

Article

Streets Sides: Encounters with Migrant Women Beggars in Enugu City, Southeast Nigeria

Obinna Dominic Ezeaku¹, Ngozika Anthonia Obi-Ani², Ogechi Akure Ikem³

Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

¹ezeakudinho@gmail.com, ²ngizika.obi-ani@unn.edu.ng, ³ogechi.ikem@unn.edu.ng

Correspondence: ogechi.ikem@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper originates from a novel investigation into the lived encounters of migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka within Igbo land, Nigeria. Street begging in this region brings forth a plethora of distressing and stringent realities, especially exacerbating for women beggars. Despite the harshness of their lived experiences, these women persist in their actions. This article scrutinizes their experiences, contending that their relentless engagement in begging, despite adversities, can be linked to a sense of helplessness, yet it also underscores their exceptional resilience, courage, and endurance – qualities reminiscent of the determined diligence exhibited by 18th-century Igbo women. Rooted in the theory of reasoned action and the learned helplessness hypothesis, this study employs in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and public engagement for data collection and analysis. To safeguard participant anonymity, pseudonyms were allocated to the 12 individuals involved, comprising two men and ten women. Participation was voluntary, and existing secondary sources were consulted to provide comparative insights. In amplifying the poignant narratives of migrant women street beggars, this research deepens our comprehension of their steadfast determination in the face of formidable adversities.

Keywords: Women, beggars, Nigeria, Igbo, streets

Introduction

The seemingly straightforward act of street begging conceals harrowing challenges for migrant women beggars in Enugu and Nsukka. Hailing from various corners of Nigeria, predominantly the eastern states, these women arrive without prior connections, thrust into dire circumstances upon their arrival. Their nights are spent beneath bridges, lorries, park benches, or kiosk verandas, and are exposed to all weather conditions. Battling dirt and discomfort, they beg in tattered clothing and disheveled appearances, often bearing deformities like swollen legs, stomach tumors, or hearing impairments. It is pertinent to mention that their average daily earnings, meager and irregular, range around ₦200 (\$0.25), dictating their feeding pattern – sometimes hunger persists, while other days see them eat once. Meals encompass anything from scraps and garbage to spoiled food, with instances of a mother preserving rotten bread for days to feed her family. Personal hygiene is a luxury they cannot afford which is evident in their ragged attire, worn-out slippers, and frequently, bare feet. Vulnerable to theft, pickpocketing, and sexual violence, they lack phones and communicate to their home intermittently through infrequent travel. These women endure the perilous impacts of urban pollution firsthand, their presence on the streets exposing them to hazardous city effluents. Harassment and punishment from security forces compound their challenges. The Enugu Beggars Evacuation Team (EBET) repeatedly raids and relocates them to the Vocational Rehabilitation Center, Emene – a government institution for handicapped entrepreneurial training. While fined ₦10,000 (\$12.60) for release, they prefer street



begging to the center's frustration-laden environment. Aside from that, the exploitative assistants, with criminal intentions, swindle these women, leaving them bereft. Verbal abuse and aggression are common, and sexual violence and exploitation add to their plight. These women's narratives reveal a poignant, unacknowledged facet of society—marked by suffering, resilience, and an unwavering drive to survive against the odds.

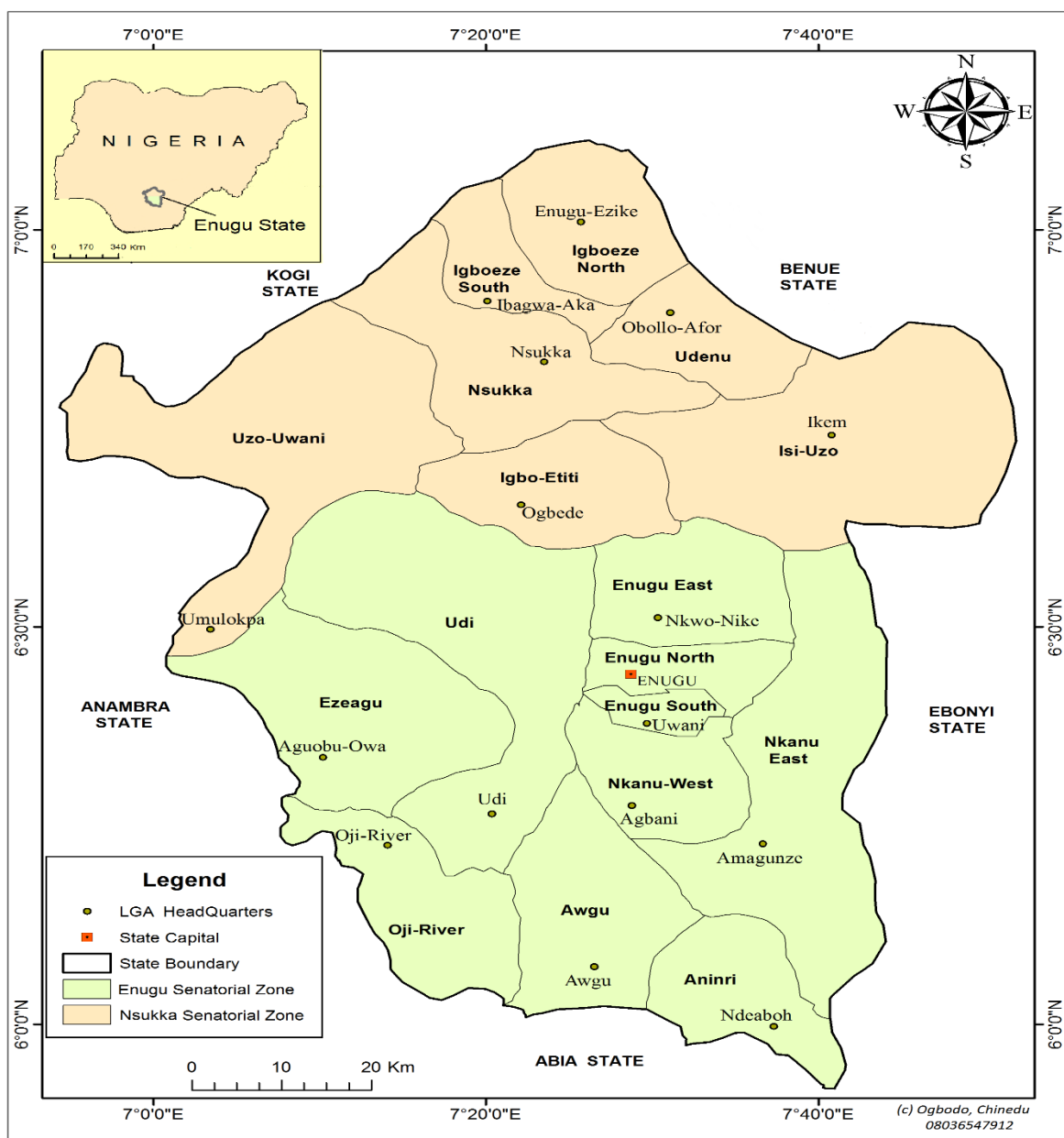
Study Location

The Enugu area was one of the final Igbo communities to be influenced by British colonization. Before the arrival of the British, Enugu town, as it is known today, was a vast agricultural land inhabited by the Nike, Ngwo, and Akegbe people. In 1903, European presence was first established in the Enugu area when the British/Australian geologist, Albert Ernest Kitson, led an exploration of Southern Nigeria (Asiegbu, 2015). The purpose of this expedition, under the supervision of the Imperial Institute London, was to search for valuable mineral resources. Although the team's quest for silver proved fruitless, they stumbled upon another valuable mineral—coal—in 1908/9 in the village of Enugwu Ngwo in Udi (Asiegbu, 2015). By 1913, a significant coal deposit had been discovered in commercial quantities. The discovery of coal piqued the interest of Lord Lugard, leading to the immediate construction of a railway line connecting Enugu and the Port Harcourt harbor. The railway was completed in 1916, and a mining camp was established. This rail link brought about rapid economic growth in Port Harcourt, thanks to improved transportation and access to the harbor. Similarly, Enugu experienced substantial growth due to the establishment of the mining camp, quickly overshadowing Udi, which had previously served as the administrative capital. By 1929, Enugu had expanded to such an extent that it was designated as the headquarters of the Southern Provinces, encompassing core Igboland and parts of Yoruba, Edo, and other neighboring minority groups such as Ibibio and Ijaw (Afigbo, 1980). Enugu became a prominent coal mining area in West Africa, providing employment opportunities for thousands of individuals. The presence of the mining camp and the railway also attracted petty traders who catered to the needs of the miners and rail workers.

In 1917, Enugu acquired its distinct status as Enuugwu-Ngwo, but it was later renamed Enugu in 1928 to differentiate it from Ngwo village in Udi. By 1939, following the split of the Southern Protectorate, Enugu became the headquarters of the Eastern Provinces and later the Region in 1951. As the regional capital, Enugu became a bustling economic and administrative center, attracting people from various ethnic groups across Nigeria. This diversity was evident when Mallam Umaru Altine, a native of Sokoto, was elected as the first Mayor of Enugu in 1956. Enugu was not only home to many Nigerians but also welcomed people from British Cameroon (Afigbo, 1980). However, the situation changed after Nigeria gained independence in 1960. The ethnic differences that were once inconspicuous under colonial rule became glaringly apparent. The country was subsequently plunged into a series of crises, culminating in the Nigeria-Biafra war.

Enugu, as the regional capital, became a refuge for survivors seeking solace from the escalating crisis. By May 1967, Enugu underwent a sudden transformation,

becoming the capital of the short-lived Republic of Biafra. However, this newfound status was short-lived, as Enugu was subsequently sacked, vandalized, and occupied by Nigerian troops between October 1967 and January 1970. The fate of Enugu is closely linked to the destiny of the Igbo people. Over time, it has experienced fluctuations, transitioning from being the regional capital to its current position as a state capital with 17 local governments within a divided Nigerian federation consisting of thirty-six (36) states. Nevertheless, what remains truly remarkable about Enugu is that the Igbo community still regards it as their capital. Enugu boasts a cosmopolitan atmosphere, characterized by its inclusivity, adaptability, and continuous growth across various domains. This study is located within Enugu urban and the university town of Nsukka which location attracts swarms of beggars to it as part of the cosmopolitan spaces.



Map showing old Nsukka and Enugu zones

Source: GIS Laboratory, Department of Geography, University of Nigeria.

Theory and Methods

This article is grounded in the theory of Reasoned Action and the learned helplessness hypothesis. The Reasoned Action theory explains behavior by identifying primary determinants and their sources, and organizing relationships between them (Yzer, 2013). It asserts that decisions stem from rational processes – weighing options, evaluating outcomes, and making choices (Reda, 2011). Understanding why begging becomes a livelihood choice requires grasping preferred job traits and constraining factors. Beggars calculate net benefits, influencing their decision to beg as their envisioned means of sustenance. In Enugu state, women beggars often accompany children, sometimes using newborns or multiples to evoke sympathy. This raises the query: Why do these women, despite socio-economic struggles, continue having children? The hypothesis is that they either exploit children for more earnings or have succumbed to "Learned Helplessness," a term coined by Hiroto (1974), and Overmier and Seligman (1967). Senator Misau dubs them "corporate beggars," capitalizing on society's sympathy to evade work and sometimes engage in criminal activities. Many perceive begging as their sole survival avenue, becoming trapped due to limited belief in alternatives (Learned helplessness, 2008; Peterson et al., 1993). Cook (2010) notes that beggars, accustomed to this lifestyle, often prefer not working, convinced they earn more from begging. Despite adversity, some women have persisted for a decade or more since 2011, while others joined in recent years. Many are widowed and beg alongside their children. Though perceived as helpless and indolent, these women's enduring presence showcases remarkable resilience and survival instincts, defying their dire circumstances. This article delves into the lived experiences of migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka cities. Previous research on street begging has predominantly focused on push and pull factors and societal impacts, often framing participants as lazy. This narrative subtly misrepresents begging as an easy escape from poverty. To counter this perception, we scrutinize the hardships faced by migrant women street beggars. While studies like Obidua, Eze, and Okide (2007) explored public views on street begging's negative societal impact, and Okoli (2016) addressed its effects on the state, the beggars' own experiences remain overlooked. To challenge this omission, we examine the trials endured by migrant women street beggars, relying on oral evidence and firsthand field observations.

Participants

Oral history, an invaluable tool in recovering neglected narratives, aligns with Bornat and Diamond's (2007) assertion that it challenges prevailing gender and class discourses. Employing field observation and in-depth interviews, we collect, describe, and assess the beggars' lived experiences. This approach acknowledges the significance of studying subjects within their natural context, understanding emerges from the meanings they attribute. We meticulously immersed ourselves in the world of migrant women street beggars, attentively capturing their emotions, thoughts, and interpretations alongside their lived realities. Participants, consisting of 13 individuals (two men and ten women), were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Voluntary participation and secondary sources supplement the

study for comprehensive insights. By exploring these women's stories, we shed light on the unexplored facet of street begging, rendering their struggles and resilience visible within a narrative often overshadowed by stereotypes and misperceptions.

Results and Discussions

Despite all Odds: The lived Experiences of Women Migrant Beggars

Discussions into the lived experiences of migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka of Igbo land negates the uniformed public notions of the blissfulness and painless nature of street begging. By extrapolation, the migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka have lived a tough-like experience in the course of begging. Their morbid experiences are habitual and vast. These women came from various parts of the country but the majority are Igbo women who came from other states notably Ebonyi, Abia, Anambra, and Imo. Many of these migrant women street beggars are in the childbearing age. The majority migrated along with their children aged between 3 and 13, although some are breastfeeding mothers with newborn babies aged between one and twenty-four months. Some of the women street beggars who migrated from the Northern and Western parts of the country and are Muslims did so under the influence of 'begging as a culture.' For instance, one Miss TS, a Muslim from Ilorin was a healthy young female of beauty and attraction. She was encountered begging in Enugu. She could not give any cogent reason for her engagement in begging except that she did not see any wrong in soliciting for alms. Another Miss MN is a Hausa-Fulani woman who begs along with her three children in Enugu. Her begging too was accounted on the morality and culture of begging. The majority of the women of Igbo extraction beg because of poverty. For instance, the majority of the Igbo women came from Ebonyi State and their story is a live embodiment of the cataclysmic effects of war. Land boundary war between Ebonyi State and Cross River State sacked these women from their homes and villages, rendering them destitute and helpless. They sought refuge in Enugu and Nsukka and resorted to street begging to survive. Sudden disasters and often ill-fated developments such as floods, inferno, and death of a breadwinner, unwanted pregnancy and delivery, and ill health and deformity informed the reasons for some others. Abject poverty and lack of support system posed as the most pervasive factor and directly or indirectly sums every other factor behind the migration of the majority of the women into Enugu State to beg.

On arrival to Enugu State along with their children, migrant women beggars who had prior contact had only little or no settlement challenge. But for most of them especially the war fleeing and natural disaster plundered victims, who had no prior contact and pre-arranged settlement before immigration, life was a dreary affair. Unforeseen destitution had rendered them homeless and dejected. They easily become natives of the street hold-up under the bridges or keyed up to corners and shades, or spend their morning, afternoon, evening, and night on the roadside. The majority spend the night in the street, underneath lorries, culverts, and bridges such as Aguata Bridge in Enugu during dry seasons. Some pass the night in the veranda of closed kiosks, bus stop stands, and parks during the rainy season. The majority of these migrant women arrived almost with nothing except the poor outfits they put

on and a parcel of few clothes. Some arrive with raffia mats. Some who could not afford raffia mat make do with disposed raffia bags. The unavailability or scarcity of waste raffia bags places importance and utility on their wrappers which they sleep on with much resolution showing no manner of concern for comfort. Cooking was a foregone alternative since they virtually arrived with nothing. Even for those that had prior contact; the easiness and longevity of their settlement depended on the generosity and toleration of their host. Their host ranges from close relatives to fellow beggars who have begged for a long time and managed to secure a room either in the suburbs or in the heart of the city. Many of the relatively established migrant women beggars who have respectively rented single-room apartments or shacks in the suburbs or the urban area fear that sharing accommodation with fellow beggars might cloud the determination of the host to secure her own settlement. Thus, some of the migrant women street beggars who even had prior contact were just contacts that guided them into the state and taught them strategic begging locations. Consequently, after a short time and they are not able to secure a shelter, they may likely end up spending their night in the street. For instance, an excerpt from Mrs AB (2020) testifies as follows:

Somebody brought us here, a relative. She is a cripple. She stays at Holy Ghost to beg. She was the one who guided us into Enugu State because we do not know anywhere here. She told us not to stay at Holy Ghost. She told us to stay here (Opposite the Traffic light at Ohafia Bus Stop). Like now that we came, after each day's begging, we go to Garriki. We do not have a house there but we stay on the veranda of people's shops and spend the night. We leave during daybreak before the owner comes. On daybreak, we leave and continue begging (Personal communication, July 10, 2020)

Passing the night in the street has exposed these women to many interminable night dangers. Insect bites and bad weather are the most inevitable of all. Once spending the night in open places, the women and their children became subjected to incessant mosquito bites and the night's intense weather such as downpours and harmattan with their accompanying chilliness. Many of the women migrated in groups into Enugu while some came individually. Most especially, some of the individual women migrants tend to keep to themselves. They neither ask questions nor try to identify with their fellow gendered beggars. They also beg independently at a separate spot away from popular begging locations. For them, bus stop shades, roadsides, and veranda of peoples' kiosks continue to be night-spending places. One respondent and mother of three revealed that "We sleep at New Market. We do not have a house there but sleep at the bus stop. Sometimes we sleep at people's shop" (Mrs DC, Personal communication, July 28, 2020). Considering the night's unfriendly weather, these women's experience is therefore unpalatable.

With the progression of time, they become adapted to surviving in the city. At this stage, they learn that there is some certain cheap hospitality, especially for spending one's night, taking a bath, and locations of public latrines. Such places as testified by some of the women include motor parks that offer public convenience. Garriki Park and Peace Park at Holy Ghost in Enugu, and Peace Park at Nsukka are the most exemplary. The migrant women street beggars spend twenty Naira to urinate

and fifty Naira to defecate (Mrs. DC, Personal communication, July 28, 2020). But as observed, many of the women do not often make use of the public convenience rather they trek far away from public sight to a reserved bush or unoccupied location to ease off. Some also climb inside roadside gutters and poo under the public glare. They take this enormous stress because the cost of formal convenience to them was a whooping sum considering their insignificant daily earnings. Aside from knowing formal convenience, the women also learned of places where one can pay a cheap sum to pass the night. Very many of the migrant women beggars in Enugu retire to Mammy at New Garriki at the day's end. Ugwuoye, a suburb of Nsukka town offers relatively cheap accommodation to the migrant women beggars at Nsukka. They either rent in groups or individually. Rent can be daily, monthly, or annually. Cost ranges from ₦200 (\$0.25) daily, ₦12,000 (\$1.50) per six months, and ₦24,000 (\$30) per year.

Their physical appearance is beggarly, their dress is shabby, and their footwear is cheap and worn. It comprised mostly old and oversized bedroom slippers. Their children carry bushy hair although some of them who go to school shave their hair in school. Many of the women also keep unkempt bushy hairs. Some plait theirs into a cheap localized style once in a while. The majority leave theirs scuffed though often covered with ruffled headscarves. Some of these migrant women along with their children are static location beggars; they stay at one spot to solicit for alms. Others move about from street to street and from layout to layout. Often, they either suffer or feign one form of deformity or the other such as being blind, deaf, dumb, or tend to exhibit some kind of terrible ailment like partial stroke, cancer, tumor, and/or soaring wound, and so on. Individuals often called 'beggars' assistants' lead this category. The beggars' assistants help in explaining the nature of the ailment, telling stories of ugly and pitiful experiences the victim had passed through, and lastly soliciting for alms. The migrant women beggars move about with polythene bags containing alms they received. They attract public attention with their deformity. However, their songs and sound instruments elicit pity more. They patrol either with bells or wooden gongs to attract attention. Some who could not lay their hands on a bell or wooden gong make use of an empty tin or a pan. They amplify the sound with often very heart-touching songs that command people's sympathy. Although one thing is worthy of pointing out, these women employ this strategy to influence members of the public who would rather be reluctant to consider giving them alms but their ability to conceive this strategy is a far clear pointer of their ingenuity and innovative spirit which is a survival tool in our globalized world.

These migrant women beggars beg under clement and inclement weather conditions. They come out very early in the morning even when the morning dews have not yet cleared off. Some of them come along with their umbrellas. The static-location beggars head straight to their usual begging spot while the patrolling beggars patrol from one spot to the other along with their assistant (s). They spread their umbrellas in the noon of occasional harsh sun radiation, while their children take charge of the street running after every passerby and soliciting for alms. During drizzle, the children retire to nearby abandoned or unequipped kiosks. However, when the drizzle transformed into an excessive downpour the women

closed their umbrellas and took refuge like their children. They head to the veranda of closed shops or abandoned kiosks. Nevertheless, in a situation where there is no available closed store, they retire to the veranda of open shops, and in such circumstances, shop owners growl and howl at them. While some shop owners go to the extent of waving them off or out. Consequently, they get drenched by the time they would have taken refuge in another kiosk. This experience explains why some of these migrant women beggars come to their begging location or patrol with umbrellas. In the evening, the women retire to their respective habitations. They do this individually and one after the other in an unsuspected manner that spares the attention of the unconcerned public. The following morning, they would repeat the same procedure, by which they came the previous days, resurface at their begging site and begging continues as usual. They beg under the sun, and not even the peak of sun radiation compels them out of the street.

The beggars had no verified means of reaching out to relatives or family members (if any) at home. The majority of them had no mobile phone, and for the very few who had, it was always shut down for low battery. This has been caused by no available means of charging. Nevertheless, even for those with accommodation, such accommodation is very poor even lacking a power connection. Even for the few accommodations that had power connections, paying the bill becomes a burden since they neither possess television nor radio, other than poor mattresses or mats, a few cooking utensils, and polythene bags of wrappers and children's wear. Judging the precedence of illiteracy among them, they do not also write home. The only means of contact with home is directly travelling home. This demands that they have saved enough money. However, in a bid to save a considerable amount very many of them stay for months and perhaps years before visiting home. This partly explains their constant presence in the street for years because travelling is aperiodic.

Migrant women street beggars in Nsukka and Enugu had to save money to buy water to drink, take their baths, and pay for their house rent. Personal maintenance like hairdressing for the women, haircuts for the children, perfume application, and even detergents for bathing and washing were not a concern of necessity to them. They appear unkempt and tattered in the street. They got wetted with salty dark sweat during harsh sun radiation. The sweat in turn gradually dries back in their body by evening.

Their daily earnings vary but are generally inconsiderable. At Nsukka, women along with their children had an average daily earnings of ₦200 - ₦600 (\$0.10-0.75). Although they earn above ₦600 on favorable begging days; on some unfortunate days, the daily earning goes below ₦200. Women beggars in Enugu seemed to earn more. Their average earnings ranged between ₦500 and ₦1000 daily (\$0.20-\$1.25). The average daily earnings might be manageably sustainable for these women but for some who have their children with them, the amount is insubstantial. This limitation is further aggravated by the intermittent flow of alms. The alms though small in amount do not come often. It comes once in a while, occasional and sporadic. Yet, these migrant women along with their children feed and do other sundry expenses from it.



Photo of women and children swallowing fufu with eye-sore soup served on an old plastic plate. Source: Picture taken during fieldwork on August 05, 2020.

Consequently, these migrant women and their children have an unstructured feeding schedule to keep up with the insubstantiality and irregularity of alms flow. They eat depending on the time the alms they receive reach a considerable amount. They feed on cheap junk like unsweetened bread, *Okpa*, and the rest. Soaked cassava flakes substitute tea and form a frequent meal. At Nsukka, women along with their children were observed severally, drinking soaked cassava flakes. They were found eating fufu with sight boring soup in another instance. A parcel of cooked fufu cost ₦50 and ₦100 both at Nsukka and Enugu. A hundred naira worth of fufu is just good enough for one square meal for a child. But pitifully these women and many of their children were observed feasting on one parcel of fufu in the street at the spectacle of a bemused public. The texture and outlook of their soup contained in an old plastic bowl inform of its very poor quality. Often they do not have breakfast and when they have their lunch, dinner would be a foregone alternative. In a nutshell, most of them live on one malnourished square meal per day. The malnourished nature of the dish of migrant women beggars in Enugu and Nsukka is such that they can confidently feed on the worst urban garbage. One, Mrs. EP lived an experience that practically illustrates the junky dish of migrant women beggars. Mrs. EP tearfully narrated her lived experiences. She was once a trader whose goods and money got burnt in an inferno. Already neglected and abandoned by family and friends with no forthcoming help, she came over to Enugu State to beg so that her four children would be fed (Mrs EP, Personal communication, July 18, 2020). She occasionally broke down in tears during her narrative. As she narrated, she brought out a rotten or somewhat decayed piece of bread, presented it to us, and said:

Look at this bread. It was beaten by rain; this is how it was shared to us yesterday. Then I divided my share into two halves and we ate one-half yesterday. It has rotten; you can perceive the smell (She brings it closer for me to perceive the odour). There is nobody who will find himself in a good economic condition and still prefer street begging. I used to help people before my condition changed. My husband is no longer there, my husband's

relatives are not helping (she starts crying)... (Mrs EP, Personal communication, July 18, 2020).

Amid their ugly situation, these women have fallen easy victims to thieves, pickpockets, and snatchers. Enugu metropolis and Nsukka recently upgrading to urban status are witnessing a rise in crime rate which according to socio-environmental studies is one of the effects of urbanization (Anumba et al 2018; Eze, Obi & Ajah, 2020). Accordingly, some of the women migrant beggars have tasted a sore bite of the widespread crime rate. A journey through the stream of the narrative of some of the women who once or more have fallen victim to criminals is at least appalling. Particularly the heart-touching experience of one Mrs. YZ, a mother of three. Mrs. YZ unveiled this:

There are the pickpockets that roam around unsuspectingly. There was a day I finished begging, and put the money in my purse and, in turn, put the purse in the Bagco bag I carry. I boarded a vehicle from Amaechi bus top to Garriki. I entered Garriki market to buy something we would eat that night. After buying, I wanted to pay but discovered that my money was no longer there. Pickpocket! They had sneaked their hand into the Bagco bag I carried and took the purse and I knew it was when I was alighting from the bus at the Apo fueling station... (Mrs YZ, Personal communication, August 22, 2020)

She stated further that, there are many of the thieves there, preying on them daily. Her agony was that:

Worse of all, I had not eaten that day with my children because I was trying to save money which we would use and buy food that we would cook for dinner. After I discovered that my money was no longer there, the shop owner, a woman took back her goods and rebuked me to be gone from her; that I was a 419, that that is how they operate... I suffered that day. We did not even have T-fare to go to where we live and it was already evening. I was stranded. I had to settle at a spot beside the street again and started begging for alms...(Mrs. YZ, Personal communication, August 22, 2020).

What is surprising about Mrs. YZ was her comportment at the time she discovered she had lost the only money she had generated from begging since morning. Mrs. YZ realized that her helpless and bedridden husband had not eaten since morning, her children needed to have dinner, and worse all she had to pay for transport to get home. She settled down at a spot once more inconsiderate of enveloping darkness at least to generate their transport fare.



The street Opposite Ohafia Bustop. College of the Immaculate Conception (C.I.C) Enugu
Source: Picture taken at the course of fieldwork on August 10, 2020.

Contrary to the perception of closeness between beggars and their assistants, handicapped migrant women beggars in Enugu and Nsukka have endured exploitative relationships with some assistants. A number of these assistants, viewing beggar support as a long-term profession, engage in criminal practices. These actions involve misappropriating the beggars' daily earnings, leaving them stranded and distressed. Numerous handicapped women and disabled children attested to such exploitation. They laboriously navigate streets, parks, and classes daily, facing all weather conditions, only to have their earnings unjustly diverted by their assistants. The traumatic ordeal faced by some handicapped migrant women beggars at the hands of these exploitative assistants is deeply distressing. The response of one Mrs. FG bears an interesting but pitiful experience. She narrated thus:

As I stayed in the village, one woman from my village who works with the welfare returned and then brought me to Enugu. She led me back and forth begging from street to street for alms not only in Enugu, but in almost all the cities- Onitsha, Asaba, Aba, and so on. There is nowhere she had not taken me to beg for alms. But there has not been any better treatment. Take me to the hospital, no! After begging, I would not see the money. Therefore, I told her and others that enough was enough. I should be left alone; let me beg on my own. Any amount I make I will know that this is the amount I have made and I will also know how to spend it and what I spent it for since you people can neither take me to hospital nor give me a considerable amount of each day's earnings. That is why you see me sitting down here. Since then, I have been begging on my own... (Mrs. FG, Personal communication, August 10, 2020).

Migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka confront not only exploitations from assistants but also an onslaught of verbal abuse, aggression, hostility, and degrading gestures from the public. This distressing reality aligns with findings by Bukoye (2015) and Jelili (2013), affirming that street beggars face immense difficulties and often fall victim to public abuse. Though some passersby

offer generosity and sympathy, others exhibit harshness and insensitivity (Bukoye, 2015; Jelili, 2013).

Enugu State, despite its prevailing religious philosophy depicting beggars as society's downtrodden, witnesses instances where certain individuals perceive them as cursed and unleash insults. A participant recounts an incident: "Sometimes if you beg someone for money, he will start to insult you. Like what happened yesterday, a man spat into our begging plate and drove off. Another time, a woman insulted me, telling me to find work as if it's easy or readily available" (Mrs. AB, Personal Communication, July 10, 2020). Nearly all interviewed migrant women beggars recount enduring public abuse as a constant facet of their begging experience. Such hostility includes spitting, sighs of disdain, rebukes, menacing stares, and more.

Despite this entrenched animosity, migrant women beggars resiliently maintain politeness, displaying sorrowful smiles, and often offering prayers for those who humiliate them. Their capacity to endure and transcend public humiliation underscores a maturity and comprehension uncommon even among ardent religious believers and educated individuals. Their ability to persevere amid adversity parallels the qualities of adept customer relation agents or successful business magnates. It is plausible that with proper empowerment, these women could excel in business, industry, or governance.

Although the lived experiences of migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka cannot be overemphasized. The most terrific of them all is sexual violence. It is like being beaten by a snake when one is still passing through the pain of a scorpion sting. Some migrant women beggars have been sexually abused by ravenous sex sex-hungry urban touts and unkind men. Some of the women have experienced attempted rape. Some others were raped. Mrs. KJ (2020) who begs in Enugu revealed thus:

The first night I came, I slept at a motor park before I found my community member the following day. That night, a security man wanted to sleep with me. He said that if I did not have sex with him, he would send me out. Although I cannot remember his face when I said that I would shout, he ordered me to leave. I resisted because I paid #500 to sleep there. I later learned that it is ₦100 or ₦200 that beggars pay to spend the night. So, when I resisted and wanted to shout, he quickly left with his torch... (Mrs. KJ, Personal communication, August 15, 2020).

The lived experiences of one Miss QR bear a case of rape. Miss QR, a 22-year-old migrant woman narrated her ordeal at the hands of an unkind man. The man had after giving her alms, promised to take care of all her financial troubles. He convinced Miss QR of his devotion to his promise by giving her considerable alms each day he passed her begging spot. After some weeks he invited Miss QR to the hotel apartment he secured with a fake identity. There, he raped her, banded her mouth, tied her arms and leg and checked off. The hotel receptionist who later came to re-arrange the room released Miss QR. She could not stop begging despite the haunting experience. Stopping begging is committing suicide because nobody will come to her aid. Probably many women in the top social echelon, often regarded as 'women in politics' and as having a lion's heart, might resort to suicide after rape.

Here is a migrant woman beggar who despite her physical deformity got raped. Despite the danger of getting unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and the trauma of forced penetration, Miss QR endured and continues with the ordeal of street begging. Her story is believably very pitiful but her bravery, courage, and resilience serve as motivation to all and sundry never to give up no matter the circumstance.

Urban pollution's perilous impacts deeply affected women migrant street beggars in Enugu. Those gathering by roadsides often positioned themselves near gutters brimming with hazardous sewage. Consequently, they faced mosquito bites, toxic fumes, and infections from city effluents. Lingering on the streets left them vulnerable to noxious emissions from urban transport. During our fieldwork, we experienced firsthand the fumes and smoke emitted by these vehicles, compelling us to seek lung detoxification with Garnicia Kola. Remarkably, these women, enduring daily exposure, resort to no medication.

Migrant women street beggars in Enugu and Nsukka, in their numbers, have suffered tuberculosis in addition to their infirmities. They testified having suffered typhoid, fever, and malaria. Some migrant women interviewees reported stomach aches. They also mentioned ulcers as part of the constant illness they have suffered. One of them revealed that she had treated her two children for chicken pox and measles. Some others testified having suffered illnesses that included headache, indigestion, and insomnia. Yet despite their state of unhealthiness, they still expose themselves to harsh sun radiation and intense downpours. In the 18th century Igbo society, as provided by Equiano (1996), the diligence of women was such that they laboured under both clement and inclement weather conditions. The ability of migrant women beggars to beg under unfavourable weather speaks of a spirit of endurance which illustrates their spirit of diligence if they get empowerment.

Vocational Rehabilitation Center, Emene: A Solution?

Security disturbances have compounded the challenging experiences of migrant women beggars, subjecting them to raids, evacuation, and detainment. The Enugu State Beggars Evacuation Team has frequently targeted begging spots in Enugu, carelessly apprehending and transporting these women to the Vocational Rehabilitation Center Emene. Initially established in the 1970s to aid war-maimed victims of the Nigerian Biafra War, the center's management transitioned from federal to state control in 1999, marked by an unfortunate lack of attention during Governor Chimaroke Nnamani's tenure (1999-2007). Under Governor Sullivan Chime's administration (2007-2015), renovations commenced in 2011, followed by further improvements during Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi's tenure (2015-2023) in 2017. In tandem with these efforts, the Enugu Beggars Evacuation Team was established in the same year. Nevertheless, Ajogwu (2017) highlighted the team's recurrent raids on begging centers, branding beggars as eyesores tarnishing the state's image. Despite official motivations, responses from interviewed migrant women street beggars indicate that these security raids disrupt not only their means of sustenance but also their survival strategy, viewed as a desperate attempt to stave off impending death (Njoku, 2019). Recounting their ordeals, many women shared tales of dehumanizing apprehensions, irrespective of their age or gender.

Detained at the Evacuation Center, they were typically required to pay a bail fee of ₦10,000 for release (Njoku, 2019). Those unable to afford this sum languished there, sometimes for weeks, unless encountered a sympathetic officer willing to release them, albeit with threats and insults. According to 'The Guardian Nigerian News,' these migrant beggars have recounted that ministry officials often demand a ₦10,000 bail fee for their release and allege that officials strip them of all their money during arrests (Njoku, 2019).



One of the renovated Buildings at the Vocational Rehabilitation Center, Emene.

Source: The picture was taken during fieldwork 10 July 10, 2020

Despite hefty fines, numerous migrant women beggars managed to scrape together the funds and return to the streets. They opt for street begging over remaining at the center for instruction due to the considerably worse conditions observed there during fieldwork. The center only provided two skills – shoe-making for males and sewing for females. Many hostels had leaky roofs, while staff quarters were even more dilapidated. Handicaps solely relied on meager center allocations, devoid of personal choices or monthly stipends, leaving them unable to tend to personal necessities. Shockingly, reports unveil sexual harassment and exploitation by staff and officials, further exacerbating their predicament. Upon completing the program, graduates are released into society without any practical resources or technological support. They return to their families, if any, and endure lives marked by dependence, seclusion, and idleness. A participant, Miss Chikodili, lamented how she attended the vocational rehabilitation center, yet after her parents' demise five years ago, she resorted to street begging for survival. Following graduation, she lacked the funds to acquire sewing equipment and a shop (Miss Chikodili, Personal communication, August 16, 2020).

Rather than squander two years on a venture that might not improve their circumstances, migrant women beggars choose to persist in the arduousness of street begging, if only to sustain their children and evade the horrors of sexual exploitation. They would rather confront the monstrous challenges of street begging, safeguarding their livelihood and ensuring their children's nourishment, than succumb to such abuse.

Conclusion

The narrative underscores the challenging ordeals faced by migrant women beggars in Enugu State during their street solicitations. These women hold untold stories, often silenced due to societal perceptions surrounding beggars. Moreover, researchers tend to align their inquiries with public sentiment, emphasizing the adverse effects of street begging, thereby casting beggars as contributors to societal issues and unsanitary conditions. This paper contends that while street begging certainly impacts society, its ramifications are particularly pronounced for migrant women. Neglecting these women's narratives reflects a biased historical perspective and clarifies why anti-begging laws lack accompanying social support frameworks. Instances of clearing beggars from streets in Enugu and Nsukka lack comprehensive strategies for financial or material empowerment, underscoring the ignorance of these women's lived experiences. This stems from their position within society's overlooked strata. Consequently, governmental decisions and policies are often misconstrued by popular beliefs and prejudiced research outcomes. Our exploratory findings in Enugu and Nsukka highlight the heartrending circumstances of migrant women beggars, warranting economic interventions. Despite overwhelming challenges, their tenacious commitment to street begging reflects extreme poverty and vulnerability, yet it also underscores exceptional resilience, bravery, resourcefulness, and endurance. These qualities also indicate the potential for dedication and diligence among these women, particularly if they receive empowerment. In essence, this study advocates for acknowledging and amplifying the voices of migrant women beggars, emphasizing their dire need for economic support and recognizing their innate strengths that could flourish with appropriate assistance.

References

- Afigbo, A. E. (1980). The Eastern provinces under colonial rule. In Obaro Ikime (Ed.), *Groundwork of Nigeria history*. Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books.
- Ajogwu, N (2017). Enugu government rids State of street beggars. *Channels TV*, December 19. Retrieved July 15, 2020, from www.channelstv.com/2017/12/19/enugu-government-rids-state-of-street-beggars
- Anumba, J. U., Ojiako, J. C., Gbokwe, E. E., Ejikeme, J. O & Nnam, V. C. (2018). Crime mapping in Enugu Urban Area of Enugu State, Nigeria using GIS approach. *Journal of Environmental and Earth Sciences* 8 (9), 18-36.
- Asiegbu, O. J. (2015). *A historical assessment of the sanitization and urban development in Enugu, 1917-2012*. B.A Project submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN).

- Bornat, H. & Diamond, H. (2007). Women's history and oral history: Developments and debates. *Women's History Review*, 16 (1), 19-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09612020601049652>
- Bukoye, R. O. (2015). Case study: Prevalence and consequences of streets begging among adults and children in Nigeria, Suleja metropolis. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 171, 323 – 333.
- Cook, S. I. (2010). *What you need to know about begging in India and common begging scams*. Retrieved February 15, 2010, from <https://goindia.about.com>.
- Equiano, O. (1996). *The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself in 1789*, tr. Paul Edward, 1-192. Long Grove: Waveland Press Inc.
- Eze, O. J., Obi, D. O. & Ajah, B. O. (2020). Nigerian Criminal Justice system and victims of crime neglect in Enugu Urban. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 14 (3), 41-53.
- Hiroto, D. S. (1974). Learned helplessness and locus of control. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 102 (2), 187-193. <http://www.appstate.edu>
- Jelili, M. O. (2013). Street-begging in cities: Cultural, political and socio-economic questions. *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences: Sociology and Culture* 13 (5). Retrieved July 15, 2020, from https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume13/7-Street-Begging-in-Cities-Cultural.pdf.
- Njoku L. (2019). Dumping of beggars, mentally: Ill persons in psychiatric facility raises concern. *Guardian Nigeria News* 23 September. <https://m.guardian.ng/news/dumping-of-beggars-mentally-ill-person-in-psychiatric-facility-raises-concern/>
- Obidua, M., Eze, J. U. & Okide, C. (n.d.). *Demographic variables in the perception of street begging syndrome in Enugu State: Implication for counselling*. A Paper Presented at the 31st Annual Conference of the Counseling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) held at Covenant University, Ota; Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Okolie, I. S. (2016). *Locations and patterns of street begging in Enugu metropolis*. M.Sc Project Report submitted to Institute for Development Studies (IdS) University Of Nigeria.
- Overmier, J. B. & Seligman, M. E. P. (1967). Effects of inescapable shock upon subsequent escape and avoidance *Learning: Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*, 63 (3), 23-33.
- Peterson, C., Maier, S. F., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2001). Learned helplessness: A theory for the age of personal control. Retrieved July 15, 2020, from http://books.google.co.in/books/about/Learned_Helplessness.html?id=7R0MQkigGcwC&redir_esc=y Ports of the Taylor Francis group.
- Reda, T. A. (2011). The causes, prevalence and psychosocial consequences of begging in Addis Ababa among beggars coming from Tigray Regional State. MA Project submitted to the Institute of Psychology, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, 2011

Yzer, M. (2013). Reasoned action theory: Persuasion as belief-based behavior change. In James Price Dillard & Lijiang Shen (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of persuasion: Development in theory and practice*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Publisher's Note/Disclaimer: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of NJH. NJH disclaims responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.