

Investigation of Socio-demographic Determinants of Public Perception of the Role of Psychologists in Controlling Street Begging in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the public perception of the phenomenon of street begging as well as the public perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. The study adopted survey research approach. One hundred and ninety participants were drawn from the members of the public in Kefffi Township consisting of one hundred males and ninety females participated in the study. The participants responded to a questionnaire designed to measure the socio-demographic determinants of public perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. Five hypotheses were tested. The first hypothesis received confirmation as the ANOVA result showed statistically significant difference between males and females in their perception of the role of psychologists: $F(1,5)=11.22, P<0.05$. The second hypothesis was also confirmed as there was a statistically significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their perception of the phenomenon of begging: $F(1,5)=26.1, P<0.05$. The third hypothesis equally received confirmation as there was a statistically significant difference between illiterates and literates in their perception of the role of psychologists $(1,6)=1.80, P<0.05$. The fourth hypothesis showed statistically significant difference between young and old in their perception of the role of psychologists: $F(1,6)=1.97, P<0.05$. The fifth hypothesis equally received confirmation as Pearson correlation showed a statistically significant relationship between unemployment, disability, poverty and street begging. It was recommended that psychologists should be given a chance to play their professional role in controlling street begging.

Keywords: Street begging, Public perception, Role of Psychologists.

INTRODUCTION

Street begging is not a phenomenon peculiar to only Nigeria but a global phenomenon to both developed and developing countries [1. Mortimer in [2] regarded street begging as demanding for money in a public place without exchange of services. The author in [3] defined almsgiving to be a habit of someone appealing for favor from others for the purpose of self-survival and enrichment. Similarly, [4] defined begging as an inter-personal or inter-group relationship primarily initiated by a part with the intention of acquiring material or non-material assistance

from the other party in relationship. However, in Nigeria Street begging as a social problem is perceived as a national shame and has become a source of concern to the nation and her citizenry. The heavy presence of beggars and their beggary life in our high ways at this present time always negatively affect social, political, and economic development, resulting from uncontrollable movement of people from villages to cities, and experience great and terrible problem [5]. According to the scholars, the beggars are seen mostly between the age of 13-17 and they are mostly found in northern part of the country, always moving and seeking for assistance from people/ passerby.

Some comments and debates have taken place; arguments have also taken place that it is a societal ill and that, it has cultural/religious dimensions to it, and while others have perceived and argued that it is political in nature. For instance, it has been stressed that street begging is unworthy and unhealthy behavior brought about by uncontrollable movement of the "almajiri" children especially in the north, which has connection with one form of crime or the other. Notably, beggars are called by other names using the three major languages; Hausa people call them *almajiri*, Igbo people call them *Onyearirio* while Yoruba people call them *Onibara*.

Also, [5] explained that begging behavior among people living with physical handicap is understood in four dimensions; firstly, some of the physically challenged individuals have been compelled to practice the act in view of their challenges. In other words, they are begging as a means of livelihood. Again, some of them beg without knowing that it is bad. Thirdly, some people go into begging practice because they have the knowledge and ability for the practice. Lastly, some people beg because they have psychological problem (due to lower self-esteem, lower achievement, and lower motivation). The author in [6], pointed out that the population of beggars are growing exponentially on our streets. According to him, the problem of street begging as potential threat to Nigerians is obviously affecting Nigerians negatively.

According to [7], begging is viewed and perceived as nationwide problem that has social, economic, religious, political and educational implications. Female beggars can be sexually harassed or abused by their male counterparts and any other member of the public or prospective helpers. They have the higher chance of being knocked down by vehicles. The scholars further stressed other causes of street begging such as teenage pregnancy, school dropout among others.

However, [4] in his perception examined and addressed the phenomenon of street begging from different dimensions. The phenomenon of street begging has become a source of concern to Nigerian government and her citizenry because of the perceived danger to the country [4]. According to him, a monthly news magazine, crystal of April, 2000 described street beggars as "national shame", while asserting that, it is a "very serious security problem" and certainly one of the greatest social problems facing Nigeria. In the same vein, he further pointed out that Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) ran a report on what the reporter termed "menace of street begging". He further explained that during the report, terms such as "nuisance" and "embarrassment" were freely used to explain or describe the beggars without consideration to their fundamental human rights. According to the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, no citizen shall be discriminated against on the basis of religion, gender, place of birth, educational background, language(Federal Government of Nigeria).Moreover, the phenomenon of street begging is not a uniquely Nigerian phenomenon but rather a global phenomenon [1]. According to [8], although street begging varies by geography and time, but is universal even with the richest countries like America having beggars in one form or the other.

All things being equal, [4], further stressed that street begging is not restricted to either older or younger people but peculiar to both, but the younger people most especially at the middle age, have higher numerical values. But other observations revealed that both the older and the young people are actively involved. The sample considered showed that as from the age of ten

to the age of seventy. That is to say, people both at the age of ten and seventy can beg. Accordingly, Ojiji's observation appears to support the earlier observation of [8] who pointed out that there are beggars whose period of begging span from five minutes to fifty years. With regard to educational background, again [4] stressed that both literate and illiterate people are actively involved in begging. For example, in the case of socially acceptable category of begging, the chairpersons, and praise singers are mostly/always educated people in which case, level of education here has gone beyond mere reading and writing to mean having extensive knowledge and to be versatile in many areas. Marital status is also not left out in the begging. Both married and unmarried people are all involved in street begging actively. In summary in a way, everybody is a beggar [4].

Psychology as a discipline is a product of western European intellectual development and it is relatively new, and a late comer compared to its sister disciplines of social sciences as it became an independent discipline following the opening of an experimental laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany in 1879 by Wilhelm Wundt [9]. However, the discipline of psychology started in the Nigerian university education curriculum in 1964 at the University of Nigeria Nsukka [9]. Accordingly, [4,10] to their knowledge, perceived that there have been no systematic evaluations of the application of psychology in different areas of Nigeria's national life. Despite the perception of the above scholars, again there is a consensus amongst scholars and practitioners and it appears to be that psychology is relevant to all areas of national life [11-13]. However, few psychologists who have worked with applied settings only play peripheral roles in national development [11,14].

The author in [9] also pointed out that the development of psychology in Nigeria has been very slow compared to many other countries where the discipline has brought development. Despite the dominance of home-grown indigenous psychologists in the teaching of psychology in Nigeria, psychology has only made negligible contributions and positive impact. It is in this regard that a fundamental question was raised: Is psychology still a teaching science or folktales? However, the negligible contributions and positive impact so far made in terms of numerical value of psychologists is skewed in favor of clinical psychologists. It is no doubt that a conservative estimate would show that most of the indigenous psychologists working in Nigeria are clinical psychologists. Therefore, according to [9], the application of psychology in Nigeria has been limited to what is known as "ancillary role", also [9], the application of psychology in Nigeria is described as "circumscribed function" in the area of mental health care. Consequently, and by implication, potential contribution of psychology or other subspecialty of psychology to the transformation of Nigeria has not been explored [15].

According to [9], it is rather surprising and worrisome that in the face of much/many institutional and organizational challenges, psychology in Nigeria has not made much contribution and impact with regard to proffering solutions to the underlying issues, many of which have psychological origins. Similarly, psychology has not made much impact in terms of quality research into fundamental human problems, some of which have psychological origins. Instead of a research involving consensus that is facilitated by a system of checks and balances regarding the publication of such research findings in such a way/manner that the new evidence is closely scrutinized by other scholars, rather very surprising, involve in what we called cash and publish syndrome. Accordingly, it is when those responsible for the evaluation of the study affirm that the research has met up with the acceptable standards within the discipline that the research can be published (Ojiji,2015).

Nevertheless, scholars such as [10,11,15] in agreement said psychology is relevant to all areas of national life in which controlling of street begging is not an exception, but the systematic investigation of how psychology/psychologists are relevant to all areas of national life has not been explored. The study is also based on our government's low patronage of the professional role of psychologists and the public ignorance of what psychologists can do in controlling street

begging in Nigeria. No research has been done to show how the public perceive the role of psychologists in controlling street begging.

In other words, the previous studies of street begging in Nigeria have not explored the perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. It is in the light of this, that this study seeks to investigate socio-demographic determinants of public perception of the role of Psychologists in controlling street begging in Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

This study adopted survey research approach to investigate the phenomenon of street begging and the perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. This design is suitable because the study attempted a survey and description of public perception of the phenomenon of street begging, as well as the perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging in Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered to both males and females, which is essentially a between group design. Questionnaires were administered to both Christians and Muslims, which is also essentially a between group design. The administration of the questionnaires equally took place between old and young Nigerians, as well as both literates and illiterates, which is equally/ essentially a between group design.

Participants

A total number of two hundred participants were drawn from the members of the public residing in keffi local government area of Nasarawa state. One hundred and ninety questionnaires were valid consisting of one hundred males and ninety females within the age range of 18-50years. The participants included both married and the single members of the public. The participants also included different ethnic group and the two major religions across Nigeria: Christianity and Islam. Each of the participants had different levels of English proficiency and educational background varying from NCE, HND, B.SC, M.SC And Ph.D.

Instrument

Questionnaire: The instrument that was used in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and validated by an expert. The purpose was to measure the public perception of the phenomenon of street begging, as well as the public perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging in Nigeria. The questionnaire consisted of three sections; **Section "A"** of the questionnaire contained forty items and each item was followed by two response options either "true" or "false". The purpose of these items in section "A" of the questionnaire was to seek information from the public about their perception of the phenomenon of street begging. The participants were asked to choose any option that applied to them. In terms of scoring the items, the lowest received=1, while the highest received=4. In other words, TRUE was scored=4 which indicated negative perception of street beggars, while FALSE was scored=1 which indicated positive perception of street beggars. The scoring will be sum up and be divided by 2 (i.e $4+1=5$ divide by $2=2.5$). **Section "B"** sought to get information on the public perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. There were thirty items on the section "B" of the questionnaire, and each item was followed by four response options varying from very important, important, not important, not important at all, very relevant, relevant, not relevant, not relevant at all, or very vital, vital, not vital, not vital at all. The participants were equally asked to choose any option that applied to them. In scoring the item, the lowest received=1, while the highest received=4. In other words, very important/relevant/vital were scored=4 which signified positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging, important/relevant/vital were scored=3 which also signified positive perception for the role of psychologists in controlling street begging, not important/relevant/vital were scored =2, while not important/relevant/vital at all were scored=1 which signified negative perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street

begging. The scoring were sum together and divided by 4 (i.e $4+3+2+1=10$, divide by $4=2.5$). Section "C" was used to elicit personal data about the participants such as age, gender, marital status, religious affiliation, educational background, ethnic group, and place of work.

Procedures

Official permission, consent and approval of the participants was sought and obtained prior to this data collection. The participants initially read a plain language statement detailing the study and the requirements of their participation should they choose to participate. The participants who agreed to participate were given the questionnaire and were encouraged to read the instructions carefully before responding to the statements in both section "A" and "B" of the questionnaire, by ticking one of the options 1,2, of section "A", and one of the options 1,2,3,4 of the options in section "B" on the right hand side of the statements to indicate how they feel or perceive the phenomenon of street begging, as well as how they feel or perceive the role of psychologists in controlling street begging.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, I am ethically and legally bound to maintain confidentiality. Therefore, the participants were rest assured that, the protection of their privacy and confidentiality was highly observed. Their anonymity was also highly observed.

Method of Data Analysis

According to [16], to select the appropriate and relevant inferential statistics for one's data, one should ask himself, is it frequency count? If yes, one can employ chi-square. Is it test of relationship between two variables? If yes, one can employ Correlation. Are you trying to establish difference between two variables? If yes, one can employ analysis of variance (ANOVA). Therefore, I have critically examined my hypotheses, and the appropriate/relevant inferential statistics that was used to analyze hypotheses 1,2,3, and 4, is analysis of variance(ANOVA) because the hypotheses are trying to establish difference between two variables, and the method of scoring is in interval scale, and parametric in nature. This is in line with the postulation of [17] which says that any test of difference between two variables, ANOVA should be used in analyzing the data. Hypothesis 5, used correlation as it is a test of relationship between two variables, in which case, the method of scoring is equally in interval scale and parametric in nature. This is also in line with the postulation of [18] which says that any test of relationship between two variables, correlation should be used to analyze the data.

ANOVA

Between group

$$SSA = \frac{\sum(A)^2}{S} - \frac{(T)^2}{a^5}$$

$$df = a(S-1)$$

Within group

$$SS_{\bar{S}} = \sum(AS)^2 - \sum(A)^2$$

$$df = a-1$$

Correlation

$$r = \frac{SP}{\sqrt{SSXSSY}}$$

Chi-square

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(O-E)^2}{e}$$

Expected frequency

$$\frac{CT \times RT}{GT} \quad df = (c-1)(R-1).$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this present study demonstrated that, the general public has more of negative perception for beggars than positive perception. 67% of the respondents negatively rated beggars while 33% rated beggars positively. The finding collaborates the earlier postulation of [19] who says that some commentator perceived street beggars as a societal ill while asserting that they should be removed from the city. The high rating of negative perception for beggars also collaborates earlier studies of [4]. According to him, a report was made in crystal magazine of April, 2000 which described street beggars as “national shame”, while asserting that, it is a “very serious security problem” and certainly one of the greatest social problems facing Nigeria. However, no literature has shown where the finding of this present study contradicts earlier findings

The plausible explanation for this high rating of beggars may be that, some of them may have been used as agents to perpetrate one form of crime or the other. They may also have been used as agents to fuel either religious or political crisis or violence thereby breaching public peace and the public hate them for such criminal act and not just because of only begging.

The theoretical significance: The ideal or finding of this study will stand as a foundation and the subsequent researchers who want to carry out research in this area will build on it and gradually, it will become an established theory.

Practical significance: The finding of this research has contributed to the body of existing literature in knowing the public perception of the phenomenon of street begging as well as devising some measures such as vocational services and counseling aiming at curtailing the problem of street begging.

The study also demonstrated that the general public has more positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging than negative perception. Ninety-five percent of the respondents rated psychologists high in terms of their importance/relevance and how vital they are in controlling the practice. The finding collaborates earlier finding by [20]. According to him, psychologists as behavioral experts, have sufficient knowledge which we would presume to make crucial decision affecting public lives in which controlling of street begging will not be an exception. According to him, psychologists are veritable tools in assessing and reporting

behaviors, carrying out psychological therapies and the clinical and administrative control of social and special environment of beggars. To him also, amongst significant professional problems facing the government is the exclusion of psychologists from vital decision making, their relegation to adviser, and their lack of influence. However, it is not found in the literature where this present study contradicts any previous study.

The plausible explanation for this high rating of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging may be that, street begging as a social and behavioral problem and its control needs or deserves collective efforts of Nigerians, government and counselors. And who are the best counselors if not psychologists? The explanation also may be that psychologists could conduct psychological test into the underlying problem of beggars thereby proffering solution to it.

The theoretical significance: Similarly, the finding or idea of this study will as well stand as a foundation and serve as a guide for subsequent researchers to build on it and it will also gradually become an established theory in the area of street begging and role of psychologists in controlling street begging.

Practical significance: In the same vein, the finding of this research has contributed to the body of existing literature in knowing the public perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging and by engaging them in conducting psychological test to the underlying problem of beggars as well as conducting clinical assessment of beggars and counseling them.

The first hypothesis was confirmed as it shows statistically significant difference or result between males and females in their perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. The result indicated that both males and females had positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging but males had more positive than their female counterparts. The result of this study collaborates that of [21] which revealed that males had more positive perception of the role of psychologists in both social and legal problems than their female counterparts. However, literature has not shown anywhere that this present study contradicts the previous finding.

The plausible explanation of this significant difference may be that there is differential socialization between males and females. Socialization in Africa tends to discriminate and restrict females from some areas of social functioning. Due to socialization and the way females are brought up, they are restricted from some social functioning and are kept and meant for specific area of functioning. Therefore, social interaction may be lower in females than males due to the differential socialization.

Theoretical significance: The finding of this study will provide solid foundation to subsequent researchers to build upon since the practice of street begging is a social problem and a source of concern to everybody, many research will still be conducted in this area using this present one as a guide and literature to make reference to, and gradually by using this idea, it will become an established theory in the area.

Practical significance: The finding of this study has already contributed to the body of existing literature by knowing that differing socialization has made males more predominantly incline in the role of psychologists in controlling street begging than their female counterparts. Since males have higher representation in street begging than females, and they have higher positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging, this will ease solving the problem of street begging.

The second hypothesis also received confirmation as it shows statistically significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their perception of the phenomenon of street begging. Both Christians and Muslims had more of negative perception for beggars than positive perception but Christians are higher in negative perception while Muslims are higher in positive perception. This finding also collaborates that of [22]. Accordingly, he says street begging is not peculiar to a particular religion, only that one religion can be predominantly involved in street begging than

the other. However, literature has not shown where the present study contradicts the previous one.

The plausible explanation for this significant difference may be that almsgiving is more predominantly inclined in Islam than Christianity. "Zakat" (almsgiving) is so powerful, it is one of the teachings of Islam. This explanation collaborates that of [22].

Theoretical significance: The finding as earlier stated, has contributed to knowledge and the body of existing literature in this area and the subsequent researchers will use this knowledge which will gradually and eventually become an established theory that one religion can be predominantly inclined in almsgiving than the other.

Practical significance: The research is significant by advising the government and the general public to avoid treating street beggars with contempt and to also avoid the violation of their fundamental human rights.

The third hypothesis equally received confirmation as the result shows statistically significant difference between illiterates and literates in their perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. Although, both the illiterates and the literates had positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging, but the literates had more positive than their illiterate counterparts. The finding of this research collaborates also the finding of [20] which strongly emphasized on paramount importance of knowledge in crucial decision making both in legal and social issues. However, literature has not shown where this study contradicts the previous study.

The plausible explanation for this significant difference may be that education has influenced the literate ones to have the better and extensive knowledge of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging than their illiterate counterparts. This may be that the higher your knowledge and level of education, the extensive knowledge of the role of psychologists you have.

Theoretical significance: It has been contributed to the body of existing literature that knowledge or education has a significant role to play in controlling street begging. The fact of this finding will be built upon by subsequent researchers and gradually theory will be established.

Practical significance: Since controlling of street begging requires knowledge, the finding of this study will ease solving the problem of street begging. This finding collaborates the earlier finding of [20] which states that psychologists have sufficient knowledge we would presume to make crucial decisions affecting public lives.

The fourth hypothesis was confirmed as the result shows statistically significant difference between young and old in their perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. Both young and old had positive perception of the role of psychologists but the younger ones had more positive of the role of psychologists than their older counterparts. This result also collaborates the earlier finding of [21] of the positive perception of the role of psychologists in social and legal problems. But the previous finding indicates that older people had more positive of the role of psychologists than their younger counterparts, while the present study indicates that the younger people had more positive of the role of psychologists than their older counterparts. Therefore, the present study slightly contradicts the earlier study in terms of the level of age that has higher perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. But the bottom line is, there is a significant difference.

The plausible explanation of this significant difference may be that younger people at their vibrant youthful stage may have frequent or constant exposure to life situations and social functions more than their older counterparts. Due to such frequent exposure, they might have

had personal experience and encounter with psychologists, and therefore have fair knowledge of what psychologists can do in all areas of national life.

Theoretical significance: It has been contributed the body of existing knowledge and literature that age has significant role to play in the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. The knowledge from this finding will equally be built upon and will gradually become an established theory and a guide for subsequent researchers in this area.

Practical significance: Since youths have higher representation of beggars and the study reveals that youths have higher positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging, psychologists are therefore veritable tools that can be effectively used in solving the problem of street begging.

The fifth hypothesis also received confirmation as it shows statistically significant relationship between unemployment, disability, poverty and street begging. The result indicates that 1 percent increase in unemployment will result to 32.9 percent increase in street begging. In other words, 1 percent decrease in unemployment will equally result to 32.9 percent decrease in the practice. The result collaborates structural functionalism theory of street begging. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements such as government, family, religion, economy, education and culture. Based on this theory, it is clear that street begging is as a result of the problem in the functioning of some social institutions responsible for human welfare. However, it is not found in the literature that this present study contradicts the earlier study.

Similarly, the result indicates that 1 percent increase in disability will result to 32.9 percent increase in street begging. In other words, 1 percent decrease in disability will equally result to 32.9 percent decrease in begging. The result of this study collaborate that of [4]. According to him, many of the beggars reported that they became beggars as a result of one form of disability or the other. However, literature has not shown that the present study contradicts the earlier study.

In the same vein, the result indicates that 1 percent increase in poverty will result to 32.9 percent in street begging. In other words, 1 percent decrease in poverty will equally result to 32.9 percent decrease in street begging. This present result collaborate theory of vicious circle of poverty. The present study contradicts no earlier study.

The plausible explanation of this significant relationship may be that many of the street beggars are jobless, many of the street beggars are found with one form of disability or the other and many of them are poverty driven people. It is found but scarcely to see employed people begging on the street, physically fit and able bodied people found begging on the street, wealthy people begging on the street.

Theoretical significance: The finding of this research has already collaborated with that of [4] in which I am building upon and the subsequent researchers in this area will equally build upon and gradually, it will become a theory.

Practical significance: The finding of this study will recommend and suggest to the government the adequate and effective methods and strategies in controlling street begging.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study shows that there is negative perception from the general public towards beggars. The study also demonstrates that the general public has positive perception of the role of psychologists in controlling street begging. The first, second, third and fourth hypothesis indicate significant difference while the fifth hypothesis indicates significant relationship. The first, second, third, fourth and fifth hypotheses all received confirmation and were supported and accepted. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the control of the practice of street begging needs collective effort of all Nigerians, Nigerian government and counselors. It

also requires massive creation of public awareness education in letting the beggars know the implication of the practice. In order to control street begging among people living with disabilities, government should be proactive to the issue of street begging by intensifying her effort in providing more medical facilities and more medical experts to checkmate some form of disabilities through antenatal care.

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