Parental Neglect and Juvenile Delinquency of Almajirai in Kano State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between parental neglect and juvenile delinquency of almajirai in Northern Nigeria. Almajirai, like other street boys, are victims of parental neglect and other family-related issues. Like other vulnerable children, almajirai are left to fend for themselves, through street-begging, which has made them susceptible to social vices, which by virtue of age, can be adjudged juvenile deviant or delinquent behaviour. With the institution of the almajiri system, Muslims are encouraged to go and search for Islamic knowledge and scholarship, irrespective of the distance, as knowledge is seen as a cherished value. In the past, particularly, in pre-colonial Nigerian society, almajirai were taken care of by the state, parents, and host community, which was later truncated by colonialism. With the colonial intrusion, coupled with the poverty situation of most parents, parents no longer care for the welfare of their wards, which has made them to engage in juvenile delinquency. The study found that polygamy was a contributory factor to this menace. The paper recommended that polygamy should be discouraged, and parental neglect should be criminalized.

Keywords: Parental Neglect, Juvenile Delinquency, Almajirai, Street-begging, Poverty.

INTRODUCTION
The Almajiri system is as old as Islam in Northern Nigeria. Among the areas of West Africa into which Islam was early introduced is Kanem-Borno, some territory of which forms part of present day-Nigeria. Complex communication systems on land and water connected several areas which later came to be known as Nigeria (Balogun, 1980). Almajiri system has been a medium of early childhood Islamic education in Northern Nigeria since the 11th century (Bolujoko, 2008). As far back as 1921, there were 30,411 Islamic schools in Northern Nigeria (Rechmuth, 1989). The almajiri system as an age-long tradition of Muslims across the globe developed as a result of the instruction given by Prophet Muhammed that knowledge is a cherished value and that all Muslims should be encouraged to go in search of Islamic knowledge and scholarship irrespective of the distance (Khalid, 2007).

The term ‘almajiri’ is a Hausa word for pupil or student. The word is derived from the Arabic term al-muhajir, meaning the migrant. Historically, the term has its origin in the famous migration of the Prophet Muhammed and his compatriots from Makkah to Madinah in the early days of Islam (Khalid, 2006). In its Nigerian usage, the word almajiri means those who left their villages or town, parents, relations, and friends in search of Islamic religious knowledge and scholarship.

The almajiri system was established as an organized and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and theology. It was a replica of Islamic learning centers in many Muslim countries such as the madrasah in Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt and Indonesia (Danbuzzu, 2013). During the pre-colonial period in Northern Nigeria, the system was funded from the state treasury and ‘zakkat’ funds under the control of the emirs. Apart from this, the community supported these almajirai most of whom came from faraway places to enroll in these schools. The students were at liberty to acquire vocational and occupation skills in between lessons and so were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, tailoring, etc (Danbuzzu, 2013). This is well captured by Bala (2014), who posited that the almajirai schools, as practiced during the pre-colonial days were maintained by the state, communities, parents, zakakah (almsgiving), waqf (endowment) and supplemented by the teachers and students through farming. Many of these almajirai in the pre-colonial era later became farmers of the northern Nigeria cotton and groundnut pyramids. They were the leather tanners and leather shoe and bag makers in the old Sokoto Empire as well as cap weavers and tailors in Zaria city (Danbuzzu, 2013).

In 1904, the British invaded and colonized the northern Nigeria territories and took control of the treasury, abolished state funding of almajiri school system, which to them were mere religious schools. Boko, meaning western education was introduced and funded instead. This development rendered Islamic scholars unqualified for employment and participation in politics. This created poverty situation as mallams lost their jobs because of lack of western education which is the
only criterion for white-collar jobs that was only available for educated individuals.

With the loss of support from the government and the helpless Emirs and increasing number of pupils to take care of, as well as increasing level of poverty in the country, the care of the almajirai became overwhelmingly burdensome for mallams who were left with no other alternative than to send the almajirai to go and beg for alms. In the course of begging, they are likely to imbibe negative values from the influence of people they come across.

Begging is the most distracting aspect of almajiri system as it takes them out of the control of mallams, and exposes them to negative habits as they come in contact with people of low virtue like prostitutes, cultists, drug addicts, traffickers, terrorists, arsonists, etc. These are some of the features of the almajirai of nowadays who are victims of neglect and exploitation. They are seen everywhere singing and begging for food and money, which according to Tilde (2009), are vulnerable to abuse, drugs, trafficking, and various forms of exploitation. Their conditions of living is less than average as reflected in their torn, dirty looking cloth, hungry stomach, and unkept body. These almajirai are outside their place of domiciliation in search of Islamic knowledge, which means they are not staying with their biological parents, who for religious permissiveness, marry as many wives as possible and produce scores of children. These children are dumped in almajirai schools because Islamic education is free; some of the parents will not show up again, let alone caring for their children.

Parental Neglect as a Delinquency-Breeding Factor

The proliferation of street children especially in developing countries is attracting global attention. Bourdillon (2001 in Oyeniyi, Ojo, Lanre and Olusina (2009) noted that when we see children neglected on the street, we should be worried about what this means for the future of our society. When they are left unsupervised, they will rely solely on the values of the informal group they come across and as they interact with these people, they are likely to imbibe negative traits which sometimes, are in conflict with the expectations of the society. According to Cashwell and Vacc (1996), families behaviours particularly parental monitoring and discipline seem to influence association with delinquent peers through out the juvenile period. A long history of research has further linked family dysfunction with future criminal offending, in part because parents monitor and provide nurturance to children. It is thought that the loosening of bonds among family members may result in more
criminal involvement. In most cases, delinquents have been viewed as individuals who come from less-intact families often referred to as “broken homes” (See Sanni, et al, 2010). The aforementioned shows the relationship between family-related problems and juvenile delinquency in society.

Abuh (2015) found that almajirai are effectively abandoned by their parents and exploited by their Mallams and members of the public; as they end up facing a future lifestyle woven by poverty and hardship. This is because the Islamic education they receive only equips them with few skills that do not fit into the harsh and capitalist oriented modern economy that the nation operates and thus cannot offer them profitable employment. The above findings corroborate Asuelimu (2015) who observed that almajiri system is a dysfunctional educational system, which produced children the parents don’t care for but dumped them with mallams or quranic teachers who misuse impressionable kids as beggars and means of livelihood was a time bomb the nation set recklessly with fatalistic assumption that what would be would be as if the almighty has not given man the wisdom to recreate life and environment.

In a field survey conducted in Sokoto State by Sule-Kano (2010), it was found that most parents would prefer not to contribute anything to the upkeep of their almajiri children. In some schools less than 10% of parents made any contribution at all. This shows that almajirai are neglected by their parents which is capable of pushing them into social vices as they rely on different devices to keep body and souls in harmony. Those in the village constitute the major source of labour in farms while those in the city are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation of different magnitude (see Tilde, 2013; Khalid, 2000).

Closely related to the deteriorating role of the families of Almajirai is the issue of polygamy. This is a situation where people just for religious permissiveness, marry as many as 3-4 wives and produce as many children as possible only to be taken to mallams so as to relief themselves of the responsibilities of training them. As a corollary, children from such families who suffer deprivation seek alternative means of survival which may only be found in the easily accessible ‘trade’ of street begging. Thus, child abuse and neglect has continued unabated in Northern Nigeria (Aluaigba, 2009). This shows a close relationship between polygamy and the plight of almajirai.

This is to buttress the position of a former Youth Corp member, Lawal Olaitan, in Gombe State who told “Islam Online” that men who abuse the institution of marriage by marrying many wives and procreating loads of children when they could hardly cater for one, send their kids to Almajiri
schools only to shed their excess responsibilities (Muhammed, 2012). This shows the same trend with the study of the socioeconomic and demographic attributes of the almajirai in Sokoto State conducted by Shuaibu and Jimoh (2011), which indicates that the majority (65.8%) of the family of the respondents practice polygamy. The study findings are also compatible with the situation analysis of social conditions and nutritional status of children in Pakistan, which revealed that most street children came from large family background. The findings of the above study corroborates a study on the almajiri syndrome in Northern Nigeria, conducted by Aluaiga (2009), where it was found that many men with mean or no meaningful source of income marry three or four wives, with multiple births from these wives, they end up with fifteen to twenty children or more which their economic power cannot shoulder.

Parental neglect has many social implications in child’s personality as they lack proper socialization from the family as the primary agent of socialization which other secondary agents of socialization will build on. The family is the first point of contact, where a child sees the world through the primary socialization, learns the norms, values, and the cultural heritage of the society. The family has a vital role to play in the development of the child’s personality. It is the foundation of every individuals and that is why it is referred to as the bedrock of society. According to Wilmot (1985), depending on the quality of socialization, the child is said to be ‘cultured’ and well behaved, or to be rude and ‘badly brought up’ and to lack home training. Secondary socialization continues throughout the life of the individual building on the primary foundation established at the family level. Since the family has the most intimate contact with the child during the formative years, it plays a uniquely important role in determining the behaviour patterns a child will eventually exhibit (Broom and Selznick, 1963).

The role of the family in the socialization of the child cannot be over emphasized. There are many who believe that “juvenile delinquency” should be referred to as juvenile P delinquency, with “P” standing for “Parental”. The emphasis is not difficult to understand for it is the relationship between parental failure and child misconduct (U.N.O., 2002).

It is in the light of the foregoing that a great deal of attention has been given recent criminological research on juvenile delinquency, home conditions and child rearing practices. As Igbo (1999) observed, criminologists and other social researchers generally agree that the family has a crucial role to play in the development of delinquent or non-delinquent personality. In 2009, the then Nigeria’s Minister of State for Education, Aishat Jibrin Dukku, lamenting on the insensitivity of the parents of Almajirai made the following remarks on a Hausa local Radio Show; They just send them away without making any arrangement for their feeding, medical care, shelter and other necessities. Most of these children, because of the harsh realities they found themselves in, end up becoming juvenile delinquents and, subsequently adult criminals (www.nigeriancuriosity.com/2009).

Family or parental neglect is a serious delinquency-breeding phenomenon. As seen in the literature, empirical studies have shown that some almajirai have engaged in delinquent activities, particularly violence, looting, alcohol, drug and substance abuse. The socioeconomic characteristics of street children in the Egyptian city of Alexandra was studied and found that street children come from problematic family backgrounds. They, like almajirai in Nigeria, were disproportionately victims of family backgrounds, sexual and physical abuse (Shuaibu and Jimoh, 2011).

Almajirai Involvement in Violent Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile delinquency has been one of the social problems in Nigeria in general and Kano State in particular. For instance, the governor of Kano State, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, referring to the role almajirai played during the Maitatsine crisis in Kano in 1980, urged parents to give their young ones good education which would move them away from juvenile delinquency that he admitted was a problem in the state (Indabawa, 2013). The Maitatsine disturbance in Kano alone resulted in the death of 4,177 people between December 18 and 29, 1980. The main adherents of Maitatsine were almajirai (Armed Conflict Events Data, 2013).

In the same direction, from 1980-1985, Northern Nigeria witnessed four main religious crises and according to Winters (1987), the participants in these riots were the Almajirai. In the 2004 religious crisis in Kano city, the violence unleashed on innocent residents was successful because the participants comprised mainly Almajirai (Human Rights Watch, 2005)

On July 13, 2010, an attempt by a 19 year old Almajiri, Usman Musa to kill the Emir of Kano at the instance of a cleric, mallam Hamidu (who according to the culprit had been his spiritual advisers) was truncated by a smart palace guard. The almajiri equally admitted that he just came back from Abuja where he robbed an Igbo man of three million naira at Jabi garage. Malam Hamidu denied his involvement but both of them were detained (Nigerian Best Forum, 2013).

Efforts at Ameliorating the Conditions of Almajirai
Despite the efforts made by government, traditional rulers, NGOs, individuals, as well as other agencies, the problems of almajirai persist partly because of lack of commitments from the stakeholders in almajiri education. In 1984, the Kano State Government banned the migration of itinerant scholars from rural areas to cities; the pilot feeding scheme in three priority local government areas of Kano State in 2003 initiated by the governor, Ibrahim Shekarau and the effort of the governor of Jigawa State, Sule Lamido to modernize Qur’anic education were all in a bid to address the problem of child street beggars (Bolujoko, 2008; Aluaibga, 2009; Kurfi, 2010). As observed by Khalid (2000), despite attempts by some state governments like Sokoto in 1986 and Kano in 1988 to eradicate, or at least regulate the almajiri phenomenon, the system continued to increase. Worthy of mention is the effort of the governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff, to integrate the Tsangaya (almajiri) system into western education (Nairaland Forum, 2014). Another recent efforts made by the federal government to build almajiri primary schools for possible enrolment of thousands of almajirai wandering the streets of Kano is yet to significantly change the tide. A source at the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board, SUBEB, presented a document that has it that, seven out of the ten federal government almajiri schools are completed. The other three are the Model 2 intervention schools that are about to be completed (Leadership Online, 2014).

In another development, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)-Malama Adama Usman Foundation, Tanniyya Foundation, Rochas Foundation, Jammatul Nasrul Islam Foundation, NASFAT-and other well-meaning individuals help to take care of these children (Bala, 2014). The wife of the Katsina State governor, Hajifa Fatima Shema distributed 5,000 sets of clothes to almajirai to enable them celebrate Eid-el-fitr happily in 2014. They were selected from the three senatorial districts of the state, among who were orphans and other less privileged that deserve assistance from the general public (Elazez, 2014). People like the late Malam Aminu Kano have, as early as the 1950s, advocated the establishment of Islamiyyah schools in place of makarantar allo (almajiri schools) so as to reflect the socio-economic dynamics of modern world. In this kind of arrangement, children can attend schools within their immediate vicinity under the watchful eyes of their parents and guardians (Khalid, 2000).

At another level, an advocacy campaign aimed at stemming the increasing abuse of almajirai has commenced work in Kano State. Sponsored by the Embassy of the United State of America, the programme is specifically designed to combat labour exploitation of street child-beggars and de-escalate the state of insecurity in Kano and the North-West geo-political zone of the country (Abuh, 2015).

The project which seeks to complement the efforts of the Governor Rabiu Kwankwaso led administration and the people of Kano to solve problems of child beggars, is designed to reduce the exposure of almajirai to violence and anti-social behaviours, which would positively impact on the sustenance of peace and harmonious relationship among people of different socio-cultural back ground residing in Kano State. The programme is being jointly implemented by two Kano based Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO); the Justice Development and Peace/Caritas Advocates (JDPCA) Kano and Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED). Already the initiative which aims at having four thousand families in complete charge of the welfare and well-being of their children have been endorsed by both Kano State, Kano State Hisba Board, selected members of House of Assembly, Civil Society Organisation, and Religious leaders, among others (Abuh, 2015).

Prior to the above initiative, Kano State initiated a prohibition against almajiri by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development (MOWASD) in order to reduce prevalence of child labour in Nigeria by 2015. This initiative which was meant to take almajirai off the streets of Kano has only succeeded in taking them off the major streets but the story is still the same in the interior and slum areas of the city as demonstrated by respondents in the interview conducted in Kano metropolis.

In another development, Kano State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy as well as United States Agency for International Development equally supported Almajiri/Tsangaya schools centre for large numbers of these almajiri children originating from outside (Kano State, 2014). This will complement the efforts of the federal government through Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Educational Trust Fund (ETF) intervention aimed at building one hundred and fifty (150) Tsangaya/ Almajiri schools across the country, in which Kano State was one of the beneficiaries. This joint gesture is to reduce the problems of child street-beggars in Nigeria. It has been established by Onwumere (2013) that 30 percent of Northern youths were almajiri.

Of the contracts awarded by UBEC/ETF for the construction of ten (10) Almajiri/Tsangaya Model Schools spread to 10 LGA in Kano State, seven (7) currently were 100% completed, while the remaining three (3) were at advanced stages of
progress (Kano State Directorate of Current Affairs, in DanZainab, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the paper has succeeded in establishing the nexus between parental neglect and juvenile delinquency of almajirai in Northern Nigeria. Polygamy was identified as a factor complicating the issue of parental neglect, a situation where people marry as many as four wives and produce scores of children they could hardly cater for, only to be dumped in almajiri school which is free, to fend for themselves, and in the process engage in juvenile delinquency. Against this backdrop, the paper recommended that parental neglect be criminalized, and polygamy be discouraged.

REFERENCES


