

Research Article

Begging in the City: Complexities, Degree of Organization, and Embedded Risks

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Received 28 March 2018; Revised 1 August 2018; Accepted 14 August 2018; Published 2 September 2018

Academic Editor: Elena Nicoladis

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Until recently and despite its familiarity, begging in Ghanaian cities had been considered worthy of little attention. Despite the best efforts of a few academics to highlight the motives of beggars, critical analysis of the begging phenomenon within the spectrum of urban livelihood remains embryonic. This article unpacks the complexities, degree of organization, and embedded risks in street begging involving children in Kumasi, Ghana. The article draws on empirical evidence from 55 conveniently selected child beggars from five heavily congested locations and presents extensive review of existing scholarships on the phenomenon. The results reveal that child beggars adopt varied operational strategies to woo public sympathy. Begging strategies are mapped by adult escort who also counts the money as it is made. For many, begging has increasingly become a socially and economically constituted process that mediates how they deal with poverty and livelihood challenges. The beggars are also daily exposed to risky encounters but without any protection. We argue that stopping the phenomenon will require innovative approaches that go beyond conventional legislations.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of 1970, one narrative tying together Ghanaian cities, like other cities in the Global South, has been the acute confluence of austerity, diminishing public welfare, and fragmentation of formal employment [1–3]. This, coupled with unchallenged urban growth, has suspended and/or reshaped work opportunities for many in the potentially working population (Thieme, 2017). As a result, prolonged periods of uncertainty characterize the experience of residents across the cities such that finding decent jobs is increasingly asymptotic [4, 5]. Even though Ghana has recently experienced remarkable economic growth [6], this has not been translated into sufficient job creation for roughly over 70 percent of the teeming youth who enter the labor market annually [3], thereby creating a niche for the informal sector, which provides approximately 90 percent of jobs.

Along legitimate informal economic activities, begging involving children has also emerged as an important livelihood choice for survival. The phenomenon has become

complex and multifaceted challenge to deal with because of the nature and changing forms it is assuming and also because it involves children who are comparatively fragile to withstand the high level of vulnerabilities and the negative factors associated with it. Hawkson [7] defines child beggars as people below 18 years who beg for alms. Begging involving children is a worldwide phenomenon [8]. Theoretically, earlier studies on child begging focused on the various faces of the phenomenon and its implication on the welfare of the child (EC, 2010) [9] and were also divided about the causes of the phenomenon [8]. The assigned causes range from economic motivation to organized or “rhythmic” movements, normally underpinned by a way of life. Other studies from different parts of the world have also unpacked the effects of the phenomenon and its future implications on countries where the practice is pervasive (see [10–13]; Swanson, 2008).

One key colonial footprint in Ghana today has been its pole position as the veritable country for child begging [7, 14, 15]. Meanwhile begging in all forms (whether for money

or food) is considered illegal in Ghana as indicated in the Children's Act (Act 560). It is also considered by many Ghanaians as unacceptable, "stigmatized", and "devalued" ([16]: 163; [17]). Conceptually, studies in Ghana have examined the root causes of child begging without providing empirical reasons for addressing the phenomenon (see [14, 15, 18]). In alignment with other critical scholarship, [19, 20] have argued that the beggary problem has a lot to do with a country's socioeconomic and historical aspects characterized by low incomes, high unemployment rates, fast rising cost of living, high rates of population growth, inappropriate public policies, and continued migration to the city. These studies further underscore the relative interest in the phenomenon in recent times and also highlight the complexities associated with it.

On the streets of Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana, the activities of child beggars have assumed multinational and multicultural dimension. It is mainly undertaken by children from diverse backgrounds—foreigners, indigenes, physically challenged, mentally fragile, and those without any form of deformity [6]. It is estimated that there are over 10, 000 of such children in the city [6] and that these child beggars engage in the practice to fend for themselves or the family. Kejetia, Adum, Roman Hill, Central Market, Asafo Market, and the various heavy traffic congested areas are but few points of concentration for these beggars. Meanwhile, Ghana has ratified many international conventions on the protection of the child such as the 1948, 1959, and 1990 UN General Assembly Universal Declarations on the Rights of the Child. The Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 have incorporated specific targets related to children, including the prohibition of child begging. These and many other national legislations including the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana have recognized the need to ensure that every child has the right to survive; develop to the fullest; be protected from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation; and fully participate in family, cultural, and social life [21]. It therefore beats credulity that begging involving children has grown to an unchallenged level on the streets of Ghana. This is against the background that such legislations and institutional frameworks were influenced, defined, and shaped by social norms and values across time and space (see Justice for Children Policy, 2015).

The objective of this article is not to dabble in the raging debates or provide exhaustive discussions on the varied causality of child begging. The intention is to contribute to existing literature by unveiling the creative tricks child beggars employ to court public sympathy, the begging outcomes, and the risks they face. We take as a point of departure, the fact that no country, community, or economy can achieve its full potentials or meet the challenges of the 21st century with many of its future leaders taking to beg in the street. We argue that although begging as a survival strategy does potentiate great opportunities for some unemployed urban dwellers to escape from extreme poverty, the risk child beggars face and the overall negative impact deserve more academic and policy makers' attention. The study is presented in five sections. The introduction is followed by the theoretical framework

guiding the study. The methodology is then presented in section 3 while the results and discussion are presented in section 4. The conclusion and recommendation follow in section 5.

2. Framing the Child Begging Phenomenon: Reasoned Action Perspective

Theories taking the "begging-career" perspective focus on how through a variety of mechanisms peers, family members, or social institutions surrounding individuals influence their decision to beg for alms in cities. One prominent example of this perspective, Theory of Reasoned Action, explains begging as a decision based upon the weighing of costs and benefits of that livelihood activity [22, 23]. Beresford and Sloper [23] believe that social explanations of begging are also relevant, in particular the notion of "sociological inheritance", whereby the involvement of parents and elder siblings legitimizes an individual's participation in alms begging, a notion that is also in sync with Bannister et al. 2010 postulations on social disorder. It is also argued that those who place more emphasis on the intertwining of family and neighbourhood history are more likely to act in accord with that legacy, adopting a particular mode of social behavior [24], so that individual social and spatial identities become intertwined.

The article is housed in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980. This framework was chosen because begging for alms in Ghanaian cities is a behavioral action that is taken after careful thoughts. The basic assumption of TRA is that in most cases individuals can choose whether or not to perform a behavior. It further assumes that the primary determinant of behavior is the person's intention—given the appropriate opportunity to perform a behavior, intentions will guide behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein [22] proposed that intentions are derived from two cognitive processes: the person's attitude towards the behavior and the perceived social norms regarding the behavior, termed "subjective norm".

They argue that attitude is assumed to be determined by the person's belief about and evaluation of the outcomes of an action. TRA recognizes that behavior occurs in the context of social influences which exert pressure to perform or not a particular behavior. A further influence on intention is the subjective norm, which is a combination of the person's belief that people who are important to them think that they should or should not perform the behavior, and the person's motivation to comply with these opinions. From that perspective, begging by children in Kumasi is determined by behavior. To put it another way, the act of asking people for financial or material assistance is just a normal behavior backed by intentions. In such contexts, we tend to concur with Simon (2011) findings, that the existence of begging is a product of social influences which exert pressure on beggars to ask for alms. The choice to beg for alms is the outcome of a process which involves assessment and judgment. That is, the beggar evaluates the different livelihood options and makes a decision about which option to choose.

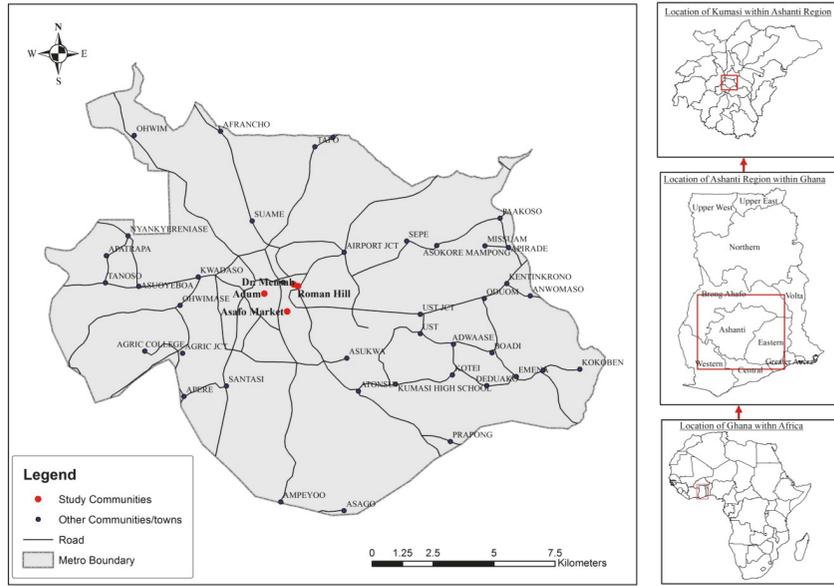


FIGURE 1: A Map of Ghana Showing the Study Area. Source: adopted from Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2016.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Area. The study was conducted in Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana [6]. The city is also regarded as the largest commercial center with the most attractive traditional settlements pattern in the country. It boasts of the largest open-air market in the West African subregion [25]. The brisk commercial activity is attributed to its central geographical location as it links northern Ghana with other parts of southern Ghana. Kumasi also serves more than five landlocked West African countries. Again, part of Kumasi's relative prosperity derives from abundant forest and mineral resources from the surrounding communities as well as the renowned local enterprise and artisan skills, particularly in the areas of furniture-making and vehicle engineering, which serve clientele from surrounding countries [26].

In 1960, the population of Kumasi was 218,172. As at the end of 2010, Kumasi had a population of over 2,022,919, representing an annual growth rate of 5.4 percent [6], which is one of the highest recorded in the subregion [27]. This phenomenal growth of the urban population has resulted in escalation in the number of people without employment. The GSS [6] indicates that over the years, the percentage of people with some form of employment has decreased from 76.9 percent in 2000 to 69.4 percent in 2010. Again, there is female dominance among all age groups regarding economically active population except in the age groups 40-44, 55-59, and 60-64 years where the male proportions are slightly higher. Similarly, the economically not active population (not employed, not seeking nor available for work) shows that female proportions are higher than those of males for all age groups, ranging from 50.3 percent for the 15-19 years age group to as high as 70.7 percent among the 35-39 years age group. The high economically not active proportion among

females 35-39 requires attention because it is the most active years of a person's life. These economic indicators according to the Ghana statistical service may have accounted for higher numbers of street beggars in the city.

3.2. Study Design and Data Collection. The study employed qualitative research design in data collection and analysis. For the purpose of this study, child beggars were drawn from five heavily congested public places in the central business district. The inclusion criterion for the study was based on the definition of a 'child' provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a person below 18 years. The five hotspots were Adum Traffic Light; the pedestrian pavements in front of the Central Market; Kejetia Bus Terminal; the footbridge at the Railway Station; and the frontage of Mel-com shopping center (Figure 1). The locations of potential interviewees were determined during the reconnaissance survey.

Even though child beggars could visibly be seen plying their trade in these selected areas, getting their consent for interviews was quite a herculean task. This was due to many reasons: the air of suspicion that greets "strangers" and "intruders" because of the often negative remarks. Another reason was the distractions granting interviews would have provided; therefore, considerable effort had to be invested in building relationships and trust. Also, they were hardly found fixed to certain specific locations for considerable length of time. Different sampling techniques were employed to select the research participants. First, in getting the child beggars to interview, the study employed convenience sampling method to sample 55 child beggars from the selected locations. Berg (2001) noted that convenience sampling relies on available subjects, that is, those who are close at hand or easily accessible.

A semistructured interview guide was designed for the respondents. This way, the researchers had control over the line of questioning while allowing respondents adequate space to provide detailed information where necessary [28]. In order to fully understand the issues being investigated, the one-on-one story-telling interview approach was adopted as it is an effective tool which offers researchers an opportunity to get in-depth information regarding the phenomenon under investigation [29]. The one-on-one interview approach was also adopted because of the child beggars' limited educational background and the fact that the respondents were all minors. There were many instances where the researchers had to read the items on the interview guide over and over and also interpret them into other local languages before the appropriate responses were obtained. Issues that were probed included reasons for engaging in begging; their parents knowledge about their trade; number of years they have spent begging at their location; how much they earn in a day; who keeps the money or how the money is spent; and more importantly the risks they face. All the interviews were conducted between 17.00 hours GMT and 20.0 0 hours GMT. The interviews with each child beggar were done at a location other than where they ply their trade, and for each respondent, the parent or guardian was present. Each interview lasted for about two hours. In all, it took three months to complete the data collection. The method provided greater insights into a wide range of attributes, behaviors, experiences, incidents, and qualities among others. It should be noted that ethical considerations of informant approval, confidentiality, and consequences were carefully adhered to. Permission was also sought from all child protection institutions in Kumasi. Consent was obtained from caregivers of all the minors involved in the research before they were interviewed. Respondents were also assured of strict confidentiality, and data collected have been handled as such.

The study also benefited from secondary data obtained from various sources including the examination of reports from state agencies and civil society groups, workshop and conference proceedings, and various studies on child protection. Other forms of secondary data were also collected and extracted from various government databases. Additionally, observation of various stages of the alms begging process was carried out. The observational allowed for gaining insights into their modus operandi, power relations (formalized and tacit), and others, while in practice, a careful attempt was made to keep the field records focused and systematic in order to generate comparable data sets to aid the analysis. During the observations, pictures were taken for the purposes of filling missing links and validate and cross-check the interviews. The observations took place during the day and at the various locations already mapped. However, because of confidentiality and also in order to respect the agreement between the researchers and the interviewees, the pictures were not included in the results.

3.3. Data Analysis. All the interviews were audio-recorded with permission. These audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and added to other field notes and analyzed manually using hand coding and highlighter pens to color important texts.

TABLE 1: Thematic area, definition indicators, and means of analysis.

Thematic Area	Definition	Means of Analysis
Courting public sympathy	How beggars attract the attention of the public	Verbatim translation of interviews and Pictures
Risky encounter	The dangers involved in the begging business	Verbatim translation of interviews
Begging outcomes	Daily income and benefits accruing from the begging business	Verbatim translation of interviews

These verbatim quotations, which illustrate how participants attached meaning to each theme, represent the core findings of the study. For confidentiality and ethical reasons, the respondents are identified only by a self-generated pseudonym. Taking a leaf from Barnett [30], the thematic areas were carefully identified and the frequency of each theme was recorded, as well as the number of participants who articulated that particular theme (Table 1).

The results are presented in four ways to reflect the four research questions/themes guiding the study. As Maxwell [29] has advised, this is a very useful approach to qualitative data analysis as it provides great opportunities for the researcher to carefully organize volumes of qualitative data into insightful findings.

4. Results

4.1. Courting Public Sympathy. At the heart of the business is the beggar's ability to court public sympathy. This is because courting more public attention and, more importantly, courting the attention of the right sympathizer often translate into good business. The study revealed that child beggars deployed all sorts of strategies to court public sympathy and that age and sex of child beggars were a good precursor to attracting a good 'client'. For instance, a 45-year-old mother explained why she allows her 8-year-old girl to engage in the act:

"As you can see from her physical appearance, she looks slim and small like someone who has not eaten for days so she easily catches the attention and sympathy of the general public".

The father of another 8-year-old beggar explained:

"I allow my daughter to beg because young females easily catch the sympathy of both adult men and women. It is easy for them to make good money. Again, the young girl is able to work according to the instructions giving to her to win people but the boys sometimes abandon the business to go and play soccer with their friends. So you see, it is always good to use the female children than the males", he concluded.

Interestingly, we observed that older males were rather more than older females. For instance, there were more male beggars between ages 11 and 17 than their female counterparts. The in-depth interviews revealed that as the

female children advance in age, they tend to feel shy than their male counterparts. At the frontage of the Melcom building, while male beggars were conspicuously seen plying their trade, the female beggars were seen at only vantage places or in some obscure corners. A 16-year-old female beggar explained:

“Truly I feel shy standing out there in the public begging. This is because I am old and very soon can be married to someone and therefore I do not want my future husband to see me in this business. As we speak, I have a fiancé at my hometown who does not know this is the job I do. The fact is that I have been doing this for almost ten years and once my mother’s last born finishes Junior High School, I will stop”.

A 38-year-old mother whose twins have been engaging in the business of begging for alms introduced religious dimension to the phenomena:

“In my hometown, twins, triplets and quadruplets are deified. The spiritualist says we the mothers must beg to cater for the children. So when my children were 3 years old we all begged together. Now I have stopped and they have to beg for alms till they are 10 years old or they will die”.

These narratives are but a few snapshots of the reasons for the age differences among the sexes. Characteristically, the research revealed that all the respondents did not have any attempts at school enrolment and none of them was on the radar screen of the state. They collectively evoke an ethnic occupational niche for migrants from northern Ghana, all of whom claimed they entered the “trade” as a way of accumulating capital that would not have been possible in the place of origin. It was also revealed that child beggars normally appeared before their targets with a pitiful face. This approach won the hearts of their targets to be merciful and offered financial support, which was primarily their main motive. A child beggar offered the following response in an interview:

“I am with my two younger brothers who need to be feed and so if I don’t make my face look pitiful people will not mind me and support me and my brothers as my mum is physically challenged and cannot work”

Samata (pseudonym), a 15-year-old beggar explained that where the pitiful facial expression does not work, she grabs passers-by and possibly cry out with intent and purpose of courting their sympathy. She explained:

“The best thing to do is to target people who are decently dressed. Once a passer-by has dressed decently, it is believed that such a person has some money to give out so you go to him straight”, she concluded.

It was revealed during the interview process that child beggars mostly planned soliciting for help from their target

from a distance. That is, an examination is somehow conducted on their targets to find out if they are able to offer them (beggars) money. One child beggar narrated how he approaches passers-by.

“Once somebody is coming you look at the way he is dressed and then you start asking for money. Sometimes, you ask anybody you see too for money when those who are neatly dressed do not mind you”

Whereas some child beggars indicated they normally assessed the possibility of getting money from their targets and concentrated more on them, some others generally begged anybody they chanced. Operationally, the begging business was observed to be quite diverse, pervasive, and spatially defined. Timing was also important in where and how to court the right attention. Mostly child beggars started their trade during the morning rush hours (between 5am and 10am). Another busy period was during that after rush hours (3pm to 7pm). Samata(pseudonym), the 15-year-old beggar, remarked:

“I like the morning and the evening period because that is the time many people are going to work or they have closed. You know in the morning everybody you approach will give you because they believe if they give you, God will bless them and the day’s work will be successful”.

The 38-year-old mother of the twins narrated why she preferred the evening rush hour period:

“At that time many people would have closed from work and those who had a good day will give you money as a way of thanking God for his mercies and blessings. Business is good between 4 pm and 6:00 pm”, she concluded.

The begging business was thus more intense at the pedestrian pavements in front of the Central Market, Kejetia Bus Terminal, and the footbridge at the Railway Station. These spaces in Kumasi constituted the largest bus terminals in the city. It was observed that the beggars exhibit artistry traits of vigilance but benefited a lot from the general disorder at those places during that period of the day. Within the chaos each beggar makes the frantic efforts to be the first to sight an on-coming “client”. Typically, the first to sight a potential client uses all kinds of gesture to court attention. These gestures were observed; they are learned and rehearsed over and over again before the day’s business starts.

Insightfully, we observed that the beggars’ location and strategies changed as the morning gave way to day time activities. The research revealed that between 10 am and 3 pm the concentration was frontage of supermarkets and shopping malls including the frontage of Melcom shopping center at Adum in the central business district. This period also came with changes in the begging strategy. It was observed the beggars employed the team begging strategy. Team begging refers to those beggars who beg jointly or as a team. The field observations showed that the team was

normally made of three or four children usually stationed at vantage points to beg. They also moved or walked around depending on the concentration of potential clients. It is important to state that team begging was different from those beggars who were seen simply crowded in one area doing individual business. Team beggars did their business in a well-planned and organized manner. The proceeds were shared after close of business but this also created some sort of conflicts as child beggars on several occasions were observed to be engaging in heated arguments because of mistrust and suspected cheating. The study also revealed that team beggars were particular about the kind of dress they wore and the overall physical appearance. For instance, they prefer to dress in bright colored clothes so as to easily court public attention. As one profiteer indicated in an interview:

"I dress them well so they do not become nuisance to the public. Sometimes, they move out pretending to belong to an organization engaging in a project. By this way people are eager to help. They therefore do not ply this trade at one place as they can easily be identified", she concluded.

The research further revealed that another form of child begging was 'advocacy begging'. Advocacy begging was a form of begging where one person begged in the name of or as an advocate or spokesperson for others. This type of begging mostly occurred where those children interviewed presented themselves as advocates for their sick mother, father, or profiteer. In some of those cases, twins or triplets were seen practicing advocacy begging due to religious persuasions/inclination. A mother of a triplet indicated in an interview that in her religious beliefs triplets must subsist on the goodwill of mankind. She continued:

"We have been advised by the native doctor in my hometown to engage in alms begging to feed the babies or lest my children will lose their lives".

Even though this practice is mostly found in northern Ghana (see [31]), it has become common economic activity among many urban dwellers in Kumasi as they have adopted this path of soliciting for money from the public. During an interaction with a group of advocacy child beggars on the footbridge at the Railway Station to ascertain what propelled them in this form of begging, the common response was:

"...my mum says people will have more sympathy for us and offer us money than her as some see her as lazy and not ready to work..." (Advocacy beggars, 2017).

Clearly, this type of child beggars was normally seen with tattered clothes and pretended to be sick or hungry. It is important to state that the tricks employed have been mastered by these children over a long period of practice.

4.2. Begging Outcomes. The results further revealed that for many families and caregivers, using children as beggars has increasingly become a socially and economically constituted process that mediated how they dealt with poverty and

livelihood challenges. All the study participants agreed that though begging was not a socially and legally acceptable livelihood activity, it was still far better than many of the casual jobs in town. They shared their views in the follow-up interviews:

"On a good day my two children give me more than GHS 120.00 (equivalent to USD 4.00 at January 2017 exchange rate). Which work will you do and get this money"?

Another 16-year-old beggar at Central Market opined:

"Now I know I am old and very soon will stop this job but the question is what work will I do and get more money and other favours like this one. Every month I am able to send my parents about GHS 200.00 (equivalent to USD 8.00 at January 2017 exchange rate). That is what they using to take care of my other siblings education in the village.

Again, majority of the beggars were staying with their single parents or nonbiological relatives. For over 70 percent of the beggars, they have been forced to beg due to the poverty situation which has been exacerbated by the limited employment opportunities in the city. In an interview with a child beggar (aged around 16 years) she opined:

"...my parents are divorced and my elder brother does not take care of us and we don't get food to eat. So I have to beg to feed myself and brothers..."

Other child beggars who participated in the study gave reasons such as poverty, broken homes, and no parental support among others necessitating their resolve to ply the trade.

"For me, it is good, for I'm getting more money every day I'm begging. Me, I'm always begging here and supporting my small brother in the house...when I don't get money I will sleep here on the street and not go home because my madam will beat me for not bringing anything to the house" (Child Beggar at Kejetia Traffic light).

Our interactions with some of the profiteers provided another side of begging that has not captured research and policy attention. The research revealed what we call "begging entrepreneurs". These are older folks who have recruited migrant children to beg in the city and paid them for the service rendered. How much a beggar is paid depended on the sales they made.

Samanta, a 45-year-old begging entrepreneur, revealed:

"I have about 11 girls from my home town under my tutelage who are doing the 'business'. What I do for them is that the daily sales they bring is divided into three; I take one portion, the they take the second portion for their up-keep and the third portion is saved for them so anytime they want to go back home or they want to engage in a new trade the savings is given back to them".

She continued that she has been in the business of recruiting beggars for the past 20 years and that the business has been good:

“I use the portion of my money to supplement the income that I make from my other business. I have also that to help them build some assets for their personal development and by extension, their families”.

In terms of income, each beggar was able to save an average of GH¢400 a month (GH400 US\$ 100). These findings resonate with studies of Oteng-Ababio et al. [3] who observed that the failure of Ghana’s formal sector to provide employment for the citizens means that the income from the begging business was overwhelmingly satisfactory.

4.3. The Everyday Risk. While child beggars’ preoccupation was for economic gains, they were on daily basis exposed to risks but their pursuit to escape the poverty trap often overshadowed these risks. The first set of risks identified is what we describe as “double agony effect”. This was when child beggars were coerced to solicit for money for their profiteers/master(s) but did not benefit directly from their activities. Mostly, these children moved around in the scorching sun with hungry looking faces to beg for alms. They were often monitored by their profiteers, who pitched camp at obscure corners and quickly took away the daily sales without compensation to the beggars for the work done. They were scorned, insulted, or even beaten when they were unable to execute the plans of their masters. Interviews with some of the beggars revealed that those who failed to hand over monies to their profiteers were deemed as stubborn and were sometimes not fed for the rest of the day. A child beggar at Kejetia Bus Terminal shed tears in the interview section when quizzed on why his profiteer was hauling insults at her:

“Mama is send me take money from him (pointing her hands to the direction of the ‘benevolent’ passer-by) and money fall down and car come and I’m running...mama say no food for me. I’m get money for her today and hungry now...”

With little emphasis on grammar, the narrative illuminates images child beggars go through in their effort to appear sympathetic and court the attention of the public. In another interview, a 16-year-old female child beggar recounted with deep emotions how she was sexually abused by unsuspecting client:

“He called me and ask[ed] me to buy something so that I can keep the change afterwards, he dragged me into the kiosk and forcefully had sex with me. When I reported the matter to the women I am staying with, she even got angered the more why a grown up like me will report such a case and warned me not to tell anybody. Later I realised that my mother go to him every day and use my case as a bate to extort money from the guy”.

The interaction with the child beggars who participated in the study revealed that the beggars who were unable to

settle their grievances with their profiteers were eventually asked by their masters to sleep on the street during the night as punishment. A fourteen-year-old boy recounted his experience with armed robbers when the master threw him out of the house:

“I was sleeping in front of the store when I saw five men breaking the padlocks. When they saw me, one of them shouted let’s kill him he is the watchman. Just as he was about to trigger the gun another guy asked him to stop because he suspects I was a small boy sleeping. They approached me and asked where I was going. They left me after I have told them my ordeal and continued with their operation”.

The results appear to be a tale of messianic hope and dejection, with some of the respondents seeing begging as new opportunity for surviving in the city.

5. Discussion

The findings from the study have clearly shown that child begging has become full time livelihood activity for the beggars and their profiteers. It paid the family rent, built the family accounts, and puts food on the table. From all indications, begging as a behavior is a planned activity that is backed by intentions as explained by TRA. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that child beggar’s motivations are based on the live experiences in their places of origin and their current economic stature and social responsibility. The beggars actively choose that livelihood activity rather than any other livelihood choice because of the ease of making money. By implications and as suggested by TRA, they evaluated opportunities available to them and took decision to beg. To put it another way, the beggars are just exploiting the economic opportunities within reach to make money and these have become an integral part of Kumasi’s economy though such an activity contradicts national laws—Children of Ghana [6]. The Children Act of Ghana also sets out to protect children from exploitative labor, discrimination, and degrading treatment. These laws and conventions make child begging illegal. Our findings also support the studies of CUBS [32], which argue that children are particularly vulnerable group and such venture further exposes them to abuse and deprivation of basic needs, care, and protection leading to miserable lower class life. As reflected in the interactions, the future of these children who engage in begging is bleak, being devalued and stigmatized, especially as some of them live on the street to beg, a situation shared by [16, 17].

The analysis also showed that child beggars faced a lot of challenges dealing with their profiteers despite begging for money for the team. On many occasions, profiteers decided whether a child beggar under his/her watch would eat and what food and at which time of the day. The research revealed that some profiteers also decided the kind of punishments to be meted out to child beggars anytime they flouted their instructions, but commonest among the punishments were starving and forcing children to sleep on the streets. For this reason, majority of child beggars who participated in the

study regarded the street as their home and therefore sleeping on the street was “normal” and a common phenomenon. For instance, over thirty of the fifty-five children indicated that for them sleeping on the streets was a normal thing because that had been the commonest form of practice from their profiteers. According to them, they even prefer to sleep on the streets because it saves them from further abuse from their profiteers. This finding is in sync with observations from UNICEF [33] that children who work on the street eventually abandon their homes to live on the street where they enjoy some form of freedom.

The narrative of the study participants clearly highlights the fact that there are a complex degree of organization and embedded risks in street begging involving children in Kumasi. Irrespective of the level of risks involved some key actors saw the phenomenon as normal and familiar, not deviant and somehow unnatural due to its frequent connection to poverty. These findings are contrary to the UN Millennium Development Goals 2000-2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 which have specific targets related to children, including right to survive; develop to the fullest; be protected from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation; and fully participate in family, cultural, and social life. The four core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are nondiscrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival, and development; and respect for the views of the child [6].

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Three issues have clearly been established by the study. First, while begging was seen as a lucrative livelihood activity that supplements family income, the welfare of these child beggars who are not only asset to their profiteers but also future leaders of the nation was grossly abused. These children laid the “Golden egg” of the families they serve and therefore the obvious question is, why is the “Hen” that lays the “Golden egg” abused? The second issue was that child beggars were daily exposed to risky encounters but this tended to be viewed narrowly. Profiteers were interested in the daily income and not how the income was made. These children lacked the basic protection every child ought to enjoy. The third issue that also emerged was that while child begging was prohibitive by law, none of the law enforcing agencies and other civil society groups has shown interest in curbing the act. This gave room for child beggars to adopt whatever tactics they deemed fit to achieve their aim irrespective of the overall consequence to the general public. In a similar vein, child beggars were far removed from the law and they could not seek redress anytime they were abused.

On the basis of these findings, the research recommends that there should be adequate and strict enforcement of all treaties and conventions affecting the welfare of children by Ghana government to protect those forced into begging. Punishment must be meted out to those who force children to beg. There is also the need for awareness creation by child activists, civil society, and gender advocates to sensitize, educate, and fight for the rights of child beggars. These interventions must include the immediate and long-term risks to

children who are forced to beg. And more importantly, the long-term intervention should target families who freely offer their children to stay with other relatives with the view of educating them. Such parents should be sensitized on the need to do regular follow-ups on such children to avoid any future repercussions associated with child begging. Finally, a range of training programs particularly for the police and social workers are needed to help them to respond sensitively to the particular needs of these children.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

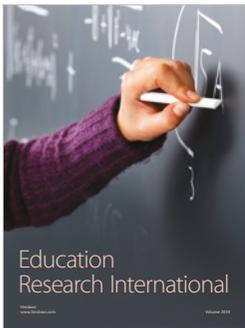
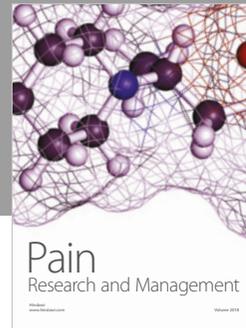
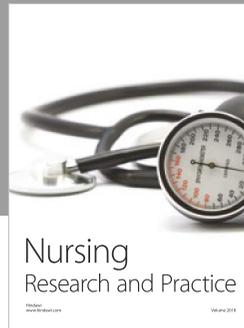
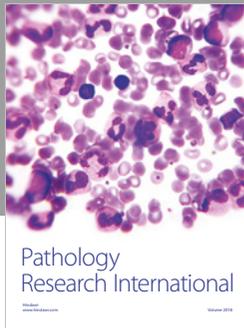
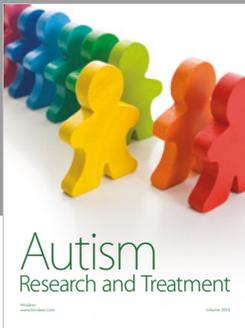
Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to the various government institutions for volunteering information on child protection in Ghana.

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