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POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the stressors and resources of Muslim child beggars in *Dagbon* of Northern Ghana in the context of child rights and existing realities

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Abstract: Introduction: Though the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) states that children have a right to education and to be protected from exploitative child labour, child begging is a widespread phenomenon. Children who beg experience stressful conditions but they continue to beg. This article explores the stressors and resources of Muslim child beggars in *Dagbon* in Northern Ghana and the consequences of their involvement in begging.

Methods: This qualitative study uses “Draw and Tell” as a research instrument to look into the working environment of these children by bringing into focus the negative experiences they encounter in begging and the resources that enable them to cope.

Findings: Though the children encounter negative experiences such as insults and beatings, they are motivated by their social networks, catering for their educational needs and seeing begging as temporary and a means through which they help their families.

Discussion: High levels of poverty in Northern Ghana may account for children’s engagement in begging but it affects them physically, psychologically and cognitively. This has implications on their educational achievement and future economic opportunities. The CRC emphasises the need for children’s education but some children in Ghana continue to beg at the expense of their education.

Conclusion: Although the government of Ghana is a signatory to international child rights documents, and Ghana has a children’s Act (Act 560), child beggars in *Dagbon*

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Tufeiru Fuseini holds a Master of Philosophy Degree in Health Promotion from the University of Bergen, Norway. The title of his Master’s thesis is: The experiences of Muslim child beggars in *Dagbon* of Northern Ghana: an exploratory study from the perspective of salutogenesis.

Tufeiru’s research interests include Health Promotion amongst vulnerable children in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Ghana. He takes a strengths-based theoretical approach using theories such as salutogenesis.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Ghana is a signatory to international conventions that seek to promote the rights of children. The children’s act and the beggars and destitute children’s act affirm a formal commitment in promoting the welfare of children in Ghana. In spite of the existence of all these documents, child begging is a widespread phenomenon in the country. The child beggars, mostly from the Muslim communities in Northern Ghana, encounter a lot of adversities in the begging terrain but they continue to beg. Concerning research and care of vulnerable children, the prevailing international perspective is that such children should be cared for by their families. This article shows that even within families, children’s life may be vulnerable.

do not have their right to education protected. Local realities mean that parents follow religious and cultural traditions rather than national legal frameworks.

Subjects: Social Sciences; Development Studies; Education

Keywords: stressors; resources; children; begging; northern Ghana; child rights

1. Introduction

Child begging is a phenomenon that is prevalent in different parts of Ghana including the Northern Region. Ghana attained middle income status in November 2010 but income inequality continues and the three Northern regions of the country are still the most impoverished. The involvement of children in begging attracts international attention, especially in the context of child labour and children's right to education. Many institutions, organisations and agencies at national or international levels observe that begging by children symbolises an abuse of the child and this has become one of the child rights issues to various rights-based organisations in contemporary times. It is a form of child labour, an unacceptable practice according to the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organisation, ILO (IPEC, 2015). Also, it is an infringement on the fundamental human rights of the child, particularly the right to education, right to good health and the right to mental and physical development (UNICEF, 2004). Studies show that child labour affects the educational achievement of the children involved because they record poor performance in school (John, 2015; Manjengwa, Matema, Tirivanhu, & Tizora, 2016).

The rights of children at the international level gained prominence in 1989 when the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was formulated. This is a comprehensive policy document (Okyere, Imoh, & Ansell, 2014) that tasks all countries to ensure the safety of all children. Article 18 (b) of the CRC states that state parties should assist parents in their child rearing duties when the need arises. Article 28 (a) urges state parties to make education free and compulsory at the basic level for all children. Additionally, Article 32 obliges states to protect children from economic exploitation and from performing hazardous work that will interfere with their education or be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (UNICEF, 1989).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was adopted in July 1990. Article 11 of this Charter mandates African countries to be proactive in educational matters by making child education at the basic level compulsory and free for all children. Additionally, Article 15 states that children should be protected from any form of economic exploitation and from engaging in dangerous works that can interfere with their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Article 31 places responsibility on the African child towards showing respect to his or her parents, superiors and elders, and to preserve and strengthen African cultural values in their relations with other members of their communities (UNICEF, 1990). It must be noted, however, that this article is found only in the ACRWC but not in other child rights documents.

The Ghana government enacted the Children's Act of 1998 (Act 560) in line with the provisions of the CRC and the ACRWC. Section 87, (a) and (b) of Act 560, prohibits the use of children for any exploitative labour, which deprives them of their right to basic health, education and social development. Section 16 places official responsibility on the District Assemblies to protect the welfare of children and promote children's rights within their area of authority. Section 18.1 (g) stipulates that a child is in need of care and protection if he or she is begging or receiving alms or is found in any street, premises or places for the purpose of begging or receiving alms. The minimum working age as stipulated in the act is 15 years G.O.G (1998), which is in line with convention 182 of the ILO's minimum age for working (IPEC, 2015).

Begging is illegal in Ghana dating back to the pre-independence era when the Control of Beggars and Destitute Ordinance of 1957 was enacted as an official response to public protest against the beggar population in the capital city of Ghana, Accra (Weiss, 2007). Post-independence, Ghana saw the reaffirmation of the attitude of those at the top echelon of state authority towards begging through the passage of a decree known as the Beggars and Destitute Act in 1969, which was not at variance with the 1957 ordinance. Under the Beggars and Destitute Act (NLCD 392), Section (2), begging is a criminal act in Ghana and offenders are to be imprisoned, fined or suffer both penalties (G.O.G., 1969).

Many studies have cited the underlying drivers of child begging across the globe but the frontline factors are religion and poverty (Bukoye, 2015; Delap, 2009; Zoumanigui, 2016). These authors report how the quest for Islamic education causes parents to give their children to the *mallams* or *marabouts* who in turn allow these children to beg under extremely difficult conditions. Poverty is also the often cited causal factor of begging (Magashi, 2015; Thorsen, 2012; Weiss, 2004).

The ILO's estimates, as at the year 2012, revealed that about 168 million children were involved in child labour representing 11% of the world's population of children (IPEC, 2015). Currently, there are about 215 million children who are child labourers in the world and majority of them live in sub-Saharan Africa (Mace, 2016).

1.1. Working environment of child beggars

The stressors that child beggars face can be grouped into psychological abuse: physical stressors, which include health risks, and involvement in activities which have long-term consequences for their well-being as adults. Several studies mention that beggars experience psychological abuse such as verbal aggression, harassment, public hostility and contempt as well as stigmatising and dehumanising responses (Adama, 2014; Calheiros, Monteiro, Patrício, & Carmona, 2016; Einarsdóttir, Boiro, & Geirsson, 2010; Kassah, 2008; Kochar, Ittyerah, & Babu, 2015). In some cases, the harassment is official and carried out by police because begging is prohibited by law as in Ghana, Kenya, the USA, Morocco and India (Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg, 2008; Kassah, 2008; Roblee-Hertzmark, 2012). People whom the child beggars approach for alms also frequently abuse them (Adama, 2014; Delap, 2009; Kochar et al., 2015; Roblee-Hertzmark, 2012).

Child beggars often suffer harsh physical stressors. They frequently beg in dangerous areas like traffic junctions or lorry parks (Abebe, 2008; Kassah, 2008; Scarboro, Ay, Aliyu, Ekici, & Uylas, 2013) and they continue to beg in all-weather conditions (Abebe, 2008; Bukoye, 2015; Kassah, 2008; Scarboro et al., 2013). Perry (2004) mentions that they work for the long hours and the fact that they have poor living conditions like unsuitable places for sleeping and washing. Child beggars may be beaten by the people from whom they beg or their parents who force them to go and beg and sometimes the *marabouts* or *mallams* (Delap, 2009; Einarsdóttir & Boiro, 2015; Zoumanigui, 2016). Additionally, child beggars face health risks (Al-Hassan and Abubakari, 2015) through exposure to substance and sexual abuse (Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg, 2008; Orme & Seipel, 2007).

Both psychological and physical stressors may have long-term impact on the child beggars. In some situations, the effects of verbal aggression exceed those of physical aggression and can affect the development of certain brain regions leading to psychiatric and temperamental problems (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, & McGreenery, 2006). Verbal aggression may also affect cognitive functioning of children and this has negative effects on their performance in school as compared to those who have not been verbally abused (Kochar et al., 2015). Verbal aggression also leads to the development of low self-esteem (Calheiros et al., 2016; Kochar et al., 2015).

In addition to the above long-term impact of the psychological stressors, there are other long-term effects emerging from children's involvement in begging. Magashi (2015) argues that the involvement of children in begging has the tendency of making them prone to criminality or to being victimised by criminals. For instance, begging sometimes compels some child beggars to engage in criminal acts

like stealing although they are well aware of the consequences of theft (Fiasorgbor, Mangotiba, Caroline, & Francisca, 2015; Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg, 2008; Kudrati, Plummer, & Yousif, 2008). In other circumstances, child beggars are accused of stealing from people and theft is a negative label, which changes a person's perception of his identity and this can lead him to accept and act out the label that he is associated with (Gheorghiuță & Vădăsteanu, 2015). Children's involvement in begging also affects their academic achievements (Helleiner, 2003; Manjengwa et al., 2016). This will definitely have long-term consequences on their economic circumstances as adults.

In contrast to the aforementioned negative aspects of child begging, some authors highlight that it can have positive impact on the lives of the children. The proceeds from begging can help children finance their education and begging is therefore seen as a pathway to academic advancement (Stones, 2013; Swanson, 2010). Additionally, it has been a gateway through which children can learn business skills and financial independence (Abebe, 2008; Stones, 2013). It is a survival strategy for street children in India, Kaushik (2014) a means that brings economic relief to the family (Scarboro et al., 2013) and teaches the children humility (Omeni, 2015).

Another contrasting argument contends that discourses on the negative aspects of child begging used by researchers, child right activists, agencies and organisations, are adult conjectures and therefore contestable (Milne, 2015). The author argues that those discourses do not really reflect the position of the children whose voices are ignored in matters that involve them. The universal applicability of child rights as the basis for these descriptions is therefore problematic. Abebe (2008) claims that the views of the child beggars are rarely heard but rather their photographs and stories are publicised for reasons that are not beneficial to the begging child.

1.2. Positive resources for child beggars

There are few studies that focus on the positive resources that child beggars rely upon to cope, nonetheless, some research has explored the underlying reasons for children's perpetual engagement in begging in spite of the multiplicity of difficulties they experience. A common feature of African children is their involvement in work that is beneficial to their families (John, 2015) and one of the motivations for children's involvement in begging is their families' economic circumstances (Abebe, 2008). Group dynamics also explain why the children are able to cope with the begging environment as they always want to join one another where they can hang out freely with their colleagues (Abebe, 2008; Ballet et al., 2010). Repackaging begging to mean work or business as in Ethiopia and Ghana is also another technique of coping that the beggars adopt (Abebe, 2008; Kassah, 2008) to erase the stigmatisation label and then feel dignified (Kassah, 2008). Social resources such as family ties and friends, who encourage them, also help children cope with begging (Abebe, 2008; Orme & Seipel, 2007).

Studies have made significant insights into the stressors of child begging including in the context of child rights (Einarsdottir, et al, 2010), but what enables the children to cope in spite of the adversities has not been given much attention as most studies are inclined to the stressors. Additionally, there are few studies from the perspective of Muslim child beggars who are staying with their parents (Ballet et al., 2010). The available literature on begging looks at it in the context of those who are with the *mallams* or the *marabouts* for Quranic studies with the focus mainly in the capital cities ignoring what happens in rural areas.

This study addresses three related research questions: What are the stressors and resources experienced by Muslim child beggars who live with their parents in Dagbon, Ghana? How does begging affect the children's lives? In the context of current child rights debates, what are the implications of children's involvement in begging?

2. Methodology

The findings of this article are part of a larger study, with data collection conducted from July to September 2015 at "*Tingsheli*" in the Northern Region of Ghana. "*Tingsheli*" is a pseudonym to

protect the anonymity of the participants. Of all the surrounding villages where it is located in *Dagbon*, it is virtually the only community whose children are engaged in begging, and within the community, it is only Muslim boys who are involved in begging.

2.1. Participants and data collection

Data collection was conducted by the first author, a native Dagbani speaker, so there was no need for an interpreter. The wider study involved three *mallams*, six parents and eight children. In this article, only data from the children are used. They are Muslim *Dagomba* boys from the ages of 10–14 years who were regular beggars. In this community, it is only boys who are involved in begging and this age group was chosen because, in this district, most child beggars fall within this age range. A young *mallam* was the gatekeeper to access the community; he identified the potential participants. Also, he contacted the parents, informed them about the research and requested their children's participation. They signed the consent and assent forms with the first author when he met them. The gatekeeper played significant role in organising the children during the research activities.

To explore the lived experiences of the Muslim child beggars, “draw and tell” was used and each of the children was asked to draw two things. The first was something that makes him like begging and the second was something that makes him hate begging. The “tell” part of the method involved using a topic guide to discuss the drawings in order to elicit the children's opinions on child begging and what motivates them to continue to beg. These discussions were recorded and transcribed. Though there are other methods like story telling in doing research with children (Grover, 2004; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004), draw and tell was the appropriate method for exploring the children's experiences in this context. It is a child centred approach to research that enabled the children to participate with autonomy because the interpretation of the drawings was done by them not the adult researcher (Angell, Alexander, & Hunt, 2015). Skovdal and Abebe (2012) explain that one of the advantages of draw and tell is that it addresses the issue of the “silent gap” between the researcher and the participant. The children concentrated on what they drew rather than the researcher and it effectively dealt with the problem of power relations (Horstman, Aldiss, Richardson, & Gibson, 2008).

Responses from all the participants were recorded and stored in a password-protected computer to ensure that the information was confidential and as a guarantee of their anonymity. In the transcribed documents, only pseudonyms were used so the identities of the participants could not be traced. Data were analysed using Attride-Stirling (2001) thematic network analysis through the use of open code, which is a computer software that facilitates the coding of raw data. The transcriptions of the children's discussions were analysed using the six steps of thematic network analysis. All the material was coded; related codes were then grouped into basic themes such as “being forced to beg”, “missing school” and “contributing to family”. Associated basic themes were then clustered into organising themes such as “negative daily experiences” and “long-term consequences”; these organising themes were then grouped into global themes like “stressors” and “resources”. The final two steps of thematic network analysis involved exploring the links between the themes and interpreting the patterns.

2.2. Ethics

Research with children is a delicate matter, therefore, permission was first sought from the Norwegian Social Sciences and Data Services (NSD) before the research was carried out in Ghana. Clearance was also obtained from the Ministry of Children, Gender and Social Protection of Ghana. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and content of the consent forms was translated into *Dagbani* and read to all of them before the children signed the assent forms whilst their parents signed the consent forms. They were told that the information they give was going to be confidential and also pseudonyms would be used in place of their names and the name of the community throughout the work for anonymity purposes. All participants were told they could decide not to answer a question if they did not want to and could also withdraw from

participation any time they wished. Audio tape recordings were taken with the participants' permission. The research was carried out during the farming season and since all participants of the research were peasant farmers, a convenient time was chosen for the children so that they did not lose farming hours. The first author, with the consent of the participants, fixed Friday for the research activities because it was their less busy day.

3. Findings

In explaining the meanings of their drawings which symbolise the things that make them hate begging, it emerged that all the children encountered multiple negative experiences in the field as beggars.

3.1. Negative daily experiences

The children reported negative experiences such as being insulted, chased by dogs, frightened by monkeys and sometimes beaten by people. For example, *Kabsu* said they always meet dogs in the villages where they go to beg and they have been barked at or chased innumerable times by these dogs. He narrated how frightening the situation is when dogs start to bark at him or are advancing dangerously towards him with their teeth exposed.

Participants, *Jacob* and *Suale*, narrated how they encountered monkeys on separate occasions in their begging expeditions. They expressed their bewilderment why people keep monkeys in their homes when they are supposed to be in the bush.

It was in the house and immediately I entered it rushed on me so I took to my heels. I was so frightened because I had never expected a monkey to be with people.(*Suale*)

Other daily negative experiences that confront these children are insults from their colleagues and adults from the places where they go to beg. This issue of insults was reported by four of the children. These verbal aggressions sometimes are intolerable so they will react which undoubtedly lands them into worse situations. They explained that sometimes people stare at them as if they are not human beings, a behaviour they described as extremely irritating. In explaining how he got himself into trouble, *Mashud* recounted how he was insulted by a girl and he was so annoyed that he had to chase her until he got her and gave her a knock on the head. He said begging on that day was truncated because he was mercilessly beaten by some adults in the village and the only option for him was to go back home. Only two participants mentioned being beaten but it shows the potential for insults to turn into physical aggression.

Additionally, these child beggars reported their exposure to a range of weather conditions from extreme heat to torrential rains. The first author observed some child beggars leaving the village one-day morning at 8:30. One of them said for him if he does not go his father would cane him and all of them said they would like to be in school. They returned 10 h later, drenched by a downpour, bare footed with their threadbare clothing soaked.

The participants also reported that their parents force them to go and beg. It appears as though begging is a routine and obligatory activity from the standpoint of the parents. So, days that the children want to absent themselves will be the days they are at loggerheads with the parents.

My thought about begging is that currently it is compulsory on us but most of us don't like it. I think we should stop it but it is imposed on us that is why. (*Suale*)

3.2. Long-term consequences

Missing school and its implications also emerged as stressors to the child beggars. *Abdulai* stated that anytime he sees students going to school, he looks at himself who is also a student but left school to beg in the villages. He indicated that it will definitely affect their future academic

endeavours because as they are not regular in school they will miss a lot in class. For him, the adults should have been those involved in begging whilst they, the younger ones, stay in school.

Anytime I go to beg and see them it pains me as to why I am not in school but involved in begging making me become angry and demoralised. I think that our parents should be the ones to beg since we are children it is not just good that we are engaged in begging. They are old so they should be the ones to beg and allow us to go to school but you can't say this to them. (Abdulai)

This idea about the need for them to be in school was expressed by all the eight children in this study. They explained that their gains in begging are transient because a time will come when they will have to stop because they will have grown above the begging age. They indicated that attainment of formal education or employable skills will be important to their lives.

3.3. Resources of the child beggars

Regardless of the difficult conditions, the child beggars continue begging. This part of the article looks at the positive resources that these children draw on to cope.

Firstly, the children see begging as a form of assistance that they render towards the upkeep of their families. Six out of the eight boys indicated that begging helps their families in terms of food. Providing food for the family is like a shared responsibility between them and their parents. *Zaaku* indicated that he usually goes to beg without being told when he sees that the food is about getting finished.

As I am going it helps the family because the maize I will bring will be what my mother sometime uses to prepare food.(Zaaku)

Zaaku indicated that since the family is poor, his desire is to beg and get enough money to buy a commercial vehicle which will yield money for the sustenance of the family. As unrealistic as the desires of *Zaaku* may be, it shows how the children negotiate their way into the hierarchies of their families where they regard themselves as part of the responsibility network to strive for the family good.

Secondly, the children use begging for their personal gains. They reported that through begging they can buy things that they want because sometimes their parents give them money but it will not be enough or they do not give them at all. In such instances, it is through begging that they get the money needed. Related to the monetary gains is the issue of examination fees. All the children except one, mentioned examination fees as one of the ways begging is helpful to them because it enables them pay to write examinations at the end of each academic term. Begging, from their reports, enables them to meet their educational aspirations, which have direct links to their future prosperity.

If you are able to pay the exam fees you will be able to write the exams which helps you to measure how you have understood what you have been taught. (Mashud)

Even though they get money from begging, it is not an exciting economic activity to them and they wished they were in school.

We beg because of money but the truth is that we don't get what we expect to get so the coin represents what we get as we go to beg and the note is our expectation. People will not give one or five pesewas the minimum they will give is 10 pesewas but it will not also be possible for them to give 20 or 50 GHC note so the maximum we always expect is 10GHC. (Abdulai)

Mostly, what they are given is coins and notes are rarely given.

Through begging, they buy mobile phones, bicycles, DVDs for movies and prepare their own food. Indeed, when the children came to the school for the research activities, the first author noticed

that two of them had mobile phones. *Jacob* mentioned *Ataaya* (tea prepared from local herbs) and preparation of rice as some of the reasons he continues to beg even though it is difficult. However, *Kabsu* reported that some of his colleagues go to beg for no apparent reason and a few of the children indicated that they are not being coerced to beg but they do it on their own accord.

Thirdly, the children's understanding that their engagement in begging has an end is a positive resource that enables them to cope. Five out of the eight children said they know they will not continue to be beggars for life. That they know their status as beggars was a temporal one and they will soon grow out of it.

Finally, families and friends of these children also play a major role in their continuous begging. They sometimes talk to the children in a manner that will definitely compel them beg. In expressing what makes him like begging, *Awal* said he begs because of what he told him some time ago. He told him to help by going to beg because he (father) was poor and would not be able to cater for their needs.

He called me one day and told me to assist him because it will be difficult for him to take care of us so I should start to go and beg. He explained to me that begging was not bad for children because they also begged when they were children. (Awal)

My friends always tell me that begging is not a bad thing and that we do it because we are children that, when we are grown we will stop it. And when they go and come back you see them buying a lot of things which they could not have bought if they had not gone to beg. (Shirazu)

Awal's explanation clearly shows how children in the traditional African family set-up respect their parents, which is in conformity with one of the provisions of the ACRWC where children are required to show respect to their parents and the elderly but sometimes they are asked to do things against their wish.

4. Discussion

The discussion of the findings will be framed by the research questions addressed in this article. The first and second research questions concern the stressors and resources experienced by child beggars and how begging affects the children's lives

4.1. Implications for the children's future

Participating child beggars mentioned many stressors they experienced daily such as physical dangers, psychological abuse and insults. One stressor that was raised by all the participants was how begging interrupted their schooling. The participants clearly understood that this will affect their future circumstances. Noting that begging was a temporary business engagement, they believed education is the best pathway out of poverty. The problem of their interrupted attendance to school is further compounded by the fact that in this district, the quality of education has not been good. The report on the 2010 Population and Housing Census figures show that the overall literacy score for the district was less than 5%. Articles 28a of the CRC and 11 of the ACRWC emphasise the need to ensure free education for children at the basic level. It is ironic that one of the reasons for their involvement in begging is to pay for their academic activities such as examinations. This casts doubts as to whether the government has the capacity to implement fully the provisions of these child rights documents.

Education and economic status are positively correlated (Zereyesus, Ross, Amanor-Boadu, & Dalton, 2014). Ekong (2016) observes that the level of education of parents links directly to their children's participation in child labour. Illiteracy which is a precursor of poverty was a predictor of child begging in Nigeria (Bukoye, 2015; Nwazuke & Igwe, 2016). This then implies that if the children are not educated, it will be difficult for them to fit into the labour market when they reach the age of employment into the formal sector and that can affect their wellbeing.

Schooling and child labour are incompatible and a negative correlation is established between child labour and educational achievement (IPEC, 2015). It is argued that children who are involved in begging perform poorly in school because the combination of work and academics leads to poor school attendance rates which invariably affect their success at completion (Helleiner, 2003; Manjengwa et al., 2016). Ekong (2016) notes that when children are involved in child labour, it affects their class participation which directly affects their performance and they withdraw from school to engage in child labour. This will definitely have long-term consequences on the children as adults in relation to their economic circumstances. Available records show that poor academic achievement consequently leads to poor jobs that do not conform with basic decent living criteria (IPEC, 2015). One can project that with the current academic levels of the children, their future educational prospects towards achieving better living conditions may be greatly affected. The implication then is that their current impoverished condition will perpetuate and the cycle of child begging will continue because without education, the vicious cycle of poverty will be difficult to eradicate making begging a transmissible “legacy”.

4.2. A focus on resources

There are some factors that enable these children to continue to beg despite the difficulties they experience as child beggars. For the children, it is not an unending task but there is terminal point to it and that is when they reach a certain age. This age factor in relation to begging confirms findings from studies on child beggars in Ethiopia and Ecuadorian Andes (Abebe, 2008; Swanson, 2007). For the children in Ecuadorian Andes, the threshold age is 14 after which they are no longer tolerated in the streets.

The children have also developed a social network that has a listening ear and a supportive heart and they share their problems with one another. Some of the children indicated that they are able to continue to beg because their friends have been supportive by giving them words of encouragement. This practice of social support the children render to one another establishes the fact that the children are not only isolated in their begging environment, but they also have social ties that connect and bond them together (Abebe, 2008; Fiasorgbor & Fiasorgbor, 2015). They share their food and material possessions with their colleagues and show love and concern for one another. This implies that the children will have emotional and psychological stability to operate as beggars in spite of the difficulties associated with it.

Additionally, for the children, part of their responsibility was to ensure that there was food for the family. They see themselves as an integral part of the family structure and its sustenance is a collective responsibility. This assertion being held by these children is similar to that of the child beggars in the streets of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, who also indicated that they were not being abandoned by their parents and that they were begging for the livelihood of their families (Abebe, 2008).

These children have a sense of motivation in begging for the family perhaps to carve out an identity and a position within the family hierarchy. By providing food for the families, they are accentuating their position and significance in the family, which leads them to feel important and could be the starting point of the children’s gendered role identity formation. In Abebe (2008), the children stated that begging to get food for their families makes them feel that they are worthy and important within the family structure and that “participation in family livelihoods restores their sense of confidence and self-reliance” Abebe (2008, p. 276). The feelings of worthiness, confidence and being self-reliant are the overarching and symbolic drivers of these children’s defiance of the negative experiences associated with begging. Child rights approaches advocate that children should be removed from begging, but as begging gives them responsibility and status within the family, what alternative approaches could provide children with similar opportunities ought to be integrated into the debate. Thorsen (2012) also articulates that taking the children off begging without a tangible substitute of the meaning and status that they attach to their act of begging will breed worse outcomes. In West and Central Africa, children who are involved in begging derived a kind of meaning and responsibility from it especially the contribution they make

to the family. It is like a form of initiation by means of indoctrination where parents tell their children to start begging to help the family and that it is not a bad act so detaching them from it will be a herculean task.

4.3. The context of the child in Ghana

The child beggars recognise both positive and negative aspects in their experiences, but in the light of current child rights debates, what are the implications of children's involvement in begging? Whilst the CRC is unequivocal in its judgement of anything that interferes with a child's education, several authors contend that reality is more complex and nuanced (Hilson, 2012; Maconachie & Hilson, 2016). Children have legal protection in Ghana as captured in the Children's Act. Section 18 of the Children's Act (Act 560) of Ghana, stipulates that begging children need protection. Sections 87 (a) and (b) of the same act advocate for the protection of children against economic exploitation and from doing dangerous works. However, the application of the global notion of children's rights is not easy in local settings (Clerk, 2011). Therefore, the call for the disengagement of children from work until age 16 as found in the ILO's documents is in conflict with the traditional processes of child socialisation. Many societies in the traditional set-up maintain that integrating children into the working environment is one of the means through which they are empowered to endure the challenges of life as they grow up to take extra responsibilities in their homes (Afua, 2012). These are the competing realities when it comes to child rights issues in Africa.

It is governments' responsibility to intervene in instances where parents face difficulties in the performance of their child rearing duties as stipulated in Article 18(b) of the CRC and Section 16 of the Children's Act, (Act 560). Governments have a responsibility to protect children so that their rights are not abused by their parents or care takers (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2015; Magashi, 2015; Zoumanigui, 2016). However, Doek (2009) believes that having legislative instruments alone do not alter the existing realities about the plight of children and the challenge is the availability of human and financial resources for their implementation. As noted by Okyere et al. (2014), the implementation of aspects of the CRC has been minimal in Ghana. With the ailing economies of African states, governments find it difficult to provide the basic necessities of life to its citizenry. That is why some African families have questioned the idea of governments' interventions in their child rearing functions and regard that as intrusion especially when the state does little in terms of supporting them (Afua, 2012). However, as it is the responsibility of parents to take care of their children, the state also shares the blame if the physical, mental, moral and educational needs of the child are not met. It is worth pointing out that the states' responsibility in the upbringing of the child is non-negotiable.

4.4. Child labour and child rights context

Child labour takes various forms in Ghana ranging from working in farms, mining, fishing and sometimes domestic works as part of the production network of the family (Clerk, 2011). Begging is one of the worst forms of child labour (IPEC, 2015). It is indicated that parents are the ones who often decide that their children should go and beg rather than the children themselves (Lynch, 2005). Also in India, Kaushik (2014) observes that parents coerce their children to engage in begging. In this study, none of the children mentioned child rights directly but did mention disruption of their school attendance and being forced by their parents to go and beg which corroborates (Lynch, 2005) assertion and a clear case of forced child labour if the act is to be interpreted using the ILO's criteria. The testimonies show that the children were active participants in the upkeep of their families but none of the child rights documents places responsibility on the child to take care of his family. It is only the ACRWC that places responsibility on the child but that has to do with the child showing respect to his family, elders and superiors, and to uphold African cultural values (UNICEF, 1990). The defect with this article is that it does not specify the nature and form of respect that children are required to uphold. Obeying one's parents in absolute terms is part of African values so if parents ask the children to go and beg, as one the children mentioned, they definitely will go as a way of showing a form of respect to the parents and a recognition of

African cultural values and that single act has two contrasting interpretations in the CRC and the ACWRC.

Begging, especially by children, is prohibited by the laws of Ghana because it infringes on their rights. Engagement of the children in begging at the expense of their academic pursuits is an infringement on their rights to education and good health a contravention on the provisions of the CRC, ACWRC and Act 560 of Ghana. Ghana pioneered the signing and ratification of the CRC and the ACWRC, a move that showed the state's formal commitment to the welfare of children through global and regional standards of child rights and vulnerabilities. However, Clerk (2011) observes that the application of global notion of children's rights is complex in local settings. The author notes that in Ghana, the concept of childhood is indeterminate, as customary law departs from international law regarding that concept. In the Beggars and Destitute Act (G.O.G., 1969), penal measures are prescribed to curb the incidence of child begging in the country because it is seen as one of the ways children are used exploitatively. However, invoking the penal part of the act, that is Section 2, is a passive legal rhetoric as it is rarely heard. A different reason may apply in the context of Ghana but in Senegal, as Zoumanigui (2016) reports, the government's voice has been an inactive in dealing with the issue of the *talibes'* involvement in begging because of political expediency as there is fear of losing political support from Islamic scholars.

One critical aspect worth noting here is that the voices of the children are often suppressed by the dominant discourses of NGOs, agencies and organisations at national and international levels that are championing child rights. As Milne (2015) observes, children are not consulted when it comes to determining issues that concern them and the discourses are adult machinations, which do not reflect the real position of the children. In this study, though the children expressed desire to be in school, they also noted that part of their obligation within the family hierarchy was to ensure the availability of food. When the children say that they feel a sense of importance in making contributions to their families but, in the adult or rights-based organisations' discourses it is regarded as child labour, which of them is to be ignored? These are the nuances involved in the child labour and child rights environment that must be well noted so that the hegemony of western conceptualisations of children's rights is thoroughly analysed and complemented with locally realistic alternatives as a way of promoting the welfare of children in Africa.

Child begging has issues to do with parental responsibility and the underlying reason for parents sending their children to beg was poverty. Indeed, the Northern Region of Ghana is one of the impoverished regions in the country. The majority of the people are peasant farmers who engage in subsistence farming (Samuel, Thomas, Christian, & Ezekiel, 2013). Several studies also support the notion of poverty as a causal factor for child begging in Africa and different parts of the world (Abebe, 2008; Ahmed & Abdul Razak, 2016; Bukoye, 2015; Ekong, 2016; Gheorghită & Vădăsteanu, 2015; Kassah, 2008; Kaushik, 2014; Lynch, 2005; Stones, 2013; Thorsen, 2012). Both the CRC and Act 560, the provisions of which Ghana purports to uphold, enjoin the state to support parents in taking care of their children but they are mute on the specificity of assistance and the measures that parents can take to access the assistance if the state reneges on its responsibility. That lack of clarity in those documents gives the state a leeway to escape from its mandatory duty of ensuring that the physical, social and cognitive developmental needs of the child are well catered for.

Amongst the *Dagombas*, the future status of the child is of prime importance (Abubakari & Iddrisu, 2013). The authors also observe that *Dagomba* parents exhibit a natural tendency of showing affection to their biological children. Surprisingly, all the children in this study were living with at least one of their parents and yet they were begging to the detriment of their academic progress. However, their observation could mean that such affection thrives under sound economic circumstances but not precarious living conditions as experienced by the parents in this study.

5. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the low number of participants but even with that we were able to reach saturation during the interviews. The study could have been improved by including the school teachers of these children. That would have enabled comparison of academic performance between the regular child beggars on the one hand and the non-regular and non-begging children on the other hand.

6. Conclusion

The first and second research question this article explored concerned stressors and resources experienced by child beggars and how these affected the children's lives. The article has established that the stressors the child beggars face as they engage in begging are numerous. These include psychological abuse, physical stressors and involvement in acts which have long-term consequences. All these factors affect the economic, educational and social lives of the child beggars. However, there are resources at their disposal to help them mitigate the effects of the stressors. The fact that their families are beneficiaries of their toils motivates these children to beg. Friends of these children and their understanding of begging to be temporal also enable them to continue with the act.

The third research question addressed the implications of children's involvement in begging in the context of current child rights debates. Begging significantly disrupts the time spent in school and reduces the children's chances of succeeding in formal education. Although the government of Ghana is a signatory to international child rights documents, and Ghana has a Children's Act (Act 560), the child beggars in *Dagbon* do not have their right to education protected. Local realities mean that parents follow religious and cultural traditions rather than national legal frameworks.

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