



DELVING THE PRACTICE OF BEGGING IN ETHIOPIA: AN INSIDER LOOK

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ABSTRACT :

To begin with, begging, defined by Kennedy & Fitzpatrick (2001) as ...asking passersby for money in a public place, is an all-inclusive observable fact, even as chiefly awkward in developing countries and tends to be understood as arise out of numerous factors befall in due course. Consonant with Fitzpatrick's view, Adedibu (1989) writes that...the problem of begging is a universal phenomenon which has generated issues both in developed and developing countries but it is prevalent and least attended to in developing countries.

KEYWORDS : developing countries , numerous factors befall , universal phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Apropos to Ethiopia milieu, MOLSA (1992) reported that, there is no information recorded about the exact time and place as to when begging started in country. However, oral reports have indicated that begging has existed for centuries especially around religious temples in the country for many years.

There are three sorts of begging being practiced in Ethiopia erstwhile. These are as MOLSA stated (1992), "begging by the destitute related to religious almsgiving, begging by religious students as a cast related to religious belief and, begging as a ritual service for the church" (pp.6-9).

The phenomena of begging is a major social problem emerged with urbanization. And, cognizant of the fact that the finding of the survey reflected, the main push and pull factors of the problem of beggary in Addis Ababa which is also assumed to be applicable to other major cities in the country (MOLSA, 1992, p.108).

The spotlight of this study is on well again understanding the experience of begging in public spaces. Who are these street beggars? Why are they begging? What has been the impact of being a beggar upon their lives, and the ways in which this might be associated with self-concept and learned helplessness? To this extent, the study fills a gap in the current literature on the psychological understanding of street begging. What is more, since the research applies distinctively to an Ethiopian milieu, too, it aims to craft a unique contribution to the general literature in the area of social psychology subtleties.

This research intends to smudge assorted stakeholders mentally lively. Here are few examples:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic Meaning and Nature of Begging

Begging has been varyingly conceptualized by different scholars in different times. For Jelili (2006), "to beg" is to simply ask people for money, food, clothes etc as a gift or charity. Just like Jelili's view, in Merriam Webster dictionary (2015), "to beg" is defined as to ask people for money or food. Consonant with Merriam Webster's definition, Lynch (2005) connote it as...the solicitation of a voluntary unilateral gift, most often money, in a public place.

Hanchao (1999) used the terms mendicancy and vagrancy to reflect means and reasons for begging. Mendicancy refers to an act of begging usually associated with religious belief; vagrancy is used to describe the begging activities of jobless, homeless, and wanderers or vagabond. Begging also derives social and cultural meaning through the interaction between the 'giver' and the 'receiver' (Staples, 2007). Although engagement in begging 'legitimizes wealth as a sign of merit and imposes upon the wealthy a moral pressure to be generous' (Niewuenhuys, 2001: p.544), the activity is seldom a 'win-win' scenario with respect to those who are on the receiving end. Whatever terms used, street begging or vagabond or mendicancy or vagrancy or solicitation, it signifies the broad-spectrum scheme of importune people for aid.

MAJOR REASONS OF BEGGING

Though there is resemblance of reasons for begging, depending on the economic circumstances of the country in question, several factors are repeatedly identified in numerous studies conducted across different countries, including Australia (Horn & Cooke, 2001), Columbia (Pinzon et al., 2008), Egypt (Bibars, 1998), the United States (Avery, 2012), the United Kingdom (Borland, 2009), India (Diener, 2006), Nigeria (Onoyase, 2010), Kenya (Kaime&Ahlberg, 2008), and Ethiopia (Tatek, 2009; Woubishet, 2005).

These studies found that, inadequacy of welfare benefits to physiological needs, substance abuse, mental illness, disability, homelessness, low education, perceiving begging as an acceptable bustle in comparison to robbery or stealing were the major reasons for begging.

Reporting on the extent and nature of begging, Michael & Michelle (2001) noted that... "the main reasons for individuals engaging in begging include psychiatric disability, addiction to heroin and alcohol, and the need for additional money in order to pay for food and housing" (p. 21).

In a similar vein, Lynch (2002), in his reports of begging for change, writes three main reasons were given by people for engaging in begging behavior. Firstly, the inadequacy of social security payments given the costs of housing, clothing, food and medical treatment; secondly, psychiatric and intellectual disabilities and illnesses; and thirdly, substance, alcohol and gambling addictions.

Very fittingly with Lynch's view, a coterie of scholar's underscore (Fawole, et al., 2010; Namwata, et al., 2011, for example) on poverty as the most frequent precipitant of street begging. They also emphasize on physical disability, mental illness, social security inadequacies, drugs, alcohol, and gambling as the significant contributors to the problem.

In a study conducted on the problem of begging in Addis Ababa, MOLSA (1992) found that... rural-urban migration for better life and health, lack of employment opportunities, & high inflation rate in the city, as the major causes of begging in the country (p.108).

UPSHOTS OF BEGGING

Reflecting on the consequences of begging Cook (2010) writes that ...the most common problem is that beggars are so used to begging that they actually prefer not to work. Many of them also make more money from begging than they would if they did work. Continuing with this notion that an individual's circumstances tend to lead to the practice of begging, it is further noted that "for many, begging is a more acceptable means of satisfying immediate needs than resorting to . . . criminal activity such as theft, drug dealing or prostitution" (Lynch, 2002).

Just like Lynch's view, in his study of begging as a livelihood pathway of street children in Addis Ababa, Tatek (2009) has found that, a great majority of the research participants considered begging primarily as work. Many children argued in defense of their engagements in begging, saying, for example, "As long as we don't take people's property, what wrong have we done?", and 'It is better to beg rather than steal" (p.294).

Eventually, the belief of having a lack of skills to do anything else introduces an element that is of particular interest, namely, the idea of people resorting to begging because they have a limited self-concept or poor self-regard (McLeod, 2007; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). Moreover, with the passage of time, it

tends to become increasingly difficult for someone engaged in street begging— regardless of their initial level of self-esteem—to view themselves as being capable of doing anything different from their current activities, or to imagine alternative ways of being and earning a living (Peterson et al., 1993).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an interview, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest (Kvale, 1996, pp. 1–2).

Since there has been little previous experientially based research in this area, a qualitative approach will be used to explore a range of aspects around what it means to be a street beggar via a series of interviews in which their day-to-day activities, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings are spoken about. A qualitative approach aims to provide an experiential framework (in this case, the participants' experiences when begging) within which to understand the verbal accounts relayed by the participants in response to the conversational engagement with the researcher.

SETTING

The study site, St.Urael church and the nearby traffic light, is located in Addis Ababa at the border of Bole sub city and Kirkos sub city. The selection of the study site was purposive. As Creswell (2003) wrote, "in case of qualitative research, for the purpose of deep understanding the subject matter understudy or research question, it's up to researchers to make a decision on the research participants, sites and even the material to use" (p.185).

What is more, the rationale behind selecting this site from other settings was population demography. For example, the site is a place where diversified people (extremely the poor and the rich people) live and work. The site is an intersecting point to Bole, Kazanchis, Hayahulet, Mexico and contains church. Due to this, many people bypass through it. Beggars also assume downtowns people have better income and gather around church to make money. This makes the site to attract large number of beggars than some other sites.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

It was pretty critical to the participants at last in the series selected for this research:

1. Should have insight into their own thoughts, experiences, and feelings, especially with regard to the actual practice of begging as well as the life-events that may have precipitated such a practice in the first instance;
2. Would be willing to discuss their circumstances and how these might have influenced their life choices;
3. Indicated a willingness to meet with the researcher over an extended period rather than just on a single occasion; and
4. Were reasonably fluent in the national language of the country and mother tongue of the researcher, Amharic.

PARTICIPANTS

The final nine participants (out of an initial group of more than 25) were street beggars in Addis Ababa (St. Urael church and the nearby traffic light) who had been on the streets for at least three months. Although the street beggars did not necessarily stay on the same street throughout the study, they even so tended to remain within the same broad residential areas so that it was possible to use a convenience sampling technique to select participants from places (street corners, orthodox Christian churches and traffic light-controlled intersections) where street beggars were generally found.

While it was difficult to be sure of their ages, it is estimated that the participants' ages ranged from around late adolescence to middle adulthood. While being open to the interview process, the participants were vague about their exact ages, several saying that they had no birth certificate. The final sample size was relatively small, comprising nine individuals. Notwithstanding, as Marshall (1996) wrote, "an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question" (p. 523). Moreover, that "the number of required subjects usually becomes obvious as the study progresses, and as new categories, themes or explanations stop emerging from the data" (p. 523).

The nine participants on whose experiences this research is based were those who were able to divulge on, and described in depth, their reasons for begging and their feelings around begging, and how they saw their future.

PROCEDURE

The foremost defy was to build up adequate, warm and comfortable rapport with beggars (on a one-to-one basis) to make possible a psychologically momentous tête-à-tête between the researcher and the participants. To do this, the researcher carefully observed, and met with, more than twenty-five street beggars on different days and across a range of different streets and Orthodox Christian churches in Addis Ababa to ascertain which panhandlers might meet the research-defined criteria for inclusion. Then and there, the researcher had regular meetings with each of the "chosen" street beggars. Every so often, with greater frequency, in-depth interviews were conducted over the sharing of leftover foods. Because of the fact that the researcher taken to account the importance to clutch each and every instant that the participants were able to chatter about their feelings and experiences, the conversations and rendezvous were extremely unceremonious. In all conscience, the researcher ply a lot to be alike an anthropologist who is graciously flexible to incarcerate every single quintessential constituents of the run-of-the-mill happenings of the participants.

DATA ANALYSES TECHNIQUES

In preference to simply reporting what the respondents have been said, and providing some quotes to that effect, the researcher gravely ply to go beyond the surface use of the word, in order to investigate what the interviewees were taking for granted, or what assumptions they were making, each time they repeatedly employed the concept, begging.

Reflecting on the validity of evidence on analysis, Mason (1997) writes that... a judgment about whether data analysis is valid is a judgment about whether or not it measures, explicates or illuminates whatever it claims to measure, explicate or illuminate (p.89). During the course of the writing up process of this report, the researcher took the role of a story-teller.

To boot, the researcher was strong minded to quality and key insights sooner than quantity and easy generalizations. Aptly, a limited number of key pieces were selected and subjected to detailed scrutiny. Above and beyond, one of the things the researcher truly martyr himself in the analysis was, constructing the specific accounts of the different themes and fixing the social forces which mold them by focusing on the issue without passing a judgment.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Firm care was taken not to compromise the street beggar's location and "money making potential," and aimed to avoid any possible perception of the researcher as having invaded the beggar's "personal territory" when collecting the data necessary for this research. Truthfully, each of the participants was given an extensive but simple explanation as to the nature of, and reason for, the interviews. It was single minded that the research was being conducted through Addis Ababa University and that the outcome of this research was aimed at better understanding the many hassles that often-confronted street beggars. The individuals interviewed were also informed that they were under no constant state of worry and urgency to

continue meeting with the researcher and that they could withdraw any time, at any stage. In addition, each participant was nominally reimbursed for the potential loss of alms during the time it took to complete the interview, whereas they would otherwise have been on the road side. The participants were also presented with a consent form, in which they gave their endorsement to be interviewed and audio-recorded.

Coherent with qualitative research methodologies, the trustworthiness of the data was utmost, and this was achieved through follow-up interviews with the participants in which further lucidity was sought and the precision of the initial reported experiences, feelings expressed, and attitudes was confirmed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the in-depth open ended interview material, themes were identified as relevant when they, in their various nuances and genre repeatedly arose during the interviews. Over time and with repeated study of the interview material, it became clear that issues such as Ignorance, unemployment, and homelessness were the overriding precipitating factors. However, because they might also serve as social dynamics reinforcing begging activities, it became important to understand the participants' experiences of their circumstances and why begging was more attractive to them than, for example, being a "parking attendant" or "lottery tickets seller".

Captivatingly, many of the findings in this research do not be in accord with the literature. For instance, the argument that begging tends to be motivated by the need to support drug/alcohol abuse or arises because of a mental disability did not apply in the current research as only one of the participants admitted to any form of drug usage but stressed that this only began after he took to the streets to beg as a means of earning money: it was not a contributing factor to the initiation of begging.

None of the respondents alluded to or reported any form of previous mental disability nor was there any disability exhibited by the respondents or witnessed by the researcher during the interview process. Sure enough, this could be a reflection of sample bias as the researcher screened out those who seemed not to have sufficient insight into their behavior. This, however, in turn, raises an even more interesting inquiry as to what would motivate individuals with intact personalities and reasonable self-insight to beg rather than engage in some other, more socially acceptable activity.

In addition, chronological age-related experiential profile became apparent between the two groupings. There seemed to be a different perception that corresponded with chronological age in that the young adolescent stage participants (below the age of 21 years) tended to be more idealistic (some might argue in denial) than the mendicants in their late 20s (middle adulthoods).

Nearly every one of the late adolescent (below the age of 21 years) participants aphorism begging as a pro tem bustle in anticipation of, for instance, they had earned adequate money to migrate to other African and Arab countries via brokers, or until they got career training to be a wood worker or a barber and all that. Likewise, most of them were hoping that, they will live their dream someday in the future. Contrariwise, many of the older (middle adulthood) panhandlers spoke that their extreme poverty and vulnerability makes them feel insecure and hopeless. Most of the older participants reported that despite the fact that in the beginning they had felt "enfant terrible" when standing at the streets for bestowments, the passage of time tended to "deadened" them to their situation as they began to live little by little, with slender thought of farther than the next week. A frequently spoken about theme was the cul-de-sac of securing even fleeting employment because of the callous treatment of employers. It was principally for this reason that some of the participants said they had diminutive courtesy in befitting "lottery tickets selling", for example. What is more, many of the participants had put across that while begging might be wobbly and degrading, it on the other hand was immensely more upright than robbery and theft, for example. Consonant with the current finding the Ethiopian researcher, Tatek (2009) found that, the participants of his study consider begging as more respectable than stealing.

Apropos begging scenes, these are inclined not to alter the minute deemed apt. In spite of this, depending upon the day of the week (saints' day) and formal etiquettes, nuptials, for example, the participants would vary their times at the traffic intersections although they would still maintain some form of regularity regarding their overall daily practice. The uppermost occurrence of street begging tended to be in the early part of the morning and from late morning to early afternoon, when commuters were in less of a hurry to get to work or return home after work.

With regard to their place of residence, every single one of the participants said that they lived with friends or were still with family, regardless of how topsy-turvy or scrappy the family relationships might have been. Independent housing circumstances may not have been a feasible option for this group either financially or with respect to having the necessary living skills. What is more, few of the participants reported that they have "favela kebele houses".

Psychological variables such as self-concept, poor self-regard, and learned helplessness develop later than individuals had engaged in the practice of begging, and as such may tend to reinforce the practice. As far as sense of helplessness is concerned, it develops within a relatively short period of time, principally apropos to the participants forthcoming outlook.

An outward expression of the factors that thrust individuals in begging tends to be the actual reasons that in fact reinforce such a practice. With the participants interacted and observed with, it has been vividly ascertained that, the participants go on with to beg thereof the factors that smooth the progress of this practice (i.e., Ignorance, unemployment, ruined family backdrop) endure unrelieved, unquestionably, thus, ad infinitum ancillary the praxis of begging.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, in view of the context of the study, it is conceivable to utter the decisive outcome of this research that, individuals slot in the practice of begging down to an assortment of factors, as of an educational level not amply able to edify the individual to secure employment as well as ruined family backdrop to the ensuing development of meager self-concept and despondent self-regard accompanied by learned helplessness.

Spreading the chronological age-gamut of the participants as well as the time they have been begging might allow greater generalization of the findings. Too, a refill sundry demographic silhouette of the respondents to rope in participants who are disabled, of migrated individuals from the rural areas of the country, and who beg alongside or with the aid of young children might serve to provide a greater understanding of the maintaining factors and associated experiences of begging.

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