Assessment of Food Insecurity among Almajiri in Sokoto Metropolis and Selected Environments (Gwadabawa and Kware), Sokoto State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This paper aimed to assess food insecurity among Almajiri in Sokoto metropolis and its environments using a structured questionnaire on 120 respondents. The respondents were Muslims, Hausa/Fulani, males and Nigerians. The occupations of Almajiri fathers were farming (66.7%), business (16.7%), and 16.7% were doing nothing. 33.3% of their fathers were married to two wives, 25.0% married to three wives, 16.7% married to one wife each and 16.7% married to four wives. 33.3% of the Almajiri said their fathers have two children, 25.0% said their fathers have three children, and 8.3% have four kids and 8.3% have one child. None of the participants attended western school. But only 25.0% admitted that they like "Boko" (western education). While 75% said they don't like "Boko". 58.3% goes home only after one year stay at the school. 25.0% return after graduation, 16.7% return home after 3 years stay at school. 50.0% said they always come with insufficient food from home, but 41.7% said they come with nothing. 3% come with insufficient money from home, whereas, 41.7% come with nothing. 41.7% eat food thrice, 25.0% eat twice, and 16.7% eat once. 58.3% earn through begging, 25.0% earn through domestic work, and 16.7% earn through external work. 75.0% eat "twowo", and 16.7% eat Gari and others. All the respondents echoed that the system hurt them psychologically. The findings revealed that Almajiri children were unable to come with enough food or money to sustain them throughout their stay at school. Thus, this depicts food insecurity, which in turn can invariably lead to hunger. Parents should give sufficient provisions to their wards whenever sending them to Almajiri schools. The government, wealthy persons and relations should fully put hands on deck to help Almajiri child.

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Knowledge is a special gift and wealth that distinguished humans from other creatures. It is a wisdom and the highest pinnacle that can be attained in life and is obtained through school and grapple. That is why in Islam, it is exhort that Muslims must seek knowledge of various fields of human endeavours. In fact, the first message descended to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a stimulation to stand up and seek for knowledge. All the past prophets (peace be upon them) flourished because of knowledge (Ali,1987; Abd, 1996). The word Almajiri was drawn from Arabic word Almahajir the migrator. It entails a person who abandoned his home and went to another town or village in the cause of religion. Whereas, Almajiri (the Hausa word) refers to a pupil or student who left his hometown to another town in search for knowledge (at Makarantar Allo or Zaure). The plural are Almajirai and are taught by Malam or Alaramma etc. The practice has a long tradition and history in Hausa land, probably since the advent of Islam in the region. In the olden days, the Almajiri practice worked smoothly without hitch, because there was surplus funding from government (by the Emirs), wealthy people and the public. When the colonial forces took over the mantle of affairs, the usual Almajiri funding halted, because the Western education has more attention. The wealthy individuals too halted the payment of Zakat and the public neglected the Almajiri practice. Since then, the practice is languishing helplessly (Amzat, 2016). Sokoto caliphate (as ceremoniously and traditionally called) serve as the centre and pivot of Islam in the olden and present days in Nigeria. It is a mother of the North, thus it is a typical place where the Almajiri is currently being practiced. Like in other places, the Almajiri system of nowadays is decisively marred by many problems. You can see the children and young ones wander for food, begging, labouring, some live or sleep on the streets, their garments are looking very untidy and unkempt. They can be source of labour or recruits for various crimes and vices in the society. These are some of the unfortunateness Almajiri is sinking in nowadays, albeit there are some good sides in the system and some few of them are not affected by these bad situations (Aghedo and Eke, 2013; Nigeria Research Network, 2013).

Islam see childhood with hope and inspiration, as something to safeguard. It is a gift that should be protected, reared and guarded. That is why, the
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children and young ones have emphatic rights. The right to have a healthy start, the right to healthcare, the right to proper nutrition, the right to dignity of life, the right to receive from society, government, and the right to education and skill acquisition among others (Alazhar University/UNICEF, 2005; Saiful, 2015). Holy Qur'an says "Should be keep her with dishonour or bury her in earth?". This is a strong criticism and caveat to those that maltreat female scions, and male alike (Saiful, 2015). One public health concern about nowadays Almajiri is the issue of food insecurity and hunger. Food is vital for existence and normal functioning of all biological systems, let alone the bigger animals, the Homo sapiens (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018). Even in the Holy Qur'an, health has been emphasized and food is one of the ingredients required to maintain it (Alazhar University/UNICEF, 2005).

Data analysis: The collected data was analyzed using thematic content analysis, particularly with thematic networks in Microsoft excel to yield descriptive parameters of frequency, and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result for this study was presented in table 1. The respondents were Muslims, Hausa/ Fulani, males and Nigerians. The major occupations of Almajiri fathers were, farming (66.7%), business (16.7%), and 16.7% were doing nothing. 33.3% of their fathers were married to two wives, 25.0% married to three wives, 16.7% married to one wife each and; 16.7% married to four wives. 33.3% of the Almajiri said their fathers have two children, 25.0% said their fathers have three children, and 8.3% have four kids, and 8.3% have one child. Pertaining western education, none of the participants attended western school, but only 25.0% admitted that they like Boko (western education), while 75% said they don't like Boko .58.3% return home only after one year stay at the school, 25.0% return after graduation, whereas, 16.7% return home after 3yrs stay at school. 50.0% said they always come with insufficient food from home. But 41.7% said they come with nothing. 7.3% come with insufficient money from home, whereas, 41.7% come with nothing. 41.7% eat food thrice, 25.0% eat twice, and 16.7% eat once. 58.3% earn through begging, 25.0% earn through domestic work, and 16.7% earn through external work. 75.0% eat tuo and 16.7% eat Gari, and others. All the respondents echoed that the system hurt them psychologically. American Psychological Association (n.d.) said the children with food problems experience psychological effects. From these findings, it can be seen that, Almajiri children failed to come with enough food or money to sustain them throughout their stay at school. Moreover, this determined that, the main food of the Almajiri children is the carbohydrate, which they got in an uncertain, unacceptable and socially problematic way. Remnants, lowly, and unchosen food is served to the pupils. Thus, this depicts food insecurity, which turn can invariably lead to hunger. They have to embroiled in child labour to succour some of the situations. Children are precious, and gifts that need care" Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is accountable for his or her flock" …and Allah has made for you wives of your kind and has made for you from your wives, sons and grandsons and has bestowed on you good provision. Qur’an:Nahl, 74 (Ali, 1987). "Wealth and children are the adornments of the life of this world" Qur’an: the Cave, 46 (Ali, 1987). The Islamic Shari’ah assures the child’s right. He has the right to be born, the right to be protected from any harmful exposure. A child has the right to have intellectual training and education, he has the right to health. "And do not throw yourselves into destruction" Qur’an:The Haifer, 195 Islam instruct that children and adults should be protected from violence, sexual abuse, social abuse, psychological abuse.
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Based on this work, these Almajiri were exposed to food insecurity, hunger, begging, child labour and psychological hurt. This is contrary to Islamic and Public Health provisions. Food insecurity refers to limited or uncertain availability of adequate safe food nutrients. It also includes the limited or uncertain ability to get food in a socially acceptable ways (Okolo and Obidigbo, 2015). Food insecurity have direct and indirect impacts on children in short and long terms. These impacts includes on physical, psychological, and mental health. It excavates malnutrition, lower food insecurity is associated with higher probability of hypertension, coronic heart disease, hepatitis, stroke, cancer, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, and kidney disease. Thus, food insecurity is a strong predictor of higher hospital use and increased health costs (FRAC, 2017).

| Table 1: Assessment of food insecurity determinants among Almajiri in Sokoto Metropolis and its selected environs (Gwadabawa and Kware), Sokoto state, Nigeria |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Demography                                    | Frequency | Percentage |
| Age                                           |           |            |
| 1-6                                          | 10        | 8.3        |
| 6-9                                          | 10        | 8.3        |
| **10-12**                                     | **10**    | **8.3**    |
| 13-16                                        | 40        | 33.3       |
| Sex                                           |           |            |
| Male                                         | 120       | 100.0      |
| Religion                                     |           |            |
| Islam                                        | 120       | 100.0      |
| Tribe                                        |           |            |
| Hausa/ Fulani                                | 120       | 100.0      |
| Occupation of father                         |           |            |
| Farming                                      | 80        |            |
| Business                                     | 20        | 16.7       |
| Nothing                                      | 20        | 16.7       |
| No of wives of father                        |           |            |
| One                                          | 10        | 8.3        |
| Two                                          | 40        | 33.3       |
| Three                                        | 30        | 25.0       |
| Four                                         | 10        | 8.3        |
| Number of children of father                 |           |            |
| Three                                        | 10        | 8.3        |
| Five                                         | 30        | 25.0       |
| Six                                          | 50        | 41.7       |
| Literacy of children                         |           |            |
| Do you like western education?               |           |            |
| Yes                                          | 60        | 50.0       |
| No                                           | 50        | 41.7       |
| Do you come with food from home?             |           |            |
| Yes                                          | 10        | 50.0       |
| No                                           | 50        | 41.7       |
| Do you come with money from home?            |           |            |
| Yes                                          | 10        | 8.3        |
| No                                           | 50        | 41.7       |
| How many times do you eat daily?             |           |            |
| Once                                         | 20        | 16.7       |
| Twice                                        | 30        | 25.0       |
| Thrice                                       | 50        | 41.7       |
| I'm psychologically hurt by my situation     | 120       | 100.0      |
| Source of food while at school               |           |            |
| Begging                                      | 70        | 58.3       |
| Domestic work                                | 30        | 25.0       |
| External labour                              | 20        | 16.7       |
| Type of food mostly eaten by Almajiri        |           |            |
| Tuwo / gari                                  | 90        | 75.0       |
| Gari                                         | 20        | 16.7       |
| Other                                        | 10        | 8.7        |
| Which time do you return home?               |           |            |
| Yearly                                       | 70        | 58.3       |
| After three years                            | 20        | 16.7       |
| After graduation                             | 30        | 25.0       |
| Do you like boko                             |           |            |
| Yes                                          | 30        | 25.0       |
| No                                           | 90        | 75.0       |
Globally, 1 out of 3 persons are in food problem. In response to that so many steps were took, one of which is the Sustainable Development Goals. Therein, a call is displayed seeking to end hunger (SDG2) (Okolo and Obidigbo, 2015; Olomola, 2017; Abubakar, 2018). Food insecurity is closely linked to hunger and malnutrition and is of serious public health concern in Nigeria. Here, there are about 17 million people that are experiencing food insecurity. This prevalence is projected to increase to 43 million in 2022 if the trend persists (FAO, 2018). Like the adults, the children have many problems because of food insecurity. Some of the public health concerns about the Almajiri child are

Psychological effects:
- Food insecurity and hunger can cause toxic stress (Chilton and Jenny, 2012)
- It affect cognitive capacity
- Food insecure individuals are stigmatized
- Food insecurity is associated with high risk of sickness, such as stomachache, headache, cold etc. Severe form is associated with anxiety, low academic achievement
- It also lead to shame on children (APA, n.d.)

b. Behavioural effects
- Make children less attentive, independent and curious
- Make children to lose self-confidence, and self esteem
- Make children prone to irritability and nervousness (K: State Research and Extension, 2013).

Workers who were exposed to hunger as children are not prepared like their counterparts. Workers who were exposed to hunger as children are less competitive, and seriously restrict human capital (Cook and Jeng, 2009). Children who experienced severe hunger are five times more likely to need counselling. They have more risks of chronic diseases, and more consumers of healthcare resources (Gundersen et al., 2011).

The respondents in this study opined the coping strategies they applied due to hunger and food insecurity. The strategies are begging, external and domestic work. Both of the trio are types of child labour. Firstly, begging is a widely practice norm in the Sahelian states, thus it is not new to quote begging as an alternative or coping strategy for food insecurity and hunger (UNICEF, 2012). In Islam begging is abhorred unless if there is a critical excuse, that is there is no any other means Islam stressed that guardians should provide their wards with sufficient provision for their study. But because of illiteracy, lack of awareness, poverty and lack of government intervention the begging practice among Almajiri is still trending (Dalhat, 2011; Ogunkan, 2011; Senterfeit et al., 2013; Maigari, 2017). The begging and labour can pose the Almajiri child to much hazards. They are more likely to fall into the hands of miscreants. They are cheap to engage in drugs, and other unsound vices.

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