

Original Research Article

Impact Homelessness on Almajiri Children in Zamfara State, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper contributes to the burgeoning debate on the impact of homelessness on children with particular attention to the almajiri children in Zamfara State. The almajiri system in Nigeria which was meant to train children in Qur'anic education has turned into a practice where parents/guardians now abdicate their primary duties of providing the basic needs of life such as food, shelter, medical attention, education to the children. These children do not have where to lay down their heads in the day time or at night. Some sleep on the streets, uncompleted buildings or motor parks. It is based on the foregoing that this paper examines the impact of homelessness on children in Zamfara state. The sample size of study consisted of 318 almajiri children. Questionnaire was used as the primary instrument of data collection. Data collected was analyzed quantitatively using tables and percentages. The findings of the study show that is high prevalence of homelessness among almajiri children. Poverty, social-cultural practices, parental neglect were the major causes of homelessness among almajiri children. The nature of homelessness showed that almajiri children sleep on the streets, uncompleted buildings and motor parks. The study also found out that homeless Almajiri children suffer from victimization more than other children while 4.4% strongly disagreed. Data collected also indicated that majority of the homeless Almajiri children represented by 56.3% suffer from victimization, no access to medical services, lack of sleep, isolation from their peers and loss personal belongings. The study recommends that government should ensure that parents that send children to Almajiri must cater for their welfare and government should persuade parents, religious/traditional rulers and other major stake holders to return to Almajiri model schools built by Federal government during the Goodluck Jonathan's administration that had all the facilities for a boarding school to reduce homeless among the almajiri children.

Keywords: Almajiri, Begging, Children, Homelessness, Poverty,

Introduction

Children constitute an important demography of the world population. According to Magashi (2015), their development is not only the responsibility of government but also of the entire international community. It has been estimated that children make up about a third of the world's population [1]. Other studies have asserted that globally, about 25 percent of the population is under 15 years of age [2]. In Africa, the population of children has continued to increase due to increased access to healthcare services with a corresponding decline in child mortality rates. It has been reported that the population of those who are 17 years and below in Africa as at 2021 were approximately 650 million [3]. In Nigeria, it has been revealed that 46 per cent of the population is currently under the age of 15 [4]. The current total population

of children under the age of 5 stands at nearly 31 million while each year at least 7 million babies are born [4].

Therefore, looking at the statistics depicted above, it is obvious that children constitute an important segment of the world population and should be accorded adequate attention in terms of access to basic needs of life given their vulnerabilities. On the contrary, children have suffered from deprivation especially in the provision of basic primary needs such as shelter more than any segment of the world population. It has been reported that homeless children in families comprise the fastest growing group of homeless persons in the world [5]. As at 2016, it was reported that globally, 28 million children were homeless [4]. Of the 28 million children, 10 million are child refugees and one million are asylum-seekers whose status has not yet been determined [4]. The remaining 17 million children are displaced by conflict and remain within the borders of their home countries [4]. It has been stated that no less than 150 million people, or about 2% of the world's population, are homeless. However, about 1.6 billion, more than 20% of the world's population, may lack adequate housing [6]

In Nigeria, homelessness among children have become a major concern. A significant number of children in Nigeria are suffering from homelessness. It has been stated that the country has the highest number of homeless persons globally with an estimated 24.4 million homeless people [4]. The situation of homelessness in Northern Nigeria is worst compared to Southern Nigeria. The reason for the high number of homeless children in Northern Nigeria is because of the phenomenon of almajiri children. The Arabic phrase "Mahaajirun," which denotes someone who has left his place of residence in pursuit of Islamic knowledge, is the source of the term almajirai (singular: -almajiri [7]. In order to receive a Qur'anic education, parents who follow the Almajiri system send their children—mostly males between the ages of 4 and 12—to far-off places [8]. Although the exact number of Almajiri children in Nigeria is unknown, estimates range from 10 million or 81 per cent of the nation's 10 million out-of-school youth [8].

An otherwise admirable custom known as almajiri in Nigeria has evolved into a practice that now encourages the denial of other fundamental rights such as food, shelter, medical attention, love and denial of formal educational activities [9]. Most of the Almajiri children do not have where to lay down their heads in the day time or at night. Some sleep on the streets, uncompleted buildings, motor parks, under the bridge etc. Even if they are given a home where they are being taught the Quran, these homes are typically overcrowded and lack windows and doors (Dajo & Tachia-Bai, 2022). As a matter of fact, the houses they live into are not fit for human habitation. It is against this background seeks to expand the debate and draw attention to the impact of homelessness with particular focus on Almajiri children in Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The following objectives have been formulated to guide the study

- i. Examine the prevalence of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State
- ii. Investigate the causes of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State
- iii. Examine the nature of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State
- iv. Assess the impact of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts of Almajiri and homelessness are clarified in this section of the research for the purpose of clarity.

Almajiri

The word "Almajiri" comes from the Arabic word "Al-muhajirin," which means "migrant" but is also used to refer to migration in search of Islamic knowledge [10]. The term "Almajiri" in "Hausa land" has been corrupted to refer to any child or adult who begs for help on the streets or from house to house, despite Islamic teachings forbidding begging except in specific situations, such as when a man loses property in a disaster or when he lends a significant amount of his money for the good of the community, like mediating a conflict between two warring parties [10]. It can be deduced from the above discourse that Almajiri children are vulnerable, disadvantaged and lack access to the basic needs of life such as shelter.

Homelessness

There is a lack of consensus in the current body of scholarly literature regarding the appropriate definition of homelessness [11]. This is not only a theoretical issue; if the definition of homelessness is not clear, it will be challenging to pressure governments to provide for the needs of the homeless [11]. In spite of this lack of consensus, attempts have been made in this section to examine some definitions of homelessness. Home is a pretty complex that embodies a lot of concepts, like identity, security, comfort, and belonging [12]. When someone does not have a stable, long-term place to live, they are considered homeless. One of the main issues in many nations is child homelessness. There are three trajectories to the definition of homelessness in Australia [11]. These are the cultural, the subjectivist, and the literal. In its literal sense, homelessness is synonymous with "rooflessness." The subjective definition asks individuals whether their current housing is adequate in an effort to determine homelessness. The cultural definition contends that the concept of homelessness is objective and independent of people's views. In this research, a child who lives on the streets, especially one who is not cared for by parents or other adults and sleeps there because they lack a place to reside, is generally referred to as homeless child.

Literature Review

The fastest-growing group of homeless people in the world is made up of homeless families with children [13]. Around the world, a significant portion of children and young people are involved with homelessness. The difficulties in precisely counting and characterizing this highly mobile population mean that there are no exact statistics on the number of children and teens who live all or most of their time on the streets; estimates range from tens to hundreds of millions [14]. Homelessness among children is caused by a variety of complex paths that differ between developed and developing countries, within geographic regions, by age and sex, and other factors [15,16].

The impact of homelessness among children have received considerable attention over the years. Homeless children face various challenges, such as poor academic performance and issues with their physical and emotional health [13]. Homeless children may face severe social isolation from their peers, especially if they are in secondary school and cannot use toilets to wash their hair or uniform [17]. While peers may entirely dismiss appearances or teachers may explain them to younger children, adolescents frequently grappled with feelings of self-consciousness and being different from their classmates [17].

Materials and Method

The study was conducted in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Zamfara is one of the states in North West Nigeria. It was created in 1996 with 14 Local Government Areas. The local Government areas are Anka, Bakura, Birnin-Magaji, Bukkuyum, Bungudu, Gummi, Gusau, Kaura-Namoda, Maradun, Maru, Talata-Mafara, Shinkafi, Tsafe, and Zurmi. Due to the level of insecurity in the state, purposive sampling technique was used to select only the local government areas that were relatively safer. The selected LGAs were Gusau, Talata Mafara, Bungudu, Maru and Bakura. Questionnaire was used as the primary instruments of data collection. The questionnaire was administered on the Almajiri children to gain insight into how homelessness affects them.

Since the exact number of Almajiri children is difficult to ascertain, proportional method was used to determine the sample size. The method has been demonstrated below:

$$n = \frac{4pq}{d^2} = \frac{4 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} = \frac{1}{0.0025} = 400$$

Therefore, only 400 almajiri children were selected for data collection. Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 and data therein was presented in tables and percentage for better understanding.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and analyses data on the impact of homelessness on Almajiri children in Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Socio –Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section discusses the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as sex, age, education and religion.

Table1: Socio –Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable		Frequency(f)	Percent (%)
Sex	Male	318	100
	Female	0	0.00
	Total	318	100.0
Age	0-5	102	32.1
	6-10	142	44.6
	11-15	53	16.7
	16 &above	21	6.6
	Total	318	100.0
Education	Quranic Edu.	290	91.2
	Noschooling	26	8.2
	Primary	2	0.6
	Secondary	0	0
	Tertiary	0	100.0
	Total		
Religion	Islam	318	100.0
	Christian	0	0
	Others	0	0
	Total	318	100.0

Source: Field survey 2023

The data in table 1 showed that majority of the respondents represented by 100 % (318) were males while 0 % (0) were females. The dominance of males in study was because most of the almajirai children on the street are males as the female children are hardly sent to beg. On age distribution, majority of respondents represented by 44.6% (142) were between 6-10 years, 32.1% (102) were between 0-5 years. Similarly, those between 11-15 years constituted 16.7% (53) of the sampled population while those who were 17 years and above were 6.6 % (21).

On educational distribution, majority of respondents represented by 91.2% (290) had qur'anic education. Majority of the almajiri children have qur'anic education because that is the principal reason why they are sent from the rural settings in Northern Nigeria and other neighboring countries of Niger and Chad by poor parents to do. The study also found that 8.2% (26) of the respondents had no formal education while 0.6% (2) had only primary school education. In terms of religious affiliation, all the respondents that is 100% (358) practiced Islamic religion and the reason is because Zamfara State is Muslim dominated State.

Table 2: Prevalence of Homelessness among Almajiri Children

Variable	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
High	224	70.4
Moderate	70	22.0
Low	21	6.6
Total	318	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result in table 2 contains information about the prevalence of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State. Based on the data presented, majority of the respondents represented by 70.4% (224) agreed that homelessness was high among Almajiri children in Zamfara State. The result also indicated that 22% (70) were of the view that homelessness was moderate among Almajiri children while 6.6% (21) of the respondents said the prevalence was low. It can be deduced from the data presented above that since majority of the respondents (70.4) ranked highest among the other responses, it can be concluded that homelessness was high among Almajiri children.

Table 3: Causes of Homelessness among Almajiri Children in Zamfara State

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Poverty is the primary cause of homelessness among Almajiri children	126 (39.6%)	171 (53.8%)	10 (3.1%)	7 (2.2)	4 (1.3%)
Social, cultural and religious factors are responsible for homelessness among Almajiri children	118 (37.1%)	155 (48.7)	21 (6.6%)	9 (2.8%)	15 (4.7%)
Government has not been able to provide shelter for Almajiri children	160 (50.3%)	141 (44.3%)	11 (3.5%)	4 (1.3%)	2 (0.6%)
Parents/ guardians neglect is responsible for homelessness among Almajiri children	133 (41.8%)	140 (44.0%)	23 (7.2%)	13 (4.1%)	9 (2.8)
In adequate housing is responsible for homelessness among Almajiri children	111 (35%)	98 (30.8%)	55 (17.3%)	24 (7.5%)	30 (9.4%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result in table 3 indicated that majority of the respondents (53.8%) strongly agreed that poverty is the key driver of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State while (1.3%) of the sampled population strongly disagree. The study also discovered that majority of the respondents represented by 48.7% were of the opinion that social, cultural and religious beliefs were responsible for homelessness among Almajiri children while 2.8% of the respondents disagreed. The role of government in the provision of housing to vulnerable groups in the society, majority of the sampled population (50.3%)

agreed that government failure to provide housing for its citizens accounted for the amount of homelessness among Almajiri children meanwhile, 0.6% of the sampled population strongly disagreed. The study also observed that parents/ guardian's inability to take responsibility by providing housing was responsible for homelessness among Almajiri children. This view resonated highly among 44% of the population who strongly agreed while 2.8% of the sampled population strongly disagree. Lastly, data elicited also showed that majority of the respondents (35%) strongly agreed that shortage of housing is one of the causes of homelessness among Almajiri children while 7.5% disagreed. In other words, poverty, social, cultural and religious beliefs, government's inability to provide housing for vulnerable groups, parental neglect and shortage of housing were the major causes of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State.

Table 4: Nature of Homelessness among Almajiri Children

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Most of the Almajiri children sleep on the streets	120 (37.7%)	161 (50.6%)	9 (2.8%)	18 (5.7)	10 (3.1%)
Almajiri children sleep in uncompleted building at night	133 (41.8%)	139 (43.7)	10 (3.1%)	17 (5.3%)	19 (6%)
Almajiri children sleep in different motor parks	126 (39.6%)	157 (49.4%)	16 (5.0%)	12 (3.8%)	7 (2.2%)
Almajiri schools provide housing for Almajiri children	35 (11.0%)	40 (12.6%)	32 (10.1%)	121 (38.1%)	90 (28.3)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result in table 4 showed that majority of the respondents represented by 50.6%) strongly agreed that most of the Almajiri children in Zamfara State sleep on the streets while the least (3.1%) of the sampled population strongly disagree. The study also discovered that majority of the respondents represented by 43.7% strongly agreed that Almajiri children sleep under uncompleted building while 3.1% of the respondents were undecided. The study also found out that majority of the sampled population represented by 49.4% strongly agreed that Almajiri children sleep in motor parks while 2.2 % of the sampled population strongly disagreed. Data collected also indicated that majority of the respondents (38.1%) disagreed with the view that Almajiri schools provide accommodation for Almajiri children while 10.1% were neutral. It be concluded based on the data presented above that majority of the Almajiri children are homeless since most of them sleep on the streets, uncompleted buildings and motor parks. In addition, the Almajiri schools that give Qur'anic instructions also failed to provide accommodation for the children.

Table 5: Impact of Homelessness on Almajiri Children

Statement	Agree	Strongly	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly
-----------	-------	----------	-----------	----------	----------

		Agree			Disagree
Almajiri children without a home often lose personal objects and have no sense of belonging	123 (38.7%)	150 (47.2%)	16 (5.0%)	20 (6.3%)	9 (2.8%)
Homeless Almajiri children suffer from victimization more than other children	99 (31.1%)	179 (56.3%)	19 (6.0%)	23 (7.2%)	14 (4.4%)
Almajiri children without a home have less access to medical services	67 (21.1%)	208 (60.0%)	29 (9.1%)	6 (1.9%)	8 (2.5%)
Almajiri children without a home significantly struggle with sleep	81 (25.5%)	111 (35.0%)	47 (14.8%)	44 (13.8%)	35 (11.0%)
Almajiri children without a home are isolated from their peers	107 (30.7%)	163 (51.3%)	25 (7.9%)	12 (3.8%)	11 (3.5%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result in table 5 showed that majority of the respondents represented by 47.2% strongly agreed that most of the Almajiri children in Zamfara without a home often lose personal objects and have no sense of belonging while 2.8% strongly disagree. The study also found out that majority of the respondents represented by 56.3% strongly agreed that homeless Almajiri children suffer from victimization more than other children while 4.4% strongly disagreed. Data collected also indicated that majority of the homeless Almajiri children represented by 56.3% suffer from victimization more than other children while 4.4% strongly disagreed. It was also observed that 60% of the respondents strongly agreed that Almajiri children without a home have less access to medical services while 1.9% of the respondents disagreed. The study also observed that majority of the respondents represented by 35% strongly agreed that Almajiri children without a home significantly struggle with sleep while 11% strongly disagreed. Lastly, majority of the respondents represented by 51.3% strongly agreed that Almajiri children without a home are isolated from their peers while 11% strongly disagreed.

Discussion of Findings

Arising from the primary data presented, the study observed that there is high prevalence of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State. From the data gathered, 70.4% (224) of the almajiri children from whom data were collected from affirmed that majority of the children were homeless. The finding of this study coheres with previous studies that there has been a rise in the number of homeless among children all over the world [18]. Other studies also agrees with the study that homelessness was high among vulnerable populations globally [19]. Similarly, other studies states that the prevalent aspect in most major Nigerian cities, especially Lagos, is the existence of destitute children and young people, commonly referred to as "street children." [20] These kids live on the streets and work. They are not like other street children, who typically go home at night to sleep [21]. These homeless kids have wandered off from their family and have taken up residence on the streets[20]. This study therefore confirms and

further the debate about the rise in the number of vulnerable children such as almajiri children and the need for policy action to address the problem.

On the causes of homelessness among almajiri children, the study discovered that poverty, socio-cultural and religious beliefs, government's inability to provide housing for vulnerable groups, parental neglect and shortage of housing were the major causes of homelessness among Almajiri children in Zamfara State. This fact reflects the findings of other studies which identified poverty and lack of affordable housing as the key drivers of homelessness among children [14, 22]. The study also observed that homelessness had negative impact on children ranging from loss of personal objects, victimization, lack of access to medical services, isolated from their peers. The findings of this study also showed that homelessness leads to loss of children personal belongings, lack of sleep, substance abuse, social isolation and low social esteem [17].

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it obvious that homeless has negative impact on almajiri children in Zamfara state and requires a coalition of efforts from parents/guardians, government and non-governmental organizations to address the problem and give the children a better future.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends as follows:

1. The Nigerian government through sensitization and education must discuss with stakeholders (religious and traditional rulers) on the need resuscitate the idea of integrating qur'anic schools with the Almajiri schools introduced during the president Goodluck Jonathan's administration. The reason is because, those Almajiri model schools had all the housing facilities to shelter the Almajiri children
2. Housing deficit is a serious problem among families in Nigeria especially among the poor. Government should make deliberate attempt to provide affordable housing for poor families to address the issue of homelessness among children
3. It estimates that 133 million Nigerians, or 63% of the country's population, live in multidimensional poverty [23]. Government should address the issue of poverty by creating jobs for citizens to earn income so that they can cater for their basic needs

4. Parents/guardians need counselling, education and sensitization to rise up to their responsibilities by ensuring that children sent to Almajiri schools should be provided with the basic needs for their comfort.

References

- [1] Pumariega, A.J., Gogineni , R. R., Benton, T (2022) Poverty, Homelessness, hunger in children, and adolescents: Psychosocial Perspectives.
- [2] Dyik, E. H, 2023,Proportion of selected age groups of world population and in regions in 2023. Statistica.<https://www.statista.com/statistics/265759/world-population-by-age-and-region/#:~:text=Globally%20about%2025%20percent%20of,has%20the%20youngest%20population%20worldwide.>
- [3] Galal, S, 2023, Population of Africa in 2021, by age group. Statistica.<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1226211/population-of-africa-by-age-group/#:~:text=In%202021%20there%20were%20around,amounted%20to%20approximately%20650%20million.>
- [4] UNICEF, 2018, Situation of women and children in Nigeria.<https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/situation-women-and-children-nigeria/#:~:text=According%20to%20data%20Nigeria%20is,7%20million%20babies%20are%20born.>
- [5] Speak, S, 2019, The state of homelessness in developing countries. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/05/SPEAK_Suzanne_Paper.pdf
- [6] U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Expert Group Meeting “Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for All to Address Homelessness. Nairobi, Kenya; May 22-24, 2019. Available from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp.>
- [7] Safiyanu, S., M & Bugaje, A., B , 2020. Almajiri system: End It, mend It or re-Invent It? Journal of Criminology and Sociology.
- [8] UNICEF 2020 Children adjust to life outside Nigeria’s Almajiri system. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/stories/children-adjust-life-outside-nigerias-almajiri-system>
- [9] Magashi, B., S (2015) Education and the right to development of the child in Northern Nigeria: A proposal for reforming the Almajiri institution. Africa Today. 61(3) Indiana University Press
- [9] Dajo, U & Tachia-Bai, M (2022) Child labour practices and the wellbeing of Almajirai children in Gusau local Government Area of Zamfara State. Wukari International Studies Series. 6(2), 1-16. <https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/95>

- [10] Adamu, I (2014) The Almajiri child, qur'anic education and the quest for new order in Nigeria. *Scottish Journal of Arts, Social Sciences and Scientific Studies*, 13-26. <http://scottishjournal.co.ukSc>
- [11] Chamberlain, C & Mackenzie, D (1992) Understanding contemporary homelessness: Issues of definition and meaning. 27(4), 274-297 DOI: [10.1002/j.1839-4655.1992.tb00911](https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.1992.tb00911).
- [12] Tripple, A., G & Speak, S. 2005. Definitions of homelessness in developing countries. 29(2):337-352. DOI: [10.1016/j.habitatint.2003.11.00](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2003.11.00)
- [13] Kerri, T & Murphy, Jo (2013) Addressing the challenges of child and family homelessness. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*: 4(1) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58464/2155-5834.1099>
- [14] Embleton L, Lee H, Gunn J, Ayuku D, Braitstein P. 2016. Causes of Child and Youth Homelessness in Developed and Developing Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2016;170(5):435–444. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0156
- [15] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2012 ; *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*. <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/OHCHR-protection-promotion.pdf>.
- [16] Public Health Agency of Canada 2006 ; *Street youth in Canada: findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth*. 1999–2003 http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/reports_06/pdf/street_youth_e.pdf.
- [17] Philip, A (2019) Homelessness and its impact on children. The Association for child and adolescent mental health. <https://www.acamh.org/blog/homelessness-impacts-on-children/>
- [18] Bassuk EL, Richard MK, Tsertsvadze A. 2015. The prevalence of mental illness in homeless children: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2015 Feb;54(2):86-96.e2. doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2014.11.008. Epub 2014 Nov 22. PMID: 25617249.
- [19] Ringwalt, C. L., Greene, J. M., Robertson, M., & McPheeters, M. (1998). The prevalence of homelessness among adolescents in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88(9), 1325–1329. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.88.9.1325>
- [20] Edewor, P., A (2014) Homeless Children and Youths in Lagos, Nigeria: Their Characteristics, Street Life and Sexual Behaviour. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5(1) DOI: [10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n1p537](https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n1p537)
- [21] Ebigbo, P. O. (1988). “Child abuse and neglect: General information”, ANPPCAN Advocacy Series I, Enugu: Chuka Printing Company.
- [22] Aratani, Y (2009) Homeless children and youth: Causes and consequences. National Centre for Children in poverty
- [23] National Bureau of Statistics. 2022. Nigeria launches its most extensive national measure of multidimensional poverty. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78>

UNDER PEER REVIEW