for money, food or other forms of favor without an exchange in a public place and in the street where people frequently pass by.

Wikipedia (2010) defined street begging as a practice whereby a person obtains money, food, shelter or other things from people he/she encounters in public place by request without return. From Chukwulobe (2011) street begging is seen as an act of stopping people on the street to beg for assistance which could either be in the form of giving money or food. It often occurs for the purpose of securing a material benefit, generally for a gift donation or charitable donation (John, 2010). From Balogun (2012) A street beggar is a person who relies on the financial graces of strangers without providing food or services in return, though it is just as much work as a wage job.

3. Categorization of Begging

Beggars can be categorized based on their appearance and techniques or mode of begging. Based on their appearances, they can be categorized into three groups; which include.

- (a) Professional beggars who find themselves in this trade on the grounds of physical disability
- (b) Those who street-beg on account of old age
- (c) Those who voluntarily force themselves into the begging class.

4. Three Techniques Employed by Beggars

Based on their techniques of begging, they are also categorized into three, which include:

- (a) **Passive Begging:** This type involve in person either sitting or standing in one place with songs or receptacle entreating donations.
- (b) **Active Begging:** This type of beggars move from place to place with their respectable soliciting money, gifts and
- (c) **Aggressive Begging:** This technique is one which harsh words and intimidations are used in soliciting for help (Burke 1999), Horn and Cooke, (2001)).

5. Begging Nigerian Situations

In Nigeria, street begging according to Amman (2009) Is more in the Northern parts of Nigeria. This is because of the adopted system of Almajiri by the Muslims for religious reasons. From Esobonu (2010) the population of beggars in Nigeria Street is growing exponentially. Today their presence in the streets of Suleja in Northern part of Nigeria is recognized to be a serious problem that requires urgent redress.

In Suleja as Esobonu (2012) emphasized, boys between eight and nineteen years go about with plates to beg for food and money by reciting a slogan which is very common among beggar “Sada-ka-Sabo-da-Allah” meaning “give because of God”. This is heart breaking.

Form the census carried out by Kano State government in 2003, 1,486, 000 beggars were identified in Kano. The figures are included in the 115 hundred thousand figures of young Almajiri beggars of Kindergarten age who sleep in open residential areas of who also roam round the ancient city barefooted. They are seen loitering cafeterias waiting for leftovers, Sokoto state has 1.1million Almajiri, Kaduna has 824, 233, Borno has 389,049 (Adelowo, 2010).

A 2013 survey indicated that the population of Almajiri (beggars) in Nigeria stood at 12.4 million. The North West zone hosts 5.1 million, the North-East Zone 3.5 million, North-Central Zone 1.6 million, Southwest zone 7,600, South-South and Southeast zones has 9,228 and 8,200 respectively.

The Almajiri in the North are denied of parental care and they form the majority of the beggar population (Onoyase, 2013). Begging is an activity that occurs in major cities and towns. Beggars are seen in every open space where there are many people around. Some like to whisper, some ask in their local languages, some begin trade, some yell to the people, some do not talk but, open their outstretched hands while looking at you with pitiful eyes. They do all these because they want people to give them money or other valuable items or even food.

6. Legality of Begging in Some Country

Many societies of the world frown at begging on the street. Nigerian Government is on its clear off beggars on the streets programme as noticed in many states in Nigeria. The Cameroons local council in Yaonde abruptly are arbitrarily engaged in arresting and rounding off beggars and panhandlers off the streets and off the major road way in an efforts to curb what the city council describe as a public nuisance and an inconvenience.

In India as emphasized by Namwata (2010) begging has been prohibited by law in various jurisdictions. In Canada, the province of Ontario introduced its safe streets Act in 1999 to restrict specific kinds of begging. In Romania Law 61 of 1991 forbids the persist of call for the mercy of the public by a person, which is able to work. In Japan homelessness is common, such people rarely beg. In Portugal, panhandlers normally beg in front of Catholic Churches, at traffic lights or on special places in Lisbon. Begging is not illegal in Portugal. Many social and religious institutions support homeless people and panhandlers. The Portuguese social security normally gives them a survival monetary subsidy.

From Johnny (2010), begging in Luxembourg is legal except when it is indulged in as a group or the beggar is a part of an organized effort. Begging has been legal in Finland since 1987 when the poor law was invalidated. But in 2003, the public order Act replaced any local government rules and completely decriminalized begging.

In United Kingdom, begging is illegal and in United State, in part of San Francisco, California aggressive panhandling is prohibited. According to Jackson (2002), some advance communities reduced street begging because of concerns that people begging on the street may use the money to support alcohol or drug abuse. As such, those wishing to give beggars can rather give gift cards or vouchers for food or service and not cash.

7. Reason For Begging

Spielvogel (2008) mentioned that long tradition of spiritual beggars in India simply beg as means to obtain material wealth. There are other many circumstance, which force individual to take to street begging. National Planning Commission (NPC) in 2004 noted that street beggars manifest in Joblessness, over-indebtedness, economic dependence, inability to provide basic needs for self and family, lack of access to land and credit facility, inability to save own assets, among others, Wolf (2005) reported that people who beg do so in order to meet subsistence needs while Quidix (2010) from his survey, revealed that 88% of his respondents indicated adequate nutritional needs, needs for accommodation 53%, Alcohol dependency 41%, healthcare 29%.

One can deduce from this study that poverty is the main factor associated with street begging. The poverty in Nigeria according to Elombah (2011) increased from 27% in 1980 to 66% in 1996, 1999 increased to 70%, by 2011 it was estimated that more than 85% of Nigerians live in poverty. Elombah (2011) also said that, research carried out by an NGO called NAPED showed figures on the incidence of poverty in the six geopolitical zones in the country, which include from North-West 74% of the people are poor and they live on less than one dollar a day; in the North-East the poverty rate is 78%; North-Central the poverty figure is 70%. By contrast in the South-West the poverty rate is 28%, the South-South 30% while the South-East of Nigeria has poverty rate of 23%.

It could be vividly seen from the above that, the Northern part of the country has the largest percentage of poverty rate, this has become a source of concern and worry in Nigeria. Middle-aged and older people are seen reclining tiredly on mats spread in streets corner and are beggars with no discrimination to gender. Asia Pacific Bureau for Adult Education (Ammani, 2006) observed that, most beggars' are illiterates who lack skills needed for enhancing their human development and empowerment. This illiteracy impacts feelings of worthlessness and lack of confidence to face challenges; hence they live at the mercy of others through begging.

8. Consequences of Begging

Street begging is believed to be carried out by the homeless, physically challenged and poor people. However, some able bodied people who instead of doing some graceful work, undertake to begging as their profession. Street begging has fatal consequences. Street begging is indictment on the quality of governance in many societies.

Apart from the strain that begging places on beggars, other factors impact negatively on their health and personality. These include:- Exploitation, sexual abuse, contact of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Some female beggars end up with unplanned pregnancies. More so, due to poverty many beggars in the street are at the risk of being kidnapped and forced into prostitution.

Usoro et al (2007) opined that many street beggars risk being run over by careless drivers and many are victims of police torture and brutality. In addition, street beggars could be willingly fools in the hand of disgruntled individuals to foment troubles in the society. Many are found with dangerous weapons, many are lured into kidnapping business and some are easily recruited as armed robbers and other social miscreants (Nigeria News update, 2009).

Conclusion

Street begging is highly prevalence in the Northern part of Nigeria due to poverty, religion and cultural believes. Many studies revealed the devastating consequences of street begging like; rape, sexual harassment, kidnapping for rituals, accidents, attack of various diseases, premature death, denting country's image, among others. Rehabilitation of beggars, regular sensitizing the public against begging, enacting a policy to inflict punishment, provision of sound education and so on were identified as the remediating strategies.

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