

Begging and Harassment Case Study: Wilaya of Bejaia

التسولو التحرش
دراسة ميدانية بولاية بجاية

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ملخص:

يعتبر التسول واحد من أكثر المشاكل الحادة التي تواجهها بلادنا هذه الأيام. ولقد بدا كمهنة وأصبح فنا. والتسول هي استراتيجية شائعة الاستخدام لدى الفقراء للتعامل مع عدم توفر سبل العيش، لاسيما في المناطق الحضرية، حيث ينتشر هؤلاء المتسولون من أعراق ووجهات مختلفة. يعتمد بحثنا على دراسة حالة للمتسولين المهاجرين في ولاية بجاية (وهي منطقة تقع في وسط شرق الجزائر). وبالتحديد دراسة التفاعلات بين المارة والمتسولين بالطرق التي أصبحت مزعجة ومضايقة وخطيرة. ولقد اخترت المنهج الكيفي لأنه يلائم هذا النوع من الدراسات، أجريت العديد من المقابلات بلغات متعددة مع ثلاثين متسولا لفهم لماذا هؤلاء المهاجرين (أفارقة وسوريون) يفضلون التسول مع العلم أن لحكومة الجزائرية أمنت لهم المأوى والطعام؟ هذا من جهة، من جهة أخرى رغبت في إظهار التحرش الذي يشعر به ويعيش فيه مائة وعشرون من المارة، خاصة عندما يرفضون التبرع بالمال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تسول ، مهاجر ، متسول ، مضايقة ، مزعج.

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Abstract:

Begging is one of the most acute problems that our country is facing these days . It has become a profession and carried on as an art. *Begging is a very common strategy employed by the poor to cope with non-availability of livelihood, particularly in urban areas* (Chukwulobe, C. 2011: 15).In which beggars are migrants from different races. This article tends to study interactions between passers-by and beggars and the ways in which they become bothersome, harassing, or dangerous. Our research relies on a case study of migrant beggars in the wilaya of Bejaia (a district located in central east of Algeria).I have chosen the qualitative interview so many multilingual interviews with thirty beggars were conducted to better understand, why these people beg since the shelter and food are secured by Algerian government? On the other side I want to show the harassment felt and lived by one hundred twenty passers-by, especially when they refuse to give money.

Key words: Begging, migrant, beggars, harassment, bothersome.

I. Introduction:

Begging is one of the age-long activities particularly in urban areas. In fact, begging phenomenon does not touch only developing countries; it is a universal urban problem.

While a considerable number of cities were identified in the US and Mexico as having a significant level of begging activity ,cities in China, especially Shanghai, have been described as homes of different categories of beggars (including the poor, the disabled, the homeless and professional beggars), which are described as ,liumin" (floating people) or youmin" (wandering people) (<http://creativecommons.org>).In Algeria, cities live a similar situation ,beggars are seen everywhere, but what differs is that the majority are migrants!

Historically speaking, begging has existed with human civilization and touched almost societies around the world. *Begging had been noticed in Greece about 8th to 6th centuries ago among the early Middle Ages and the byzantine era the phenomenon of street children has been documented as far back as 1848.*

II. Methodology

A qualitative interview is different from everyday conversation in the following ways. First it is a research tool and a good interviewer must prepare questions in advance, and later analyze and report results. The interviewer guides the questions and focuses the study. Good interview skills require practice and reflection. Finally, beyond the acquisition of interview skills, interviewing is a philosophy of learning. The interviewer becomes a student and then tries to get people to describe their experiences in their own terms. The results are imposed obligations on both sides. The qualitative researcher's philosophy determines what is important, what is ethical, and the completeness and accuracy of the results (Chukwulobe, C. 2011: 13)..Because we want to find out why someone acted in a certain way, we have to ask him/her. One must negotiate an explanation that consistent and believable (Bukoye, O.2005:4) this results in an explanation of the meaning of the action for the people interviewer

follows up an interview with more questions for clarification or understanding. The key is to establish rapport and trust during the interview, a person may change his/her interpretation.

Through the qualitative interview we wanted to explore a range of aspects about the meaning of a street beggar through a series of interviews in which their day-to-day activities, thoughts, and feelings are spoken about (Bukoye, O.2005:4). A period of one month was sufficient to facilitate a deeper understanding of—and greater rapport with—the participants (<http://www.ganji.com>), who were selected as follows: I went one day to a young beggar called wassila and asked her to speak about her experience with begging .At first, she refused, but when I proposed her money, she accepted against 1000 Da per day, and must have a commission of 200Da on every beggar , she brought to me to be interviewed. So, my sample was an avalanche; every beggar brings another but must pass by wassila. Each beggar received 300Da whenever, we met to compensate ‘begging working time’. Finally , the participants selected for the research were 30 beggars , 12 begged in Ihhadadden street, 10 in bus station , 4in the town center and 4in Edimco street.

III. Participants characteristics:

In our study, demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, social status and income) of beggars are shown as follows:

A. Sex

Research data showed that female number is increased in comparison with those of male (more than 2/3) mostly with no formal education (slightly more than half), as low-income persons and mostly informally married .This can be explained by the activity nature practiced, women can attract more people’s pity than men especially if they are accompanied by one child or more!

B. Age:

Beggars age is a topic that participants showed less enthusiasm to talk about, and if ever they did, they looked vague so, it was difficult to be sure of their ages :those who appear younger pretend have old age and the opposite for those older. Consequently, it was estimated that the participants' ages ranged from around 16 to late 20s.

C. Ethnic group :

All of them are migrant except two were kabyles (original inhabitants of Bejaia)

Eighteen are from Africa (twelve from Niger, four from Mali, and two from Senegal.)

Ten Gypsies and who pretend to be Syrians to get much sympathy and more money.

In the second part of my research, we used the quantitative method in relation with the second variable (harassment). Since, the best practices for using such methods based on factual data that is easily analyzed. Feedback, questionnaires, and surveys for any product in the planning phase reveals statistical numbers leaders can analyze. In order for any quantitative research method to work, one must first establish the baseline of what will be analyzed. So, we chose a quota sample composed of one hundred twenty person from the university community to represent Bejaia citizens and they were divided into the following equivalent groups: Forty teachers, forty administrative agents, and forty students.

VI. Study results:

A. Definition of Begging

To beg, means to ask for money, food, clothes, etc, as a gift or as charity. Street begging is defined as the act of requesting for money, food or other forms of favour without an exchange in a public place and in the street where people frequently pass by. But not all beggars are poor or motivated into begging by poverty, and not all the poor are beggars. This implies that begging is not atypical to individuals, but also poorer organizations or countries seeking for charity, grants or debts annulment by richer organizations or nations.

However, it exists some concepts as “panhandling” “mendicancy” and “vagrancy” (Abdallah, J.2017:64) which characterize the begging and beggars. In Algeria and specifically in Bejaia, we call them “Sadaka” to define the African beggars, and “shameless” to refer to Gypsies beggars.

B. Begging characteristics:

1) Homeless, There are a number of reasons that leads to homeless—financial collapse, lack of support systems like friends and family, and natural disasters. In Bejaia illegitimate migrants who could be beggars, were grouped in camps set up by Algerian government , to secure shelter food and security till to find a solution . In the case of participants, they preferred sleeping on streets, in doorways or bus shelters rather *than the campus .* *’I do not like to be watched by everybody, we feel as if we have no intimacy’* [J.Batiste ,22years old ,Senegal]

One of their main concerns of being homeless is where they sleep or rest. They go to two abandoned buildings or one new but not yet finished, where they temporarily live on.

They live in community, though, they are illegitimate, the police did not bother them. On the other hand, gypsies that pretend to be Syrians rent flats ,

because when they beg they raise a slate on which was written “ *Syrian family needs to rent a house*”.

2) Clothing, **Unlike** the traditional vision of street beggars who do not have neat or sufficient clothes to suit changing weather conditions and are usually bare footed. They put on the same clothes during days and nights. But, for the participants their clothes, faces and bodies are clean and even they might to possess mobiles with sim cards by which they are connected with each other or with their family members remained in the country.” *All what we give them of used clothes they throw it , but new ones they bring them to the market and sell it and keep their ordinary clothes*’[Fahima , 45 years old, lecturer].

3)Meals, The same thing for their meals .It is far a way to say that *getting a day’s meal remains the major priority for many street beggars* (Ammari, A.A.2014:).Participants did not get their daily meals as leftover food from hotels, restaurants, markets, garbage bins, dump sites and individual residential areas, they normally obtain their daily meal as any Bougeote citizen, they bought milk, bread,mineral water, baby diapers, shampoo, perfume.. All what they need by money they beg .” *last day I saw an African beggar washing her baby by mineral water and a very expensive washing gel, a thing that me as an administrative agent I cannot offer to myself*’[Nadhir ,41st years old].

C. Why Do They Beg?(Stones ,R.C.2013:157)

The reasons why people beg or ask for money are complex. They include people who might:

- be ineligible for or waiting to receive income assistance or welfare payments (those aged under 18 years don't qualify)

- want to supplement income assistance or welfare payments
 - suffer from a mental illness but cannot find an available hospital bed
- be supporting drug or gambling habits

D. Beggars categorization (Sharmin, R.2015:43).

Beggars can be categorized based on their appearance and techniques or mode of begging. Based on their appearances, they can be categorized into three groups; which include.

-Professional beggars who find themselves in this trade on the grounds of physical disability

-Those who street-beg on account of old age

Those who voluntarily force themselves into the begging class (Sharmin, R.2015:43).

Based on their techniques of begging, they are also categorized into three, which include:

Passive Begging: This type involve in person either sitting or standing in one place with songs or receptacle entreating donations.

Active Begging: This type of beggars moves from place to place with their receptable soliciting money, gifts.

Aggressive Begging: This technique is one which harsh words and intimidations are used in soliciting for help

Begging is more attractive as ‘wage’ to them than, *for example, being a “parking attendant” or “grocery packer” in the local supermarket*

E. Why Do People give beggars money?

1) The culture of giving money to poor (beggar), Unemployment and difficulty in accessing social grants as well as poor education and homelessness were the dominant factors of begging. This leads to the obligation to give alms as a religious virtue.

Islam values generosity encourage every Muslim to give zakat and sadaqa.

That is to say that an obligatory amount of money must be taken from the rich to support poor and the needy. But this value does not in any way encourage begging. In fact, Islam provides the economic ways that cover the overall individual responsibilities with regards to the way and manner an individual can sustain his/ her life effectively and accordingly without breaching religious order''As Muslim, we cannot be peaceful if ever somebody does not eat or , he has cold , ill or.... Without helping him. Because, all Muslims are brothers and sisters'' [Ghilas, 23 years old, student]

Algeria is, obviously, their new hunting ground since they learned from some of them, returned "fortune made" to the country, that Algerians are generous; that's why they come, en masse, with women and children. However, nothing of the situation in Niger, currently, justifies this surge of migrants on Algeria.

At first , the multiform African migration, was perceived by Algerians as a human phenomenon so, as a human being , we must accept ,help at best and have a lot of compassion towards these foreigners especially Nigerians, who continue to enter the country in rush . But later, they discovered that African migrants especially those from Niger are not war refugees or drought victims but rather professional beggars who have been engaged in this activity since their birth in the country from Arlit. And Agadez(<http://www.lematindz.net/>).

Begging might be precarious and an activity of low social status, it nonetheless was vastly more respectable than thievery and cheating, for example.

2.) The culture of not giving money to beggar, Obligatory alms-giving or zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam and incumbent upon all Muslims. From an Islamic standpoint, zakat narrows the gap between the wealthy and the poor, and rehabilitates the poor. (Abdallah, J.2017:62) So, poor people do not need to beg money to survive since he is by zakat which is an institutionalized economic system supported by Algerian government as an Islamic country.

In the Hadith, the upper [giving] hand is superior to the lower [taking] hand'' (Cornnel, L.2019:2)

-The culture of fear:

Xenophobia, or fear of strangers, is a broad term that may be applied to any fear of someone who is different from us. In someone who suffers from legitimate xenophobia, hatred is generally a reaction to the fear. In addition, xenophobia need not be limited to those of a different race. Homophobia, fear of those from different cultural backgrounds, and even fear of those who dress, speak or think differently could be considered subsets of xenophobia(www.common-phobias.com). **In relation with beggars, it is a question of hobophobia**, the fear of bums or beggars, because they are afraid of catching germs or being robbed. (Ababa, A.2010:112)

-Others think that beggars represent an urban disorder; in the sense that the appearance of beggars in a middle class neighborhood may directly lead residents to believe that their neighborhood is declining .Because their presence may be associated to violence and crime.

-Money was going towards supporting a habit to drugs.”I was told that people on the street are spending the money begged on drugs”.

-They had permanent accommodation and other forms of income besides begging.

“Why are we so uncomfortable when destitute people hold their hand out? Because their need is ugly. So we dehumanise them. If we ignore the person and just give money to charity, assuming the money will help them,” (Ammani, A.A. 2014:52)

None of our participants admitted to any form of drug usage, so the argument that *begging tends to be motivated by the need to support drug/alcohol abuse or arises because of a mental disability did not apply in the current research*.

The potential amount of money earned per day is 4000Da, and 120000Da per month for Gypsy beggars, equivalent to what a university teacher earned through a minimum-wage job .And 700Da to 900Da for Africans! As far as the kabyles beggars , they earn lesser , because ,generally , the original inhabitants do not beg ,since it is shameful to beg and you can work and if she is a woman the community can support her .Thus , it is unnecessary to stay in streets!

All days, are considered time work for both categories

An interesting (and perhaps surprising) point is that all the participants are named Muhammad though only six are Muslims .And when asked about their ages all of them are twenty three years old, despite they look older .To verify their claiming I asked for their identity cards or passports , the answer was the same “ *I lost my documents during the travel*”

Most of them especially the gypsies owned houses “ *one day I took two beggars girls and in the taxi they change their clothes , put on make-up and brush their hairs and I discovered that I know them as students in the university and live in Dalas street(a very rich one in Bejaia)!Assured [Hocine ,41 years old, taxi driver] .*

V. Harassment

A. Definition:

Harassment is when someone behaves in a way which offends you or makes you feel distressed or intimidated. This could be abusive comments or jokes, graffiti or insulting gestures (Tessier, H.1999:297).

Harassment is unwanted conduct that occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of an individual or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

It frequently involves someone in a position of authority bullying someone in a lesser position. But, in case of participants, though the passers-by are in force position, they are harassed by beggars who are lesser or no power at all.

B. Unwanted behaviour could be (Morneau, N.1999 : 117)

- Spoken or written words or abuse
- Offensive emails, tweets or comments on social networking sites
- Images and graffiti
- Physical gestures
- Facial expressions
- Jokes.
- Violating your dignity,(Soares, A.2003 :24).

- Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

‘‘Whenever I go work a male beggar makes insulting comments, in Portugal language that I master because he always asks for money and always refuse ‘[Amel,36 years old ,administrative agent]

A bus driver is complaining from a group of Gypsy beggars children who enter every day the bus and annoy the passengers and refuse going out till they got money.

Insisting: some beggars both Africans and Gypsy

C. *Begging strategy:* (Shai, M. 2012 :847)

1) To get nearer the victim, ‘‘No doubt many of you have been approached by a beggar in some form or the other. I have, and it is not usually a problem. And yes, even though the frequency and boldness with which begging has been happening are a bit of a concern, I can let that pass.’’

2)Asking for something, with a probable ‘‘no’’ if the passer-by is hard-earned worker and a man we are all free to say ‘‘no’’ at any point.

3)To dare asking unpredictable amount of money, insist on, the number of items and the nature of the items. ‘ ‘one day while on my way into a supermarket, a woman shouted at me to buy her milk for her baby.. On the outside I gave her the bag in which I added some biscuits, she looked into the bag and, it lacks water ‘‘I ignored her and walked away. She persisted: ‘‘You can’t get me water how am I going to prepare the milk?’’.At that time, I returned back took over the bag and run away. I heard her shouting , cursing and insulting me...While I was getting further I looked her over, she looked young , showed no signs of

disability or illness, I reckoned that she could easily find a job .’’ (Shai, M. 2012:-871)

4) Use of violence, Target women and international tourists, hurt people who would not give them money. «We saw one person spat upon, we saw another person pulled to the ground when they refused to give money to the beggar," said [Said, 36 years old, teacher].

Professional beggars were financially secure enough not to need help with food orShelter’’ they eat banana of 900Da‘’’ claimed [Assia,39 years old secretary]

Conclusion:

It has been revealed in this paper that street begging is an urban phenomenon with socio-economic, cultural consequences .It indicates poverty, unemployment , religion and cultural believes as significant measure of understanding this social illness. In this study, some concepts are associated to street begging like; rape, sexual harassment, kidnapping for rituals, accidents, attack of various diseases and death, denting country’s image. In the first section, I tried to deal with begging as a way of life of a certain number of African and Gypsy migrants. And in my second sets of data analysis I tried to find out more about the beggars violence and harassment towards passers-by. The paper has further still, generated a number of constructs, and hypotheses, which may be useful as platforms upon which future research endeavours may emanate.

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