

Street Begging among School Age Children and Social Protection Policy in South western, Nigeria

M. Kolawole Aliyu and Joshua Temitope Kayode

Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjahss.2013/vol12n4132>

Published April 29, 2024

Citation: Aliyu M.K. and Kayode J.T. (2024) Street Begging among School Age Children and Social Protection Policy in South western, Nigeria, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.12, No.4, pp.1-32

Abstract: *This study discussed the factors that caused street begging among school age children and investigated social protection policies aimed at eradicating the menace in Southwestern, Nigeria. It also examined the impact of the social protection policies on street begging among school-age children and assessed the challenges confronting social protection interventions. The study's primary data were sourced through multi-choice structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. The study administered one hundred and fifty copies of questionnaires on teachers, parents, and school age children in Ondo, Oyo and Lagos States. Interviews were conducted with twelve 12 respondents on the basis of four from each state based on their experience of street begging by school-age children and social protection policies meant to tackle the menace. Purposively sampled interviewees were from ministries of education and schools, with two education officials from each of the three states and two school principals from each of the three states. Secondary data were from books, relevant journals, government publications, policy guides, gazettes, and online publications. We analyzed quantitative data with the use of descriptive and inferential statistical tools, and qualitative data with content analysis. The study showed poverty, unemployment, broken homes, and poor feeding and other factors as responsible for street begging among school age children. Some of the social protection policies that are in place to eradicate street begging by school-age children in Southwestern Nigeria include Zero Project, Better Education Service Delivery for All, Integrated Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education, and other domesticated policies of the federal government. Social protection policies in Southwestern, Nigeria are impactful in reducing street begging but poor funding, change in government, overstretched facilities, and corruption are some of the challenges militating against them. The study concluded that street begging by school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria is a social menace that requires intensification of existing social protection policies and serious government attention.*

Keywords: street begging, school age children, poverty, child poverty, social protection policies

INTRODUCTION

Street begging by school age children is a social menace. It makes young learners to have emotional, economic, and psychological trauma, and a great concern to Nigerian government. Begging on the streets while children should be in schools are due to poverty, parental separation, deprivation, and cultural belief. However, poverty remains a major challenge responsible for street begging across the world. To overcome poverty and other associated challenges, school age children resort to street begging (Bukoye, 2015). The situation in Nigeria is worse, because it is one of the countries with the highest number of poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The World Bank's 2017 Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals noted that 35 million Nigerians lived in extreme poverty as of 2013 earning less than \$1.90 a day. Furthermore, World Bank (2018) reported that 86.9 million Nigerians lived in poverty. In addition, the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index report noted that more than 133 million Nigerians are poor (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Given the level of poverty in Nigeria, children who live in poverty make efforts to get out of it. National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reported that 67.28 million children, which was 67.5% of Nigerian population, lived in poverty. The situation of child poverty in Nigeria is consistently increasing. In Nigeria, child poverty and child deprivation are increasing levels (UNICEF, 2018). Street begging is prevalent among children who are between the ages of three and seventeen years. It was hitherto rampant in northern Nigeria where children move about in groups of five to twenty, with plates or bowls in their hands soliciting stipends or food from people (Alhassan, 2015).

There is a new twist to school age children begging in Southwestern Nigeria commonly referred to as "please, I lost my mother's money or sorry I want to eat" (Amuda, 2021). Globally, state and non-state actors made social protection of human beings to ensure equality and eradication of vulnerabilities among citizens (Adeoti & Popoola, 2012). According to Onyeonoru (2018), the global social protection is to ensure that governments prioritize the protection of their citizens especially the children. The United Nations Organization has put up the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 to put an end to all forms of poverty by 2030 while Target 1.3 concentrates on the potency of social protection in addressing the menace. Some countries are doing well to address the challenge, others, including Nigeria are still in infant stage. In Africa, there have been emphasis on social protection instruments such as the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (CAP), the African Union's Social Policy Framework (2008), the African Civil Society Platform for Social Protection Strategy for Africa and the African Union Vision 2063 among others (Onyeonoru, 2018).

The Nigerian government has keyed into the global social protection policies but has not made sufficient efforts in the area of social protection of its children (Holmes, Akinrimisi, Morgan, & Buck, 2012). Under the National Development Frameworks and Social Protection (NDFSP), there is the National Social Protection Policy framework that cover social justice, inclusive growth, and

equity through mechanisms that can mitigate poverty and unemployment (Aluko & Olanipekun, 2019). The policy include The Teach Nigeria Scheme (TNS), The Youth Employment Agency (YEA), The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), The Home-grown School Feeding (HSF), The Free Education Scheme for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and The Micro Credit Scheme (MCS) (Fanifosi, et. al. 2022). Social protection of children is vital because children are important for the continuous progress of any society (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). There is desire to protect children but numerous challenges have thwarted the good intention of government.

Nigeria government's desire to address the menace of street begging by school-age children propelled the federal government to prohibit street begging, evacuate street beggars, relocate foreign and non-indigenes to their home countries, and construct rehabilitation centers for beggars (Onifade, 2019). These efforts are to improve the living conditions of children (ILO, 2022). Other measures are the Child's Rights Act, the National Program on the Elimination of Child Labor, Family Nutritional Support Program (FNSP) (Olaore, Ogunlade, & Aham-Chiabuotu, 2016). The inadequacies of the programs have exposed more children in Nigeria to extreme poverty, which have serious impacts on their growth, welfare, health, and education (Lawal, 2018). The rate of begging on the street by school-age children when they should be learning in schools in Southwestern, Nigeria is worrisome. Many scholars have looked at various dimensions of street begging and poverty among school age children, there is no empirical study on the relationship between street begging and social protection policy, especially in Southwestern, Nigeria, hence this study.

Research Objectives

- (i) Identify the factors that are responsible for street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria;
- (ii) Identify the social protection policies aimed at eradicating street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria;
- (iii) Examine the impact of the social protection policies on street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria; and
- (iv) Assess the challenges militating against social protection policies meant to eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- (i) What are the factors responsible for street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria?
- (ii) What social protection policies put in place to eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria?
- (iii) What impacts do social protection policies have on eradication of street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria?

- (iv) What are the challenges militating against social protection policies in eradication of street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria?

Research Assumptions

- (i) Poverty accounts for the high prevalence of street begging by school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria.
- (ii) Several social protection policies exist to eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria
- (iii) Social protection policies have significant impacts on the eradication of street begging among children of school age in Southwestern, Nigeria
- (iv) Certain challenges inhibit the social protection policies from eradicating street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a mixed methods design. It involves both quantitative and qualitative data. We generated quantitative data from primary source through multi-choice questionnaires. We used the modified five-point Likert scale questionnaire with options of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Neutral (N); Disagree (DA); and Strongly Disagree (SD) to generate quantitative data. The qualitative data were from a semi-structured interview guide. The study's population includes school-age children beggars, school authorities, parents, and educationally based non-governmental organizations. The study's scope is Southwestern Nigeria, focusing on Ondo, Oyo, and Lagos states with the use of cluster sampling to select mutually homogenous but internally heterogeneous groups. The selection of Ondo, Oyo, and Lagos states in Southwestern Nigeria conforms with the multiple indicator cluster survey, MICS 6 (2021) showing the states as having a very high number of street beggars.

We sampled 150 respondents using Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ where n sample size, N = population and e = margin of error, to generate quantitative data, based on fifty respondents from each state, Ondo, Oyo, and Lagos. We also interviewed twelve respondents with four from each state based on their expertise. The interviewees were from ministries of education and schools, with two education officials from each of the three states and two school principals from each of the three states respectively. Secondary data were from published government and non-governmental reports, books, journal articles, donor reports among others. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 was the tool for analysis of quantitative data with descriptive and inferential statistical methods, and thematically analyzed the qualitative data using content analysis.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Begging, street begging and school age children

The concept of begging has no uniform definition. Some scholars view begging as an indicator of poverty, while others are of the opinion that not all beggars are poor (Aluko & Olanipekun, 2019). Generally, begging is the act in which an individual asks passers-by for money, however, begging does not only take place in public places and is often not limited to money. Beggars also solicit for other items such as food or clothing material (Adefowokan, 2017). In their opinions, Sarki, Marcus & Auta (2021), begging is a defiant social behavior, a result of poverty that involves the collection of resources from others. Furthermore, "mendicancy" and "vagrancy" are two forms of begging. Mendicancy is commonest among those with religious affiliations, vagrancy relates to the act of begging by individuals who have no jobs or homes such as wanderers, displaced persons or refugees (Jelili, 2013). Contrasting other views (Onifade, 2019) noted that not all beggars utilize soliciting words; some of them insult and threaten people. As noted by Aluko & Olanipekun (2019), beggars are usually involved in social vices and constitute a nuisance to the environment. However, beggars also have the potentials that can benefit the society.

Street begging refers to the act of requesting monetary, non-monetary, or other forms of material things from passers-by in public places or streets. Poverty and homelessness influence street beggars. There are destitute, disabled or genuine, mother-of-many, tout, stranded professional, entrepreneur, child, and online begging. Street begging affects urban centers than rural areas (Lawal, Aliu, & Irhue, 2022). Street begging also inflicts dangers on social and geographical look of an area, and a problem to the government, law enforcement agencies, social service providers, and members of the public (Tafadzwa & Bekezela, 2014; Sarki, Marcus, & Auta, 2021). As noted by Sifawa (2018), there are active and passive street beggars with active beggars moving from one place to another while passive beggars are seated or standing in one position to receive alms (Sifawa, 2018). Street beggars use different techniques such as telling lies or making-up stories (Jelili, 2006).

School-age children are children between the ages of five and twelve years, who supposed to be students in schools. They are also child-begging (beggars) because they beg for alms on the streets (Aluko & Olanipekun, 2019). Child begging has become a survival strategy for children, who do not have alternative source of income. Child beggars are prime targets for criminals. Criminals can abduct child beggars or coerce them into participating in crimes. Child beggars are objects of ritual and sexual abuses. Child beggars exchange their proceeds in exchange for protection, leaving them homeless with little as gains (Onyeonoru, 2018). Child beggars are vulnerable due to the circumstances of their birth or environment. Some parents and guardians use their children to solicit money from people. They believe that potential donors are more likely to be sympathetic to children pleas that of adults (Kennedy & Fitzpatrick, 2001). There are instances where parents and guardians

inflict harm upon children, expose them to public spaces before their wounds fully heal, to elicit sympathy from potential donors (Aluko & Olanipekun, 2019).

Factor accountable for school age begging

Poverty is one of the factors that made children to beg. Poverty refers to a situation in which an individual or a group of people lacks the financial and material capacity to meet up his basic needs. It is also a condition of insufficiency leading to low standard of living. Child poverty is a situation in which children under the age of eighteen live in poverty, with limited access to essential resources such as food, clothing, education, sanitation, water, health, nutrition, and housing among others. Child poverty is an extension of household poverty and have adverse effects on children. As pointed out by Kennedy & Fitzpatrick (2001), there is a cause-effect relationship among street begging and poverty, unemployment, and healthcare system. The desire to survive amid economic hardship has driven children into street begging. National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that 58.7% of Nigerians are poor multi-dimensionally while 67.5% of children are poor.

In Nigeria, the act of begging is also a cultural practice, particularly among certain ethnic groups. For example, nursing mothers of certain tribal extraction with twins seek alms in public places. The presence of children elicit sympathy from passers-by, prompting generous donations to support the mothers. This practice aligns with the religious significance of almsgiving as a pillar of faith. According to Sarki, Marcus, and Auta (2021), individuals fulfill a religious duty by providing alms, and a conduit for blessings, and avenue to accumulate spiritual merit (Amuda, 2021).

In addition, the 'Almajiri' system of Quranic education in Northern Nigeria, according to Mijinyawa (2001), contributes to child begging. The 18th-century jihad led by Usman Danfodio, poses challenges, leading to rural-urban migration among children. Mijinyawa (2001) notes that the jihad fostered the emergence of delinquents and criminals, depriving potential future leaders of essential opportunities for a better life. Similarly, Adefowokan (2017) highlights the 'Almajiri' practice, wherein young boys undergo Islamic studies under clerics. The lofty aspirations of young men leaving their homes to serve Allah and receive assistance from their communities often turn sour as they find themselves begging on the streets instead.

Another factor causing street begging is homelessness. Aye (1996) reported that there are approximately 100 million homeless children globally, with Nigeria alone accounting for about 15,000. Horn and Cooke (2001) note that 43% of beggars have experienced long-term homelessness, with 71% of them resorting to sleeping rough. Danczuk (2000) observed that 80% of beggars are without permanent shelter. Additionally, familial structure can push individuals towards begging on the streets. Many children flee their homes due to perceived strictness from stepmothers or neglect from busy parents. Separation or divorce can also lead to financial strain, prompting mothers to send their children to beg (UNICEF, 2018). Mental illness and substance abuse are also contributory to the prevalence of street begging.

Child starvation, deprivation, alienation, mortality and survival

Child starvation refers to a severe form of malnutrition in children, resulting from a prolonged lack of adequate nutrition. It occurs when a child's body does not receive sufficient essential nutrients, leading to stunted growth, weakened immune system, cognitive impairments, and even mortality. A child's well-being hinges on access to safe and nutritious food, parental socioeconomic status, good environmental conditions, and nutritional knowledge of caregivers. Good food and environment play crucial roles in determining children's nutritional health. Thus, socioeconomic conditions, feeding, hygiene, environment, healthcare, and support systems, dietary intake shape children nutritional status. Child starvation is associated with poverty, inadequate access to nutritious food, and other socio-economic factors. Child starvation contribute to street begging when families' extreme poverty makes them to send their children to beg for survival.

Child deprivation refers to a condition where a child does not have access to essential resources necessary for his healthy development. Lack of essential necessities leads to maltreatment, infringement of rights, degradation, and exploitation (Adeoti and Popoola (2012). Amuda (2021) emphasizes the reliance of children on public authorities for access to necessities, underscoring the disproportionate burden placed on them compared to adults. According to Fanifosi et al. (2022), children should have access to good health care, education, nutrition, water, shelter, and social security. However, many children in Nigeria face deprivation of these rights, leading to challenges such as inadequate education, nutrition, healthcare, and exposure to child abuse and labor (Alhassan, 2015). Despite efforts to reduce child mortality, nearly one million Nigerian children die annually before reaching the age of five, with a quarter of these deaths occurring within the first years (UNICEF, 2016). Deprivation can be material, educational, healthcare, emotional, social, and cultural. Child deprivation is associated with poverty and social inequalities.

The concept of alienation refers to a condition in which individuals or groups experience a sense of separation or isolation from various aspects of their lives. Karl Marx examined alienation in the context of economic and social relations. Child alienation refers to a complex situation where a child experiences a sense of separation or detachment from significant aspects of their life, often involving relationships with parents, family members, or their broader social environment. Alienation can be parental, emotional, educational, and peer.

Child mortality, under-five mortality or child death is the likelihood of a child passing away between birth and precisely 5 years of age. It is the passing away of young children under five years of age. Given the high infant mortality rates in certain regions globally, the primary focus in promoting effective child development is safeguarding children during their most vulnerable early years, and combating disease and malnutrition. The mortality of under-five children serves as a pivotal metric defining population well-being, often considered a developmental indicator of health and socioeconomic status, indicative of overall quality of life, as gauged by life expectancy.

Child survival refers to the ability of a child to live during the vulnerable stages of infancy and early childhood. Child survival diminishes child mortality. Child survival initiatives promote the well-being of children in areas with challenges of poverty, poor healthcare, and other socio-economic factors. Child survival strategies encompass proactive actions taken by individuals and communities to mitigate the risk, duration, or severity of health challenges of infants (Fanifosi, et. al. 2022). These strategies include breastfeeding, immunization, oral rehydration therapy, zinc supplementation, immunizations, micronutrient supplementation, growth monitoring, female education, family planning, and food fortification.

Social protection policies and the Nigerian experience

Social protection policies are all forms of policy interventions by state or non-state actors targeted at providing income transfer to poor people. They are also to protect the vulnerable at the social and economic levels. The World Bank (2004) also defined social protection as "a collection of measures to improve human capital, ranging from labor market interventions, publicly mandated unemployment or old-age insurance to targeted income support." Social protection interventions assist individuals, households, and communities to manage the income risks that leave people vulnerable (Ortiz, 2001). Globally, social protection is an important way to increase social development and solve the problem of vulnerability and exclusion caused by poverty (UNICEF, 2016). National Planning Commission (2021) pointed out that the major goal of social responsibility is the reduction of vulnerability experienced by low-income households concerning consumption and access to basic services. In Nigeria, governmental and non-governmental organizations have collaborated to address job creation, housing, essential amenities, social security, and health insurance for citizens (Morgan & Yablonski, 2011). Scholars and international organizations' noted that the county's social protection programs have influenced Nigeria's integration into Vision 20: 2020 program. Nigeria's social protection strategies are to lift the impoverished out of destitution, provide financial assistance to the ill and retirees, boost enrollment in public schools, address short-term job needs through skills training, and mitigate the impact of natural and human-induced calamities on property (Umukoro, 2013). Few of Nigeria's social protection policies are the followings.

President Olusegun signed the Child Protection Rights Act into law in 2003 that advocates the right to survival of every child. The act provides that the interest of a child is paramount in all considerations. These rights also emphasize proper parental care, provision of leisure, recreation, and cultural activities, health and heal services and most importantly the responsibilities of a child to a parent vice visa. Child rights also prohibit child labor or abuse in any form, including street begging, and provides punishment to anyone that violates any of these provisions. A child must be properly cared for and not as object of begging. The act also makes government to make order and exercise control over a child in any situation whereby the parent or guardian is unable to exercise

control. (UNICEF 2016). The Act recognizes all persons under 18 years as children to ensure their survival, welfare, and growth.

President Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) program on September 30, 1999, in Sokoto State to address poverty by parents, and inability to afford formal education for their children (Umukoro, 2013). This initiative provides nine years of basic education, eliminates illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty and foster national development and integration. Despite its initiation in 1999, the lack of an enabling law initially impeded its progress. The UBE Act, signed into law on May 26, 2004, mandates basic education coverage, with the finance shared between State and local Governments, and a 2 percent allocation from the Federal Government's Consolidated Revenue Fund (Umukoro, 2013). The Act establishes the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to coordinate program implementation through State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB) and Local Government Education Authorities. While Nigeria has achieved progress in primary school enrollment, there are over seven million children still out of school (National Planning Commission, 2021).

The National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), launched in 2001, involves diverse stakeholders ranging from government bodies to civil society organizations, research institutions, private sector entities, women's groups, and concerned individuals (Onifade, 2019). NAPEP tackles extreme poverty and long long-standing issues highlighted by stakeholders, such as the lack of a policy framework, insufficient stakeholder engagement, ineffective implementation mechanisms, absence of policy evaluation tools, and inadequate coordination (Umukoro, 2013). NAPEP oversees and synchronizes all poverty alleviation endeavors, streamline actions, optimize resource allocation, and ensure the greatest possible benefit for citizens. The program has four initiatives, which are the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), the Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS), and the National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) (Umukoro, 2013). The Community-based Health Insurance Scheme (CBHIS) shields the informal sector and marginalized populations from the financial strain of high out-of-pocket healthcare costs (Hagen-Zanker & Holmes, 2012).

The Conditional Cash Transfer programs provides financial assistance to impoverished households, contingent upon their fulfillment of specified behavioral criteria, linked to the healthcare and education of children. The rationale behind conditional cash transfer initiatives aligns closely with the United States Department for International Development that effective social safety nets can reduce poverty, forestall the descent of impoverished individuals into deeper destitution, and provide a pathway out of severe poverty. Conditional cash transfer program in Nigeria domiciles in "Care of the People". It entails the provision of monthly stipends to exceptionally impoverished households, contingent upon the condition that they ensure their school-age children attend basic education and utilize all available free healthcare services, including immunization (Umukoro, 2013). The goal is to disrupt the transmission of poverty, diminish the susceptibility of the most economically

vulnerable in society to prevailing socioeconomic hazards, and enhance the potential for human contribution to economic development at the community, state, and national levels (Hagen-Zanker & Holmes, 2012). The program involves beneficiary households receiving a monthly Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) for one year, along with a lump sum Poverty Reduction Accelerator Investment (PRAI) (Aluko & Olanipekun, 2019). The program targets households with specific characteristics, such as a being economically disadvantaged, elderly individuals, persons with physical disabilities, and those affected by HIV/AIDS (Umukoro, 2013). Identification of beneficiaries is by a Community Development Committee comprising a district head, social welfare officer, health assistant, primary school headmaster, women's leader, ward councilor, and religious leaders (one imam and one pastor). Originally piloted in 12 states, the program became mandatory nationwide in the second phase and is presently in its third phase. The state governments are obliged to match funding and program implementation. Yet, the program coverage remains limited, with estimates suggesting that COPE has reached approximately 22,000 households, covering less than 0.001 percent of the impoverished population (Umukoro, 2013).

The Ambassadors Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP) is a vital facet of the United States Government's African Education Initiative (AEI). Administered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on behalf of the American government and its citizens. This educational initiative aims to enhance access to quality primary education in Africa. According to Umukoro (2013), the program covers scholarships, textbook provision, teacher training, and community engagement. Since its inception in Nigeria in 2004, AGSP has supported 9,149 students in 411 schools across 13 states. Presently, 255 students in 26 schools in Niger State and 235 students in 55 schools in Nassarawa State benefit from AGSP. The U.S. Government has allocated over \$1.2 million in scholarships.

Edo Girl's Power Initiative (GPI) is another initiative, established in 1993 by BeneMadunagu and Grace Osakue in Nigeria. It aims to empower girls with information, skills, and opportunities to overcome societal challenges they face. Onifade (2019) underscores GPI's mission to educate girls aged between 10 and 18 years on health, rights, self-reliance skills, and gender-specific needs through information dissemination, communication, counseling, and community intervention. The recent removal of fuel subsidies by the Federal Government of Nigeria has resulted in the Fuel Subsidy Reform Palliative Measures. This removal has increased the pump price of fuel, sparking divergent views among analysts regarding its impact on poverty reduction. Some people posit that the subsidy elimination will address the issue of poverty; others contend that it is likely to escalate poverty by diminishing the purchasing power and demand of most Nigerians. To mitigate the adverse effects on the populace, the government has taken steps, such as procuring diesel-powered public buses under the Urban Mass Transit Program.

Theorization school age children begging

This study adopts human capital theory and culture of poverty theory to explain street begging by school age children. We chose the two theories because they fit more appropriately into the subject matter of street begging among children.

The human capital theory is associated with Theodore Schult (1961) and Gary Becker (1964). The theory holds that all forms of investment that contribute to human development will result in higher socioeconomic conditions of the society. The theory argues that investing in human capital helps people acquire the necessary knowledge, capacity, and expertise needed by them to be productive. Therefore, people with such training, skills, and abilities are more central to increased productivity than those who lack them. The theory indicates that children may get involved in activities other than schooling if parents think that those other activities bring greater returns than education. Therefore, human capital investment in terms of education is dependent on the value placed on education via its opportunity cost against other possible options. Accordingly, children may prefer to be begging if they realize that it pays better than to stay in schools. The theory also explains why it is important to focus on the future implications of children actions. Many parents who prefer that their children beg on the street as against going to school fail to understand that while begging generates daily income, it has negative implications on the future productivity of such children.

The culture of poverty theory explains the impact of poverty on human preferences. Oscar Lewis introduced the theory in the late 1950s and argued that when poverty is predominant in any setting, there is always a sense of marginalization, inferiority, and helplessness. Thus, poor people come up with ways to deal with the circumstances. Street begging especially among school-age children has become a culture due to poverty. The "culture of poverty" theory, according to Lewis (1996), has different levels on individuals, parents, caregivers, and guardians that include weak ego, poor impulse, little capacity for deferring gratification, a sense of resignation, and an unstable family structure (Ering, 2000). There have been criticisms of the theory because of its generic presentation without unique characteristics to present area where poor people are weak. It also neglected western societies and the relevance of self-help programs in Africa to ameliorate the prevalence of poverty (Okolo, 2002). The theory is so relevant to the study because it sees street begging as an effort made by children of the poor to escape poverty. The theory however notes that within such family lines, poverty remains a predominant culture and influences the behavior of the poor children. Thus, children who engage in street begging do so to get out of poverty. However, while the theory has given different conceptions of poverty, it influences school-age children to beg on streets.

PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Factors responsible for street begging among school-age children

Table 1.1 below shows that poverty is the major factor responsible for street begging among school age children in southwestern Nigeria with 92.6% in agreement, (75.3% strongly agreed, and 17.3% agreed). The cumulative percentage of agreement (combining strongly agree and agree categories) is 92.6%, indicating a high level of consensus on the influence of poverty on street begging in this context. Cultural beliefs showed (25.3%) agreement with 9.3% strongly agreed and 16.0% agreed. For religion, 18.7% are in agreement, with 8.0% strongly agreed and 10.7% agreed. Physical disability or health challenges as a reason for street begging stood at 62% in agreement, with 24.0% strongly agreed and 38.0% agreed. Lastly, parental upbringing showed 49.4% agreement with 14.7% strongly agreed and 34.7% agreed. Other factors such as culture, religion, physical disability or health, and parental upbringing were not crucial factors that made school age children to beg. While it is true that people across the globe and other parts of the world employ their disabilities to beg it is not as rampant as poverty.

Table 1.1: Factors responsible for street begging among school age children

Statements	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Poverty is a major factor that influence street begging among children of school age in Southwestern, Nigeria	113	(75.3)	26	(17.3)	4	(2.7)	5	(3.3)	1	(.7)
Cultural beliefs make children of school age to beg for alms in Southwestern Nigeria	14	(9.3)	24	(16.0)	38	(25.3)	46	(30.7)	28	(18.7)
Religion influences street begging among school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria	12	(8.0)	16	(10.7)	21	(14.0)	49	(32.7)	52	(34.7)
Children of school age takes advantage of their physical disabilities or health challenges to engage in street begging in Southwestern, Nigeria	36	(24.0)	57	(38.0)	21	(14.0)	28	(18.7)	8	(5.3)
Parental upbringing gives school age children the opportunity to beg in Southwestern, Nigeria.	22	(14.7)	52	(34.7)	26	(17.3)	30	(20.0)	20	(13.3)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Results in Table 1.2 below shows poverty as responsible with highest agreement as responsible for street begging among school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria. Lagos state showed (48%), followed by Ondo and Oyo states with 46% agreement respectively.

Table 1.2: Crosstab Count

		Poverty is a major factor that influence street begging among children of school age in Southwestern, Nigeria					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
State	Ondo	36	10	1	3	0	50
	Oyo	36	10	2	2	0	50
	Lagos	41	7	1	0	1	50
Total		113	27	4	5	1	150

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 1.3: Chi-Square Tests on States and Perception of Poverty

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.409 ^a	8	.002
Likelihood Ratio	18.057	8	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.128	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	150		

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

a. 9 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

The Chi-Square tests, including Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square, and Linear-by-Linear Association, all suggest that there is a statistically significant association between the

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK

variables "state" and "perception of poverty." The basis of the conclusion is on the p-values associated with these tests, which are all less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. Children of school age take advantage of poverty to engage in street begging.

Table 1.4: Crosstab Count

Children of School age takes advantage of their physical disabilities or health challenge to engage in street begging in Southwestern, Nigeria

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
State	Ondo	15	23	7	3	2	50
	Oyo	10	21	7	10	2	50
	Lagos	11	13	7	15	4	50
Total		36	57	21	28	8	150

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 1.5: Chi-Square Tests on perception of physical disabilities as a factor responsible for begging

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.900 ^a	8	.115
Likelihood Ratio	14.005	8	.082
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.093	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	150		

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

a. 3 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.67.

The Pearson Chi-Square and Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square tests do not show a statistically significant association between the variables at the conventional significance level of 0.05. Both p-values are greater than 0.05. However, the Linear-by-Linear Association test does show a statistically significant linear trend between the variables, with a p-value of .004, which is below the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that there is a linear association between the variables. This implies that the Linear-by-Linear Association test indicates a statistically significant linear trend between the variables, suggesting an association between the states and the perception that children with physical disabilities engage in street begging.

Social Protection Policies that eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

Table 1.6 below presents data on the social protection policies that eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria. The most significant social protection policy is compulsory education for school age children (88%) agreement, with 64% strongly agreed and 24% agreed. In addition, 81.3% agree that vocational training programs to develop practical skills and opportunities for school-age children with 43% strongly agreed and 38% agreed. Next to the above is 66.6% of the respondents in agreement that government gives financial assistance and micro credit facility schemes to parents and guardians with 35.3% strongly agreed and 31.3% agreed. In addition, the results showed 70% of respondents who agreed that there is provision of comprehensive social welfare programs that take care of healthcare, nutrition and other basic needs of schools age children with 28.7% strongly agreed and 41.3% agreed. Lastly, that community-based organization and local authorities help create awareness to reduce street begging receive lowest level of agreement of 59.3% with 20% strongly agreed and 39.3% agreed. The data shows that 122 respondents of 150 agreed that there are vocational training programs in place to aid skill acquisition and development. With 105 (70%) of the respondents, who agreed that there are comprehensive social welfare programs that take care of healthcare, nutrition and other basic needs of school age children in Southwestern Nigeria. About 89 respondents are of the opinion that there is collaboration between community-based organizations and local authority and this would largely aid in creating awareness to stop street begging by school age children.

Table 1.6: Social Protection policies that eradicate street begging among school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

Statements	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Provision of free and compulsory education for school-age children is one of the social protection policies to eradicate street begging in the Southwestern, Nigeria.	96	(64.0)	36	(24.0)	8	(5.3)	7	(4.7)	3	(2.0)
There are vocational training programs to develop practical skills and opportunities for school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria.	65	(43.3)	57	(38.0)	12	(8.0)	13	(8.7)	3	(2.0)
Offer of financial support and microcredit schemes to parents/guardians of school-age children are available in Southwestern, Nigeria	53	(35.3)	47	(31.3)	28	(18.7)	17	(11.3)	5	(3.3)
There are comprehensive social welfare programs that take care of healthcare, nutrition, and other basic needs of school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria	43	(28.7)	62	(41.3)	17	(11.3)	20	(13.3)	8	(5.3)
There is collaboration with community-based organizations and local authorities with a view to creating awareness and driving community-driven initiatives in Southwestern, Nigeria	30	(20.0)	59	(39.3)	29	(19.3)	24	(16.0)	8	(5.3)

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The impact of social protection policies on street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

Table 1.7 showed the impact of social protection policies on street begging, which has led increase in school enrolment in southwestern, Nigeria, with results showed 61.3% in agreement, with 21.3% strongly agreed and 40% agreed. In addition, 59.1% corroborated the effect of social policies as changing the children's perception to see education as a life-sustaining asset with 23.5% strongly agreed and 35.6 % agreed. Furthermore, 56.6% are in agreement, with 23.3% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that social protection policies have effectively reduced street begging among school-age children in the region. The results showed that 54% agree, with 21.3% strongly agreed and 32.7% agreed that social protection policies have made school-age children to stay in school during the weekdays. However, 22.7% of the respondents are of the contrary opinion that the policy does not hold back the engagement of school age children in street begging. 51.7% of the respondents indicated that social protection policies have made school-age children more punctual in school because of the school feeding program, with 14.8% strongly agreed and 36.9% agreed. Thus, this showed that social protection policies played a key role in improving school attendance of school-age children and were capable of effectively reducing the rate at which children engage in street begging in the region.

Table 1.7: The impact of social protection policies on street begging among school age children in the Southwestern, Nigeria

Statements	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Social protection policies by governments of the Southwestern, Nigeria have effectively reduced street begging among school-age children	35	(23.3)	50	(33.3)	24	(16.0)	28	(18.7)	13	(8.7)
Social protection policies have led to increase in school enrolment by children of school age in Southwestern, Nigeria	32	(21.3)	60	(40.0)	27	(18.0)	19	(12.7)	12	(8.0)
Children of school age in Southwestern Nigeria now stay in school during week days because of social protection policies in use	32	(21.3)	49	(32.7)	35	(23.3)	24	(16.0)	10	(6.7)
Children of school age in Southwestern Nigeria are now more punctual in school because of school feeding	22	(14.8)	55	(36.9)	33	(22.1)	26	(17.4)	13	(8.7)
Social protection policies to curtail street begging have changed the children perception to see education as a life sustaining asset	35	(23.5)	53	(35.6)	31	(20.8)	20	(13.4)	10	(6.7)

Source: Fieldworks, 2023

Table 1.8: Cross tabulation

Social protection policies to curtail street begging have changed the children perception to see education as a life changing asset

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
State	Ondo	8	10	13	11	8	50
	Oyo	11	22	10	4	2	49
	Lagos	16	21	8	5	0	50
Total		35	53	31	20	10	149

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 1.9: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.628 ^a	8	.003
Likelihood Ratio	25.528	8	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	17.186	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	149		

a. 3 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.29.

The Chi-Square tests, including Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square, and Linear-by-Linear Association, all show statistically significant associations between the variables at the conventional significance level of 0.05. The p-values are .003, .001, and .000, respectively. The Linear-by-Linear Association test, with a highly significant p-value of .000, suggests a strong linear trend or association between the variables. The analysis indicates that there is a significant relationship between the perception of children seeing education as a life-sustaining asset and the implementation of social protection policies to curtail street begging across different states. The analysis therefore explains that there is a statistically significant association between the variables, particularly supported by the highly significant Linear-by-Linear Association test

Challenges that militate against social protection policies meant to eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

Table 1.10 presents the challenges faced by existing social protection policies. Of the 150 respondents, 72%, with 35.3 % strongly agreed and 36.7% agreed that poor funding is a challenge against social protection policies meant to eradicate street begging. Limited awareness as hindrance to social protection policies also has 72 %, with 24.7% strongly agreed and 47.3%. In addition, inadequate coordination, and collaboration among government and NGOs as a challenge has 64%, with 21.3% strongly agreed and 42.7% agreed. Poor monitoring and evaluation of enacted social policies has 69.4% with 30.7% strongly agreed and 38.7% agreed. Finally, socio-cultural factors stood at 61.3% with 21.3% strongly agreed and 40% agreed. In all, challenges of funding and limited awareness were the major challenges against socio protection policies meant to eradicate street begging among school age children in the study area.

Table 1.10 Challenges that militate against social protection policies meant to eradicate street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

Statements	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Poor funding of social protection programs hampers the effectiveness of eradicating street begging among school-age children in the Southwestern, Nigeria.	53	(35.3)	55	(36.7)	24	(16.0)	7	(4.7)	11	(7.3)
Limited awareness and understanding about available social protection policies among relevant beneficiaries	37	(24.7)	71	(47.3)	25	(16.7)	12	(8.0)	5	(3.3)
Inadequate coordination and collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and critical stakeholders undermine the exploration of social protection policies to eradicate street begging among school-age children.	32	(21.3)	64	(42.7)	40	(26.7)	8	(5.3)	6	(4.0)
Poor monitoring and evaluation of promulgated social protection policies are challenges to eradicate street begging among school age children.	46	(30.7)	58	(38.7)	24	(16.0)	17	(11.3)	5	(3.3)
Socio-cultural factors is a bottleneck to eradicating of street begging among children of school age in Southwestern, Nigeria	32	(21.3)	60	(40.0)	34	(22.7)	14	(9.3)	10	(6.7)

Fieldworks, 2023

Presentation of Qualitative Results

This study's interviews twelve respondents to further gain a deeper understanding of street begging among school age children and social protection policies in Southwestern Nigeria as follows.

Factors responsible for street begging among school-age children in southwestern Nigeria

The study identified several factors as responsible for street begging. One major factor identified by virtually all respondents is poverty. They agreed that school age children, who cannot find food to eat, could resort to begging. A respondent in Ondo state and senior secondary school principal¹ noted that:

There are many parents, who cannot afford to sponsor their ward to school. No matter how cheap education is, there are parents who simply cannot afford it except if it is very free. Secondly, lack of education on the part of the parent. Many parents do not know the value of education, because they do not go to school. Thirdly, we can say lack of proper training and this is on the part of the children.

The Ondo SUPEB service officer supported the position above, by noting that poverty and unemployment on the part some parents could lead to street begging by school age children.

The first factor is poverty. Added to this is unemployment. It takes us a lot of time to convince some children. In a situation where parents struggle in a family of five to send three to school with the hope that after graduation things would get better but to their surprise no job, hardly would you see a youth desirous to go to school and not beg on the streets.

Furthermore, Principal² noted that losing a parent early in life or poor parenting with no other source of livelihood could make children beg. He noted:

I would like to point out poverty. Some of the school age children beggars have lost their parents early in life, making them to beg. There are some parents, who do not have time for their children.

Education Officer² agreed with others who have spoken that poverty is the major factor responsible for street begging in Ondo state. He also mentioned parental laziness. His views:

I believe the main factor is poverty, because anybody that has resources will likely care for his wards. Children from such homes will not beg except such parents do not have time or are lazy.

The response from another Principal¹ in Oyo showed that poverty, broken homes, harsh economic conditions, lack of basic needs, parental support, and genuine love constitute the reasons for street begging. He noted that children faced hardship where parents could not provide for their daily needs.

The economy of the country has given rise to the emergence of street begging among schoolchildren. Some parents have nothing to give their children because they do not have anything themselves.

The Education Officer¹ also supported the point raised above that street begging is caused by poverty, economic hardship, poor parenting and lack of interest in education.

High levels of poverty because of economic hardship in the country makes it difficult for some parents to feed themselves and their children. The nonchalant attitude of some parents and lack of parental care make their children to beg. There are parents who derive pleasure in sending their children to hawk.

The same Education Officer² noted that street begging has become a pattern of behavior as a form of business.

Poverty is the major factor for street begging and this is because of the economic hardship in Nigeria. When you cannot feed yourself, wife, and children, you have to survive by looking for another means. The same thing applies to school age children.

Responses from Lagos state showed porous border and anti-social behavior as responsible for street begging. In the view of Education Officer¹, he noted that poverty was a strong factor responsible for the menace. He was of the view that when people could not meet their needs they beg around. He also identified the influence of peers who lure their friends into begging. He put his view thus:

There is the traditional and cultural factors to issue of begging by school age children. What I mean by traditional factor is that some children from Cotonou and other indigenes do house help. There is also poverty and destitution. Their parents send them out to go and look for money. It is part of them. Deformity of the children like being blind, lame or other physical deficiency makes children of school age beg.

The speaker indicated that a broken home is a significant factor that is responsible for begging.

Broken homes when parents are not together, you know, anything can happen. If the children are staying with the father and the father normally goes to work in the morning, how will he have time for the children? Poverty is also another factor. In a situation where parents do not have anything to give, they treat their children like the Amajiris.

Furthermore, Education Officer² corroborated the point made above by linking street begging by school age children to personal ego and self-aggrandizement. To him: notes that:

Poverty, lack of parental care and inability to fulfill socio-economic responsibilities make their children to beg. When parents are unable to fulfill their responsibilities by providing necessities for the children, they will have to go out. When the children see their colleagues having basic facilities, they would want to be like them. The only way they can get it is by going to the streets to beg for money.

In summary, factors responsible for street begging among school age children in southwestern states are similar but only vary in some instances. Other factors include orientation against education, lack of parental care, and genuine love.

Social protection policies that eradicate street begging among school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

This segment presents several social protection policies across the southwestern states, as revealed by respondents.

An Ondo state education official mentioned construction of mega schools as a way of providing more opportunities for children to attend and stay in schools. In Ondo state, Principal¹ noted that mega schools with modern facilities were in place to encourage enrolment of children and remove inferiority complex that children, who attend public schools have. He noted that:

During Mimiko era, we had mega schools, and the current government is doing the same. You need to see the enrollment. Parents enrolled their children because there were fine buildings that erased inferiority complex of children in public schools.

In addition, Education Officer¹ identified the building of IQTE that helps provide nomadic education for the children in nomadic or religious schools. Government provided Islamic and qur'anic schools with modern buildings.

Government support the Integrated Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education (I.Q.T. E.) that accommodate Almajiris. It is to prevent them from sitting under the trees or go out to the street to beg.

Ondo Education Officer² identified the enactment of laws to protect the children of the poor. One of these programs is the gender violence-based policy, which safeguard the rights of female children. This policy also ensures arrest of children found on the street during school hours. He noted that:

One of the policies is gender violence-based policy. Another one is safeguard policy, and then we have a human rights policy, which enables some agencies to move around to ensure that no child is on the street during school hours.

In Oyo state, Education Officer² noted that there is the introduction of the IQTE, which enables children to learn English and Mathematics while learning Islamic training. Oyo state government introduced "Better Education Service Delivery for All" (BESDA), which allows all categories of children that engage in street begging to inculcate literacy and numeracy skills in order to eradicate

illiteracy. There is also conditional cash transfers for poor parents to ensure food is available to them and their children. According to Principal², he notes:

In Oyo State, there are some social protection policies such as BESDA, for the children under qur'anic education. In such local qur'anic schools, there are state facilitators. They are to teach basic subjects. Another program is the Out of School Children Program (OSCP), which enables the state government to move around garages and under bridges to arrest any child, put him in school, and feed them.

There is also the homegrown school feeding in conjunction with the UNICEF noted Oyo Principal² Education Officer¹ in Oyo state noted that the implementation of different programs encourages children to attend school rather than roaming the street begging. Such programs include the homegrown school feeding of the federal government, BESDA that provides clothes, food, and other things to motivate children in schools, eradication of school fees and promulgation of law against child begging. He puts this succinctly:

Free education in Oyo state, homegrown school feeding, Oyo state government BESDA, eradication of illegal fees in schools, and enactment of law to arrest parents of any child found on the street under the UBE edict.

Finally, Education Officer¹ in Lagos state noted that every child in the state must have access to free education under Project Zero, which means that no child must be on the street. Principal¹ noted that free education is for children up to basic nine (JSS 3). However, He was of the view that many parents are not aware that education is free up to that level. He captures his view as shown below:

There is the slogan that says, leave no child behind. Leave No Child Behind cuts across the 20 local governments and the 27 LCDAs in Lagos state. There is also Project Zero, which bring in vulnerable children from the streets to classrooms and reduce the number of out-of-school children begging on the streets. Some policies under the Universal Basic Education Commission make children be in school. Basic education in Nigeria now is up to JSS 3, that is, at age nine.

All the above are evident that several programs are in place by different states to combat begging among school-age children in the southwestern states, of Nigeria.

Impact of social protection policies on street begging among school age children in Southwestern Nigeria

The social protection policies put in place in Southwestern Nigeria to reduce the number of school age children begging on the street have good impacts on the menace in diverse ways. In Ondo state, education officer¹ noted that there has been a steady rise in the enrollment figures with about 50% of the children back to school because of the numerous programs and sensitization. His views:

We have seen a situation whereby after giving them materials, about 50% of them are back to schools because of the various government programs and sensitization.

Education Officer² noted that reduction in street begging by school age children in the state has made the actions of government to be yielding results.

We have been working to bring back children on the streets back to schools. Our action policies on how to curb street begging by our children from schools are now improving school enrolment.

This shows that most of the programs as noted by the speaker below is showing satisfactory outputs. In the words of the Principal²:

I think government policies on curbing of street begging by school age children are positive and effective in Oyo state. We can say enrolment figures are increasing and we do not find many children begging on the streets again during school hours.

From the excerpt above, Oyo State is seen impact of collaborative efforts to combat street begging among school-age children. Cooperation between the state departments and numerous NGOs has led to successful campaigning, with a focus on awareness and education for children as well as parents. Supporting the position above, the Education Officer¹ noted thus:

Oyo State government Out of School Children Program (OSCP) is recording success. Parents, teachers and NGOs are commending the state government initiatives. The results are evident. More than 6,000 children from the street are back to schools. Those in informal schools learn to stay indoors, with many of them now learning English, Mathematics and literacy. We are winning the war on street begging by school age children.

No doubt, the narrative is changing with the Out of School Children Program (OSCP). It is a game-changing initiative that has brought children back to schools, reduced street begging among school age in Oyo state. The Education Officer² from Lagos state supported the above position by noting that:

Largely, we now have about 175% of children who were initially begging during school hours in Lagos streets back to schools. We have been doing it and we are continuing to bring them back to schools.

The responses above showed substantial improvement in what street begging among school-age children used to be in Lagos. Across the southwestern states in Nigeria, there are significant rise in school enrolment and reduction in the number of children found on the streets during school hours. Participants across the states highlight continuing work to address the fundamental causes, expressing optimism that the substantial decline in the incidence of street begging is truly abating. All though, a conclusion can be reached that the efforts of government are not in vain but yielding fruitful results to take school age children who are begging during school hours off the streets.

Challenges militating against social protection policies meant to eradicate street begging among school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria

There are still several challenges that are standing against the ways of existing social protection policies in Southwestern Nigeria including economic uncertainty and prolonged poverty, ingrained cultural and religious convictions, and insufficient access to excellent education. Others are deficits in execution and evaluation, hostility to formal schooling, and the difficulties of urbanization. This section presents the various constraints that prevent the abolition of street begging, despite ongoing proactive social protection measures by the government of the Southwestern states. In the opinion of the Ondo state Principal¹, he noted that:

The inability of the government to sustain all these policies and projects has affected them. Government policy summersault is not helpful. Government needs to revive the home school feeding.

Another speaker, Education Officer¹ identified the challenge of social protection policies to be changes in government where government policies fade away with government of the day. In addition, he noted that funding is a major albatross.

The only barrier is a paucity of funds. The volume of schoolchildren that are begging on the street and those that are out of school is extremely much for the government. It requires huge amount of money to confront. Unfortunately, there are

other severe challenges such as insecurity, fall in the value of Nigerian currency, and power supply. Unfortunately, corruption on the part of political leaders and career officers is a clog in the wheel of government.

We can infer, from the above that major obstacles to the ongoing fight against street begging among school-age children in Southwestern, Nigeria are continuity in government, funding, and corruption. Thus, frequent changes in government interrupt continuity of good policies for political reason. Absence of continuity makes new administration to modify, or even discontinue a good program and thereby interrupt the momentum required for long-term growth. Lack of fund is a significant impediment to the accomplishment policy like "Zero Project". Attempts to register children and resolve the core causes of street begging need substantial financial expenditure. The absence of financial assistance not only jeopardizes the continuation of existing programs but also disrupts the government's capacity to achieve its policy targets. The Principal¹ in Ondo state noted this:

Corruption kills good government policy. For example, when the school feeding program started, they built a structure that up till now the structure is still there and the feeding has stopped that's to tell you that the government had invested in these, but some of the money for this project I can't say are not traceable. At a time, all the food meant for over 18 local government in Ondo state was been prepared in Akure. How do you explain that?

Favoritism aggravates the problem further, as noted by Education Officer² in Oyo. He observed that those with connections or power frequently exploit the institutional framework for their benefit. Such bad culture erodes the integrity of good policies.

Yes, we have human problems because perfection belongs to God; we have issues of corruption, favoritism, and issues of people threatening each other because a particular program is not benefitting them.

Added to the above by the same Education Officer² in Oyo state is corruption. There is also the challenge of people threatening one another because a particular program does not benefit them, who often do everything not to allow such policy to see the light of the day or sabotage it at implementation stage. Principal¹ in Lagos state captures the challenges as:

One of the major challenges is corruption. Besides, constant changes in government destroys good program. Our governance system does not support the continuity of

government. There is also poor funding or lack of funds. When the money meant for a good program is not coming, what happens?

The situation in most states of the Southwestern Nigeria is similar to that of Ondo state. Corruption which is not a challenge to street begging among school age children in one state but generally to all states and a national issue.

DISCUSSION

A number of factors such as poverty, religion, culture, parental separation and attitude, and other socioeconomic variables are responsible for street begging among school-age children in Southwestern Nigeria. Results revealed that poverty is a leading factor, with 92.6% that makes children of school age to beg on the streets during school hours. This finding aligns with existing work that argued that poverty is a primary driver of street begging, forcing some parents to send their children out for begging when they should be in schools learning (UNICEF, 2018). It also tallies with the finding of Fanifosi et al. (2022) that children of school age take to street begging during school period as a means of survival. Thus, poverty is a causal factor that influence school age children to beg. In addition, the results showed 62% of respondents affirming physical disability or health challenges as responsible for street begging by school age children. Our finding is in tandem with the work of Ahmed et al. (2014) that individuals with disabilities face increased barriers to education and thus making street begging a plausible option for them. Parental upbringing, as identified by 49.4% of respondents, is another crucial factor contributing to street begging. This aligns with the role of poor parenting in prioritizing their children education and provide enabling conditions that make children to have interest in learning (UNICEF, 2018). The results showed cultural beliefs with 25.3% and religious influences with 18.7% as factors that also push children of school age to beg. While the support for cultural influence in this study is low but the work of Ahmed et al., (2014) acknowledges the impact of culture on attitudes of some tribes towards education particularly from northern Nigeria but uncommon in Southwestern states. Thus, children of some northern tribes' extraction beg on the streets in Southwestern Nigeria line with their culture. Even while the result in this study does not support religion as responsible for street begging by school age children in in Southwestern Nigeria, it is a major factor for begging as argued by Gallin et al. (2015), which this study does not support. The result also showed 76.7% of respondents agreeing that marital status as accountable for street begging by school age children. This finding agrees with the opinion of Amuda (2021) that unstable or separated family or single-parenting face economic challenges and indirectly make children from such families, who are of school age to beg on the streets.

The result showed a number of social protection policies implemented in southwestern Nigeria to combat street begging among school-age children to include construction of mega schools in Ondo

State, Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) program, homegrown school feeding and conditional cash transfers to parents in Oyo state, Project Zero in Lagos state. The finding aligns with literature emphasizing the positive influence of improved school infrastructure on enrolment rates, removal of inferiority complex associated with public schools (Adefowokan, 2017). The homegrown school feeding program aligns with the broader impact it has on attendance and academic performance as reported by National Planning Commission (2021). Similarly, Oyo State's Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) program and conditional cash transfers to parents resonate with literature advocating for targeted interventions to reduce illiteracy and address poverty-related barriers in education (Onifade, 2019). Lagos State's Project Zero underscores the importance of inclusive education tallies with UNESCO (2009) that inclusive policy can address educational disparities among children.

The impact of social protection policies on street begging among school-age children in southwestern Nigeria is significant. The results showed a positive impact, with increased school enrolment and reduced instances of street begging because of the policy initiatives. This aligns with existing literature that reiterated effectiveness of targeted interventions in enhancing educational access and mitigating the prevalence of street begging (Onyeonoru, 2018). The collaborative effort between government departments and non-governmental organizations in Oyo State echoes the importance of partnerships for successful social intervention programs as canvassed by UNICEF (2016). The significant return of about 175% of children begging on Lagos streets back to schools signifies aligns with the need for proactive measures to address the root causes of street begging in line with previous study by UNESCO (2009).

On the challenges faced by social protection policies aimed at mitigating street begging among school-age children in southwestern Nigeria, the results showed poor funding, lack of awareness, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, coordination issues, and socio-cultural factors as key obstacles. The results showed poor funding with 72% and lack of awareness 69.4% of the respondents. These challenges tally with the works of Lawal, Aliu & Irhue (2022) that funding is a critical barrier that hinder effectiveness of interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of major social problems, and that a robust funding makes government policies to bring fruitful results. The results showed that 61.3% of respondents in support of socio-cultural factor as hindrance to social protection policies that agrees with the work of Sarki, Marcus & Auta (2021), who agreed that socio-cultural factor is a strong hindrance to effective and efficient government intervention. The finding of this study concurs with the finding of Onyeoronu (2018) that socio-cultural factor is a bottleneck, acknowledging that deeply ingrained cultural norms and beliefs can hinder the acceptance and efficacy of social intervention policies. The results also affirms the challenge of parental incapacity and loss of parents to social protection policies. This finding tally with the findings of Adeoti & Popoola (2012) and Okpukpara (2016).that parents facing poverty and unemployment may not have the capacity to provide for their children, leading to likelihood of street begging. In addition, the results showed that poor monitoring and evaluation hinder the impact of

social protection policies and correspond with the works of Alhassan (2015) on the significance of rigorous evaluation mechanisms to track progress and identify areas of improvement.

Recommendations

In order to achieve results expected from the numerous government's social protection policies to eradicate street begging by school age children, we offer the following recommendations:

Government needs to tackle poverty that has become a recurring threat to parents and by extension, the schoolchildren by genuine efforts through intensification of different social protection policies and welfares programs. Provision of jobs, basic health care, good road and infrastructure are duties and responsibilities of government, which can help to reduce poverty. There is need to visit the menace of street begging by government from its root by delivering good governance.

Existing synergy among the stakeholders such as government, education officials, parents, communities, and educationally based NGOs is not strong enough on the issue. The synergy requires a more focused discussion among stakeholders. More close rapport to tackle the issue of street begging is necessary so that stakeholders would support prosecution of children found begging during school hours. The culture of giving government names over such arrests should be outdated.

Nigerians expect more seriousness from government on its free education policy. Government must properly fund basic education. It is not enough to make a policy, implementing and regularly evaluating such programs matter a lot. It is time to put an end to Nigerian political leaders' lip services to policies. Good free education that would address street begging requires government to "truly" provide writing materials, school uniforms, and good free-meal, prompt payment of teachers' salaries and allowances, and good classrooms. Government must make its free education program compulsory with an act of parliament, only when it is actually of good quality. Appointments of teachers should not be political to have responsible and competent hands in schools. There should be proper monitoring, fair and commensurate disciplinary measures to curtail staff excesses.

The school feeding program of the federal government had proven to be effective in encouraging the children to study, be punctual and stay in schools. Already, there is increase in school enrollment in some public schools, it is therefore important that government improves on the lapses of the programs to reduce its challenges of corruption, changes in government and issue of food poisoning.

Government should put in place ways of rewarding excellence among the students, especially the vulnerable ones. Government can reintroduce scholarship for 'real' vulnerable learners. This would reintegrate the culture of excellence, commitment, punctuality, regularity and in school.

The challenge of street begging among school age children in southwestern Nigeria demands comprehensive interventions that will address poverty, disability, parenting, cultural and religious dynamics. There should be proactive, comprehensive and collaborative efforts by critical stakeholders in education sector to implement social protection initiatives, and tackle poverty to have sustainable solutions that would put an end to the menace of street begging by school age children.

CONCLUSION

Street begging by school age children in Southwestern, Nigeria is a thing of serious concern to government and stakeholders. It is a social and educational menace. Poverty, physical disability, parental upbringing, religion, culture, and so on are some of the factors responsible for the challenge. State governments in Southwestern, Nigeria have embarked on several social protection policies such as project zero, mega school construction, conditional cash transfer, IQTE, BESDA, OSCP, and school feeding programs to tackle street begging by school-age children. Existing social protection policies have reduced street begging in weekdays, made the children to stay and be punctual in schools, increased school enrolment, and changed the orientation of children to see school as prospect for greater tomorrow. There are still challenges facing the effectiveness of the policies such as poverty, poor funding, poor awareness, socio-cultural factors, corruption and changes in government. Government should continue to collaborate with parents, guardians, teachers, and educationally based non-governmental organizations to confront the menace.

References

- Adefowokan, D. (2017). June 17). Katsina: A glimpse of Yar'Adua's Home town. 3, 222, 28-29. *The Sunday Sun*, June 17.
- Adeoti, M. & Popoola, T. (2012). Causes and consequences of street begging: implications for counselling. 31st Annual Conference of the Counselling Association of Nigeria, Ota Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Aluko, Z. O. & Olanipekun, D. (2019). Social Welfare and the Problem of Begging in Nigeria. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 7-11.
- Alhassan, Y. S. (2015). Patterns of Street-Begging, Support Services and Vocational Aspirations of People Living with Disabilities in Ilorin, Nigeria. 108-118.
- Amuda, Y. J. (2021). Enhancing national progress and sustainable economic development among Al-Majiri children in Northern Nigeria. *Heliyon*, 7(9).
- Bukoye, R. O. (2015). Case study: Prevalence and consequences of streets begging among adults and children in Nigeria, Suleja Metropolis. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 171, 323-333.
- Danczuk, C. (2000). Analysis of Government Policy on Street Begging in South Eastern States of Nigeria. *Journal of Administration*, 3(2), 1-20.

- Fanifosi, W. et. al. (2022). Street Begging Problem in Nigeria: The sustaining factors and government policy intervention challenges . *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*, 1-13.
- Gallin, D. et al. (2015). *Mutual interests–mutual benefits: Evaluation of the 2005 Debt Relief Agreement between the Paris Club and Nigeria. Main Report.* . Oxford : Ecorys Nederland BV and Oxford Policy Management.
- Hagen-Zanker, J., & Holmes, R. (2012). *Social protection in Nigeria, synthesis report.*
- Holmes, R., Akinrimisi, B., Morgan, J., & Buck, R. (2012). *Social protection in Nigeria.* London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Horn, F. & Cooke, Q. (2001). *The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour: Evidence review and policy implications.* Innocenti: UNICEF Office of Research .
- Jelili, M. (2013). Street begging in cities: Unveiling the Global situations and Issues to be addressed. *Asian Academic Research Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, November, 1(17)*, 41-60.
- Kennedy, G. & Fitzpatrick, O. (2001). Street Begging and Its Psychosocial Social Effects in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 11(12)*.
- Lawal, A; Aliu, P. & Irhue, S. (2022). Poverty and Child Protection Policy in Nigeria. *International Advanced Journal of Policy and Organizational Policy, 1(1)*, 1-12.
- Mijinyawa, N. (2001). Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa: Getting the politics Right. *World Development, 40(1)*, 163-176.
- Morgan, R., & Yablonski, J. (2011). Addressing, not just managing vulnerability: Policies and Practice for Equity and Transformation. *International Conference: “Social Protection for Social Justice.* UK: Institute of Development Studies,.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index.* National Bureau of Statistics.
- National Planning Commission. (2021). *Nigeria: Millennium development goals (MDG), Countdown strategy: 2010–2015.* Abuja: NPC.
- Olaore, A. Y., Ogunlade, V., & Aham-Chiabuotu, C. (2016, 1 22). care, Child-sensitive Social Protection Initiatives in Nigeria:A role for indigenous social. *Social Development, 234-259.*
- Onifade, D. S. (2019). Street Begging Practices. *International Journal of Academic and Applied Research (IJAAR), December, 3 (12)*, 5-15.
- Onyeonoru, I. P. (2018). *Social Protection in Nigeria.* Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Ortiz, I. (2001). *Social protection in Asia and the Pacific.* Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Sarki, O., Marcus, T. & Auta, B. J. (2021). Beyond the social protection paradigm: Social policy in Africa’s development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 32(4)*, 454–470.
- Sifawa, J. (2018). Social protection concepts and approaches: Implications for policy and practice in international development. *Working Paper 143.* London: Overseas Development Institute.

- Tafadzwa, M. & Bekezela, V. (2014). Socio-Economic Causes of Begging. *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 37-52.
- Umukoro, N. (2013). Poverty and Social Protection in Nigeria. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 29(3), 305–322. doi:10.1177/0169796X13494281
- UNICEF (2007). *World development report 2007: Attacking poverty*. Oxford, UK: University Press.
- United Nations International Children’s Fund (2011). *Information sheet: Child labour*. Abuja: UNICEF.
- United Nations International Children’s Fund (2016). *UNICEF Social Inclusion, Policy and Budgeting*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/index_social-protection.html
- United Nations International Children’s Fund (2018). *Child Protection Advocacy Brief*. UNICEF. Retrieved 12 20, 2022, from <http://www.unicef.org/>
- The World Bank. (2004). Making services work for poor people. *World Development Report*. . Washington, DC: World Bank.
- The World Bank. (2017). *Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2017: From World Development Indicators*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- The World Bank. (2018). *World Bank report*. Retrieved 2 1, 2023, from World Bank: <http://www.world bank.com>