

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abuse and Exploitation: Examining the Social Risks for Underage Migrant Beggars on Ghana's Streets

William Daitey^{1*} Samuel Teye Daitey² Luke Amateye Tettehio³

¹ Department of Product Design and Entrepreneurship, AsanSka University College of Design and Technology Ghana; daiteywilliam@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1011-8828>

² Department of Indigenous Art and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Ghana; daiteysamuel65@gmail.com,

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0270-9278>

³ Department of Indigenous Art and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Ghana; luke.tettehio@knust.edu.gh

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2996-4820>

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Abstract

Underage migrant beggars in Ghana constitute one of the most vulnerable in society and are subjects to various risks that put a strain on their safety, dignity and future. This paper examines the social risk that these children face with a special emphasis on their exposure to physical abuse, exploitation, neglect, and environmental risks. The study used the qualitative research method and was based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with underage migrant beggars in urban locations and the social workers and community leaders. It was found that the main child migration factors in rural to urban centres were poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity and pressure to migrate by their families. Furthermore, the research has identified the insufficiency of the current child protection systems that do not meet the short-term and long-term requirements of the street. To formulate sustainable interventions, there should be cooperation between the government agencies, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and the international organizations.

Introduction

Internal or transnational migration is largely triggered by the pursuit of better socio-economic opportunities. However, for child migrants, migration triggers unanticipated exposures, particularly when they are on the streets. Child beggar migrants in Ghana, primarily from poor families, live on the brink of a cruel exploitative conditions with little exposure to social protection networks (Bogdan, 2025). This has become increasingly evident in urban centres such as Accra, Kumasi, and Takoradi, and with this has come sharper critical perception of the social threats on which these children live day to day.

The experience of socio-economic destitution, inadequate parent care, and institutional disintegration has the propensity to usher the child into dangerous urban areas. According to Oppong Asante (2015), the migration of children is usually due to poverty in the family, the allurements of urban living, or the promise of brighter opportunities. Underage beggars, urban migration usually turns into the forfeiture of protection on the part of the family, exposure to dangerous environments, and the maltreatment of adults who exploit their vulnerability.

The social vulnerabilities of these children are also multi-faceted, ranging from physical abuse, sexual exploitation and forced labour. Research has shown is more appropriate that the use of begging as a strategy for survival among the migrant children usually results in them being physically abused by the general public, street gangs, and even the police (Abekah-Carter, 2024). In addition to that, their absence of adequate legal provisions exposes them to human trafficking because traffickers target them on grounds of being children and possessing low social capital (Fuseini & Daniel, 2018).

The implications in the wider society are extensive. The victims of mass abuse and exploitation on the streets suffer from stunted growth, poor health, and restricted educational opportunities, which perpetuate cycle of poverty. In addition, the lack of targeted interventions to address the special vulnerabilities of migrant beggars is a stark absence in Ghana's social and child welfare protection policies. It is the objective of this study to examine the structural and systemic origins of such dangers and to further understand their daily life and finally mould policy intervention into their empowerment and protection.

Within the study of child underage migrant beggars' abuse and exploitation, this research contributes to the growing body of research on child migration and poverty among Ghana's poor urbanites. Building from the social vulnerability theory, the research places its focus on where individual agency and structural inequality converge. Grounded in qualitative inquiry, the research seeks to cry out and listen to the voices and testimonies of such children so that their realities become the priority over prescriptions of policy.

Theoretical Framework

This investigation was framed mainly on the Social Vulnerability Theory, which established the extent of success and findings of structural Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory to offer a multidimensional concept on the hazard and steadiness of the underaged migrant beggars in Ghana. Combined, these models shed light on the interaction between these structural, socio-economic, and community level factors in influencing access to abuse, exploitation, and survival-level strategies by children on the streets.

Social Vulnerability Theory

According to the Social Vulnerability Theory, the accessible exposure, the vulnerability, and the adaptive capacity to social, economic, and environmental risks vary among people or even groups (Cutter et al., 2003; Adger, 2006). It is the vulnerability that is not defined by hazards but rather by prior inequalities like poverty, marginalization, and exclusion to social entitlement. Among the high-exposure, sensitive (age, poverty, lack of parental care), and low-adaptation (limited education and institutional support) groups, the underage migrant beggars within the Ghanaian context fall victim to this. They are vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation which is a good example of social vulnerability but in marginalised sections of the population (Adjei & Afram, 2019). Nevertheless, informal coping mechanisms by which children form a mini-community of protectionism, distribute resources, and do not give up of being reintegrated into the larger system portray some aspects of resiliency and adaptive abilities (Moyo and Sibanda, 2021).

Structural Strain Theory

Structural Strain Theory was developed based on the previous Study of Merton (1938), but subsequent developments made to it transformed it into an explanation where deviant/non-conventional behaviour was the reaction of the given structures in society that constrained the proper ways of pursuing goals that were reasonable within the cultural framework. The concept of child migration and begging on the street can, therefore, be understood as a result of structural strain in this study when poverty, family disintegration, and weak social institutions limited children to receive their education and survival on the street (Mensah, 2021). In this way, begging is merely a sensible yet hopeless accommodation to social imbalances. The common use of forced peddling and exploitation by the adult population in addition to above shows how social pressure forms an atmosphere that makes vulnerable children be duped into brothels of exploitation. Therefore, the theory can be useful in linking the economic deprivation and family disintegration to societal perpetuation of child begging as a survival strategy.

Social Disorganization Theory

Firstly developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), the Social Disorganization Theory attributes crime and social disorder to the destruction of community organizations and deteriorated social control. When applied to the Ghanaian urban setting, it describes how developed urbanisation, joblessness and insufficiency of child protection practices have whittled down traditional community controls. A chaotic condition of neighbourhoods, particularly in the urbanism like Accra and Kumasi would allow child negligence, streetism, and exploitation to flourish unabated (Amoako & Boakye, 2022). The absence of institutional response, ineffective law enforcing forces, and the legitimisation of street children through the improvement of their visibility are few causes of social disorganisation that lead to the aggravation of vulnerability and restriction of reintegration efforts.

Connection between Theories

These theories collectively give a stratified view of the socio economic and institutional processes that keep the under aged migrant beggars vulnerable. Social Vulnerability Theory places children in a paradigm of inequality in the structural system and deficiency in adaptive capabilities; Structural Strain Theory demonstrates how the poverty and unavailable opportunities in the system drives them into abusive livelihoods; and Social Disorganization Theory also explains why urban blight and ineffective structures keep children vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The overlap of these theoretical positions with the empirical results of the study is relatively high, namely, the existence of the children in those realities is not due to some incidental factors but the dysfunctions of larger structural or community systems or environments. Using these theoretical frameworks, the research aims to contribute to knowledge regarding poverty and child protection in urban areas, utilizes available evidence to shape policy and programs that reduce vulnerability and enhancing the well-being of underage migrant beggars in Ghana.

The recent empirical literature has strengthened the expectation that there is a constellation of structures that produces street-connectedness among children (poverty, family breakdown, seasonal or long-term migration) and correlates with high rates of physical, sexual and economic abuse. In East Africa and West African studies, there were similar patterns of the structural drivers and harms. Qualitative literature in Kenya identified the mechanisms of how constraint to create the social and health injustices of street-related children comprised of systemic socio-economic marginalization and discrimination, which resulted in absence of education, exposure to violence, substance use and excessive preventable morbidity and mortality (Embleton et al., 2020).

These studies highlighted that the street is a livelihood place and a place of injury, which is a construct of structural similarities and not the moral ineffectiveness of the individual. Kenyan program-level assessments revealed that reintegration was barely maintainable unless poverty at the family level and family functioning was controlled. There is a reported family-strengthening intervention evaluation outcome has demonstrated statistically significant improvements in familial functioning and child well-being in reintegrated children but also noted that reverting to the stressors of street life was a significant risk in case of economic stressors (Frimpong-Manso, Agbadi, & Deliege, 2022).

The findings lead one to the significance of interventions at family- and community-level combined. There has been an increasing literature on issues of exploitation of street-related children as well as their resistance mechanisms. Studies censored across the COVID-19 as well as subsequent studies reported those interventions based on active child participation and peer-helping which enhanced the agency of the children, aid their access to services, and created evidence to be used in advocacies - indicating that child-active and rights interventions would lessen certain harms when supported by protection structures (Greeson et al., 2024).

In the West African region, trafficking and forced begging have been noted to be recurrent problems. The recent analyses of global trafficking and mixed-migration operations at regional level revealed that any children born in either Sahelian or West African environments were exposed to cross-border trafficking and are forced to become beggars, since migration routes and religious/educational establishments are actively used by the traffickers in transit and exploitation of children (Frimpong-Manso, Agbadi, & Deliege, 2022). Nigeria Country reports of forced child begging, association with the Almajiri/Qurany systems in some areas of north Nigeria, and still existed where worst-form child labour such as forced begging. It is through these patterns across countries that forced begging and trafficking is not an isolated occurrence, but rather it is embedded in regions. It is still observed that Ghana-specific studies were still reporting on cultural, economic and institutional pushes towards child begging and streetism (Bhattacharyya & Chakraborty, 2024).

Field and ethnographic studies in Ghana and Accra characterized the role of poverty, organization of religious schools and cross-border migration in causing children to be on the streets and pointed out that poor stigmatization and enforcement of child protection laws exposed the kids to exploitation. These Ghanaian researches supplemented researches in other regions in establishing that the Ghanaian setting bore notable similarities to other West African contexts, and nonetheless had its own distinctive touch points (i.e. unique North-South migration pathways and hard-bop religious education patterns).

Gaps in Literature

Although there are some accounts of child migration and street life by existing studies, few have explored the intersection of abuse, exploitation, and living among child migrant beggars in Ghana. There are also few qualitative studies that incorporate the voices of the children, hence leaving egregious gaps in examining their perceptions and coping mechanisms. This study endeavours to fill these gaps with the examination of structural and systemic forces driving underage migrant beggars' risk-taking behaviour while maintaining the voice of the latter under focus.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This research took the form of a qualitative study based on interpretivist paradigm in order to understand the experience of the underage migrant beggars in the streets of Ghana. This was appropriate due to the possibility of an in-depth comprehension of the multifaceted social realities, perceptions, and coping approaches of the participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Phenomenological design was used to translate the meanings children give to their incidences of abuse, neglect, and exploitation in urban setting. This design also helped the researcher to study how their vulnerability and survival strategies are conditioned by bigger socio-economic and institutional forces.

Population and Sampling

All underaged migrant beggars who lived and worked on major streets and intersections in Better Place, Accra and Kumasi were the target population. The population that was accessible was only those who were identifiable in the sampled urban places like Kwame Nkrumah Circle, Kaneshie and the Amakom Traffic Light. The subjects were chosen using purposive and snowball sampling methods since this approach allowed reaching a mobile and hidden group (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2020). Total was 35 participants who were 20 boys and 15 girls, aged 8-17 years. Additional nuanced interviews involving 5 social workers, 2 NGOs representatives, and 2 community CEOs in the child welfare and social protection were supplementary. The sampling was terminated when it was not possible to ask any additional questions to the interviewees because any new themes and perspectives had been identified (Saunders et al., 2018).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were notable as data gathering techniques to enable them to use their own words to recount the experiences in which they lived. The interview guides were crafted to touch on the key concepts of the research which include abuse, exploitation, coping strategies, and institutional support.

Interviews were carried out in Twi, Hausa and Ga, languages that the subjects understood so that during the transcription they were translated to English. The interviews were conducted at a regular time of about 30-45 minutes and FGDs were carried on over a period of one hour. Observational notes and field notes were recorded so as to take into consideration the non-verbal expression and the contextual aspect. Only the participants allowed recordings to be done on audio.

Data Analysis

The data were coded with the thematic analysis and it involves six phases (Braun and Clarke 2006) that included: (1) familiarisation of the data (that is getting familiar with the data while reading it), (2) creation of preliminary codes, (3) hunting of the themes, (4) revisiting the themes, (5) giving labels and names to the themes and (6) delivering the report. Interpretation of transcribed interviews was hand coded in order to develop an idea of recurrent connotations and patterns. Things like poverty, neglect, exploitation, resilience and coping mechanisms in the stories were raised inductively through the storylines. Another theoretical lens that was incorporated throughout the analysis was the social vulnerability construct, where the results of the deal were linked to the notion of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Memos on observations in the field were done by writing analytical memos to provide linkages between field observations and theoretical thrusts in order to achieve depth and reflexivity in interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical approval of the research was provided by the AsanSka University College of Design and Technology Research Ethics Committee (AUCDT-REC/2025/04). Their analyses were also conducted by asking local authorities and community gatekeepers at sites of the research around the same. Since the respondents were minors, the informed consent was informed with verbal descriptions of the objective of the study, risk possibilities, and confidentiality precautions. The guardians or the elder children were consulted and consent was given by the guardians/ children. Anonymity was guaranteed to participants, no actual names or details were taken. All participants were given fake names and no identifying information was provided in transcripts and visual aids. In case of photographs utilized in the report, the non-identifiability images (i.e. silhouettes, hands or landscape) were used, without exposing faces or specifics of children. They would be told clearly that they are free to pull out of the study without repercussions.

Validation and Baby-Doll Reliability. To make it credible, data triangulation has been used by using various sources (street children, social workers and community leaders). The member checking was done by revisiting some of the participants to ensure the interpretations were accurate. These descriptions of the context of the study were quite detailed and helped to achieve the transferability. Dependability and confirmability have been outlined with the use of an audit trail which consisted of interview guides, transcripts, and coding notes that will be used to review (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussion

The study explored the lived experiences and social risks of child migrant beggars in Ghana, and the results were presented under the following themes:

Drivers of Migration

Most participants indicated poverty and limited opportunities in their rural hometowns as significant factors for migrating to urban centres. They cited difficulties such as food insecurity, lack of access to education, and pressure from relatives as push factors. An example was a 14-year-old girl from northern Ghana who said, *"My parents couldn't afford to send me to school, so I came to Kumasi to work and send money back home."*



Figure 1: A group of underage migrant beggars resting under trees in Kumasi Amakom
Source: Photographed by Researchers, 2025.

Experiences of Abuse and Exploitation

Participants reported frequent physical abuse by adults and law enforcement. Many also recounted instances of sexual exploitation, particularly among female respondents, who faced harassment and abuse while begging on the streets. A participant stated, *"Men often make promises of food or shelter but end up taking advantage of us."*



Figure 2: A young girl begging at a busy intersection in Kumasi Amakom children's park.
Source: Photographed by Researchers, 2025.

Lack of Access to Basic Services

The majority of children responded to having little to no access to education, healthcare, or stable housing. They stated that they only concentrated on everyday survival and had little ability to think about aspirations. It was observed that a significant number of children were in poor conditions that were contributing towards their susceptibility to diseases.

Psychological and Emotional Impact

Several participants reported that they felt loneliness, fear, and hopelessness. They stated that they had emotional distress due to repeated rejection, harassment, and inability to fulfil their basic needs. One respondent stated that, at times, *I feel like I am non-existent because nobody cares whether I live or die.*



Figure 3: Underaged beggars sitting alone (Emotional isolation) near a busy road in Accra.

Source: Photographed by Researchers, 2025.

Impact of Urban Environment

Respondents emphasized the impact of the city on their experiences. The congestion of city centres frequently gave them a chance to meet sympathetic passersby but also exposed them to dangers of the environment like extreme weather, traffic accidents, air pollution, fatigue etc.



Figure 4: An underaged child beggar sleeping heavily after a long day of begging.

Source; Photographed by Researchers, 2025.

Role of Organized Begging Networks

Some respondents disclosed their involvement with organized networks of adults who managed begging activities. These networks typically exploited the children, requiring a substantial proportion of their income as payment for protection, shelter and/or food.

Risk of Kidnapping

A few of the participants shared memories of kidnapping or attempted kidnapping in their lives on the street. These kidnappings were usually orchestrated by adults posing as good Samaritans or strangers luring the children with food, shelter, or employment. One participant explained, "One night, a man offered to take me to a safe place, but my friends held me back, saying they had seen him take other children and they never returned."

Physical Abuse by Pedestrians

Most of the children cited instances of being slapped, punched, or abused by pedestrians when they had approached them to beg for money. These acts of violence were not just unprovoked but also left the children humiliated and insecure. One participant recalled, "I

approached a man to ask for assistance, and he slapped me, telling me to return to my village."

Traffic Accidents

A few of the respondents recounted incidences of being knocked by motorcyclists while begging in traffic. These occurred as they attempted to reach vehicles or make their way through moving cars to beg for alms. One respondent related, "I was knocked by a motorcycle while rushing to beg from a driver. I could not walk well for weeks."

Coping Mechanisms

Despite the adversity, there was resilience among some of the participants who lived communally and shared what little they had. They formed informal associations for protecting one another and for sharing food or proceeds from begging. These actions, however, exposed them to additional risks, such as exploitation of the group by adult organizers.

Discussions

This paper has found out that the experiences of the underaged Ghanaian migrant beggars can be customized in wider societal and structural processes that create and further generate vulnerability. The findings are consistent with the regional data of sub-Saharan Africa but also reveal Ghana-specific types of urban poverty, institutional abandonment and marginalization. The results indicate the problem of children begging in the street is not just a question of choice and lack of principles but a logical reaction on the deprivation and social disintegration systems. Through the possessions of social vulnerability, structural strain, and social disorganization, the paper sheds light on how structural inequality, poor social control and weak protection mechanisms combine to serve children to a variety of ways of abuse and exploitation. Lack of economic stability, food satisfaction, and incapacity to raise education fees were found to dominate as push factors to child migration. These pressures are the structural stresses that cause families and children to move to urban areas, where the right means of earning intense livelihoods is unavailable. Migration was regarded by many families especially those in the north Ghana as a household economic measure, a kind of regional trend in livelihood mobility. Like West Africa has had mixed-migration studies including findings of comparable findings, child mobility is considered a coping mechanism to challenges of poverty in West Africa, and not voluntary migration (Samuel Hall, 2024). It is against this background that the act of begging is a form of adaptation, though dangerous, to economical lack. The result supports the Social Vulnerability Theory according to which vulnerability to harm is more likely in the situation when people do not have access to economic resources, education, and institutional safety nets. The paper has also discovered that the exploitation and abuse were frequently arranged at times and not arbitrary. Children

were also been seen to mention being coerced to give out profits to adults who would occupy the begging spots or even get them to be taken to the urban centres. These trends echo UNODC (2024) reports which represent forced begging and trafficking network of the West African region not as an incident but as a systemic governance. The Ghanaian experience is thus part of a larger regional trend where there is institutional failure as well as poor enforcement. In terms of Social Disorganization Theory, the expansion of such networks is an indicator of the lapse of the community control, metropolitan control, and social solidarity in the accelerating growth cities such as Accra and Kumasi. This is because there is no proper law enforcement by the government to take care of the criminal middlemen to deal with vulnerable children. In addition to the economic and systematic exploitations, the research showed the extreme social aggression and stigmatization the street children have to grapple with the day in and day out. Respondents described incidences when they would be slapped or punched or verbally molested by passersby when set to beg money. This kind of everyday violence does not just also act as physical violence, but also symbolically as an expression of social disapproval. Antipathy of citizens enhanced marginalisation and dehumanisation, which practically denied the children social legitimacy. The same results in findings by Embleton et al. (2020) in Kenya revealed that police harassment and available stigma in the public increase the isolation of street-contact youth, sending them further out of institutional support. In Ghana, this mirrors how the root causes of the lack of community organisation and the stereotyping of morality of the children with vulnerability turn these people into an object of despise instead of the beneficiaries of help. Another dominant theme that appeared to be of crucial concern is the risk of trafficking injuries which become an issue due to the infrastructure of the city itself. Often some children with their parents on the way between the moving cars or at some severe points of the highway intersection causes many accidents and even nearly fatal situations when the child interacts with motorcyclists. This result serves as verbal support of the Social Vulnerability Theory concept of exposure, according to which the interaction of the environment that is not effectively regulated adds extra social dangers.

Similar research in Kenya and Nigeria also indicates that street environment is a high-ranking condition that leads to child morbidity and early mortality (Greeson et al., 2024). To counter this aspect of vulnerability, social protection must be instilled in urban planning especially through the provision of child-safe areas and imposing traffic authority in the high-prone market and cross-roads. Participants were resilient in some measure despite the hardships exhibiting levels of adaptive capacity. Lots of them managed to create informal groups of peers to get protection, share scarce resources and create a set of rules to ensure survival. These tactics of coping are demonstrations of the agency of the street children and of their adaptation to disaster albeit under limited conditions. This solidarity is reflected in what was reported by Moyo and Sibanda (2021), who recorded the role peer solidarity plays among street children in the southern African country. This strength is however quite precarious: these adaptive measures can help only in a short time unless there is institutional support or the restoration of the families. Kenya and Nigeria reintegration programmes demonstrated

that permanent reintegration is dependent on efforts to strengthen a family with livelihood-enabling efforts, and that resilience needs to be enabled by systemic change but not individual adaptation. Summarising the findings on the background of the theoretical concept, the aspects of vulnerability, strain, and disorganisation become apparent.

The high exposure showing in the incessant presence of the children in the risky urban areas; the intensity of sensitivity due to their age, poverty and lack of guardianship; and the poor ability to adapt to the situation is evidenced by the lack of adapting to formal guardianship through reliance on informal peer protection. The Structural Strain Theory measures the reason as to why poverty and blighted opportunities drive children to begging as a survival panacea and the Social Disorganization Theory as that which permits exploitation and violence to proceed after institutional failures and community breakdowns. Those overlapping theories indicate us that this is a systemic-level problem; one caused by the synergies of also structural poverty and poor governance, and social neglect. Weaknesses in institutions also contribute to vulnerability. The study found no coordination among the social welfare agencies, minimal law enforcement regarding child traffickers and lack of community participation as the key areas of concern. These are the ones that the literature describes as policy gaps between practice gaps wherein the well-intended national purposes are not well-funded and implemented (Amoako and Boakye, 2022).

Child begging eternal exists, therefore, not only due to economic deprivation but by institutional inertia lacking the delivery of protection turning policy into reality. In short, the discussion shows that under as far as Ghana is concerned, the lives of underaged migrant beggars occur in a landscape of vulnerability, which is layered by poverty and social disintegration and lack of proper institutional response. Structural deprivation, urban governance of disorganisation and limited adaptability ability of the children create the cycles of exploitation and abuse. This dynamic has to be recognised so as to create successful interventions, which can integrate economic assistance with the reinforcing of families and cities and the implementation of stringent policies against organised exploitation. In the end, one can note that the findings imply the necessity of a multi-layered and contextual approach to child protection, according to which street begging is not a deviant behaviour, but a manifestation of the strain of the system and social hierarchy.

The findings of this research were mostly in line with the larger empirical data on sub-Saharan African countries, in addition to pointing out specific contextual peculiarities in Ghana. The major migration push factors like poverty, food insecurity, and school dropout reflected the results of other parts of West Africa, where child migration is commonly discussed in terms of economic survival of the households (Samuel Hall, 2018). The testimonies of physical abuse, sexual exploitation and intersections with the organized begging networks were reminiscent of conclusions of the UNODC and other research in Nigeria, and highlighted the fact that the exploitation of street children is not haphazard, but rather systematic. Equally, the threat of kidnapping and trafficking, as mentioned by the

participants, was similar to those expressed by the regional migration and trafficking studies, especially in the Sahelian routes.

Social hostility patterns included pedestrians harassing and attacking them, which was a manifestation of research in Kenya (Embleton et al., 2020), which highlighted stigma and negative reactions by the community as the causes of exclusion. The road accidents also matched regional outcomes which found out that the children are exposed to avoidable morbidity by street work in the urban centres. However, as much as these trends were regional, there were Ghana specific variations such as north south migration flows, impact of some religious schooling traditions, and the practice of enforcing different ways in cities. Such contextual disparities underscore the need to formulate interventions that can work in line with the realities of Ghana and that would be a combination of rural development, city protection systems, and enhanced legal enforcement.

Conclusions

Child migrant beggars in Ghana are a clear cut social problem that needs swift and long term action. This paper has revealed the deplorable circumstances these children are exposed to on a daily basis which include physical abuse, exploitation, neglect, and exposure to life threatening risks like road accidents and kidnapping. Structural factors, including poverty, lack of access to education and poor child protection mechanisms compound and entrench these dangers into a cycle of exclusion and deprivation.

It emerged in the report that most of these children leave rural areas in pursuit of better opportunities only to be exposed to activities that compromise their own safety, dignity and future. Their testimonies pointed at the urgency of specific interventions which would both cover the reasons of child migration and refer to the threats they would face in the urban centres. Effective interventions must place rural development, including poverty alleviation, education, and vocational training, at the forefront of their agendas in order to reduce the economic and social pressures that lead children to leave their communities. Urban child protection systems must be strengthened to provide safe havens and basic services for street-connected children. Public sensitization campaigns are necessary to combat stigmatization by society, while urban planning and traffic safety measures can mitigate physical hazards.

Lastly, the study calls for a multi-stakeholder response of government departments, NGOs, opinion leaders, and development partners to leave no child behind to endure the dangers and difficulties of street life. By developing a culture of empathy, inclusivity, and progressive policy-making, Ghana can create an environment where all children can thrive, protected from exploitation and harm.

Acting to address the plight of child migrant beggars is not a matter of benevolence alone but a societal obligation towards a more equitable, safe, and sustainable future for all.

Recommendations

Addressing the social vulnerabilities faced by child migrant beggars in Ghana requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that tackles both the root causes of child migration and the ambient issues within urban areas. In the course of this study, the complex vulnerabilities that face these children have been highlighted, including physical abuse, exploitation, and environmental hazards. Based on these, the following practical recommendations are proffered:

Foremost, tackling the root causes for the movement of children from rural areas is paramount. The majority of the children migrate from their rural areas due to poverty, lack of education, and unemployment. To curtail this, the government and NGOs should implement poverty reduction strategies, such as cash transfers, microfinance services, and agricultural development programs. Secondly, programs providing free and quality education in rural areas are most important. Establishment of more schools, supply of educational materials, and school feeding programs can encourage parents to keep their children in schools. Vocational training programs for young people in rural communities can also equip them with the skills they need for sustainable livelihoods, eradicating the push factors that lead children to urban centres.

In the urban centres, child protection mechanisms should be reinforced. Establishing children's friendly centres for the delivery of basic services such as food, shelter, health, and psychological counselling may provide immediate respite for street children. Street outreach programs with social workers, psychologists, and medical professionals are able to reach children in the context of high risk, offering on-the-spot intervention and case identification of exploitation or abuse. It is also crucial to implement the existing laws against child labour, trafficking, and exploitation so that offenders are prosecuted and children are removed from abusive environments.

Public awareness and community engagement are critical in reducing stigma and vulnerability of street-connected children. National education campaigns must be launched with a view to fostering empathy and understanding and encouraging the public to step forward to report instances of abuse or exploitation. Neighbourhood watch groups can also be established to monitor high-risk areas and report suspicious behaviour, such as kidnapping attempts or begging syndicates. With the active participation of local communities, such initiatives can promote a sense of collective responsibility for child safety.

There are also urban safety measures to be undertaken in order to reduce the physical risks that these children face. Collaborating with town planners in planning pedestrian-only zones and public places that are safer can avoid traffic-related accidents. Education drives for public and street children on road safety can also help create awareness. More enforcement of traffic regulations, particularly in streets where children are known to beg, is also necessary to keep them safe.

It is necessary to identify the particular vulnerabilities of different sub-groups of underage migrant child beggars, such as girls and younger children, to design targeted interventions. Female street children should be given gender-specific shelters to protect them from higher risks of sexual harassment and exploitation. These shelters should also provide them with health services tailored to their needs, such as reproductive health education and menstrual hygiene.

Policy development and legislation are the foundation for any successful intervention. A national child protection policy addressing the needs of street-connected children, with prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation strategies, must be developed. Adequate funds must be allocated to execute these programmes, and a comprehensive database should be developed on street children to make decisions based on evidence.

Effective execution of these suggestions needs the cooperation of key stakeholders. Coordination with NGOs that focus on child welfare can enhance service delivery, and private sector involvement through corporate social responsibility initiatives can mobilize additional resources. International coordination with donors and organizations active in child protection can also scale up efforts and bring in much-needed expertise.

Finally, long-term measures must prioritize social reintegration. Rehabilitation programs that aim to develop skills, provide education, and offer counselling can help reintegrate ex-street children into productive society. Family reunification efforts, in addition to economic and social support to the families, can discourage children from returning to the streets. Furthermore, youth should be empowered through mentorship and employment opportunities can create possibilities for them to become productive members of society within their communities.

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Author Bio note

William Daitey – williamdaitey@gmail.com

William Daitey is a lecturer in the Department of Product Design and Entrepreneurship at AsanSka University College of Design and Technology. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Integrated Rural Art and Industry, a Master of Philosophy in Product Design Technology, both from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and a Diploma in Education from the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), Ghana. With a strong commitment to innovation, he explores diverse media, including waste plastics and metals, to create sustainable and impactful designs. His teaching philosophy is rooted in inspiring students to think critically, embrace creativity, and develop eco-friendly solutions that

address real-world challenges. His research focuses on sustainability, environmental conservation, sustainable product design, education, and social sciences, all geared towards fostering a greener future. Through my work, I bridge design, technology, and environmental responsibility, driving forward the principles of eco-conscious living and responsible innovation.

Samuel Teye Daitey- daiteysamuel65@gmail.com

Samuel Teye Daitey is a Chief Technician in the Department of Indigenous Art and Technology in the Faculty of Art in the College of Art and Built Environment at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. Mr Daitey holds a master of philosophy in African Art and Culture, a bachelor's degree in Art and a diploma in Rural Art and Industry, all attained in KNUST. His research focuses on environmental sustainability and nature conservation

Luke Amateye Tettehio – luke.tettehio@knust.edu.gh

Luke Amateye Tettehio is a Lecturer at the Department of Industrial Art, KNUST; holding a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Art Education from the KNUST. He also holds a BA. Integrated Rural Art and Industry degree from the KNUST. Luke Amateye Tettehio has a high level of creative potentials, have good communication and administrative skills, good human relation skills, innovative, able to work under minimum or no supervision, an active team player, goal oriented and have strong analytical skills with good judgment. His areas of research interest are Indigenous Textiles and Fibres and Fabrics Technology.

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