

Evidential Socio-Economic and Cultural Characteristics Defining Street Begging in Akure, Nigeria

Gabriel, E.^{1*}, Fasakin, J.O.² & Mande, K.H.³

¹⁻²(Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Federal University of Technology, Akure Nigeria)

³(Air Pollution & Ecophysiology Laboratory, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.)

*Corresponding author: Gabriel Emmanuel,

Abstract: *This research examines socio-economic and cultural characteristics of issues defining begging in Akure metropolis, a medium-sized city in southern Nigeria. The study focused on Akure city where an extensive field survey was conducted on the incidence of street begging. It made use of both primary and secondary data. Using multistage sampling technique, a total of two hundred and forty (240) street beggars were sampled, constituting 12.5% of total 1,908 beggars. Data obtained from the questionnaires were processed and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. The research findings were presented in form of tables, percentages, maps and charts as appropriate. The findings of this research reveal; (i) that 60.8% of the beggars were males as against 39.2% for females. (ii) that the majority of the beggars sampled were Hausa (73.7%) of northern origin; while 23.8% of the beggars came from within and towns around Akure. The study recommends that beggars should be given vocational training and skill acquisition together with public awareness, advocacy, sensitization and poverty alleviation schemes among others.*

Keywords: *Beggars, Begging, Cultural characteristics, Socio-economic.*

I. Introduction

The appearance of beggars, who seem to spend most of their time on the streets and public spaces in many urban areas of Nigeria and in cities of some developing countries, has become nauseating. This situation is a reflection of urban complexities worldwide and has become a very common and familiar experience for a long time. The population of beggars on Nigerian streets is growing rapidly. Today, their presence is a serious problem that requires remedy and rehabilitation [1].

However, not only have their numbers grown over the years, their lifestyles and the display of overtly aggressive behaviour make them the subject of suspicion and hostility by both the public and the law enforcement agencies. The menace of street begging as a potential threat to the environmental, economic and social survival of human societies is evident [2]. Interestingly, people engaged in begging recognize it to be a 'problem', due to its harsh, humiliating and frustrating nature [3].

It is obvious that begging has become a global phenomenon which threatens the environment, economic and social survival of humanity. This is true of Nigeria where different categories of beggars are conspicuously found in motor parks, religious worship areas, markets, road intersections, venues of ceremonies among other public places [4]. Scholars have attributed the problem of begging to a number of factors such as poverty [5]; [4], religion [6], physical disability [5]; [4] and culture [4], [4]. Of all the identified factors, poverty and physical disability are most visible in Nigeria [6]. Therefore, in order to meet their basic needs, some of the poverty-stricken people resort to begging as the sole means of livelihood. Also, from empirical evidences, physically disabled people constitute the bulk of identified beggars in Nigeria [4]; [7].

If the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number one (eradication of extreme poverty and hunger) is to be achieved in Nigeria, the problem of increasing incidence of begging in her cities needs to be properly addressed. This is because, apart from the fact that street begging constitutes nuisance to the physical and social environment of Nigerian cities, the continuing reliance on the activity as a means of livelihood, amount to a waste of human resources and a burden on the already overstretched meager-income earners of the majority of the work force [8].

The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of street beggars in Akure, Nigeria. Notable indices of investigation include the level of income, household size, religion, tribe and education among others. It is imperative to state that, the increasing incidence of beggars in Nigerian cities, is not only due to poverty and physical disability, but also to the fact that, majority of the beggars are satisfied with the "job" [5]. Some have become "very rich" that they have acquired buses and houses, yet they always appear wretched so as to draw sympathy from the general public [7]. The presence of fake beggars and criminals has not helped the situation and may be dangerous to the society. Despite the evil posed by begging in

Nigerian urban centres like Akure, it is curious that much research works have not been directed towards the investigation of the incidence of street begging and rehabilitation in Nigerian urban centres [1].

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A street beggar is known to be individuals such as children, elderly, disabled people, and families who normally beg in public spaces such as shopping areas, banks, public offices, churches, mosques, busy streets, among others [9]. These classes of people are seen in virtually all the urban centres of Nigeria. Although, the problem of begging is a worldwide phenomenon, it is more pronounced in the third world countries [4]; [7]). In Nigeria, the Lagos State Government also recently made efforts to tackle the problem of begging, by building rehabilitation centres to cater for beggars [10].

However, these governmental efforts to curb the menace of begging have not been effective and rarely dissuade the beggars. Moreover, the constitutionality of bans on begging has not been fully established by law cases [11]. In Nigeria, some government authorities made various efforts to tackle the problem by sending beggars back to their homes but without setting forth strategies to make street beggars attain basic necessities of life. As a result, many municipal authorities have been striving to control the influx of street beggars in the cities without success. A quick examination of these efforts indicates that, most of them focused more on the symptoms rather than on prevention or eradication of the deeper structural causes of the problem [12]. Despite the menace of begging to the environment and socio-economic development of Nigerian urban centres, it is unfortunate that not much research works have been directed towards the rehabilitation of street beggars. This signals the need for more to be done to contain the situation in a comprehensive and sustainable way [1].

The problem investigated in the study was that, in Akure, an increasing population of beggars is visible on the streets causing environmental, social and economic discomfort on the city. There is no rehabilitation centre, social welfare, vocational training programs for the beggars. These beggars are seen in land uses such as religious centres (mosques and churches), motor-parks, filling stations, markets and major road intersections, among others. This study focuses on investigating the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of street beggars in Akure.

II. Materials And Methods

2.1 The Study Area

Akure is a traditional Nigerian city and like other traditional Yoruba towns in the country, it has been in existence long before the advent of British colonial rule in the country. The city is located within Ondo State in the south western part of Nigeria. Ondo State is one of the 36 states of Nigeria. It lies approximately on latitudes $7^{\circ} 5^1$ and $8^{\circ} 00^1$ North of the Equator and longitude $5^{\circ} 45^1$ East and longitude $6^{\circ}00^1$ East of the Greenwich Meridian at an altitude of 370m above sea level. Akure is a medium-sized urban centre and became the provincial headquarter of Ondo State province in 1939. It also became the capital city of Ondo State and a Local Government Headquarters in 1979. These dual political roles of Akure have since acted as impetus to the influx of people into the city [13].

Akure is located approximately 700 kilometers South West of Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria and about 350 kilometers to Lagos the former capital of Nigeria. It is located within the tropical rain forest region of Nigeria where rainfall is high throughout the year. The increased relative political influence of Akure as a state capital since 1976 has greatly promoted its rapid growth and increased socio-economic activities resulting in its spatial expansion from an area of about 16 square kilometers in 1980 to about 30 square kilometers in 2000 (Ministry of Works, Lands and Housing, 2000) the population of the city grew from 38,852 in 1952 to 71,106 in 1963. Its population was estimated to be 112,850 in 1980 (DHV, 1985); and 157,947 in 1990 (Ondo State of Nigeria, 1990). The 1991 national population census however, puts the population of Akure at 239,124 and its population in 2006 was 353,211 [14]. At 2014, using a growth rate of 3.18 percent, the city is estimated to have 453,731 people using a formula for projection, $P_t = P_o (1+r)^n$ [15].

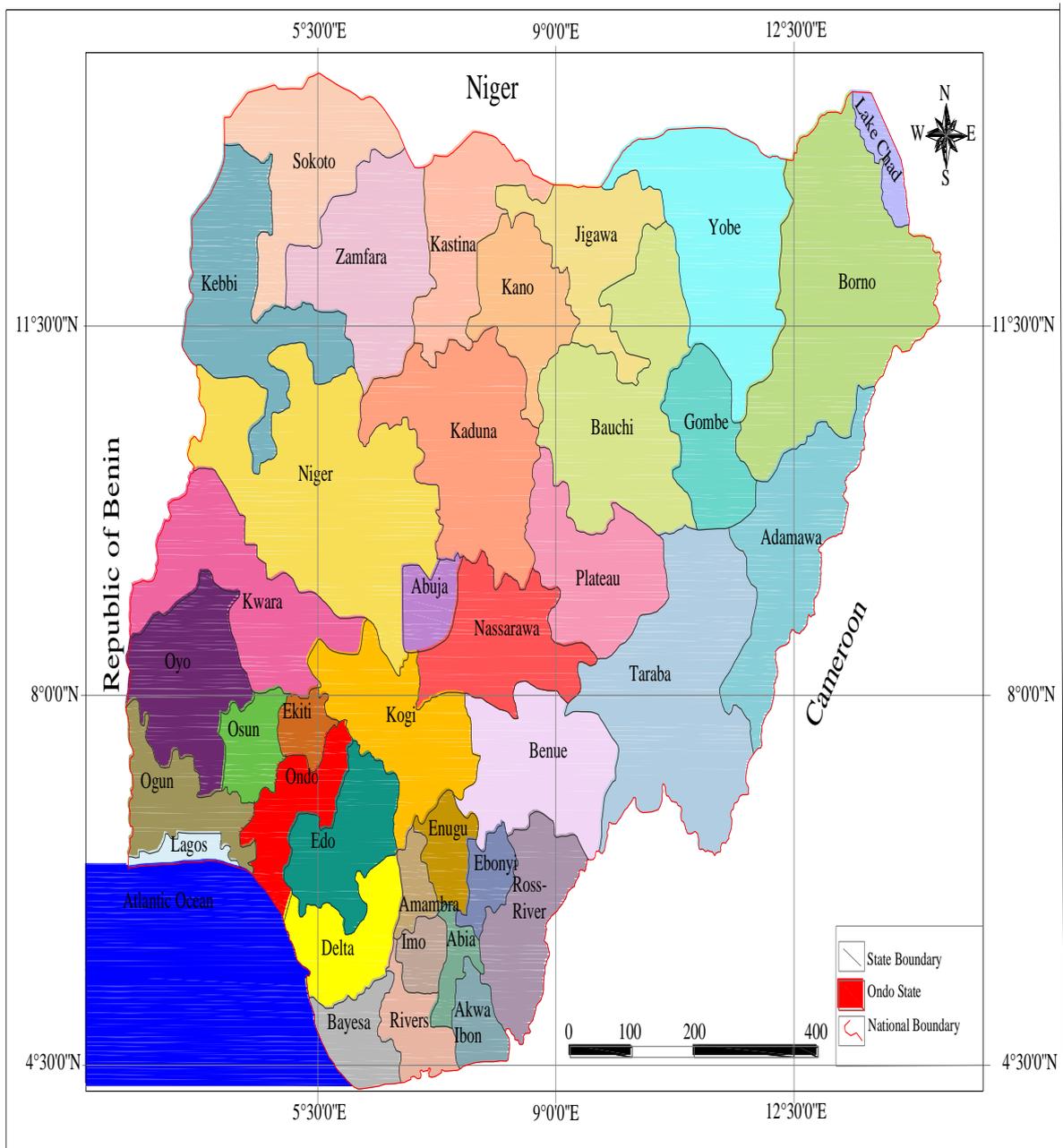


Fig. 1: Map of Nigeria showing the study area in its national setting

Source: Ministry of lands and survey, Abuja (2014).

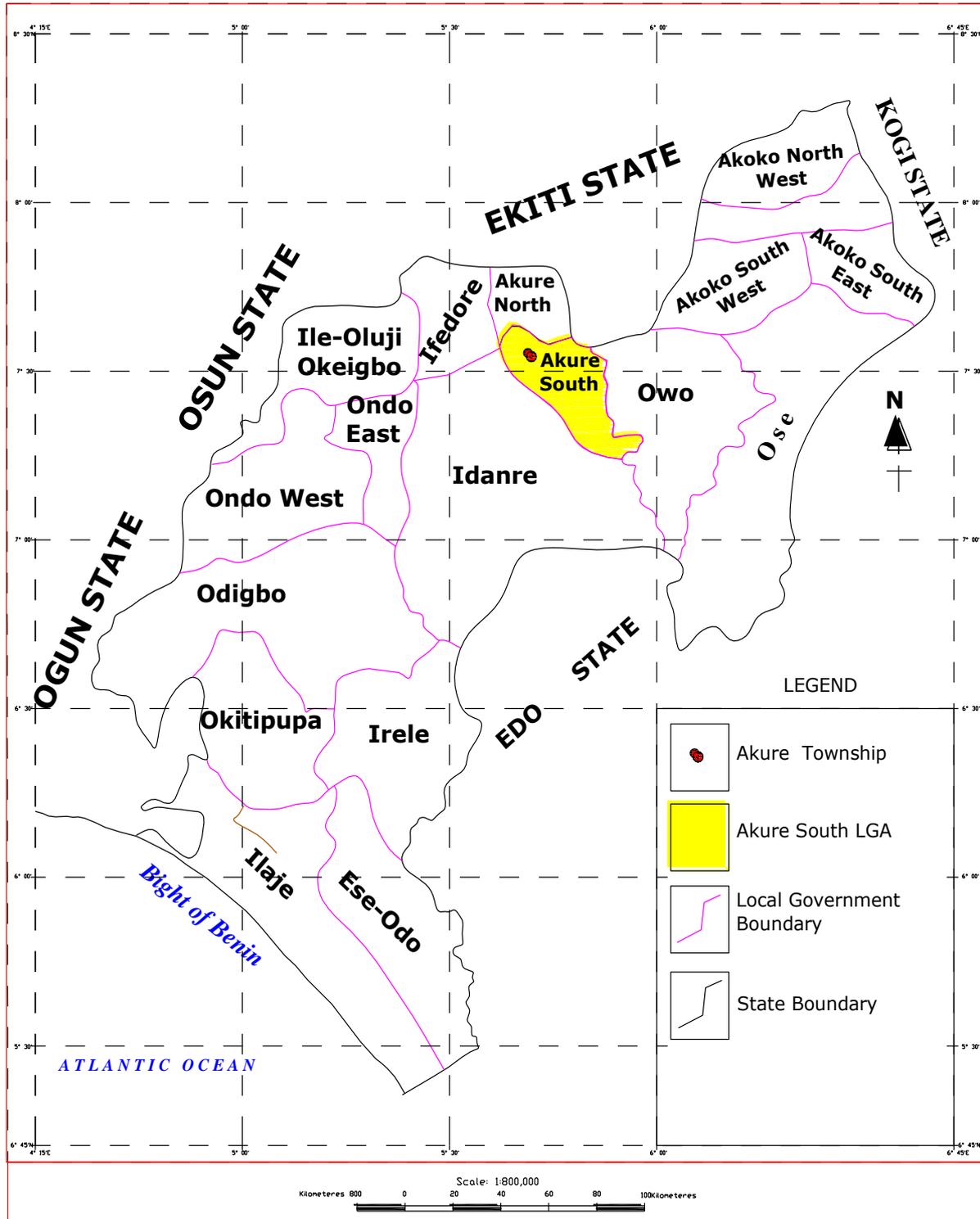


Fig. 2: Akure (study area) in its regional setting.

Source: Ondo State Ministry of Lands and Survey, Akure (2014).

employed. Using multistage sampling technique, a total of two hundred and forty (240) street beggars were sampled, that is, 12.5% of the total, 1,908 beggars.

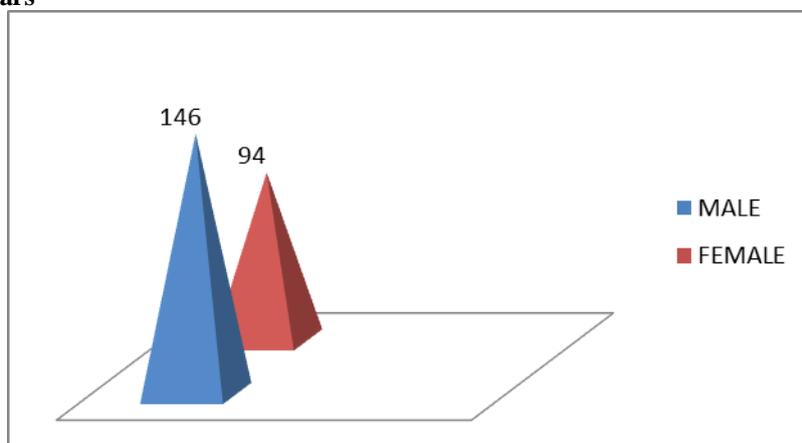
In 2014, using a growth rate of 3.18 percent, the city is estimated to have 453,731 people with an average household size of seven. Further relevant information for the study were collected from in-situ observations, photographs, informal interviews and discussions with the beggars, especially the key informants. Data obtained from the questionnaires were processed and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. The research findings were presented in form of tables, percentages, maps and charts as appropriate.

III. Results And Discussion

3.1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of Beggars

This sub-section examines the socio-economic characteristics of the beggars in the selected land uses and streets within Akure city. The results are presented as shown in the following charts, tables and subheadings. The subheadings cover a number of personal characteristics of the beggars which include: sex, age, marital status, educational level, income and household size.

3.1.1 Sex of Beggars



Source: field survey, 2014.

Figure 4: Sex of beggars in Akure.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of street beggars by sex. The study found that both men and women in the study area were involved in begging activities. Majority of the sampled beggars (60.8%) were males as against females (39.2%). This finding suggests that begging is more of male than female. This situation has a negative implication for Akure's economy as men who are culturally placed as bread winners for families are relatively idle in this unproductive habit. Similar findings were reported by [16] who found that men are highly involved in begging related activities than women.

3.1.2 Age of Beggars

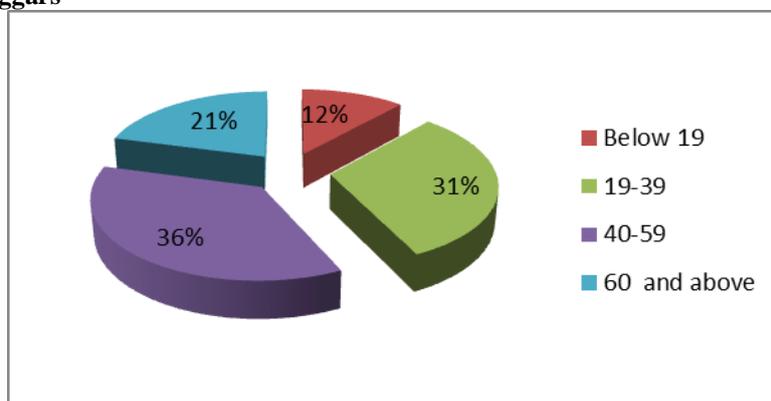


Figure 5: Age of beggars in Akure.

The street beggars were categorized into four age cohorts. Findings indicate that a large percentage of investigated street beggars (31.3%) and (36.2%) respectively belong to the group of persons considered as youths and productive. This situation suggests that, taking them off the streets through education and other empowerment measures will yield better positive results for the economy. The low percentages, (11.7%) were in the age bracket of 1-18 years and (20.8%) were 60 years and above; this shows the dependency ratio of the street beggars' age-wise. It can, therefore, be deduced that, children and aged people constitute a low proportion of beggars in Akure city. All the study locations within the city seemed to have a large population of the middle-aged beggars. Likewise, within each study spot, the findings suggest that people engaging in begging life ranged from the children, youths and the old ones.

3.1.3 Marital Status of Street Beggars

Table 1 shows the distribution of street beggars by marital status. The findings indicated that majority of overall street beggars (49.6%) were married and (14.2%) were singles. This is an indication that poverty, indeed abject poverty is responsible for street begging in Akure. On the other hand, Akure city has (04.6%) divorced, (03.3%) separated and (28.3%) widowed of the total sampled street beggars. This finding is in agreement with what were observed by [16] who found that begging is more of the married than the single in Ogbomoso in Nigeria. In Nigeria the relatively large average family size of seven (7) must be a factor occasioning poverty especially in an era of continuously economic downturn and political instability.

Table 1: Marital Status of Street Beggars in Akure.

Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Single	34	14.2
Married	119	49.6
Divorced	11	04.6
Separated	8	03.3
Widowed	68	28.3
Total	240	100.0

Source: field survey, 2014.

3.1.4 Education Levels of Street Beggars

Table 2 shows that majority of the street beggars (90.4%) had no formal education. However, a small number of the beggars had primary education (7.1%), secondary (02.1%) education and only (00.4%) had tertiary education. These findings suggest that street begging is more pronounced amidst illiterates as majority of street beggars have no formal education.

Most of the beggars had no formal education due to lack of care, peer group/family influence, unemployment/human capital deficit, cycle of poverty, lack of financial support and access to schooling. Financial incapacitation and lack of needed materials were identified as the impediments for not attending school.

Table 2: Educational Level of Street Beggars in Akure.

Educational Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
No formal education	217	90.4
Primary	17	07.1
Secondary	5	02.1
Tertiary	1	00.4
Total	240	100.0

Source: field survey, 2014.

3.1.5 Household Size of the Beggars

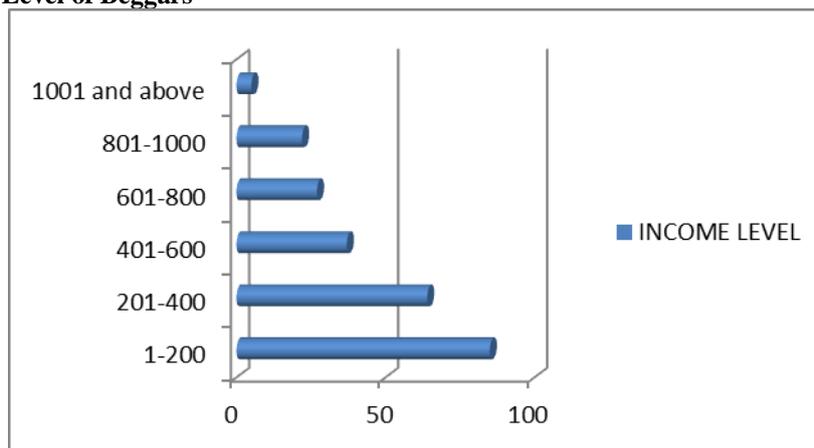
Regarding the beggars' household size, the findings revealed that the largest proportion (40.4%) had household size between 4 - 6, (36.7%) had 7 - 9 household members, (17.9%) of them had household size of 1 - 3 members while (05.8%) had household members of 10 and above. The result of these findings implies that putting a stop to street begging will be difficult. This is so because the beggars are holding on firmly to begging as their sole means of earning a living.

Table 3: Household Size of Street Beggars in Akure.

Persons/Household	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1-3	43	17.9
4-6	97	40.4
7-9	88	36.7
10 and above	12	05.0
Total	240	100.0

Source: field survey, 2014.

3.1.6 Income Level of Beggars



Source: field survey, 2014.

Figure 6: Daily income distribution of beggars in Akure.

Findings show that a large population of beggars in Akure belongs to the low-income group. For instance, (35.4%) of beggars in Akure realized between N1- N200 daily, while (26.7%) realized N201- N400 daily. The least population of the beggars (02.1%) earned N1001 and above as daily income. However, the average daily income of the beggars is more than N400 but less than N600 showing an average monthly income of between N12000 and N18000. The result shows that street begging is profit oriented. In other words, it is a business where money is not invested; nevertheless, money is realized on a daily basis. This implies that evacuating the beggars from the streets might involve serious effort because of their daily earnings on the streets. Forceful evacuation may induce the beggars to move to adjacent streets to earn income. It is trite to observe that poverty is the main cause of street begging in Akure.

3.2 Cultural Characteristics of Beggars

This sub-section examines the cultural characteristics of the beggars in selected land uses and streets within Akure city. The results are presented as shown in subsequent tables. These cultural variables include: nativity of the beggars, ethnicity and religion.

3.2.1 Nativity of Street Beggars

Table 4 presents the distribution of street beggars by home origin. The findings indicate that majority of the beggars (77.9%) in Akure city were migrants. This implies that majority of beggars conduct their begging life away from home areas (state of origin) or regions. The bulk of the migrant came from the northern part of the country (Nigeria). Few of the beggars (22.1%) were indigenous beggars engaged in begging activities.

Beggars in the city of Akure had various reasons that made them to migrate into the city. Only a few of the beggars said that they migrated to Akure in search for job while majority of them did not respond. On the other hand, some of the sampled migrant beggars in the city mentioned seeking for fellow relatives in town and medical care as the main reasons for migrating into the city and thereafter resolved into street begging as a source of making the both ends meet.

Table 4: Home Origin of Street Beggars in Akure.

Home Origin	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Indigenous	53	22.1
Migrants	187	77.9
Total	240	100.0

Source: field survey, 2014.

3.2.2 Ethnicity of the Street Beggars

Table 5 reveals the ethnicity of beggars in Akure city. The majority of the beggars sampled were Hausa (73.7%) of northern origin. The study reveals that most of them were from Kano, Katsina, Jigawa and Sokoto states. The Yoruba (23.8%) of the total sampled beggars came from within and towns around Akure. The smallest population of the major tribes in this finding is the Igbo (02.5%). Therefore, it can be deduced that street begging has cultural and religious inclination, which is why the Hausa had the largest population among the sampled beggars in Akure.

Table 5: Street Beggars by Ethnicity in Akure.

Ethnicity	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yoruba	57	23.8
Hausa	177	73.8
Igbo	6	02.5
Total	240	100.0

Source: field survey, 2014.

3.2.3 Religion of Street Beggars

Table 6 shows the distribution of the religion of the beggars within the study area. The findings show that in all the strategic locations (land uses) chosen for this study, majority of the street beggars (85.8%) were Muslims against (12.9%) who were Christians, and a minute proportion of the beggars were traditionalists, (01.3%).

Table 6: Street Beggars by Religion in Akure.

Religion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Islamic	206	85.8
Christianity	31	12.9
Traditionalist	3	01.3
Total	240	100.0

Source: field survey, 2014.

IV. Conclusion And Recommendations

The study established that street begging is carried out by diversity of people regardless of age, sex, religion and marital status among others. A short drive on the streets of Akure reveals that persons of both sexes, ages, all forms of disabilities and some without any kind of physical challenges are seen along the streets begging for alms. Notable findings include: Street begging is more of males than females; Age of the beggars reveals that productive youths are engaged in street begging; the average family size of the beggars is large; begging is more pronounced amidst the illiterates; and poverty as a major reason for begging. In summary, one hopes that our investigations have thrown light on the evidential socio-economic and cultural characteristics defining street begging.

In line with the findings of this research work the following measures are recommended: Beggars should be given vocational training and skill acquisition that will enhance the economy; education; rehabilitation centres should be built for beggars; public awareness, advocacy and sensitization on the negative effects of street begging; and poverty alleviation schemes among others.

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