



The Nigerian Journal of **Sociology and Anthropology**

SPECIAL EDITION ON AGEING IN NIGERIA

Volume 12, No. 1, June 2014

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**THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND
ANTHROPOLOGY (NJSA)**

SPECIAL EDITION ON AGEING IN NIGERIA

ISSN: 0331-4111

**Journal of the Nigeria Anthropological and Sociological
Association (NASA)**

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Funded by

Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) 6, Zambezi Crescent, Maitiama, Abuja

Socio-Economic Context of Begging Among the Elderly in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study utilised a context-based analysis of field observations and fifteen in-depth interviews to examine how begging is practiced by the elderly in a city in South-western Nigeria. As both sub-categories of beggars in the population and the larger elderly persons in the society, elderly beggars are a distinct demographic group whose needs differ from the rest of the population. Adopting a livelihood perspective as the exploratory frame, the study explains how beggary constitutes a rational response to economic, social, physiological, institutional and structural imperatives, adopted by old people as a strategy for improving their wellbeing. The study concluded that in trying to eradicate begging among elderly, the context of their emergence must be duly examined and given considerable attention in the policy process. Efforts should also be directed at supporting households headed by the elderly as means of removing the most fundamental social and economic situations that promote begging among old people.

Keywords: begging, beggars, elderly, livelihood, Nigeria

Introduction

It is almost an academic cliché in the social, political and policy sciences to assert that begging is a historic and complex social reality. Interestingly, this cliché is mostly permitted by the pervasive nature of the phenomenon in question. In its simplest form, begging describes the practice of a group of people who ask for money from others without offering anything in return (Adler & Rosie, 2000, cited in Khan; Menka & Husain, 2009). Beggars also ask for food and other non-monetary assistance as much as they request for money (Massey, Rafique & Seeley, 2010).

The prevalence and scale of begging activity differs from one society to another. It depends on historical epoch, region, and factors of level of affluence and poverty, extent of inequality and access to opportunity structure. Availability of welfare services for members of the society is another determining factor, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as children, disabled, destitute, women and elderly (Simpson, 1954; Bromley, 1981; Dean,

1999; Lugalla & Mbwambo, 1999; Abebe, 2009; Khan *et al.*, 2009; Massey *et al.*, 2010; Ahmed *et al.*, 2011).

Beggars adopt verbal, active, and aggressive solicitation and non-verbal and passive strategies (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2008; Jordan, 2011). As a street-level economic activity, begging is a product of paradoxes in social existence that is characterised by complexities and contradictions (Dean, 1999b). On the one hand, beggary represents one of the most obvious makers of the inherent failures and stagnancy of the so-called human civilisation and centuries of "progress" (Deems, 1883). On the other hand, the practice has deep root in histories of different societies and cultures; it is practiced by diverse groups of people, and often elicits contradictory emotions, from compassion to irritation and disgust (Bromley, 1981; Dean, 1999a).

Beggars are visible aspect of social landscape of almost all societies. In eighteenth century London, almsgiving was described as a sort of social performance that was delicate and requires a high dose of manoeuvrability (Hitchcock, 2005). In industrial Europe, social policy emerged as a response to begging (Dean, 1999a), including English vagrancy and poor laws that aimed to force people to work, particularly among "sturdy beggars" who were thought to have intentionally refused to work (Baker, 2009). Variants of these laws emerged as the "Ugly Law" in states across the US following the post-war problems of mass destitution and beggary (Schweik, 2007; 2009). In Asia and South America, a number of works have captured the experience and practice of begging (Bromley, 1981; Lu, 1999; Khan *et al.*, 2009; Massey *et al.*, 2010). Lugalla and Mbwambo (1999) and Weiss (2007) are good examples in sub-Saharan Africa.

Nigeria is not excluded from the phenomenon of begging. In 2010, close to 70 per cent of the population was estimated to be living in poverty [National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2012], a demonstration of the worsening deterioration in quality of life when compared with the 27 per cent level in 1980 (Nigeria, 2004). Quality of life has been on the decline as a result of widening social inequality, widespread corruption, profligacy in the public sector, unsound macro-economic practices, and political incompetency (Aluko, 2002; Mustapha, 2006; World Bank, 2011). Consequently, millions of Nigerians, like their counterparts in other African countries, have embraced street begging as a means of improving personal and family wellbeing.

As demonstrated by Iliffe (1984) and Decker (2010), begging is not so new in Nigeria. However, the scale of begging in contemporary times far exceeded what occurred in the past. In many cities across Nigeria, begging is a livelihood strategy for millions, and constitutes an attractive profession for different categories of the population, including the "area boys," disabled, elderly, children, unemployed, and other able-bodied men and women (Adewuyi, 2000, 2007; Aderinto *et al.*, 2007). In 1988, about 3 million beggars and destitute were estimated to be living in the country (Igbinoia, 1991). A 2003 survey in

20 out of the 44 local government areas of Kano state showed that 657,000 children depend on begging for survival (Bamable, 2007). Studies conducted in some south-western cities also point to high and increasing incidences of begging among Nigerians (Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009; Adedibu & Jelili, 2011).

This study examined the social-cultural context of begging among elderly in Nigeria. Previous studies have focused on the subject more broadly, while little attention is given to how begging is practiced and experienced by different categories of population, and much less on the dimensions of the context of such practice and experience. The study demonstrates the relevance of contextual understanding of this social phenomenon, and reveals how such endeavour can be useful for developing effective and sustainable policies.

Being Elderly, Being a Beggar: A Context of Begging

Globally, the number of persons over 60 years and above has grown rapidly in the last few decades. This change is unprecedented, pervasive, and enduring, with profound implications (United Nations, 2009). At 759 million in 2010, global aged population is projected to reach 2 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2011). Presently, ageing is most visible in wealthy or more developed countries. In the coming decades, however, population ageing will put pressure on resources in developing regions as well (Velkoff & Kowal, 2007; United Nations, 2011). In Africa, the context within which ageing is unfolding differs radically from other parts of the world. As Aboderin (2011) observes:

Africa's total population will continue to grow rapidly between now and the end of the century [and] ...will remain the youngest world region, characterised by a vast population of children and youth. Similarly, the population share of older persons... presently only 5.5%, is projected to rise to only 9.8% by 2050, compared to increases from around 10% to 25% in Asia and Latin America, and 20% to 30% in Europe and North America... (Aboderin, 2011: 69)

Policymakers in Africa give little attention to elderly population, focusing more on youths, women of child-bearing age and such other categories. While only a few countries have explicit and formalised policies for elderly people, majority of African governments are signatories to international policy frameworks that committed signees to give adequate attention to issues affecting old people (Ogwumike & Aboderin, 2005; Eze, 2010; Aboderin, 2011). Government inattention continued in spite of the fact that the traditional system of care for older people has transformed significantly, due to factors such as modernisation and urbanisation, shift in value orientation, economic structural adjustment, rural-urban migration, HIV/AIDS pandemic, regional conflicts, and widespread poverty (Adamchak, 1989; Kakwani & Subbarao, 2005; HelpAge & Cordaid, 2011). Conflicts and HIV/AIDS deaths have intensified the role of elderly as care givers and breadwinners to grandchildren at the stage when they themselves are in need of care and economic support.

Their condition is further complicated by lack of access to healthcare, malnourishment, age-related illnesses, diseases, physical and psychological abuses in home and care centres and belief in witchcraft and cultural representation of old people as witches (HelpAge-ARDC, 2001; Najjumba-Mulindwa, 2003; Mba, 2007; Oloka-Onyango, 2008; Mwahunga, 2011; Fayehun, Adebayo & Gbadamosi in this volume).

In Nigeria, elderly people are caught in the same web as those in other parts of the continent; facing difficult and harsh social, economic and cultural realities. Aged population represents 5.3% of the total population and would rise only marginally to 7.4% by 2050 (Global AgeWatch, 2013). In absolute number, elderly people constitute about 9.1 million of the entire population, if calculated against the recent estimate of 170 million (Mundi Index, 2012; Population Reference Bureau, 2012). Most of them are poor and resident in poor rural communities (NPC, 2003). Between 1980 and 2004, poverty in elderly headed households rose from 28.8% to 52.8% (NBS, 2009).

Geriatric services is non-existent in most hospitals while many old people suffer from ill health and diseases, both communicable and non-communicable variants (Abdulraheem & Abdulrahman, 2008). In addition, a survey conducted among some Yoruba elderly showed that 90% of the males and 96% of the females were nutritionally vulnerable; either moderately or highly vulnerable to malnourishment (Olasunbo & Olubode, 2006). Whereas many rural elderly still engage in farming and contribute significantly to food production, most were taking inadequate nutrient (Olayiwola, 2007), an indication that illiteracy and lack of information constitute some problems among old people. Traditional perception of “elderly” as repository of knowledge and wisdom (Mba, 2007) has eroded, and replaced by scornfulness and what may be tagged “geronophobia” – for lack of a better word.

Except from pockets of temporary “interventions,” campaigns and localised programmes, no national social security policy currently exist in Nigeria to protect and cater to the needs of the elderly (Ajomale, 2007; Global AgeWatch, 2013), in spite of mounting evidence that there may be more poverty within this population than among youths where policy attention has been more focused (Ogwumike & Aboderin, 2005).

From the foregoing, the circumstances of elderly in Nigeria can be surmised as follows: one, age and health constrain them from engaging in some kinds of work in the informal sector where most of them are concentrated, including farming and other labour intensive occupations, regardless of whether they survive marginally on such works in the past; two, they may have to look elsewhere for assistance since (1) traditional support system cannot provide for them any longer, and because; (2) children who may help are either poor themselves or have limited means, or totally unwilling to support; (3) government’s failure to initiate steps and effectively deploy social security policies to help elderly persons attain and maintain minimum welfare

aggravates their situation. What these point to is that elderly people are indeed helpless and powerless.

Thus, elderly are faced with limited livelihood choice. Begging seems like the obvious choice for many of them when micro- and macro-level structures are failing to provide needed support. This does not imply in any way that begging is a *good* or *normal* livelihood choice as it exposes them to abuse and hazard of different kinds – from almsgivers to government agents, younger beggars and other persons making livelihood on the streets. Rather, it is a *practical* choice based on reflective consideration of their social, economic and psycho-physical circumstances and the options available therefrom. A number of studies have shown that begging ranks atop the list of livelihood strategies employed by elderly in poor households in countries across Africa (HelpAge & Cordaid, 2011; Mwachungu, 2011).

Frameworks for Understanding Begging

Four main frames of reference have dominated the discussion of begging: the criminological, institutional, economic necessity and livelihood perspectives (Massey *et al.*, 2010). The first perspective sees begging as social deviance, a crime or a pathological behaviour that departs from societal norms of expectation. This view is most dominant in public policy circle, and the main approach to which many lawmakers subscribe (Dean, 1999b; CRISIS, 2003; Swanson, 2007; Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2008; Baker, 2009; Schweik, 2009) and one that is sometimes defended by academics (Karacoskun, 2009).

Institutional perspective situates begging within the context of prevailing religious and cultural beliefs of a society. It takes as its point of departure the premise that religious doctrines and precepts, and certain elements inherent in the cultures of different societies, propel beggary and provide the rationale for almsgiver to give and for beggars to request and accept alms (Jordan, 1999; Massey *et al.*, 2010). Economic necessity and livelihood approaches are linked, and will therefore be discussed together for ease of analysis. Economic necessity approach emphasised the relevance of grasping how unfavorable economic condition shape the lives of people while the livelihood perspective posits that begging is a means of diversifying household income in poor communities.

The phenomenon of begging in most developing societies is better explained within the combined frames of reference offered by economic necessity and livelihood approaches, although the institutional and criminological perspectives are dominant. In what follows, the economic and livelihood approaches are applied to Nigeria to discuss the context of beggary among the elderly population.

Methodology

The study is both descriptive and explanatory by design, and relied on primary and secondary data, the former was gathered using qualitative approaches of in-depth interview and field observation while the latter were sourced from

relevant and current literature, reports, policy papers, and internet articles. The study was carried out in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state, southwest of Nigeria. Ibadan has a very long history of migration, starting with its founding and later as one of the main destination point for migrants from the northern part of the country (Afolayan, 1994; Fourchard, 2003). The metropolitan area of Ibadan is large and permits all forms of formal and informal business activities. Like most populated urban centres in Nigeria, poverty is widespread in Ibadan, with lots of people, residents and migrants alike, engaging in marginal occupations such as scavenging, street vending, loading and begging.

Begging is particularly visible at motor garages, traffic and bus stops, churches and mosques, markets and parties. In high density and busy areas like Ojo, Oja'ba, Molete, Beere, Mokola, Sasa and Bodija, beggars can be seen in all directions wandering from spot to spot, engaging would-be almsgivers or just sitting quietly waiting for passers-by to give them money. Elderly beggars were purposively selected at major transit parks and high density markets. The locations for transit parks were Ojoo (4 IDIs) and Iwo Road (2 IDIs). Oja'ba (3 IDIs) and Bodija (6 IDIs) markets were popular markets selected for the study.

A predefined in-depth interview guide was used to direct the discussion but participants were allowed to narrate their circumstances. This granted the researchers deeper insight into their lives and how they think of, and subjectively interpret, their respective conditions. Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with elderly male and female beggars over a 3-week period, employing the services of two field assistants. Since the researchers were only proficient in Yoruba and English, both assistants were selected for their knowledge of the main languages of interview, Yoruba and Hausa. This approach helped greatly in translating the discussion to English language in which the interviews have been reported.

Verbal consents were obtained from the elderly beggars after clarifying issues such as participants consent and freedom to withdraw from this study at any time without fear. Confidentiality of the participants were emphasised and observed. The interviews were one-off but clarifications were immediately sought for unclear responses. Questions asked covered the kinds of work they have done in the past, living arrangement, hazards associated with begging, and types of social supports available to them at family, community and government levels. The qualitative data were grouped according to pre-determined themes and analysed accordingly. Due to the limited number of participants, the study is limited by questions of generalisability. Also, in the process of translation, intents and meanings are sometimes lost, raising concerns of what was indeed said by a research participant. While acknowledging that such may have occurred, we tried to minimise this possibility by asking direct, clear and uncomplicated questions – sometimes repeating certain questions while also clarifying vague responses.

Results

The narratives from the in-depth interviews shed light on different aspects of lives of elderly beggars, on and off the streets. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of selected background characteristics of the elderly beggars. The larger number of male participants is a reflection of the overall distribution of beggars in the study locations. There were more male beggars on the street in Ibadan. As noted in the literature on begging in Nigeria, population of beggars who are of Hausa ethnic group is higher than others. Although the study was carried out in predominantly Yoruba communities, the number of Hausa elderly beggars is higher than the Yoruba. Two out of three of the elderly beggars interviewed have some form of obvious physical disability like blindness, paralysis, leprous deformity, severed limbs and arms.

Table 1: Social Profiles of Participants

Variable	Categories	Counts n=15
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Hausa	9
	Yoruba	6
<i>Age</i>	55-65	6
	66-75	1
	Above 75	1
	Unknown	8
<i>Gender</i>	Male	11
	Female	4
<i>Disability</i>	Physically Challenged (PC)	10
	Not Physically Challenged (NPC)	5
<i>Marital Status</i>	Married	6
	Single	0
	Widowed	3
	Separated	1
	Unknown	5
<i>Living Arrangement</i>	Alone	1
	With Spouse and/or Children	9
	With Adult Children	2
	Others*	3
<i>Number of Children</i>	1-3	3
	4-6	1
	7 and above	3
	Unknown	8

*Live with siblings, significant others or no form of living arrangement has been categorised above (for instance, homelessness)

Overall, what emerged from most of the interviews was that begging among elderly population was a livelihood choice for survival, borne essentially out of challenges of varied dimensions. Amongst other issues, shocks and circumstances within the household, physiological limitations, neglects by family and governance disinterest in the wellbeing of older people, create a condition of extreme deprivation and powerlessness.

Work History of Elderly Beggars

Elderly beggars were asked to provide information on why they became beggars, and what jobs they have done in the past. Unexpected shocks and fundamental episodic occurrences within the family were mostly mentioned as reasons for venturing into begging as livelihood strategy. Narrating how spousal death informed her decision to take up begging, an elderly suffering from partial blindness explained as follows:

After the death of my husband there was nothing to survive on. The house I was staying was also not habitable. There are problems here and there. So I came here so that I can be alive and well. Female/Hausa

Except from a single instance of separation, the women in the study referred to the demise of husbands as turning point in their lives and a deciding factor in their eventual livelihood choice. Meanwhile, males had different stories. In one case, parental death, social conflict and subsequent loss of property merged to create a condition of powerlessness and mysterious disability:

*It is because of the problem I have. My father stayed in Hausa land and he gave everything to them. Everything he left in Kano was destroyed during Kano crisis and it was so sudden...
...I developed asthma because I was hit with something at the back when I wanted to go and fight with the Hausas in their land. Suddenly, I will fall and start behaving like someone that has "warapa."¹ It is not ordinary, it is spiritual and it is what those Hausas used to hit me at my back... My home and family were destroyed and I ended up here. Male/Yoruba*

In relation to work history, most of the elderly beggars were, at different times in their lives, involved in one form of work or another. In fact, only a fifth of the participants have never worked before, including a female who, having reported that she cannot remember how long she has been begging, explained that:

¹ Commonly symptomatic of epileptic disease condition.

I have not done any business in the past. All I do is to come and beg for money. This is the business I do and it is what I use to survive. Female/Yoruba

For those that have been engaged in some work in the past, what they did varied considerably, even though all the occupations were concentrated in the informal sector. Some engaged in crafts and farming while some others were involved in trading, rentals, food processing etc. A leprous male participant, for instance, mentioned that he cultivated crops such as millet, sorghum and rice before his condition became worse. Another participant explained thus:

I was a carpenter before. I worked in Lagos state for 20 years as a carpenter. It was here in Ibadan that I broke my leg and became a beggar because I didn't have money to treat it. It is even the traditional orthopaedic that did it like this when they told me that they will amputate it and I don't want that to happen. You can see, it is not balanced and I use a crutch. Male/Yoruba

One participant who is now partially blind also described the nature of her work in the past:

I worked as a filterer in my village. I help people to sieve shaft from beans. Like corn too, if they want to sieve it. We were always so many doing it back then especially for those that cannot farm. That's the kind of work I used to do. Female/Hausa

It was, however, observed that some participants were not so incapacitated to the extent that they can no longer do their former work; attempt was made to find out why they had to stop. One former handyman that specialised in repairing fumigation knapsack provided a reason for abandoning his previous work:

It is possible [to continue] but I really need the money so that I will be able to buy instruments and materials. Sometimes when people bring things for repair, I may need money to buy one or two things so that I can use that money to make more. Male/Hausa

Elderly and Hazards of Begging

On the risks and hazards of begging, experience differed among the participants. Whereas some considered begging to be hazard-free, others reported that harassment, fear of vehicular accidents, and diabolical intentions of would-be alms-giver were sources of great concern. Narrating his encounters with thugs, a participant explained that:

I don't encounter much problems except on some days when Area Boys will walk up to me to demand for money. I normally ask them if I was the one to give them money or they should be

the ones helping me. They come from time to time but once I threaten them they walk away. Male/Hausa

Since beggars usually conduct their activities away from home, travelling long distances in some cases, beggars are constantly faced with the challenge of crossing expressways on a daily basis. As shown in the quotation below, the danger posed by this reality is doubled in the case of old and physically challenged beggar:

The challenge is not more than when I need to cross the road because of my leg. Most times, people will need to help me stop vehicles so that I can make it across and it is not always easy to do that. Male/Hausa

Prevailing cultural beliefs also played some roles in the construction of begging-related hazards among elderly. While expressing his resentment towards the indiscrimination of Hausa beggars, one participant explained that some alms-givers were malevolent:

At times, one needs to be careful because some people come to do sacrifice from herbalist and came for a purpose especially to shift their problems to us beggars. The Hausas are fond of taking things from people anyhow. For me, I take money and I take food from the people I perceive as God fearing people through my instinct. Male/Yoruba

Living Arrangement of Elderly Beggars

On the living arrangement of elderly beggars, it is important to make a quick distinction between Hausa and Yoruba beggars. All the Hausa participants were migratory beggars who have at least two places of residence; one in the city and the other back in the village. The Yoruba participants are resident in Ibadan, even though most of them engaged in begging away from their immediate place of residence. So, the living arrangement reported for the Hausa in the Table 1 above corresponds to their living situation in their original places of resident in the villages – rather than their situation in Ibadan. In Ibadan, the elderly Hausa beggars are essentially migrant beggars, just like Hausa beggars of other age groups, and a lot of them live alone or in groups whenever they come to begin the city.

In their primary places of residence, a good number of the elderly beggars still live with their spouses and/or children under the same roof. This is the case with most married males who are still largely responsible for household economic needs. Females were either widowed or separated from their husbands, and in cases where children live with their widowed elderly beggars, it is more of a “tenancy arrangement” rather than co-residency. As shown in the quotation below:

Back at home, the children are there trying to fend for themselves. But for the older girls they all have their own rooms and no one is really in-charge of coordinating the house. All of us are powerless. When there is heavy rain at home and the house is damaged, we usually go to those that can help us out with one thing or another. These are the people we sometimes cry to for help. But there's really no one in-charge of the household. Female/Hausa

Situation of homelessness was also observed among elderly beggars. From the narratives of a participant, negative attitude of people towards his health condition was the main reason for his inability to secure a place to live. He explains thus:

I don't have a house that I stay. The asthma disturbs me a lot and everyone gets scared to take me in. Any house that I stay, I will be driven out. I stay alone. If these people go home now, I will find one shop and sleep in front of it. I have lost everything – my wife and children during Kano crisis. They were all burnt to death. Male/Yoruba

Social Supports for Elderly Beggars

The extent and forms of support received by elderly beggars also vary. Whereas a handful of participants mentioned that some forms of social support come from children and relatives, cases of neglect by children, community and the government were most dominant. For those receiving assistance from their children, the support is not consistent. As a result, there was always a need to get out on the streets to beg for alms:

My children are helping me but it is not enough. They don't even know that I come here and they must not know. You know it is when they are satisfied that they remember me, so I come here to support myself. Male/Yoruba

Another elderly beggar also received supports in form of ₦100 and kola nut from only one of his eight daughters from time to time. However, some of the participants have young children that were incapable of supporting them, as shown below:

...The children are very young [pointing to young passer-by who appears to be about 15-years old]. What they do is to go and assist people in farming; little farming here and there to get what to eat from that. Female/Hausa

Availability of social support from relatives was also not general: some received hand-outs from relatives when offered; meanwhile, cyclic poverty runs through the family network of others, thereby preventing some relations

from helping elderly members. Describing his experience in this regard, a participant remarked:

As for my own relations, to be honest, they are trying for me. Like if I leave here now to go back home, they'll cater for all my feeding and other things until I come back. And me too I assist some brothers from whatever I have – they also assist me in return. Male/Hausa

At community and government levels, most of the participants claimed that they were not receiving any form of assistance from their communities but the researchers observed variations in the experience and/or perception of what constituted “government support” for elderly beggars. For example, the “freedom” to beg and access to secured environment was perceived as a form of support by a participant who explained that though:

I don't get anything special from the government...the security that they provide and the comfortable environment is enough. We consider it as help from the government. Although they don't give us something directly but indirectly, for us staying here in a peaceful environment as one Nigeria is something to us and we appreciate that. Male/Hausa

The importance of such “freedom” can best be appreciated from the viewpoint of the fact that some of the participants complained of being constantly harassed by government agents. On one occasion, uniformed men arrived and all the beggars, both young and old, started running. A participant claimed that it was not unusual, that “...they come often to drive us away without providing any assistance for us” (Iwo Road/Male/Yoruba). There were also instances when arrests were made by *wole wole*², and some elderly beggars were “dumped at Ikire,” a nearby town outside Oyo state where the beggars were originally conducting their activities (Oja’ba/Male/Yoruba).

In some states where the government have instituted welfare programmes, the coverage is narrow and elderly beggars who benefit from them were only indirectly impacted. This is because the programmes were not specifically targeted at them. In Jigawa state for instance:

...there are some among us whose data were collected and they were registered so that they will be able to get something monthly... But it is not for everyone... I'm not a beneficiary. I know some who are benefitting from it. The programme is based on quota system...If you're lucky your name is on it you will get paid. Female/Hausa

² Government-employed house inspection officers.

On the overall, however, majority of the participants feel that government is not doing much to assist them:

The only thing the government gave us was an ID card and it was only for us to be able to show that we are citizens of the country. [He slipped out his wallet and showed the National Identity Card]. But the government does not give us any direct benefit. Male/Hausa

Another participant was particularly infuriated with the attitude of government to their welfare:

...it's becoming frustrating. They have come to me several times to collect names and gather information. I am even so infuriated! [curses and then continues] There's nothing they want to do and even if something was available, I'm sure they'll eat it alone. Male/Hausa

Discussion

As shown in the results, begging within the elderly population is mainly a livelihood strategy for negotiating complications of life. Family tragedy, physical disability, old age, social crisis and declining capability to meet personal and household needs were important predisposing factors. Indeed, these challenges are not unique to elderly beggars. Aderinto *et al.* (2007) had shown that spousal death and economic hardship correlated with begging among able-bodied females while disabled younger beggars too are as disadvantaged as old people with respect to disability. Yet, elderly people are unique because old age places far greater limitation on what they can do to change their situation.

The fact that many elderly beggars were active in their youths also suggests that laziness does not entirely explain why beggary is common among this population. Most of the participants in the study committed their active years to trade, farm work, crafts, equipment repairs etc. and were mostly economically responsible for themselves and their dependants. They met personal and household needs on their own until their bodies could no longer carry on. Regardless of how elderly beggars are being presented or perceived today, these former farmers, carpenters, sifters and trap-makers did manage to make contributions to the maintenance of the informal sector of the economy. A few may even have continued to do so if only cheap and accessible credit systems for elderly were in place – the knapsack repairer falls in this group. To a large extent, elderly in most African countries do not have access to cheap microfinance services, and this is believed to constitute serious impediment to their ability to contribute to economic development (Ogwumike & Aboderin, 2005; HelpAge & Cordaid, 2011). But for elderly beggars in particular, lack of access to credit stagnates those that are prepared to improve their conditions.

Making a livelihood in the street exposes elderly people to some challenges. Disability and old age are major vulnerability points for elderly

beggars as they move around the city. Elderly Hausa travel far distances to get to Ibadan, enduring long, risky and physically exhausting journeys. At destination point, encounters with agents of government and other actors involved in street-level activities often make the “work environment” unbearable. The presence of enforcement officers creates an atmosphere of anxiety, sometimes forcing aged beggars to embark on unplanned jogging exercise. At other times, elderly beggars are rounded up, arrested and “deported” to their states or deposited in neighbouring states. In this respect, Ibadan city administrators are similar to government officials in Lagos. Recently in May 2013, a national newspaper reported that eight elderly beggars were arraigned before a Lagos special offences court for begging. The elderly beggars were sentenced to 1 month in prison, with an option of ₦5000 fine, having been “found” criminally guilty of: (1) conducting themselves across the city without *visible means of livelihood* (2) conducting themselves in manner *likely* to breach peace, and (3) demanding, receiving and collecting *unauthorised levy* (Akinola, 2013). These beggars, according to Ramanathan (2008), are *status offenders* who offend and become criminals by *being who they are*, and *not by doing what they do*. It is not exactly clear whether government can do so much, or even be willing, to protect aged beggars from *Area Boys* who sometimes impose unofficial taxes.

Two other observations are also worth discussing further: living arrangement and types of support available to elderly beggars. Findings showed that when elderly beggars live with their children under the same roof, their role as “breadwinner” does not change much, either because the children are themselves poor or too young to provide for their aged parents. This is very significant as it draws attention to the limitations of assuming that old people normally benefit from living with adult children in the same household. The poverty condition of children impacts their ability to support their parents. For elderly beggars, living within the same household with poor adult children does not do much to alleviate their suffering. Such situation may even constitute a source of psychological trauma.

Meanwhile, even though some of these elderly beggars received some support from their children and family members, it is either not enough or inconsistent. Living with, or receiving financial assistance from children, does not necessarily reduce the need to seek other means of subsistence. Sufficiency of monetary and material support offered to elderly people matters. Begging for elderly is not wholly a consequence of living alone or lacking support from their children. Sometimes, the support is not just enough. This observation seems to provide qualitative supports for Cameron and Cobb-Clark’s (2008) finding that in developing countries, little evidence exists to substantiate the thinking that support from children, through transfers and co-residency, could substitute for elderly’s need to work. The study, which was conducted among elderly in Indonesia, highlighted the continued significance of labouring well

into old age as because the support provided by children does not always and fully meet the needs of aged parents. In another study on family support for elderly in Nigeria, Peil (1991) points out that insufficient support is complicated by inflation and rising cost of basic needs in villages.

At community and government levels, support for the elderly was largely non-existent. In states where some form of assistance or welfare programme was in place, they were not particularly targeted at the elderly. Elderly people were made to compete for access on the same programme with other vulnerable groups, like widows and disabled, whose needs may not necessarily be the same. This approach is not so different from the so-called empowerment programmes that had been implemented over the years at federal, state and local levels of governance, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Over the years, government had initiated women or youth empowerment programmes, and expect that elderly were inclusive of the former while assuming also that success in the latter would indirectly impact positively on the lives of old people. The assumption of these programmes reflects the misconceptions surrounding government's approach to alleviating the suffering of old people in most African countries. It was one thing that these programmes failed with the targeted groups; it is yet another that they wrongly assumed that elderly people do not face distinct set of problems that separate them from the rest of the population.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Begging among elderly should be seen as a rational response to economic, social, physiological and structural imperatives, practiced as means of self-improvement. As both sub-categories of beggars' population and the larger elderly persons in the society, elderly beggars are a distinct demographic group whose challenges and needs differ in important ways from the rest of the population. They are involved in a livelihood system that is tough and hazardous. And whereas this livelihood option is disapproved by city administrators and frowned upon by the general population, elderly people nonetheless continue to venture into it in attempts to confront complicated challenges of life. Thus, in seeking to reduce, curb, control or eradicate begging among elderly, the context of their emergence must be duly examined and given considerable attention in policy process.

Prioritising the livelihood perspective over, and placing it above, criminogenic and institutional or religious views puts begging among elderly in the realm of social policy failure that it really is. It would also immediately reconstruct the phenomenon as an issue that is solvable. For instance, livelihood perspective would ensure that public policy is sensitive to question of multiple dependency in poor, elderly-headed households, especially those who still have their wives and young children living with them. The perspective also ensures that policy planners are sensitive to the fact that households must survive somehow in countries where social security for old

people is non-existent or where old age pensions is limited to employees in formal and public sectors.

Two approaches to reducing begging among elderly are proposed. First, efforts should be directed at supporting elderly-headed households with basic needs of food, health and shelter as means of removing the most fundamental social and economic situations that promote begging among old people. For many poor, the on-set of old age comes with less demand for luxurious goods and more of basic needs for self-sustenance. This strategy should be matched by transfer of small cash to elderly poor in order to reduce *cash traps* that has the potential to push them into the street once basic needs are catered for.

Second, provision of opportunities for suitable employment for active elderly persons should be seriously considered. Suitability implies that the employment opportunities be sensitive to the age and health conditions of old people. Such work opportunities may be based on their work histories, focusing mostly on resuscitating old businesses and crafts of those still active and capable. The intervention must engage the rest to find out what they can do in order to reduce food poverty at individual and household levels. Livestock and equipment like grinding machine can also be procured and distributed to physically active elderly in order to expand their access to income. Favourable result depends on strict monitoring to ensure proper utilisation of the equipment and implements. Meanwhile, the programmes must be informed by strong awareness of the gender differences within the group, particularly with regards to the women who often shoulder the burden of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and culture more than their male counterparts. Suffice it emphasise that the suggestions should not be taken as substitutes for welfare and social security for old people. It must be implemented as complimentary plans for active elderly who desire to earn more and enhance their lives beyond subsistence.

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