



## **SPATIALITY OF STREET BEGGING AND BEGGARS IN ENUGU STATE METROPOLIS SOUTH EAST NIGERIA**

**OKOLIE, Ikechukwu Stephen**

Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria Enugu Campus.  
E-mail address: ikechukwu.okolie.pg69220@unn.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

*This research investigated spatiality of street begging and beggars in Enugu State, Nigeria. One hundred and eight five beggars were purposively and conveniently selected from street begging locations across Enugu State metropolis. Data were collected with the aid of an in-depth structured questionnaire titled spatiality of street begging and beggars (SSBBO). Findings showed that street beggars are adopting new patterns and spatiality which are not well known by the masses. 60.3% of the sampled street beggars carry out their activities in the market, motor parks 23.1%, churches 11.4% and traffic lights 5.2%. It was observed that 40% of the beggars use terminally ill persons to beg, begging with hired new born babies 24%, begging for charity and church envelop 18%, corporate begging/beggars 11% and ATM spot beggars 7%. The study noted that 75.1% of the female street beggars are sexually exploited, 24.8% for males. On Kidnapping risk, 71.3% of the female street beggars are afraid of being kidnapped, 28.6% of the males face the risk of getting kidnapped. Accident 75.6% of Female Street beggars risk being hit by cars, 24.3% of males face such risk. Physical assault 58.3% of the female respondents had experienced it, male counter 41.6%. Forced prostitution 87.5% of the female respondents are faced with forced prostitution, 12.4% of their male counterparts face such.*

**Keywords: Street begging, Poverty, Beggars, Enugu State, Inequality**

### **Introduction**

Street begging is a global phenomenon which is as old as mankind and has increasingly become a societal problem and social menace in developing countries of the world. Street begging is increasingly noticeable in many cities in Nigeria.

Although the problem of street begging is an age long worldwide social problem, it is more pronounced in the less developed countries LDC's (Broun, 2010, Namwata, Mgabo and Dimoso, 2012 and Jelili, 2013). The presence of beggars (Clapper, 2012) noted is indicative of larger social ills which can cause others to avoid beggar-inhabited areas.

Phelan, Bruce, Moore and Estueve (1997), and Osiki (1999), also attached beggary to conditions that have sociological connotations like poverty, under-educational, underprivileged and homelessness. According to Khalid (1995), begging as an occupation, a permanent means of livelihood involving large number of people, men and women able and disabled, seem to be a phenomenon peculiar to northern Nigeria. Street beggars are highly visible in public places, commercial centres, residential neighbourhood (Osagbemi, 2001), and worse still on campuses and inside buses (Jelili, 2006).



In many Northern States in Nigeria, street begging is “Institutionalized”. Proponents justify the practice that begging has its roots from the time of the migration of prophets from Mecca to Medina (Khalid, 1995). This notion explains the practice where Islamic scholars travel with a group of children from villages to towns in search of knowledge. As noted by Ammani (2010), the children have to feed themselves, cloth and find little pocket money through begging. In whatever form, begging is often associated with poverty (Adedibu, 1989; Horne and Cooke, 2001). Little wonder that begging is common in many Northern States of Nigeria with its characteristic of high poverty levels. According to the 2019 poverty headcount, the poverty level in some northern states are Sokoto 87.73%, Taraba 87.72%, Jigawa 87.02% and Adamawa 75.41%, Zamfara 73.98% and Yobe 72.43% as against national rate of 40.1% and Urban 18.0% (NBS, 2019 and Nigeria Living Standards Survey, 2018-19).

John (2006), Akua and Priscilla (2010), contend that begging has a cultural, religious and political dimension. A 2013 survey indicated that the population of beggars in Nigeria stood at 12.4 million. The North West zone hosts 5.1 million, the North East zone 3.5 million, North central zone 1.6 million, South west zone 7,600, South-South and South East zones has 9,228 and 8,200 respectively (Okolie, 2017).

Today, however has witnessed increasing spread of begging in areas outside the traditional areas associated with begging in Nigeria. In Enugu for instance beggars are increasingly visible in the town in spite of the relatively low levels of poverty headcount 58.13%, poverty gap index of 16% and unemployment 49.5 %, compared to some Northern States in Nigeria Benue 67.3%, Kogi 69.1%, Bauchi 64.9%, Adamawa 67.7%, Kano 67.1% and Yobe 60.0% as against national rate of 55.7% (NBS 2019).

Convincingly, the incidence of street begging is a function of many demographic dimensions. As such, among other factors, demographic factors like ethnic, background, gender, marital status, religion, education level and body physique play a basic role in composing and patterning the street beggars’ informal social relationships and in determining the choice of friends (Demewozu, 2005).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increasing population of street beggars in Nigerian cities constitutes an eyesore or environmental nuisance and health hazards, particularly those carrying infectious and contagious diseases (Egeonu, 1988). Street begging has serious implication for the city and national economy (Jelili, 2006). It leads not only to social relegation of the city but also to that of beggars as well as stigmatization of the class of people and their relatives. Street beggars portray a bad image to outsiders or strangers, criminals hid under the guise of street



beggars to perpetuate their evil deeds. Their activities are not restricted to the northern cities of Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina or Bauchi; they are also seen in the southern and traditionally non Hausa-Muslim cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Port-Harcourt, Enugu, Aba and Calabar (Adewuyi, 2007).

The identified three categories of child beggars in urban areas are thus; those who lead disabled or sick parents or relatives, those who beg entirely on their own and those who act as front for parents, especially mothers who are usually hidden from public view but supervise them from distance (Okolie, 2017). Street begging cuts across all ages and groups- children, elderly, disabled, males and females. Some operate alone, while others are in groups. They wait for patronage in public spaces as shopping areas, banks, public offices, churches, mosques, busy streets, among others (Adugna, 2006).

Nigeria, the biggest economy in Africa was named as the poverty capital of the world overtaking India. Nigeria surpassed India with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty. About 86.9 million Nigerians live in severe poverty in 2020, which is about 50% of her total population. In essence, corruption, unemployment, nepotism, inequalities have damaged the state's economic foundation and framework, thereby accelerating poverty menace and causing it to be the poverty capital of the world.

One of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is to end extreme poverty by the year 2020 and the poverty rate in Nigeria is on the increase and unproductive population boom is making poverty reduction and alleviation difficult. The inflation rate in Nigeria has been on the increase 13.25% in 2020 and 15.97% in 2021, likewise poverty level 50% and unemployment rate 55.7%. All these negative indicators have exacerbated inequality, poverty and destitution in Nigeria leading to high rate of hopelessness and crimes. The inequality gap in Nigeria continues to grow despite the huge oil revenue generated by the government.

In recent times however, begging is also gaining ground in many cities in South East Nigeria (Okolie, 2017). Anywhere you go in Enugu Metropolis you find street beggars either young or old begging for alms (Okolie, 2017). Some are in wheelchairs, some are blind and led by someone, while some are with new born twins or triplets soliciting for alms from passer-by and commuters. Besides, it is shameful and disheartening for the “*Ndi Igbo*” race that were not known or used to institutionalized and professionalized begging to now indulge in the practice. It is a serious social misfortune and problem needing the attention of all concerned stakeholders (Okolie, 2017).



The continuous increase in the number of street beggars in Enugu state, Nigeria needs to be studied. It is against this backdrop that this research investigated the spatiality and patterns of street begging in Enugu State Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The research is to investigate street begging in Enugu State Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Locations of street begging in Enugu State Nigeria.
2. To understand the patterns of street begging in Enugu State Nigeria.
3. To find out risks faced by street beggars in Enugu State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the research:

1. What are the locations of street begging in Enugu State Nigeria?
2. What are the patterns of street begging in Enugu State Nigeria?
3. What are the risks faced by street beggars in Enugu State Nigeria?

### **Methods and Materials**

The major study area is Enugu Metropolis, in Enugu state, Nigeria. Enugu (*Énugwú*) is the capital of Enugu State in Nigeria. It is situated within the following Coordinate limits: 6°27'9.60"N 7°30'37.20"E, the city core has an area of about 90 km<sup>2</sup>. The Enugu metropolis area is made up of Enugu East, Enugu North and Enugu South Local Government areas.

Descriptive survey and observation methods were employed for this study. The samples consisted of beggars selected from different begging spots in Enugu metropolis. One hundred and eighty-five (185) respondents were purposively and conveniently selected from 20 begging spots in Enugu Metropolis. An in-depth structured questionnaire was used to collect data, likewise observations. Data collected were analysed in table summaries and bar chart.

### **Conceptualizing Street Begging**

Begging is an act of asking people for help which could be inform of money, food and other assistance with no intention of refund. In addition, the technical committee of MOLSA (2014), defines as a method of earning ones living from the income obtained by other means of formal sectors of the society by using age, health, and economic conditions as a means of gaining sympathy.

Ahimie (2015), defined street begging as a practice whereby a person obtains money, food, shelter or other things from people he/she encounter in public place by request without



return. Chukwulobe (2011), street begging is seen as an act of stopping people on the street to beg for assistance which could either be in the form of giving money or food. Street begging is an act where a person or group of persons request for money in a busy place from people or passerby.

### **Categories of Street Beggars**

Street beggars can be classified or categorized based on their locations, techniques and appearances.

1. **Apostolic Beggars:** These types of beggars are found in motor parks of notable transport companies, where they hang around and wait for the buses to get boarded by the passengers, then they move in to preach for a short period with prayers and afterwards ask the passengers to sow a seed in his life or ministry.
2. **Automated Teller Machine Spot Beggars:** These types of beggars are sometimes called corporate beggars because of their appearance. They hang around where Automated teller machines are installed and wait for people to withdraw money, and then they approach you with a heart melting story and request for a certain amount of money from you. These beggars size up the person to approach by their appearance, car and amount withdrawn from the automated teller machine.
3. **Active Beggars:** These types of beggars are always on the move asking for money, food and other gifts from members of the public as they move from place to place.
4. **Passive or Persuasive Beggars:** These types of beggars station themselves in a busy location and in a pitiable condition soliciting for alms from commuters. Most of them will carry triplets, some with open and decaying wounds and some with deformities. They use these conditions to draw pity, persuade and solicit for money.
5. **Hostile Beggars:** These types of beggars are not friendly in their quest for soliciting for money. They use force, aggression and coercion when asking for money, food or other things through harsh and abusive language or words.
6. **Corporate Beggars:** These types of beggars are called corporate beggars because they are well dressed in corporate outfits with briefcases and office file on their hand, then marshal out in busy areas to ask for alms from unsuspecting persons. These types of beggars are on the increase and becoming professionalized.

### **Reasons for Poverty in Nigeria**

According to Borgen Magazine (2020), the following factors are mentioned as the reasons for the increasing and severe poverty level in Nigeria;

1. **Corruption:** Corruption is the major reason why poverty is at such a high rate in



Nigeria. In fact, many economists have declared that it is the “single greatest obstacle” that prevents Nigeria from prospering. Corruption is endemic in every area of our social life in Nigeria. Consequently, poorer communities are suffering and the economic structure has experienced disruption.

2. **Unemployment:** The high rate of unemployment also lead to extreme poverty. Unemployment typically exists among the younger population. In fact, only about 44.6% of young people have employment, leaving more than half of the population unemployed. A major cause of unemployment is the fact that people tend to focus more on oil production rather than a variety of other industries. Not only does the country suffer from a lack of employment but it also suffers from a lack of development, progress and diversification of its industries.
3. **Inequality:** Along with corruption and unemployment, another major driver of poverty in Nigeria is the presence of inequality within the nation. Nigerian women are subject to unequal treatment in terms of labor, education and property. While about 79% of women make up the rural labor force, they are the least likely to own their own property. Along with this, only about 6% of Nigerian women have achieved literacy, the rest are still illiterate. Inequalities in Nigeria are a result of poorly allocated resources and corruption. While Nigeria has plenty of resources, these resources are typically reserved for the wealthy who can afford them. Along with this, corruption within the government leads to further inequalities between the political elite and those living in poverty (<https://www.borgenmagazine.com/the-poverty-capital-of-the-world-nigeria/>).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on vicious cycle theory. The theory of Vicious Cycle of Poverty (Nurske, 1950), seeks to explain the persistence of poverty in society and indicates that poverty as a subculture, passes from one generation to another and becomes institutionalized amongst the poor. It is one of the characteristics which prepare the ground for the phenomenon of street begging. It emphasized on the people's ability to manage risk rather than their attitude to risk as a way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Other attributes of poverty which make escape difficult are poor health, lack of skills, lack of self-confidence or support mechanism, remoteness from market, lack of physical asset or borrowing power, malnutrition, tendency towards indolence, lack of cognitive psyche, feeling of incapability, dependence on others, feeling of unworthiness or combination of the above (Ahmadi, 2010, Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009). As a result, the poor are trapped in the situation with little chance of escaping, such that in a vicious process, poverty is maintained among the poor across the generations. The vicious cycle of poverty helps to explain the existence of begging across the generations (Jelili, 2009).





This work is linked to the theory of vicious cycle. The reasons for linking this work to the above stated theory is because: The vicious cycle theory seeks to explain the perpetuation of poverty in communities and indicates that poverty and inequality as a subculture, passes from one generation to another and becomes institutionalized amongst the poorest of the poor.

### **Consequences of Street Begging**

A handful of studies (Jowette, Banks and Brown, 2001 and Lynch, 2005), have identified some consequences of begging. Some of these include:

1. **Sexual Abuse:** The dependency on public individuals by beggars has its dangers. One of such is that some of them have been identified as victims of HIV/AIDS (FGN/UNICEF, 2010). The chances of contracting AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases are much higher for this set of people. The implication is that those in this business and the rest of the population are at risk. Since women and young girls are the most vulnerable, chances are that they end up with unplanned pregnancies, as seen in the case of most female beggars in Nigeria.
2. **Kidnapping and Prostitution:** Trafficking in women and children in recent times is most distressing and inhuman. Many beggars in the streets risk being kidnapped and forced into prostitution by individuals.
3. **Crime and Illegal Drug Trade:** In a previous research, an overwhelming 82% of respondents indicated that if they were unable to beg or prevented from doing so by law, they would resort to other illegal activities (Horn and Cooke, 2001). One of the commonest crime, which they were likely to be involved in, is Shop lifting as indicated by 76% of respondents (Jowette, Banks and Brown, 2001). Unsuspecting beggars are likely victims of illegal drug trafficking, due to promise of better life by ring of traffickers.
4. **Accident Risks:** Street begging could be risky to life especially in areas where there is heavy traffic. Beggars risk being run over by careless drivers. It is more likely that beggars constitute a great percentage of corpses occasionally found on the highways in Nigeria.
5. **Police Harassment:** In countries where begging has been banned, beggars risk imprisonment for a year, for first offenders or two years for a second or subsequent offence (Lynch, 2005). Many are also victims of police torture and brutality, particularly those who are 'tagged sleeps' (Forell, McCarron and Schetzer, 2005).



**Results Presentation**

**Figure 1 locations of street begging activities in Enugu State, Nigeria**

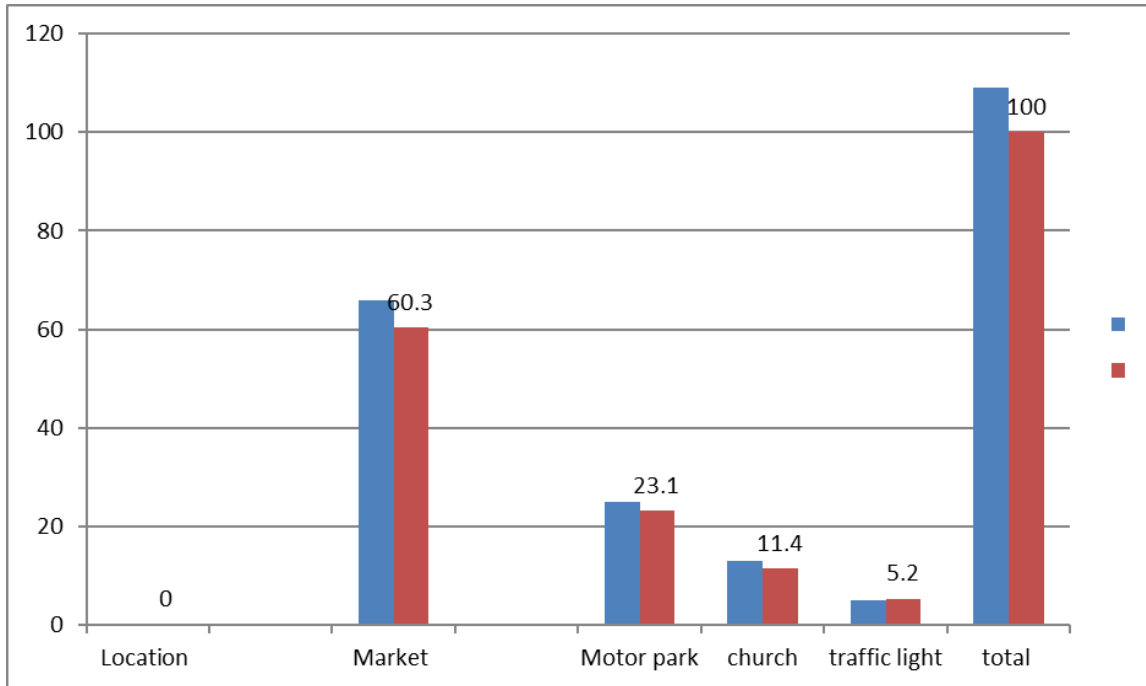


Figure 1 revealed that most of the street beggars in Enugu state carry out their activities in the market places where there is high flow of persons and business transactions.

**Table 1 Observed patterns and strategies of street begging in Enugu State Nigeria**

Characteristic	Percentage %
Corporate beggars	11%
ATM spot beggars	7%
Begging with terminal ill persons	40%
Begging for charity/church envelop	18%
Begging with hired new born babies	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above 1 revealed that street beggars in Enugu state have adopted patterns which are classified in the table. These new patterns and strategies are different from other known patterns.





**Table 2 Showing risks faced by street beggars in Enugu State Nigeria**

Risks	Male Number	Percentage (%)	Female Number	Percentage (%)
Sexual exploitation	46	24.8%	139	75.1%
Kidnapping	53	28.6%	132	71.3%
Road accident	45	24.3%	140	75.6%
Physical assault	77	41.6%	108	58.3%
Forced prostitution	23	12.4%	163	87.5%

Table 2 revealed that sexual exploitation is the most risk faced by street beggars in Enugu state. From the data gathered and analyzed, female beggars were highly sexually exploited than their male counterpart.

**Discussion of Results**

Findings show that 60.3% of the sampled street beggars carry out their activities in the market places where there is high flow of persons and business transactions. These street beggars swamp on pedestrians as soon as they approach or enter the market areas for business transactions. These beggars in the markets, sometimes move in groups especially the female folks carrying babies. Other locations used by street beggars in Enugu state are motor parks 23.1%, churches 11.4% and traffic lights 5.2%. In terms of patterns and strategies employed by street beggars in Enugu State, it was observed that 40% of the beggars use terminally ill persons to beg, begging with hired new born babies 24%, begging for charity and church envelop 18%, corporate begging/beggars 11% and ATM spot beggars 7%.

Street beggars are faced with so many risks on daily basis as they go out to beg in different locations. Sexual exploitation is revealed to be the most risk faced by street beggars in Enugu State, during data gathering and tabulation it showed that female beggars were highly sexually exploited than their male counterpart. 75.1% of the female street beggars are sexually exploited, 24.8% of male street beggars suffer sexual exploitation. Kidnapping risk 71.3% of the female street beggars are afraid of being kidnapped, while only 28.6% of the males face the risk of getting kidnapped. 75.6% of female street beggars risk being hit or crushed by cars, while 24.3% of males face such risk. 58.3% of the female respondents had experienced physical assault by commuters and male counterparts 41.6%. Street beggars also face forced prostitution, from the research 87.5% of the female respondents are faced with forced prostitution, while only 12.4% of their male counterparts face such.

Street beggars face all sorts of abuse, inhuman treatment and humiliation every day in the hands of commuters and other members of the society. They are treated in so many disgusting ways and are called derogatory names.



## **Conclusion**

The research investigated spatiality of street begging and beggars in Enugu State Nigeria. The research revealed that street beggars adopt different strategies and patterns that are not known by the society to carry out their activities without the masses raising an eyebrow. The research also revealed different locations frequently used by beggars. Inequalities and unemployment have increased the rate of destitution, poverty and crime rate in Nigeria. The inequality gap in Nigeria continues to grow despite the huge oil revenue generated by the government. Corruption, unemployment, nepotism, inequalities have damaged the economic foundation of Nigeria and framework, thereby accelerating menace of poverty and also made it to be the poverty capital of the world. Street begging is becoming a norm and professionalized in Enugu State and Nigeria at large. Street begging, is a reflection of the level of destitution and poverty in our society which must be tackled by all concerned.

## **Recommendations**

Street begging deserves a collaboration of the efforts by the government, Nigerian populace, counsellors and Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, Community Based Organizations in order to fight the scourge of poverty, inequalities and destitution in Nigeria. Since poverty and inequalities are the cardinal causes of street begging in Enugu State and Nigeria as a whole.

Based on findings of this research and also to address the problem of street beggars and begging activities in Enugu State, the following recommendations are made:

- Given that poverty is the underlining factor of street begging and destitution in Enugu State, remedial measures should entail poverty alleviation measures for the street beggars. This may be different from the current measures where street beggars are simply evacuated from the street and city centres without adequate provision for poverty alleviation of the street beggars.
- The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, social welfare agencies and relevant NGO's should take terminally sick beggars off the streets for proper treatment and medical care.
- Federal and state governments should enact a law and formulate a policy to ban and sanction all forms of street begging, and efforts must be put in place by all stakeholders to ensure that such law and policy is implemented.
- The state should develop a policy of training and equipping the street beggars with skills and tools for self-reliance.



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