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PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT OF STREET BEGGARS IN LAGOS METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The situation of street begging in Nigeria is appreciated with different categories of beggars found at motor parks, religious worship centres, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies and worst still on the university campuses. The situation is quite embarrassing with efforts of governments in curbing the menace of street begging not yielding fruits. The present study examined the perceived social support of street beggars. It adopted the descriptive research of the ex-post facto type. A random sample of three LGAs was selected and 516 participants took part in the study. Out of these participants there were 311(60%) males and 205 (40%) females. Hausas were 284(55%), Yorubas were 162(31%), Ibos were 40(8%) and others were 30(6%). The age ranged from 12-65 years with standard deviation of 38years. All the participants reported low perceived social support. The findings revealed no significant difference in gender, tribes and age groups in perceived social support. It was recommended that families, government and non-governmental organisations should weave social support round the beggars. It was concluded that formal and informal organizations, as well as grass-roots movements, should be recognized as partners in the construction of social support for beggars.

Keywords: street beggars, social support

Introduction

The problem of begging is a universal phenomenon which has generated issues both in developed and developing countries but it is prevalent and least attended to in developing countries (Adedibu, 1989). The situation in Nigeria is appreciated with different categories of beggars found at motor parks, religious

worship centers, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies and worst still on the campuses (Jelili, 2006). Characteristics of street beggars in Nigeria are diverse. Some are disabled, ranging from the blind to the deaf and dumb seeking means of livelihood. They have no skilled ability for self-employment or for employment by companies. There are the mad people; the twins mothers and the able bodied. Begging is an age-long social problem in Nigeria. There are not 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).

Internet begging, cyber – begging or internet panhandling, for example, is the online version of traditional begging (Wikipedia, 2008). With hundreds of internet begging sites on line, it has become common practice for web beggars to register and own the domain name of their websites. Using free to inexpensive hosting services, internet beggars ask the public for help with many needs including breast augmentation, cancer treatment, new car, preventing personal homelessness and medical bills. Internet sites such as Savekarlyn.com, Avirginplea.com, one red paper clip, the million Dollar homepage are few of internet begging sites. While many of these internet begging websites appear to be as a result of an individual genuine need for attention or help, majority of them are as a result of earning a living through more convenience means.

Combating street begging has been a concerted effort of the individuals, government, religious bodies and nongovernmental organisations. Ogunkan (2009) emphasizes the roles of individuals and mass media in educating and sensitizing the public on the negative consequences of begging.

The Lagos state government initiated 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. In Jigawa state, government has put in place a social welfare programme of N7,000 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. 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.

While those strategies are laudable, the achievements recorded so far are minimal. This is because begging has taken a new dimension. Rather than seeing begging as a product of chronic poverty or physical handicap, some people take begging as a profession – a means of earning livelihood. There is a need to combine efforts in solving the problem of street begging. One way that can complement the efforts of government is the support from the family members, philanthropists and religious bodies.

The significance of social support in influencing psychological well-being is recorded in literature (Adejumo, 2008, Hardee, Eggleston, Wong, Irwanto and Hull, 2007). There seems to be a lack of social support for the beggars (who might often be ignorant/illiterate and/or unemployed), as they seem to have no other option than to beg to make a living. Social support has been defined as information that prompts the individual to believe that he (or she) is cared for and loved, esteemed, valued, and a member of a network of common and mutual obligation (Cobbs, 1976, Rhodes, 1983). An individual's perception of support is thought to be a characteristic related not only to the actual availability of support but also to the criteria that individuals use in interpreting behaviour as either supportive or nonsupportive (Sarason, Pierce, Sarason 1990).

Among family members, social support can help buffer the negative impacts of poverty and economic hardship (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, Buriel. 1990). Caplan (1974) states that the most important factors affecting the outcome of a crisis are the quality of emotional support and the actual assistance provided by individuals in one's social network. In view of that, people with fewer social relationships are at a higher risk for diverse negative health outcomes like street begging (Berkman 1988, Cohen., 1988, House, Landis, Umberson, 1988).

Statement of Problem

The decline in the economy, gradual disintegration of the extended family system, unemployment, lack of state provision for unemployed in Nigeria, as well as rural-urban migration all contribute to the noticeable decline in the level of care provided by the family in recent times. The situation in Nigeria is appreciated with different categories of beggars found at motor parks, religious worship centres, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies and worst still

on the campuses (Jelili, 2006). This embarrassing situation is enough to scare away foreign investors and tourists. Apart from this it does not project Nigeria as a society that cares for its citizen. However, there is an urgent need to find solutions to this problem when it is clear that government alone can not either reduce or eliminate this menace. Investigating into the roles of social support in solving this problem is the crux of this study.

Methodology

Design

This study adopted the descriptive research of the ex-post facto type. This approach was employed because the researcher had no control nor intended to manipulate the independent variable.

Population

It is very difficult to estimate the number of street beggars in Lagos metropolis, because there is no official statistics and no special research provided on this issue. However, the target population for this study comprised beggars in different locations; motor parks, religious worship centres, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies and the university campuses.

Sampling Procedure

A random sample of areas reported to have high prevalence of cases of street begging were identified from three local governments-Agege, Oshodi-Isolo and Alimosho. In all 180 participants were selected in each of these local governments. In all 540 participants were randomly selected for this study. However, 516 questionnaire were found usable representing 96% rate of return.

Instruments

Selected items from a widely used measure of general social support, "The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List" (ISEL) developed by Cohen & Hoberman, (1983) was used to collect data. Four items, one each from domains of tangible, belonging, and two from appraisal support were used. The items included "There was at least one person I knew whose advice I really trust" and "When I felt lonely, there were several people I could call or talk to." In a study of 221 individuals who participated in a preliminary version of the intervention, this version of the ISEL had an internal consistency reliability of .77 (Glasgow, 2005). It correlated in predictable ways with self-care. This 4-

item version has equivalent alpha reliability to the original version of .92. (Glasgow, 2005). Despite reported psychometric properties by previous study. The pilot study of thirty- four participants having the same characteristics as the participants eventually used revealed test-retest after one month of .68 and yielded Cronbach Alpha of ,81

Research Procedure

These researchers personally visited the places randomly sampled before the administration of the questionnaire. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire the investigator provided a brief tutorial to research assistances employed on how to administer the questionnaire which contained bio-data information and social support scale. Four interpreters were employed to translate the questionnaire into Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. Most participants were helped to fill the questionnaire because of their level of education. Some participants requested for financial rewards to participate in the study. During and upon completion of the questionnaire, (non-intrusive) screenshots were taken to cross checked what was done. After this was completed, a post-check was done to ensure proper completion of the questionnaire.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant gender difference in perceived social support of street beggars.
2. There is no significant difference in perceived social support of street beggars based on tribes.
3. There is no significant difference in perceived social support of street beggars based on age.

The hypotheses stated for this study were tested using analysis of variance and stepwise regression analysis.

Results

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant gender difference in perceived social support of street beggars.

Table 1: Summary of independent sample t-test

Variations	N	df	Mean	SD	t- observed	Sig. level
Male	311	514	3.18	1.29	0.22	0.05

Female	205		1.64	0.08		
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The table 1 presented summary of independent t-test. The findings revealed that there is no significant gender difference in perceived social support of street beggars at $t_{observed} = 0.22$, 514 degree of freedom and > 0.05 significant level.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in perceived social support of street beggars based on tribes

Table 2 Summary of Analysis of Variance

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between	388.341	3	129.447	3.058	.05
Within	21667.84	512	42.32		
Total	22056.181	515			

Table 2 presented the analysis of the second hypothesis which revealed that there is no significant difference in perceived social support of street beggars based on tribes at $f_{(3,515)} = 3.058$, 0.05 significant level. This implies that the four groups (Hausas, Yorubas, Ibos and others) of beggars identified were not significantly different in their perceived social support.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference in perceived social support of street beggars based on age.

Table 3 Summary of Analysis of Variance

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between	138.9648	3	46.3216	0.68	.05
Within	34877.44	512	68.12		
Total	35016.4048	515			

Table 3 presented the analysis of the third hypothesis which revealed that there is no significant difference in perceived social support of street beggars based on age at $f_{(3,515)} = 0.68$, 0.05 significant level. This implies that the four

age groups of beggars identified were not significantly different in their perceived social support.

Discussion

In the recent times, increasing academics attention has been directed to the problem of begging (Adedibu, 1989; Okoli, 1993; Hanchao, 1999; Smith, 2005; Jelili, 2006; Ogunkan, 2009). The major thrust of these works is that begging has become a global phenomenon which threatens the environmental, economic and social survival of humanity. Although, the problem of begging is a worldwide phenomenon, it is more pronounced in the third world countries (Adedibu, 1989). This is true of Nigeria where different categories of beggars are conspicuously found in motor parks, religious worship, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies among other public places begging for alms (Jelili, 2006). The problem of begging has arrested the attentions of governments of various countries, particularly the advanced countries of the world (Ogunkan, 2009). However to complement the efforts of the government in developing countries, there should be construction of social support round the beggars. The findings of the present study revealed low perceived social support across gender, tribes and age groups.

Families experience a lot of support when the support networks surrounding themselves and their family member are more fully developed. This process of constructing social support not only gives "voice" to the beggars, but also to the family. The process of constructing social support enables us to begin to look at "community" and how to build the capacity of communities to include all citizens who are vulnerable which include the beggars.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. Governments should do an enormous amount to prevent isolation and vulnerability in the first place. Funding for early family support, educational changes to ensure inclusive education, and funding for more individualized support programmes would be a beginning.
2. The formal community supports should be strengthened, while expanding the informal networks and community connections of vulnerable citizens and their families.
3. It is perhaps more controversial to suggest that governments fund communities, families, and vulnerable groups to do this work on their own.

4. Non-governmental organizations should play a vital role in the shaping and implementation of construction of social support. The nature of the independent role played by non-governmental organizations within a society calls for real participation; therefore, independence is a major attribute of non-governmental organizations and is the precondition of real participation in helping the beggars.

Conclusion

Formal and informal organizations, as well as grass-roots movements, should be recognized as partners in the construction of social support. Governments and international bodies should promote and allow the participation of non-governmental organizations in the conception, establishment and evaluation of official mechanisms and formal procedures designed to support the vulnerables including the beggars.

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