

**PSYCHOTHERAPY AND REHABILITATION  
COUNSELLING FOCUS: PANACEA TO STREET BEGGING  
IN MAJOR CITIES IN IMO STATE**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper postulates psychotherapy and rehabilitation counselling focus as a cure, a magic potion to street begging in major cities of Imo state. Street begging is a social phenomenon that is prevalent in Nigeria, arguably due to economic down-turn. It involves the elderly, the young and children, male and female alike. It is of social concern that street begging which used to involve mostly those who have conspicuous physical handicaps of many forms, has today metamorphosed to involve able bodied and very young people. The public opinion indicates that street begging is a social scourge in main cities in Imo State. Some laudable efforts have been made by some individuals, organizations, government and non-government agencies to checkmate street begging phenomenon. However, psychotherapy and rehabilitation counselling have not been explored in the picture of responses to tackle street begging. The position taken in this paper is that psychotherapy together with rehabilitation counselling the victims of begging behaviours, more especially street beggars could be rescued and assisted to embrace and embark on a skill/vocational acquisition training that could be more sustainable and more dignifying as a means of livelihood rather than begging on the streets. In addition, it would go a long way to eliminating or reducing street begging nuisance and its attendant menace consequences.

**Keywords:** Begging Behaviour and Beggars, Psychotherapy, Rehabilitation Counselling, Imo state

## **INTRODUCTION**

Begging in the opinion of the author of this paper, is seen as an act of asking for money or favour without or in the absence of or exchange of service. The impression created in the minds of many is that begging in itself is demeaning and reduces an individual – the beggar to a very inferior state. It is not out of place that for someone who has some level of dignity and shame, one feels empty and unimportant when refused in an event of begging. It is important to note that sometimes begging is associated with laziness by many people who are looked upon or approached for help by beggars. Begging is to say the least not dignifying.

Before now in Nigeria, granted that begging is not an exclusive preoccupation for any group of people, race or ethnic affiliation, it used to be very rampant and indeed a deep social challenge in the Northern part of Nigeria. The reason is that the religious belief and cultural practices encourage the act of begging there. The situation for instance of the Almajiri system by the Muslims is a religious practice which largely encourages street begging as well as begging in religious premises in Northern Nigeria. In line with that opinion, Ammani (2009) supports that in Nigeria; street begging is more in the Northern part of Nigeria. The reason, the

author continued is due to the adopted system of Almajiri by the Muslims for religious belief. In the Northern Nigeria, more than any other place in the country because of the Almajiri phenomenon, begging is entrenched and accepted in view of their religious Muslim belief and culture. Hence, street begging has become a necessary evil. Esobonu (2012) revealed with stress that in Suleja, it is common to sight young male children, especially spanning the ages of 8 to 19 years, going about with plates begging for alms and food. Esobonu maintained that they are known or identified by the common begging slogan “sa da- ka sabo – da – Allah”, which in English interpretation means “give because of God”. This runs and is allowed throughout the Northern State, Kano, Sokoto, Borno, and Kaduna and so on. It is not only shocking but heart breaking to note alarming figure of Almajiri beggars in the Northern States. A survey in 2013 put the total population of Almajiri beggars in Nigeria the North – West zone, North – East zone, North – Central zone, South – West, South – South and South – Eastern zone as 12.4 million (Adelowo, 2010; Bukoye, 2015).

Begging in the recent times has changed in its perception by all brands of people. Thus, the involvement of people in begging behaviour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become indeed very worrisome. Recently, begging is perceived by well-meaning individuals, groups, government and non-government organizations as a major social problem and hazard. In the perception of the author of this paper, the massive begging behaviour as experienced in the society today in the major cities and towns of Nigeria, including Imo state is a critical indicator of poverty in the land. It is a clear signal to poor economic development in the country. It is an indicator of poor-quality type of education in the country. This is considered because begging has been embraced today by a lot of young people who would comfortably introduce themselves as graduates of different fields of study but they are in the streets begging. The question that confronts an individual’s mind hearing their excuses as graduate beggars would be what kind of graduates could be begging on the street? This puts to query the type of education the young adults today are getting in the various levels of education/schools. Thus, indeed, begging can be described as a hazardous and embarrassing social problem. In the opinion of Jelili (2009) street begging is not only a reproach to the beggars themselves but forms a serious nuisance to the physical and social environment of the major cities and towns in the country. Jelili maintains that their dependence on begging as means of livelihood turns out to be a deep waste of human resources and manpower. Hence, begging negatively impact on the national economy. Again, in the view of Lynch (2005) begging in the street is described majority of the time as an anti-social behaviour. On the other hand, Martiner (2005) describes street begging as ignominious asking for money without doing some services in the public places. Again, in the opinion of Olawale (2007) street begging for alms is a habit formed by a beggar, as the individual asks for favour from other people for survival and enrichment,

Recently, begging has not only crisscrossed round the Nigerian nation, it has also taken various dimensions and styles. As observed above, it was clear that begging was encouraged by the religious and cultural beliefs in the North. It is possible or common to experienced beggars due to physical disabilities. There are lots of people on the major streets and towns in Nigeria including Imo State, begging because they are blind. There are some who are found or seen begging on wheel chairs, some are on clutches. There are a host of others involved in street begging with varying degrees of physical challenges. Apart from such cases above, where there are relatively obvious reasons for begging on the streets, there are some other cases where young people, adults, children male and female alike are on the streets begging without clear signs of any kind of disability significantly not physical, perhaps emotional or psychological that could drag them to the streets begging for money in no exchange for any form of services.

It is common to encounter young people especially the male come up to you; they speak clean English and introduce themselves as graduates. Some other times, they may tell you that they are undergraduates from one Nigerian tertiary institution or the other and for one excuse or the other they found themselves begging on the streets. This is a common experience in major cities in Nigeria, and Imo State is not an exception. This to the author's view is very worrisome. It is not only a social challenge; it is also an environmental menace and embarrassment. It is above all an indicator to the poverty level, economic underdevelopment and mal-governance of the country and thus, demands attention.

### **Beggars Conceptualized**

In the context of this paper, beggars are simply defined as , those less privileged citizens who by virtue of their vulnerability or circumstances or even by share inability to engage in any kind of rewarding job make up their minds to demand from active citizens for means of livelihood in form of alms and money without doing any service for exchange. In trying to conceptualize beggars some authors have looked at styles and techniques of the begging among beggars to categorize them (beggars). In this way those authors tried to describe the beggars associated with each begging style and technique.

Critically looking at the various styles and techniques of begging observed above, some authors have come up with some sort of categorization of beggars and begging. In the views of Burke (1999), Bukoye (2015) looking at the appearance and techniques of begging, they categorized begging as based on appearances into three; these include begging due to obvious circumstances like physical disabilities. These encompass beggars who have visual impairment, those on wheel chairs (they have challenge with legs either by amputation due to accidents or naturally there is some form of defect and they are unable to put into effective use of their legs and hands). There are those who have scares or defects of varying degrees. These are grouped under professional beggars. There is yet another group of beggars who are engaged in street begging because they are old. Thus, old age syndrome has pushed them into street begging because they do not have people to take care of them at this stage of life and they have no capacity to fend legitimately for themselves. The third category are those who voluntarily and who perhaps due to frustrations could not but chose to be on the streets begging. There techniques could also be varied to a large extent thereby putting them into different groups like passive begging; these are beggars whose begging technique entails the use of songs to attract sympathizers and customers. Again there are those who are grouped as active beggars. This group is seen actively moving about and canvassing for sympathizers. Again Malik (2012) in agreement with the above opinion maintains that beggars can be put into three classes however, this may not be exhaustive. Continuing, Malik (2012) still believes that these classes are those beggars who have accepted begging as a vocation or career. There are those in the second class who are forced into begging and those in the third class are those beggars who are into begging due to circumstances.

Looking closely at the various categories/classification/groupings of the beggars on the street it is quite disturbing that many of a country's citizens are in a single brand of live career that are visibly not contributing to the economic growth of the country and states as the case may be. They can be seen as one of the unproductive people in the country because they are either disadvantaged by weakness; they are vulnerable and cannot stand on their feet, due to some form of cultural, religious deception or state's systemic failure that predisposed them to consent, compromise and conform to the life on the streets as beggars. Thus, it is the view of

the author of this paper that the begging culture in the country generally and Imo State in particular is the creation of the man's inhumanity to man. This is based on the premise that if various cultural practices, religious practices abhor begging in whatever form and deal with it by the provision of enabling environments for every citizen to thrive, be encouraged to be productive, in no matter small measure, then there would be the political will to deal with begging on the street, even with the weak and vulnerable. Hence, the question that comes to mind now is how does the government(s) the world over attempt to manage begging life style and particularly in Nigeria including Imo State as observed in places like Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe?

### **Efforts of Governments in Managing Street Begging**

In the course of this work, literature revealed that various countries the world over have tried to adopt different strategies to contain the menace of street begging. Some countries have adopted legislation in dealing with street begging and come up with severe penalties against begging behaviour. India, for instance promulgated what they called the "Bombay Prevention Act, 1959". This Act provided for the establishment of beggar's homes in Delhi. These homes provided a safe place for housing beggars rounded up, off the streets of Delhi and these homes provide welfare scheme for the beggars who are taking off the streets (Malik, 2012). In addition to this there is also the establishment of regular beggar courts which try to prosecute those who are found in the act of begging on the streets, because the Bombay Beggar Prevention Act of 1959 criminalized begging even though there are strong arguments that begging should not be criminalized. Prominent among these arguments is based on the fact that Amnesty International recognizes that begging is behaviour due to hunger and poverty and perhaps homelessness. These according to Amnesty International are human right issues. In the view of Amnesty International everyone has the right to live with dignity. In other words, no one should be denied the right to food, adequate housing, water, education, health care and others. Again, the arguments continue that since begging does not involve force on the part of the beggar for food or money or any other thing, that is the beggar is given voluntarily, there is no way the state can call it a crime (Malik, 2012).

In Nigeria, at sometimes especially in states where begging has been seen to be more prevalent, governments of those states made concerted efforts to combat the menace of street begging and see to its eradication entirely or at worse reduce it considerably. It is also noteworthy that some groups or non-governmental organizations and even religious bodies have in their various ways joined to advocate for the cleansing of the streets by ensuring that beggars are consciously given their proper place and permanently managed out of the streets. In the view of Ogunkan (2009) some individuals, mass media and non-governmental bodies often engage in enlightenment campaign conscientizing and educating the wider public on the hazards of street begging.

Some states governments have in the past established rehabilitation homes where destitutes (beggars) are housed. The Lagos State government for instance established a rehabilitation centre at Majidun, in Ikorodu where on record over 4,000 destitutes are kept (Adejumo & Oyedepo, 2011). Again, in Jigawa State Adejumo & Oyedepo, (2011) maintained that the government established a social welfare programme, in which an amount of N7, 000 described as survival allowance is paid monthly to the physically disabled in the state. In Sokoto State blind street beggars are given monthly stipend of N6, 500 by the social welfare department (SWD) (Balarabe, Mahmoud & Ayanniyi, 2017). These were targeted at assisting the

physically disabled to overcome their Confirmed challenges at least to a considerable extent and more importantly to discourage begging and keep them off the streets.

In another development, Adejumo and Oyedepo, (2011) observed that in 2007, Kwara State came up with a policy banning street begging and made it an offence to be seen begging in the streets in the state. The offence became punishable with a penalty of N5, 000 or three (3) months imprisonment or both as the case demands when defaulted. This action of the Kwara State government was targeted at eradicating street begging in the state. In the Northern part of Nigeria where begging is considered prevalent among the visually impaired people, government efforts have been high especially in the area of identifying the major causes of blindness and attacking causative factors most especially very many environmental factors that are commonly described as avoidable causes. Studies have alleged that these avoidable causes are responsible for above 80% of blindness among beggars in the Northern part of Nigeria (Balarabe & Mahmoud, 2017). It is important to applaud at this point those efforts of the various governments in combating street begging as they are indeed laudable. However, the question still agitating the mind of the author of this paper remains, how come there are still beggars roaming about the very busy streets of major cities of the country including Imo State for instance Owerri, Orlu, Okigwe even with these huge efforts.

### **Barriers Associated with the Perceived Government Efforts to Solving the Problem of Street Begging**

From the foregoing, it is very clear that some concerted efforts have been made by various groups, organizations especially non-profit non-governmental organizations and most importantly governments at both federal and state levels to forestall street begging, but then street begging still persists. The reason it seems the whole efforts and strategies adopted by governments and others are not yielding fruits despite how good they are is that begging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has rhizome from involving typically those who suffer some pronounced physical challenges (blindness, physical handicaps and others) to classical begging involving a lot of people whom an individual could without any form of contradiction describe as being just lazy.

Again, it is true that poverty, both of the mind and hand as endemic as it could be cancerous has driven majority of the people into the streets begging to achieve or maintain livelihood especially in Nigeria. Thus, begging without any iota of shame is practiced as a vocation without stress so to say. Hence, an individual who is fully lively, completely able bodied, there is no single form of physical challenge or handicap but for chronic poverty of the mind and of course hands would feign one challenge or the other and hit the streets for begging. Therefore, for this kind of person there is no kind of intervention to take him out of the road for begging that will make impact.

Specifically speaking however, most of the intervention efforts examined above however laudable are good and only sustainable on white paper. They are not usually sustained due to improper articulation of how to make such strategies owned up by those whom they are designed for. The payment of monthly stipend or allowance, for instance as is the case in two states stipulated in the paper, one decries the temporary solution approach of giving fish rather than a permanent kind of approach of teaching the beggars how to fish and become self-determinant in getting their fish regularly. Again, a situation where people – beggars are rounded off and put in a rehabilitation centre and perhaps they are exposed to one form of skill acquisition or the other and at the end of the day, they are not equipped or empowered



financially to live out the skills they have acquired, chances are that they will still find their ways back to the streets to beg for the means now to start in “earnest” whatever skills they have learnt while in the rehabilitation centre; in which case no problem has been solved. There is a worse scenario still where beggars are carried off the streets just to create sanity on the streets and they are put in a home where they are abandoned to their faith. In this case they are punitively managed, perhaps to inflict some pains on them so that they will be deterred from being on the streets, to prevent some ugly consequences and not to permanently stem the problem of street begging. In line with this idea, (Ojo, 2021) observed that beggars are removed from the streets to rehabilitation camps/homes not because the government is interested in taking care of them but just to get rid of them from littering and loitering the streets. It was also observed that the federal government had at one time used law enforcement agents to clear off the streets of beggars and they are put in rehabilitation homes which were not well maintained. These homes lack basic amenities that are necessary for human living and do not conform to the fundamental human rights of the citizens (Adejumo & Oyedepo, 2011). Again, talking about fundamental human rights, it has earlier been observed in this paper that poverty which is the major factor that put people on the streets begging is recognized by Amnesty International as a human right issue. It advocates that people of all nations are entitled to their right to live with dignity, rights to food, water and housing and poverty can hinder these being attained in life legitimately due to honest hard work other than begging.

In view of the above therefore, the present researcher is of the opinion, that any intervention to checkmating or ameliorating begging behaviour should focus on making the beggar being able to realize how richly endowed he/she is in his/her circumstances in life and that such circumstances can be positively be converted for personal gainful living and at the same time adding value to the society where he belongs. It is the conviction of the present researcher that in addition to all the efforts being made by constituted institutions to considerably check begging behaviour, rehabilitation together with skill or vocational training education and so on, there is great need to introduce some measure of psychotherapy with cognitive (behaviour) restructuring to bring about stability in their thinking pattern and behaviour. The reason is that begging is a behaviour style that is dependent upon the thinking pattern of the individual. The individual thinks and gets self-convinced that it is impossible for him to extricate self from the ramshackle of life other than to go begging. Then the individual settles with begging behaviour not minding the consequences.

### **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as a Panacea to Street Begging**

The author considers that the huge efforts of the governments at various levels state and federal alike together with that of other non-government organisations over the years would have made a lot more impact on the check of street begging if the intervention programmes have all-inclusive approach. The author is of the view that a more holistic approach which will not stop at the establishment of settlement centres without adequately caring for the inmates (beggars) needs. Perhaps a rehabilitation centre that will sufficiently provide material needs of the inmates in terms of (food, water, clothing and so on), take adequate care of the medical needs of the inmates so that their health challenges can at all times be taken care of. While ensuring that the beggars are empowered and made more relevant, they should be exposed to skills or vocational training that will equip them for gainful living no matter their challenges and circumstances. Perhaps, it may be pertinent also to state here that there could not be extremely bad situation or circumstance in life that one may not be able to convert to a maximum benefit with a genuine resolve, self-motivation and self-determination to actualize self. This is what

Carl Rogers in his client-centred (Humanistic) theory called self-actualizing tendency. The above can only be made possible when psychotherapy and counselling are consciously made part of the centres' activities. These to a large extent would provide for the psychological and emotional balance of the beggars to appreciate their circumstances and benefit from the skills/vocational training they will be exposed to. In this paper the author considers the option of psychotherapy (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) intervention as a panacea to street begging.

Psychotherapy in this paper is simply considered to be a talking therapy which involves a therapist who is an expert trained in the skills and techniques of helping called 'talking treatment or therapy' and another person who is 'vulnerable' the patient/client. It is important to note here that psychotherapeutic treatments (talking treatments) are many and varied and can be adopted to help varied patients/clients overcome varied challenges. According to Winter, Bradshaw, Bunn, Wellsted, (2009) Psychotherapy has many different schools, approximately 500. These have their own theoretical orientations that provide different ways of interpreting the same events. In view of this psychotherapy is primarily defined as interpersonal treatment that is based on psychological principles and involves a trained therapist and a client who has a mental disorder, problem or complaint; and it is adopted or individualized for the particular client and his or her disorder problem or complaint. Among these could be emotional issues (challenges), social habitual challenges, relationship problems and so on. Psychotherapy comes under various shades. In this paper, the author examined the use of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in talking people out of begging behaviour together with rehabilitation counselling. Cognitive behavioural therapy is a combination of the two techniques, which try to constructively examine the pattern of behaviour demonstrated by an individual in relation to the thinking and belief patterns of the individual. It is a truism that majority of the time an individual's behaviour is a direct product of how and what the individual thinks and believe. Cognitive therapy tries to help the individual talk about those unhelpful beliefs systems and thereby is encouraged to interactively and constructively come up with more valuable ideas. The individual is then assisted to develop and maintain more helpful ways to think and invariably behave. Begging behaviour, in the view of the author, as a decision of the individual after series of considerations, can be reconsidered by the beggar after careful series of interactions with a cognitive behaviour therapist. The individual, then after the interaction/treatment dosage learns to develop and appreciates a more valuable and helpful behaviour pattern that will be consolidated by rehabilitation counselling.

### **Rehabilitation Counselling (Vocation/Skill)**

The goal of rehabilitation counselling at any point in time is targeted towards providing assistance or help to people living with disabilities. The assistance provided by rehabilitation counselling makes them achieve independence by way of employment or meaningful activity they can attain and sustain. This goal is based on the assumption that meaningful activity provides one major means or avenue to which people living with disabilities can become productive members of the active society. It also enables them to establish social networks and interpersonal relations that will predispose them to live ultimately good quality lives. Rehabilitation counselling therefore, in the context of this paper is described as a process where the counsellor collaboratively with the clients work to understand their challenge/problems, barriers and potentials in order to facilitate the clients' effective use of personal and environmental resources for career, personal, social and community adjustment in view of his disability. What that stands to reason is that as a process, rehabilitation counselling leads the way to the client engaging in a vocation or skill acquisition which will afford him or her

opportunity to live independently a fulfilled life. They are thus, easily integrated into their community of people and well adjusted. Arguably, today what may be seen as models of rehabilitation counselling (vocational), of course what indeed informs this discussion is what is demonstrated by the disabled sports men and women all over the world. Nigeria has a fair share of disabled men and women who are doing very well in various sporting activities and indeed winning laurels for Nigeria. These men and women in their disabilities see their strengths, abilities and capacities and thought, begging is a misnomer. It is a truism that in the academia, the law profession, in journalism and other areas are found many who are living with physical disabilities and they are contributing immensely to the development of other citizens and the country in general haven lifted themselves above their disabilities in life. Thus, we know about blind educators, blind lawyers, blind musicians and all others who are living with various other physical disabilities and are engaged in different professions. These people consider begging as 'lazy man's apology'. From an account of coastal Mozambique in the 1590s a case of a crippled man who lived in a village called Inhaguea was exemplified. This man was born without a left arm. However, he was endowed with such dexterity that from childhood he learnt and became accustomed to work with the right hand and the left foot in a manner that with the two though not the same he made them so compatible that he could do anything that other people could do with two hands, as he made wooden bowls and platters and weaved straw mats, upon which his livelihood depended (Miles, 2001).

From the foregoing, it is the opinion of the author of this paper that psychotherapy and rehabilitation counselling, targeting skills/vocational acquisition can go a long way in helping a lot of beggars roaming the streets of the major cities of Nigeria, including Imo State, to adopt a better and more self-determined independent life style than embracing begging behaviour. The gains are dignifying and far more out ways the evil consequences of begging on the streets.

### **Conclusion**

Street begging is a universally acclaimed social challenge and menace. It is a degrading indicator not only of ravaging economic poverty but that of mal-governance of a country. In Nigeria various efforts have been made to forestall or checkmate street begging but they over the years have not proved effective due to some obvious limitations. However, it is assumed in this paper that an all-inclusive approach to the reduction of street begging will make good impact. Thus, the author posits that the adoption of psychotherapy and rehabilitation counselling (vocation/skill) will go a long way to checkmating street begging not only in Imo State but in Nigeria generally.

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