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Research Article

Data Collection in Street Begging Research in Nigeria: The State of the Art and Associated Challenges

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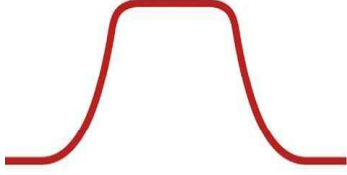
Abstract

Nigeria is among the major countries contending with the social problem of street begging. The pervasiveness of the problem has continually placed it at the front burner of scholarly engagements and intellectual discourse. However, despite the existence of abundant literature on the phenomenon of street begging, the epistemological and methodological issues typically embedded in the process of data elicitation from street beggars in Nigeria are yet to command adequate scholarly attention. Therefore, this article attempted to fill this observed lacuna by focusing on the necessity for data collection on street begging and the major challenges that are associated with data elicitation from street beggars in Nigeria. The paper ascribed the necessity for data collection on street begging to multiple reasons. Language barrier, the fluid nature of street begging, the mobile nature of street beggars, and trust issue are among the major challenges that are associated with data collection on street begging research in Nigeria.

Keywords: Street Begging, Street Beggars, Data Collection, Social Problem, Nigeria

JEL Codes: J17, J18, J28

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Araştırma Makalesi

Nijerya'da Sokak Dilenciliği Araştırmasında Veri Toplama: Becerinin Durumu ve İlişkili Zorluklar

Usman Adekunle Ojedokun¹

Öz

Nijerya, sokakta dilenciliği sosyal sorunuyla mücadele eden başlıca ülkeler arasında yer alır. Sorunun yaygınlığı, onu sürekli olarak bilimsel meşguliyetin ve entelektüel söylemin ön sıralarına yerleştirdi. Sokak dilenciliği fenomeni üzerine bol miktarda literatür bulunmasına rağmen, tipik olarak Nijerya'daki sokak dilencilerinden veri toplama sürecinde gömülü olan epistemolojik ve metodolojik sorunlar henüz yeterli bilimsel ilgiyi çekmiyor. Bu nedenle, bu makale, Nijerya'daki sokak dilencilerinden veri toplama ile ilgili temel zorluklara ve sokak dilenciliği hakkında veri toplamanın gerekliliğine odaklanarak bu gözlemlenen boşluğu doldurmaya çalışmıştır. Makale, sokakta dilencilik hakkında veri toplama gerekliliğini birçok nedene bağladı. Ancak, dil engeli, sokak dilenciliğinin akışkan doğası, sokak dilencilerinin hareketli doğası ve güven sorunu, Nijerya'da sokak dilenciliği araştırmalarında veri toplama ile ilişkili başlıca zorluklar arasındadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sokak Dilenciliği, Sokak Dilencileri, Veri Toplama, Sosyal Sorun, Nijerya

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is among the major countries in the world that are contending with the problem of street begging. Despite the fact that the practice of street begging has been expressly banned under sections 249 and 250 of the Nigerian Criminal Code of 1958, the pervasiveness and ubiquity of the phenomenon is being daily exemplified by different categories of individuals including able-bodied, aged, children, the physically challenged and migrants that are actively involved in it (Adewuyi, 2000; Jelili, 2009; Fawole, Ogunkan & Omuruan, 2011; Taiwo, 2018).

Specifically, section 249 of the Nigerian criminal code makes direct reference to the proscription of alms solicitation publicly by stipulating that: “*Every person wandering abroad and endeavouring by the exposure of wounds and deformation to obtain or gather alms shall be deemed to be a rogue or vagabond, and is guilty of misdemeanour*”. Similarly, the section 250 of the code specifies that: “*Every person going about as a gatherer or collector of alms, or endeavouring to provide charitable contributions of any nature or kind, under any false or fraudulent pretense, shall be deemed to be a rogue and vagabond, and is guilty of misdemeanour*”. However, in spite of these legal provisions which clearly defined the illegality of street begging in Nigeria, its pervasiveness in both rural and urban areas has continually drawn the attention of the government and other concerned relevant stakeholders in the country (Ojedokun, 2015; Impey & Olowe, 2018).

The phenomenon of street begging in Nigeria has rapidly transformed from serving primarily as a temporary means through which indigent and needy persons in society alternatively source for their livelihood to becoming a commercial enterprise that is purely profit-driven. Indeed, some persons have taken to street begging as their permanent vocation, while others engage in it as a strategy for the facilitation and perpetration of a crime. Also, the potential profitability of alms solicitation has further become widely recognised to the extent that it has now assumed an international dimension. Consequently, while some Nigerians migrate to more economically advanced nations to conduct alms solicitation (The Punch, 2012; Ojedokun, 2015); there is also a largescale involvement of migrants from some neighbouring African countries in the deviant act (Ojedokun, 2018).

Although a portion of the Nigerian society sees street beggars as rendering some important services to other members of society by only not praying for their patrons, but by also assisting them to carry out some of their important religious and spiritual obligations, the socio-economic and political costs associated with this practice largely outweighs its perceived benefits. Moreover, the fact that street begging threatens the environmental, economic and social survival of human society is particularly evident in Nigeria (Amman, 2006; Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009; Taiwo, Agbabiaka, Adeyemi & Dada, 2019). The act of begging clearly constitutes serious problem for federal and state administrators, law enforcement officials and city space managers because it impacts crime rate, fosters the fear of crime, concerns the public, negatively affects businesses and retail trades (Goyal, 2005).

Apart from the Nigeria’s situation, the problem of street begging has also become a major cause for concern in many other countries (Adedibu, 1989; Ojedokun, 2015). For instance, in their own analysis of the problem in Bangladesh, Al Helal and Kabir (2013) state that street begging is a pervasive problem in the country with beggars usually converging in large numbers in public spaces such as mosques, bus terminuses, railway stations, market locations, and near traffic signals. On his own part, Azam (2011) categorises street beggars in Pakistan into impoverished people who solicit alms to survive, individuals who take to begging out of preference, and people who conduct begging because they are being compelled to do so by members of criminal cartels. Similarly, Namwata, Maseke and Dimoso (2012) group

individuals soliciting alms in Central Tanzania into beggars on the street, beggars of the street, beggars in the street and beggars of street families. In their own research that was conducted in Thailand, the Friends-International and United Nations Inter-Agency Project (2006) found that individuals involved in street begging included mothers begging with their children, children begging unaccompanied, elderly men, elderly women, disabled men, women and children, blind people being assisted by children, and blind people playing music using microphones.

Furthermore, Kirchofer and Weeks (2010) observe that begging is a subject of serious debate in Austria due to the fact that it is organised in nature and has a chain of command. Dean and Gale (1999) state that young individuals lacking access to automatic social security entitlements and patients recently discharged from mental health institutions are among the people begging on the streets of Britain. Similarly, Jordan (1999) posits that street begging activity in Britain and North-West Europe is mainly carried out by individuals lacking personal and cultural resources that are essential for their survival such as young people who are in care of mental hospitals, homeless individuals, and individuals with serious alcohol and/or drug problems. Also, Tatek's (2009) research on individuals conducting street begging in public spaces in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, found a gender dimension to the phenomenon in which boys were more involved because girls considered the practice shameful and hence feel inhibited about it. However, Swanson's (2007) study on street beggars in Ecuador showed that able-bodied male beggars were very rare to come across.

Lankenau (1999) contends that regardless of the fact on whether individuals involved in street begging constitute any form of threat to the safety of passers-by, their mere presence generally conveys a message symbolising the breakdown of social control in society. Similarly, Snow and Anderson (1993) mention that the presence of beggars typically brings about resentment because such an act violates the core value of work ethic as prescribed in society. Mortimer (2005) identifies the problems that are associated with street begging to include exposure of beggars to sexual harassment, being forcefully evacuated from one location to another, being exposed to harsh weather condition, being injured by passing vehicles, denigrating societal image, and breeding social disorderliness. Ahamdi (2010) also notes that begging is a social problem which has not only psychological consequences but also has multiple negative implications on the geographical landscape and social structure of cities. Goyal (2005) claims that individuals who engage in begging are amongst the most disadvantaged and vulnerable persons in society because they are frequently caught up in some activities that are dangerous, damaging and humiliating while they also often found themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and deprivation.

Although street begging as a social problem has attracted tremendous academic research in Nigeria. However, there is paucity of scholarly information on the epistemological and methodological issues that are typically embedded in the process of data elicitation from street beggars soliciting alms in the country. Therefore, this article intends to fill this observed lacuna by focusing on data collection process in street begging research in Nigeria with specific attention to devoted to the necessity for data collection on street begging and the major challenges that are associated with data elicitation from street beggars.

2.The Necessity for Data Collection on the Social Problem of Street Begging in Nigeria

The centrality of data collection to any evidence-based research endeavour cannot be overemphasised. Conceptually, data collection entails the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer some clearly stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Kabir,

2016). On their own part, Whitney, Lind and Wahl (1988) view it as the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypothesis, and evaluate outcomes. Data collection can be in form of numbers, words or pictures (Neuman, 1964). Also, data can be collected in a primary or secondary format. Primary data are first-hand information that can be elicited through various data collection methods such as observation, interviewing individuals, questionnaires, case-studies, diaries, photographs amongst others (Adetiba, 2013), while secondary data include those data that have been collected and compiled by someone else, and are made accessible to the public (Parveen & Showkat, 2017). Secondary data include vital sources such as government reports, census data, departmental records, law enforcement agency reports amongst others.

Generally, data collection is an important component of research that is universal to all fields of study. Although the methods usually deployed for this purpose often vary across disciplines, nonetheless the emphasis at facilitating accurate and honest collection typically remains the same (Kabir, 2016). The purpose for which a research is being conducted typically defines the approach that must be utilised for the collection of data (Kothari, 2012; Backstrom & Hursh-Cesar, 1981). The main goal of all data collection process is to capture quality evidence that can be translated into rich data analysis and which will subsequently allow for the elicitation of a convincing and credible answer to research questions that have been put forward (Kabir, 2016).

Data collection on the phenomenon of street begging is highly fundamental to its effective control in Nigeria for numerous reasons. Firstly, a systematic elicitation of data on street begging will provide useful insights into the nature, trends, patterns, and dimension of the problem. These are important information that are key to both federal and state governments' policy decisions at tackling the problem. Although different public policies had been formulated in the past by successive administrations to specifically address the pervasive problem of street begging and the rapidly increasing numbers of street beggars in Nigeria such as the banning of the deviant practice, the occasional evacuation of beggars from the streets of major urban centres, the construction of rehabilitation centres and welfare homes for street beggars in some states of the federation, resettling and reuniting street beggars with their family members, the extension of micro-credit facilities to the needy and the vulnerable, amongst others. However, all of these adopted measures have largely been ineffective as a result of the structural gaps in the analysis of the situation and the adoption of inappropriate approaches to solve the problem (Adedibu & Jelili, 2011; Ojedokun, 2021). Thus, data elicitation is tangential to the holistic understanding of the situational and contextual factors that are associated with the problem.

Secondly, data collection on the phenomenon of street begging is essential to the generation and development of a comprehensive national statistics on the population size and demographic characteristics of street beggars and destitute in Nigeria. The availability of essential statistical information on the socio-demographic profiles of individuals involved in street begging will constitute an important benchmark which the Nigerian government and its relevant agencies, particularly the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare can adopt to better plan for and design appropriate far-reaching social welfare schemes for the poor and destitute in the society. There is currently dearth of statistical information on the people conducting street begging in Nigeria; and this situation has serious negative implications for the extant institutional frameworks that have been developed at both national and state levels to address the problem. Therefore, to have accurate grasp of the prevalence, demography and statistical distribution of the problem, data collection on the phenomenon is imperative.

Also, research on street begging in Nigeria has consistently demonstrated that the problem is multidimensional in nature (Amman, 2006; Bambale, 2008; Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009). Hence, accurate data collection on the phenomenon is essential for the understanding of the life and lived experiences of individuals involved in street begging as the process will facilitate the generation of useful information on their respective motivations and trajectories into the deviant act. By generating information directly from street beggars on the reasons informing their decisions to engage in alms solicitation, individuals that were genuinely driven into the practice street begging by the prevailing harsh socio-economic condition in Nigeria can then be identified and assisted financially, while those who have embraced alms solicitation as their primary occupation and permanent means of livelihood or as result of physical disability can be recognised and subjected to relevant rehabilitative and corrective interventions.

Equally, it is only through data collection that the Nigerian government efforts channelled towards the eradication of street begging and rehabilitation of street beggars at both national and state levels can be objectively assessed and evaluated. Indeed, the dominant nature of street begging is a clear evidence that previous measures that were designed to control it have been grossly inadequate and ineffective. Therefore, it is necessary to periodically embark on the collection of data on street begging so as to adequately facilitate the unravelling of the factors accounting for the failure and ineffectiveness of the past efforts of successive administrations at controlling it. Moreover, the recognition and analysis of the shortcomings associated with them would go a long way in guiding future policy initiatives of the government in relation to the addressing of street begging in Nigeria. For instance, research has consistently demonstrated that forceful evacuation of beggars from the street which is among the major control measures commonly employed for tackling street begging in Nigerian cities usually results in the shifting or relocation of beggars to some other destinations rather than addressing the underlying factors that are sustaining the problem (Igbinovia, 1991; Adedibu & Jelili, 2011; Ojedokun, 2021).

Furthermore, data collection on the phenomenon of street begging is a vital step for government and other relevant stakeholders to take because it is capable of generating new knowledge and yielding unique information that otherwise would have been very difficult to come to public understanding. For instance, it was through the process of data collection on the problem of street begging that it became known that a kind of ‘contractual begging system’ exists in Nigeria in which some adult beggars usually hire babies from nannies and daycare centres for some hours during weekdays for the purpose of using them as begging bait on the streets as a way of pricking the conscience of potential alms-givers (Olaniyi, 2009; Ogbeche, 2016; Eniola, 2017). Similarly, it was in the course of data collection on the phenomenon in Nigeria that it became known that there is a relationship between street begging and the occurrence of some criminal acts such as armed robbery, human trafficking, insurgency, mugging and prostitution, (Igbinovia, 1991; Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014; Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2018; Bambale, 2008; Adedibu & Jelili, 2011; Ojedokun, 2015).

3.Challenges Associated with Data Elicitation from Street Beggars in Nigeria

Data elicitation in street begging research in Nigeria is not usually a simple, snappy and crash process. Generally, there are some challenges that are typically associated with the collection of data from individuals involved in the deviant act. Language barrier is among the major challenges that are dominant in street begging research. Nigeria is a multicultural nation with over 374 distinct ethnic groups speaking different local languages and dialects (Oтите, 2002). Consequently, language barrier often poses serious problem to the communication process between field researchers and people involved in street begging. Although English language is Nigeria’s official lingua franca. However, street beggars are often not formally

educated. Thus, it is always difficult for them to communicate in English language. Similarly, language barrier is also a big problem in data elicitation from migrant street beggars who immigrated into Nigeria from some neighbouring African countries for the primary purpose of conducting alms solicitation in the streets of some major urban centres. A major approach that can be employed to surmount this particular challenge is to engage the service of a research assistant who can speak the local language of potential respondents fluently. Cwikel and Hoban (2005) have also recommended that it is important for researchers to seek the assistance of interpreters in situations where it is very difficult to conduct interviews in respondents' native language. Although this approach is a very useful one, nevertheless, this form of arrangement has the tendency of negatively impacting the overall content validity of research instruments designed for the elicitation of data as well as the quality of responses that will be given by respondents if the interpreter engaged is not professional in the handling of the interpretation process.

Another major challenge that is embedded in data collection in street begging research in Nigeria is the mobile nature of individuals involved in alms solicitation in the country. Begging is typically a street-based enterprise in Nigeria and beggars usually converge in large numbers in some strategic location such as major road junctions, near Automated Teller Machine (ATM) points, motor parks, central business districts (CBD), filling stations, religious centres, and market squares. A common practice among street beggars is to frequently move from one begging location to another. Thus, a beggar soliciting alms at a motor-park in the morning could decide to beg at a market square in the afternoon. The same beggar could move to a central business district to engage in panhandling in the evening. This frequent mobility of street beggars has an implication for the integrity of data collected on street begging because it is capable of resulting into a situation whereby an individual beggar can be sampled more than once. This possibility is particularly inherent in a situation when data is being consecutively collected in a given zone by a small number of fieldworkers. This risk of double coverage of a given respondent can be controlled or significantly reduced by engaging large number of trained research assistants to simultaneously conduct data elicitation from street beggars on a zonal basis.

Furthermore, the begging practices of some classes of beggars adds another dimension to the challenges that are associated with data elicitation in street begging research in Nigeria. Specifically, the wide variation and the fluidity in the patterns of street begging has the potential of negatively impacting the overall quality of data collected on the subject matter. Improper planning of a fieldwork exercise and hasty data collection would certainly result into wrong situational analysis and incorrect interpretation. Indeed, the risk of wrong data interpretation is especially high in street begging research due to the complexity of the problem. For instance, migrant street beggars soliciting alms in major urban centres in Nigeria usually immigrate into the country in large numbers annually between February and September, and are hardly sighted during the remaining months of the year (Ojedokun, 2015). Also, able-bodied male beggars in Nigeria usually prefer to conduct alms solicitation individually rather than converging with other group of beggars in their chosen begging locations in the major urban centres. Also, child beggars in Nigeria are usually more active on the street on weekends and during school holidays. Consequently, if the process of data collection is not carefully handled, this wide variation embedded in the begging practices of individuals involved in alms solicitation could negatively impact the quality of data elicited as one can erroneously conclude that some categories are not present at all or are only in small quantity in Nigeria.

Also, trust issue is equally a major impediment to data elicitation from individuals soliciting alms in Nigeria. Due to the illegal status of street begging, persons engaging in the act are often wary and reluctant to interact with people who show some considerable level of

interest in their personal affairs other than to give them alms and donations. Therefore, it is always very difficult to elicit data from street beggars as they are typically uncooperative and reticent as a result of their suspicion of the true intention of researchers. Indeed, it is common for government officials in Nigeria to arrest and/or forcefully removed beggars from the street. Thus, they often believe that anybody asking them personal questions is likely to be a law enforcement official. Weitzer (2005) has similarly observed that it is always difficult to conduct research on individuals who are stigmatised and involved in an illegal behaviour. One major way through which this particular challenge can be overcome is to solicit the assistance of local people in selected study area(s) who over time have developed some form of relationship or familiarity with street beggars who are potential respondents. Indeed, some studies have demonstrated that people involved in street begging in Nigeria can be well-motivated to interact with fieldworkers and grant interviews if they are encouraged to do so by their close associates and confidants (Adewuyi, 2000; Ojedokun, 2015).

4. Conclusion

This article essentially focused on the centrality of data collection in street begging research with specific attention devoted to the situation in Nigeria. It noted that street begging as a major social problem confronting the Nigerian nation is multidimensional in nature. Also, it ascribed the necessity for data collection on the social problem street begging in Nigeria to the fact that: it is a crucial step towards the generation of useful insights into the nature, patterns and dimension of the problem; it is essential to the production and development of a comprehensive national statistics on the population size and demographic characteristics of street beggars and destitute in Nigeria; it is pivotal to the understanding of life and lived experiences of individuals involved in street begging; it is germane to the objective evaluation and assessment of efforts of the Nigerian government towards the eradication of street begging and the rehabilitation of street beggars; and it is fundamental to the acquisition of new knowledge and unique information that are crucial to public understanding and the development of relevant social policies on the phenomenon of street begging. The major challenges identified by the article as typically associated with data collection process on the phenomenon of street begging in Nigeria include: language and communication barrier between field investigators and respondents, the mobile characteristics of individuals involved in alms solicitation, the wide variation and fluidity in the practice of street begging, and trust issue between potential respondents (street beggars) and fieldworkers. Data collection is highly crucial in street begging research in Nigeria because it is not only fundamental to the understanding of the major undercurrents that are embedded in the prevalence of the social problem, but it is equally germane to the adequate comprehension of the pathways and the motivations behind street beggars' decision to engage in the deviant act. Thus, it constitutes an integral approach that cannot be wished away if the social problem of street begging is to be effectively and holistically addressed in society.

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