



Exploring Public Opinion on Migrant Child Beggars in Metropolitan Areas in Accra, Ghana

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Article Info

E-ISSN: 3107-7129

Volume: 01

Issue: 06

November - December 2025

Received: 06-09-2025

Accepted: 10-10-2025

Published: 05-11-2025

Page No: 07-16

Abstract

The study explored general public attitudes and opinions about the migrant children begging in Ghanaian capital cities such as Accra, including the socio-economic factors, cultural views, and issues related to the phenomenon. Qualitative approach was employed in the research with case study based on interviews, discussions in focus groups, and observations of the participants; community members, business owners, social workers, law enforcement officials, and migrant families as the subjects of the study. The results indicated that poverty, rural-urban migration, family disintegration, and socio-economic vulnerable are some of the factors which caused child begging. Social opinions were split: some people considered child beggars to be innocent victims of the situation who needed the help and support, others regarded it as a nuisance that distracts the city order and other business activities. On these findings, the research suggests that child begging can be dealt with on a multi-stakeholder basis. Some of the strategies would involve building the family support schemes, improving the child welfare, enforcing child protection laws, building partnership between the NGOs and government agencies and raising public awareness. The research paper ends by recommending sustainable policy models and more research on the long-term reintegration mechanisms of child beggars.

Keywords: Child Begging, Child Welfare, Ghana, Migrant Children, Public Opinion

Introduction

The problem of child begging in the metropolitan regions of Ghana is a complicated phenomenon in the social life of the country, and it can be always a subject of arguments and controversies concerning the human rights and social nuisance. It is becoming a widespread phenomenon in urban areas like Accra, Kumasi, and Takoradi to see children begging at the side of the roads, intersection, and marketplaces (Owusu & Asante, 2018) ^[21]. A good number of these children belong to migrant families whereby they are frequently shoved by socio-economic conditions or environmental misfortunes in their mother countries. Living and working environments of these young people raise the issues of child welfare, human dignity, and social duties. Nonetheless, their presence in the street also causes uneasiness to some of the residents, who consider them as a source of nuisance, causing some to initiate a call to tighten restrictions.

On the one hand, the vulnerability of these children is noted by human rights activists, and such children require protection, education and social inclusion (UNICEF, 2016) ^[23]. According to them, child begging needs holistic remedies which would allow dealing with the causes of migration, poverty and family disintegration. However, city officials as well as urban dwellers tend to see these child beggars as sources of disorder and security issues at the public level and, thus, as a nuisance to the

community (Adjei & Osei, 2019) ^[2]. The conflict of these views shows the necessity to investigate the social opinion on the issue in its full extent to base policy and advocacy work. The study will focus on exploring the perceptions held by various groups of people regarding migrant child beggars in the metropolitan regions of Ghana. It aims at investigating the orientation of the public opinion towards the identification of child begging as human right issue or an urban threat. The factors affecting such perceptions will also be investigated in the research such as the socio-economic background, educational level, and exposure to the human rights discourses.

It is crucial to understand the general opinion regarding this problem to develop the policy that would address the interests of human rights and the requirements of the city management. It will also give a reflection of how the society perceives the marginalized groups and the community social responsibility in terms of creating a culture of inclusivity and compassion. In the end, this study will add to the current debates on the best way of addressing vulnerable children and at the same time upholding the order and security of the city.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework employed for the study is the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), based on the theoretical frameworks of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 ^[24] and other international standards (Noh, 2022) ^[20]. HRBA underlines that children are rights-holders, and should have their fundamental rights (education, health and dignity) met, feel included and secured regardless of their socio-economic background or migration. It does not consider child begging as an individual weakness but rather as the contravention of these rights due to structural inequalities such as poverty, displacement and ineffective welfare systems. This framework upholds accountability, non-discrimination, and empowerment with a view to supporting interventions that are focused on root causes and not punishment asserted by Abahussain (2019) ^[3].

Regarding the investigation of the popular opinion about migrant child beggars in Accra, Ghana, HRBA offers the perspective through which one may consider polarized opinions: sympathetic opinions as humanitarian ones and nuisance opinions as urban annoyance. It describes the influence of socio-economic factors and cultural beliefs on the formation of attitudes and requires a policy that promotes the rights of children and at the same time inclusion in urban management. As an example, HRBA is in line with the research on the vulnerability of children to exploitation and the necessity of the rehabilitative approach, and it encourages the collaboration of multiple stakeholders to provide dignity and reintegration. This paradigm supports the rights-based policies demanded by the study, and transcending the stigma to long-term solutions that support child welfare in the metropolis settings.

Child Beggars in the Global, African and Ghanaian Migrants Cases

Child begging is a socio-economic problem that prevails in the majority of urban centres in the world or to be precise, the developing countries. It has been found that in most instances it may be the sign of bigger issues such as poverty, forced migration and social exclusion (Abebe, 2008) ^[1]. The Sub-

Saharan African population that is moving to the urban centres in search of a more comfortable living environment has been brought about by poor economic conditions, political violence, and natural calamities that have compelled many individuals into the streets to make ends meet (Bourdillon, 2014) ^[7]. In such cities as Nairobi, Lagos, and Accra, the number of child beggars has grown, and most of them are immigrants to the urban centres, those who are immigrants or immigrants to neighbouring rural areas and other countries located in the West African region (UNICEF, 2016) ^[23].

The exploitation of minors is possible to describe child begging in most instances since minors are seen as the least likely to not evoke a crowd of people (Khan *et al.*, 2015) ^[16]. In the majority of the cases, the abused children are neglected and are denied education and healthcare services. This issue remains the same since despite the assistance of the use of such global regulations as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that foster the rights and welfare of every child, the laws regarding the protection of the needs of children are not effectively implemented, and the social welfare system is ineffective (UNICEF, 2016) ^[23].

In Ghana, child beggars are urban centres and particularly in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi where many of them are migrants in Ghana or their neighbouring nations such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (Owusu & Asante, 2018) ^[21]. These children are likely to trail their parents or other members of the family to the urban centres due to abject poverty or with a hope of getting better opportunities. Unfortunately, they end up in the streets and are subjected to exposure to unsafe situations and stigmatization (Adjei & Osei, 2019) ^[2].

Some studies have conducted various studies on the socio-economic processes which are affecting child begging in Ghana. To illustrate the point, Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf (2008) ^[6] mention that the rural to urban migration is motivated by poverty and inaccessibility of education and health services among the rural population. This is worsened by the lack of effective social policies to look after the needy families in the urban environment where it leads to poverty and exploitation.

Human Rights Perspective and Public Nuisance Perception

Child begging violates fundamental rights of a child as per human right sense, like right to education, right against exploitation and satisfactory standard of living to be physically, mentally and socially mature enough (UNCRC, 1989) ^[24]. According to the human rights activists, children beggars should be seen as victims of socio-economic injustice rather than the source of such inconvenience to the community (Bourdillon, 2014) ^[7]. They require comprehensive answers to the issue and the factors that led to it that would involve poverty relief programs, education accessibility, and social welfare services (UNICEF, 2016) ^[23]. The institutions like the Department of Social Welfare, international NGOs have tried but have failed to rehabilitate child beggars and restore them to the society in Ghana. Nevertheless, the following factors impede them: the lack of resources, cultural stigmatization, and insufficient application of child protection laws (Owusu and Asante, 2018) ^[21].

Regardless of the issue of human rights, there exists increasing feeling among urban dwellers and urban

authorities that the child beggars are contributing to the nuisance of the people. People consider them to be a hindrance to traffic, a sanitation issue, and a source of disorder in the city (Adjei and Osei, 2019) ^[2]. Cities have at times used street clean-ups, where child beggars are rudely forced out of the street or even arrested when adults are believed to be taking advantage of them (Mensah, 2020) ^[18]. The dilemma of considering the problem of child beggars as victims or nuisances' points to the necessity to find a middle ground, where both the human rights of the children and the relevant challenge of managing urban space are taken into consideration (Adjei & Osei, 2019) ^[2]. The people tend to be divided on this issue with some supporting the idea of compassionate treatment and some seeking tighter law enforcement.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors Influencing Public Perceptions and Child Begging as a Human Rights Concern

Studies have shown that the socio-economic status, education, and cultural values play a very big role in shaping the attitude of the citizens towards child beggars. It is also common that people with a higher level of education and income tend to be more empathetic, and individuals with a low socio-economic status tend to treat child beggars as competitors of scarce metropolitan resources (Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008) ^[6]. There are also cultural preferences towards charity and social responsibility of taking care of vulnerable people, which are critical in influencing the opinion of people (Mensah, 2020) ^[18]. Some traditional Ghanaian cultures consider almsgiving as an obligation, and child beggars are represented as people who want a communal reinvent. Nevertheless, in the contemporary city environment, such an impression is fading as people are becoming more concerned with city safety and hygiene (Adjei & Osei, 2019) ^[2].

Child begging is also explored in the context of children rights, where the international conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), highlight the importance of children growing up in the environment that promotes their dignity, growth, and safety (UNICEF, 2016) ^[23]. Cases of child begging often describe the exposure of such children especially children of migrant status which are often exposed to exploitation, physical abuse, and neglect (Owusu & Asante, 2018) ^[21]. Scholars believe that access to medical care and education is also inaccessible to child beggars, and this fact infringes their basic rights.

These problems are complicated in Ghana by systematic problems, such as poverty, poor implementation of child protection legislation, and inadequate social welfare (Adjei & Osei, 2019) ^[2]. A study by Gyekye and Adomako (2020) ^[15] revealed that the majority of child beggars in Accra belong to a bigger trend of street children, that can be traced to other societal shortcomings in tackling inequality and displacement. This view promotes the rights approach in dealing with child begging which focuses more on long term solutions including educational programs, shelter services and family reunification programs.

Public Perception, Social Attitudes and Policy and Interventions

The mindset of the masses towards child beggars depends on various factors and they include the socio-economic level of the population, education, and the exposure to human rights discourses. Adjei and Osei (2019) ^[2] report that urban dwellers with greater education tend to perceive child begging as an institutional problem that needs governmental and social intervention. Conversely, the less educated people tend to view child beggars as nuisances who are contributing to the urban decay.

The media images are also influential in the formation of the opinion of the population. Research indicates that sensationalist media coverage of street crime and urban poverty tend to stigmatize child beggars, supporting negative stereotypes and justifying anti-begging policies that are harsh (Gyekye & Adomako, 2020) ^[15]. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights groups have however been successful in bringing into the limelight the plight of these children with increased empathy and demands to turn to inclusive solutions.

Current policies regarding child begging in Ghana do not have integration and vision. Although initiatives like Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) program are helping to alleviate poverty among the vulnerable families, they have a minor effect on child beggars because of poor targeting and implementation (Ghana Social Welfare Ministry, 2021) ^[13]. Skills training and family support programs have demonstrated potentials in the community-based reduction of child begging, but they need permanent funding and the cooperation between interested parties.

Methodology

Research Approach

This paper has considered the qualitative method of research to examine the perception of the population of migrant child beggars in Ghanaian metropolis. The qualitative method was also suitable as it provided a possibility to gain an in-depth insight into the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of the participants and the social and cultural aspects that affected these perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) ^[11]. The methodology allowed investigating subtle viewpoints that the quantitative methods would not allow to detect.

Research Method

The phenomenological research design was used to record the experience and perceptions of people who encounter the migrant child beggars or are influenced by their existence in the open areas. Such an approach was centred on the way the participants interpreted their interactions and observations and the implications of child begging in the society (Moustakas, 1994) ^[19].

Population for the Study

The people who were included in the study population were residents of, business owners, commuters, social workers and law enforcers in the metropolitan areas in Accra with respondents in Kaneshie, Circle (VIP Station) and Madina.

The reason behind the choice of these groups was their regular encounters with child beggars, and the various perspectives on the problem were to be offered. The representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that deal with child rights advocacy and urban management were also involved in the study.

Sampling Techniques

The participants were chosen according to the purposive sampling technique being the individuals with topical experience and knowledge of the phenomenon of child begging. The purposive sampling was appropriate because the selected individuals should provide deep information (Patton, 2015)^[22]. It consisted of 40 participants that included 10 residents, 10 owners of businesses, 10 commuters, 5 social workers, and 5 law enforcement agents. This created a good representation of different stakeholders.

Population Group	Target Population	Accessible Population	Sample Size
Residents	200	100	10
Business Owners	150	80	10
Commuters	300	120	10
Social Workers	50	30	5
Law Enforcement	60	40	5
Total	760	370	40

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGDs) were used to gather the data. The interviews gave the participants an avenue through which they could give personal views and personal experiences, whereas the FGDs helped exchange ideas and group dynamics which helped in enriching the data. The interviews guides were formulated according to the literature themes such as perceptions of child begging, issues of human rights and factors of nuisance to the people (Bryman, 2016)^[9]. Interviews took around 45 minutes each, FGDs with 5 to 7 in a group lasted 90 minutes.

Validation and Reliability

Multiple validation strategies were used so that to provide the credibility and validity of the findings. This involved member checking where the participants were able to read and ensure the correctness of the transcripts of the interviews and the emergent themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)^[17]. Triangulation was done through comparison of the data in various groups of participants and data collection ways as means of ensuring consistency and richness of insights (Creswell and Miller, 2000)^[10]. Moreover, the interpretations were also debriefed with academic colleagues to refute the interpretations and increase the credibility of the results.

Ethical Consideration

The ethics review board of the university provided its ethical approval. All participants were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity and given informed consent. It was a voluntary participation and respondents were at liberty to drop out of the whole process any point without reprimand. Issues that were sensitive particularly those relating to children were enacted with sensitivity in order to prevent feelings of distress to participants.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed and reported using thematic analysis. This was achieved by coding, finding meaningful themes and explaining the results with respect to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006)^[8]. These themes encompassed the human rights approach to the issues, socio-economic factors that contributed to human begging, issues concerning the nuisance by the people and the management of the urban areas.

Results and Discussion

Popular Attitude towards Migrant Child Beggars.

The research found that there were a wide range of attitude of people toward migrant child beggars within the Ghanaian metropolitan regions, which are manifested in the varied socio-economic interests, culture, and individual experiences. The results showed that the attitude towards child beggars did not universally apply but it depended on the educational backgrounds of the people, their economic stability, and the magnitude of daily exposure to the street life in the city. The residents were very sympathetic to the children as many people saw them as victims of poverty, displacement and poor systems of social support. About 60 percent of the residents pointed on the need to have government and non-governmental organisations to employ social welfare interventions including family support programmes, access to education and rehabilitation services. These respondents emphasized that the issue of child begging has to be viewed in a large context of the lack of economic equality and social vulnerability.

But there were divergent opinions with regard to business owners and commercial operators. Approximately 70 percent of business owners viewed migrant child beggars as a nuisance to the city which had a negative impact on the business environment in urban areas. Cases of petty theft, continued begging and crowding around shop doors were also reported which traders complained led to frustrations of doing business as child beggars scared away buyers and did not allow business to be transacted normally. A few business owners also indicated to the extent that these children are being used by organised networks or adult handlers to make a lot of money. The conflict between humanitarian interest and city order demonstrates the sophistication of the public opinion and supports the necessity of a balanced policy of protecting the rights of children and the interests of the populace.

Human Rights Perspective

The paper also found out that there were high human rights-based opinions, especially within the group of social workers, NGO representatives and welfare-based community groups. According to these stakeholders, the plight of child beggars among migrants in the cities was always highlighted as highly vulnerable. They pointed at the fact that the children were exposed to daily exploitation and coercion, and were physically harmed and exposed to gross health risks. These participants stated that child begging could not be solved by the control of the open spaces; however, it is associated with the protection of the fundamental rights of children and their satisfaction. It is consistent with the claim by UNICEF (2016)

[23], according to which child begging violates fundamental rights to safety, education, health, and holistic development. Social workers also discovered that most of these kids belong to the economic disadvantages families where in most cases forced migration, environmental degradation, rural poverty, or socio-economic displacement determine the lives of these children. In this case, taking the children to the streets and begging is a survival measure and not a choice. They claimed that these children ought to be considered as victims of the systemic and structural failures viz. insufficient social welfare provision, poor implementation of child protection laws and lack of livelihood avenues open to vulnerable families.

Certain respondents emphasised that treating child beggars as simply the cause of city crime does not reflect long term socio-economic conditions of their lives. They supported the concept of inclusive policy responses, including free access to education, community-based rehabilitation programmes, healthcare assistance, and socially sensitive mechanisms of reintegration which focus on the dignity, protection, and long-term growth of the child.

Public Nuisance Concerns in the Cities in Accra

This paper also found that there were widespread public nuisance issues that were related to migrant child begging especially among the law enforcers, daily commuters and workers in the transport sector. The members of such groups often referred to child begging as a threat to the city order and security. The police observed that children beggars usually work in busy places like bus stations, road crossings, and market places where they can hinder traffic and can cause accidents to the road users.

An astute officer, AO asserted that:

'We always have to break the situation because some of the children beggars become aggressive during rush hours and this puts a strain on the police and the management systems in the city.'

Commuters also raised concerns on personal safety, particularly when they were requested to provide personal favours by persistent solicitation or petty theft. Sanitation was also brought up and some respondents commented that children who slept and lived in open community areas were a source of unhygienic environments. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which claims that observable poverty can create social tension and public pressure regarding the need to tighten the urban governance asserted by Asamoah and Oppong (2018) [5].

They were however strongly warned against punitive or criminalising responses by social workers and child protection advocates. They stated that treating child beggars as criminals, not victims, would increase their vulnerability and strengthen the dynamics of marginalisation. They, instead, highlighted the importance of policies that take care of underlying conditions like poverty, displacement, and inaccessibility to education with their provision of humane and rights-based support structures.

Aspects that Affect the Perception of the Populace

The research found that the perception of the migrant child beggars by the society was a product of the synthesis of the socio-economic, educational as well as cultural factors which

dictated how the people understood and reacted to the menace. Socio-economic status was also a very powerful opinion determinant. Those with greater incomes more often saw child begging as an annoyance to the public and a danger to the order in the city. Most of this population complained about repeated disruptions in the commercial and working activities and they felt that child begging was a sign of social disorder in the community that had to be controlled. By comparison, the less-privileged participants were more empathetic, tending to draw the scenario to their own or family life experiences of misfortune. To them, child begging was not considered a disruptive behaviour and more a survival tactic in the economic uncertainty.

Background education also was very important. The respondents who had tertiary education had more comprehension of the structural and systemic factors of child begging such as poverty, displacement and poor social welfare systems. This population was more inclined to promote the long-term interventions like the reform of policy, social assistance and community rehabilitation.

There was also the influence of cultural beliefs on perceptions. The cultural background of respondents with rural backgrounds were more amenable to the act of begging, and they saw it in some instances as a conventional way of getting alms, religious assistance or social charity. On the other hand, urban dwellers, who were used to rush life, tended to be less tolerant and thought of the habit as something disruptive and not fitting in the city.

Urban Management Strategies and Recommendations

Another issue in the study was the suggested variety of urban management policies, as well as intervention measures, which can be suggested to effectively tackle the problem of migrant child begging in a sustainable way. The members of different stakeholder groups such as the residents, social workers, NGO representatives, and community leaders stated that a multi-stakeholder approach is urgently required to be co-ordinated. They claimed that a certain single institution could not handle the problem effectively by its own, because the factors that cause child begging are connected to wider socio-economic and structural issues.

Among the most valuable recommendations were the educational interventions, such as free basic education, assistance with school enrolment, and vocational training, specifically developed according to the needs of the older children who might have grown too old to receive any opportunities of primary school. These education programmes were perceived not only as short-term relief measures, but short-term investments in the future self-sufficiency and self-improvement of these children.

Family support services were also essential among the participants. This involved financial support, income-generating skills training, and livelihood empowerment initiatives to ensure that the families do not use child begging as the economic survival strategy. Increasing the household resiliency was considered as paramount in the prevention of intergenerational spiral of dependency in the streets.

Along with this, the research observed there was a high impact in favour of public awareness campaigns to reform the attitude of the society. These campaigns would foster benevolent actions, dishearten stigmatization and foster community accountability towards child protection. The participants were of the opinion that awareness creation

would result in a more compassionate, knowledgeable population that would have the desire to contribute to long term rehabilitation efforts instead of punitive actions.

Migrant Child Begging Formed by Socio-Economic Drivers

The researchers established that poverty and migration were the most notable causes of kids going out to beg on the streets. The subjects observed that most of the child beggars belonged to the neighbouring countries that were economically stranded like Burkina Faso and Mali. In others the families migrated as a result of environmental degradation such as droughts and land degradation which led to low agricultural production. This is a reiteration of previous studies that have associated rural-urban migration with socio-economic vulnerabilities (Amponsah & Tetteh, 2021) ^[4].

Besides, their families sent some children to the streets to get alms that functioned as a source of household income. Cultural norms occasionally put begging in perspective as a strategy of survival and not a social problem. This was also the view of the participants in the rural regions who perceived the child-begging process as a community-based activity as opposed to exploitation.

Child Beggar: Psychological and Social Effects

The research also found that there were serious psychological and social impacts that were part of the lives of migrant child beggars. The participants, especially social workers and child protection advocates, highlighted the fact that long durations in the street impacted their emotional state, social, and physical well-being of children. Interviews revealed that child beggars were stigmatized and socially excluded in most cases. After being tagged as street children, most of them would struggle to get formal education or social services because most institutions would see them as untamed or out of rehabilitation. This stigma strengthened the processes of marginalization and reduced the chances of reintegrating children.

There were also significant concerns on health risks. The children were subjected to poor environmental conditions, poor living conditions, unbalanced meals, and untreated diseases. Even the minor ailments may turn into serious health issues without the dependable access to the healthcare. Moreover, the necessity to move to and through traffic zones and congested shopping centres always made them more at risk of accidents and bodily injuries.

Most worrying were the emotional and psychological effects, perhaps. Strangers and handlers often verbally harassed, exploited and even beat children. According to one social worker, the more the period children spend on the streets, the more difficult it will be to re-enter the society because of trauma and social adaptation problems. The consequences of such conditions in the long term were anxiety, distrust, low self-esteem, and behavioural issues. These results highlight the necessity of the urgent development of trauma-informed rehabilitation and psychosocial support programmes.

Dimensions of Child Begging in Gender

Gender dimensions were also found to be meaningful within the phenomenon of migrant child beggar as the study showed that boys and girls perceive and negotiate the life in the streets in different ways. It was observed that male child beggars were more usually located in well-known and busy areas in

the urban environment such as crossings, bus terminals, and market entrances. Such boys tended to use more assertive or persistent solicitation behaviour, occasionally approaching passing traffic or cutting through traffic. The respondents proposed that this visibility can put boys under more physical risk such as accidents and conflicts with law enforcers or commuters.

By contrast, female child beggars were not as visible in the street, but were often observed looking after younger siblings or infants as they took alms. Their modus operandi frequently depended on evoking compassion on the way of passers-by, using the cultural expectations of females and babies being vulnerable and needy. Nevertheless, this perceived soft-spokenness covered some underlying issues that were brought up by social workers. The female child beggars were said to be much more susceptible to this exploitation, manipulation, and gender-based violence, particularly when they are not accompanied and when they belong to the informal begging network.

Participants accentuated that the dangers having girls were not limited to physical injury only, but also emotional trauma, sexual coercion, and the consequences of interrupted social and developmental pathways. The above results highlight the necessity of gender-sensitive intervention measures, such as safe shelters, tailored psychosocial support, and protective surveillance that is aware of the unique hazardous and stressful situations of girls operating in street-based survival.

Responses of Community and Government

The research also found different and even contradictory reactions to migrant child begging by the community and the government institutions. Since they were relatively minor, yet important, community-led programs facilitated the work with child beggars. Some religious organisations and neighbourhood groups occasionally offered food, temporary shelter, clothes and informal learning sessions which were aimed at developing basic literacy and social skills among the children. Such attempts were characterized by high cultural principles of sharing and caring. Such efforts were, however, reported by participants to be unsustainable mostly because of insufficient funding, volunteer burnout, and failure to plan in the long term. In the absence of formal rehabilitation systems, a lot of children went back to the streets once they were temporarily helped and the cycle of support and recidivism was observed.

Interventions on the government side were more regulatory rather than protective. Law enforcement officials reported periodic exercises of relocating child beggars from bus terminals, traffic junctions, and commercial areas, especially during major events or high-security periods. These public space clearance initiatives are not the same as support systems in response to the socio-economic drivers of child begging. Besides, participants pointed at a lack of coherence in policies, as well as poor inter-agency coordination among those involved in child welfare, urban safety, and social protection. Institutional role fragmentation and a lack of communication channels are some of the cardinal factors that relate to the limited effectiveness of the official response, says the Ghana Urban Authority (2019) ^[14].

The findings indicate that while community and government actors are playing roles in intervening against child begging, there is an urgent need for more sustainable, coordinated child-centred intervention frameworks.



Source: Researchers Fieldwork

Fig 1: A Philanthropic group distributing meals to street children in Accra.

Legal and Policy Frameworks

The study has also indicated some wide gaps within the legal and policy frameworks on the welfare and protection of children in Ghana. In the view of the participants, the laws of the land, such as the Children's Act, Act 560, accompanied by a child protection policy, proclaims categorically the state's obligation to ensure safety, education, and general well-being for children. Despite these provisions in the acts of Ghana, implementation is weak and inconsistent, and child begging has persisted across metropolitan areas.

Consultations with lawyers and child rights activists also indicated that most police officers lacked specialist training on how to deal with child protection cases with sensitivity and tact. The police action against child begging in most instances did not go beyond transferring or dispersing children from key spots in urban areas and never really addressed the root causes, or ensured such children were placed under suitable welfare care. Participants attributed this to meagre institutional resources, lack of personnel, and a lack of clear operational guidelines on how to handle cases related to vulnerable children.

It also established that the coordination of state agencies responsible for the welfare of the children, such as departments of Social Welfare, municipal assemblies, and law enforcement, was fragmented. The findings showed that such institutional gaps in the systems translated into slow response systems and variable follow-up after rescue or referral, hence many of the children returned to street begging shortly after intervention.

These findings highlight the current imperative to strengthen mechanisms for enforcement, inter-agency coordination, and capacity-building so that legal protection under the existing frameworks translates into actual and sustainable gains for vulnerable children.

Public Awareness and Changing Attitudes

This study also documented the gradual yet significant attitudinal change in public attitudes toward migrant child beggars impelled by advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns from NGOs, faith-based groups, and community welfare advocates. Growing sensitization at the public level, according to participants, helped reframe child begging from that of disorderly urban behaviour to one of deeper socio-economic vulnerabilities. The campaigns humanized such

issues through personal stories, hardships, and structural challenges faced by the children.

Therefore, many members of the public began to show their support for reform-oriented interventions rather than punitive responses. For example, commuters and business owners who had previously treated the presence of child beggars as a nuisance reportedly changed their attitudes upon hearing the stories of the children's backgrounds and family situations. One commuter CO2 indicated that:

"I used to think of street kids as a bother, but after hearing their experiences, I see that they need our assistance rather than punishment. This shift indicates a greater understanding of the importance of family empowerment, school availability, and societal support in ending child begging."

It has been assessed, however, that an attitudinal shift of this kind remains nascent and uneven. While awareness campaigns have been on the right track, continued advocacy is needed for deeper public engagement to demolish stereotypes, reduce stigma, and build shared responsibility for child welfare.

Comparative Analysis with the Existing Literature

These findings further complement the existing literature on the complex social meanings attached to child begging in urban settings. Such a conclusion, just like that of Owusu and Asante (2018)^[21], affirms that public perception about their phenomenon is usually between humanitarian concern and frustration regarding their disruption of public order. Owusu and Asante observed that the majority of child beggars are perceived interchangeably as victims who need protection and as agents of urban disorder who need regulation. In this present study, this dichotomy was re-iterated when some of the respondents called for compassion and social support for them while other subjects stressed city cleanliness, safety, and business activities.

However, the present study varies from past studies that had placed greater emphasis on punitive or control-based efforts as main interventions. Instead of policing and removal from public spaces, the study brings into focus community-based, rights-based, and rehabilitative interventions. A unanimous argument by the participants was that unless the root causes

for begging among children, such as poverty, displacement, vulnerability of the family, or lack of implementation of social policy, are addressed, begging by children cannot be successfully countered.

The findings of Daitey *et al.* (2025)^[12] that street-connected children in Ghana pose long-term psychosocial issues that need for thorough reintegration possibilities rather than

merely short-term palliatives are also supported by this study. Any effective approach should prioritize trauma-informed care, formal education access, family-building initiatives, and caregivers' sustainable livelihood empowerment.

All of these results point to the need for coordinated, multi-stakeholder initiatives that prioritize children's rights, dignity, and well-being over surface-level solutions.

Summary of Key Themes Identified	
Theme	Key Findings
Humanitarian Concern	Empathy for child beggars, calls for rights-based interventions
Public Nuisance Perception	Disruption of urban life, aggressive solicitation, negative business impacts
Socio-Economic Drivers	Poverty, migration, family dependency on alms
Psychological Impact	Trauma, stigmatization, social isolation
Gender Dynamics	Increased vulnerability of female child beggars
Community Responses	Temporary aid from community groups, insufficient government interventions
Legal and Policy Issues	Weak enforcement of child protection laws

General Discussion

These findings confirm that in Ghana's metropolitan areas, public perception about migrant child beggars is shaped by the complex interplay between socioeconomic conditions, cultural understandings, and the lived experiences of city life. As Owusu and Asante (2018)^[21] discussed, this kind of dual framing presents child begging as both a humanitarian issue and a public nuisance. While many have expressed empathy with, and thus acknowledged, these children as victims of poverty and structural inequalities, others—mostly owners of businesses and commuters—are very likely to regard child begging as an irritant in economic and social order. This shows how contested the space is that child beggars occupy within public consciousness and urban social life.

The research further illustrates that socio-economic status and educational background are determining variables in helping shape perceptions. While high-income and more urbanized participants favoured regulatory approaches, among the low-income and those most familiar with rural hardship, far more sympathetic responses were given. Awareness of systemic drivers such as displacement, economic marginalization, and policy gaps was significantly higher among tertiary-educated participants; this would appear to indicate that public sensitization could be a very effective means of changing perception.

The study further articulates the severe psychological, health-related, and social impacts associated with street life among child beggars. Accounts of emotional trauma, social alienation, unsafe living environments, and exploitation, therefore, support UNICEF's 2016^[23] declaration that the practice of child begging essentially violates the rights of children to safety, protection, and development. Notably, gendered trends were identified in the practice of child begging, where girls were at heightened risk of sexual exploitation and emotional trauma. Such findings are no different from those presented by Mensah and Badoe (2020)^[18], which equally raise the vulnerability of street-connected girls in Ghana.

The study finds that the current government responses are largely regulatory rather than rehabilitative—that is, exercises of relocation and street clearance operations without accompanying welfare support fail to address root causes, and cycles of displacement and return to the streets are repeated. Important barriers identified to effective intervention included weak enforcement of child protection

laws, lack of coordination between agencies, and resource constraints. Community- and faith-based initiatives were more compassionate but not sustainable due to financial and logistical limitations.

However, the incremental changes in public attitudes, partly through the advocacy and awareness-raising work of NGOs, suggest a growing realization of the need for rights-based, child-centred responses. The changed perception justifies the position taken by the study that in terms of longer-term interventions, education, family support, livelihood development, and psychosocial rehabilitation should take precedence rather than punitive measures. In sum, this discussion underlines the fact that migrant child begging is not an issue of urban management alone; rather, it is linked to structural inequalities in the pursuit of social justice and child rights. It will therefore require coordination of collaborative action among government agencies, communities, NGOs, and civil society within a holistic understanding of the welfare and dignity of the child.

Conclusion

This study explored public views about migrant child beggars in Ghana's metropolitan areas in a bid to identify the sociocultural, economic, and psychological processes that shape public perceptions and constitute the lived experience of the children. Results reveal a rather complex story of competing constructions of child begging as a humanitarian cause, a socio-economic problem, and a public nuisance. Residents and social workers frequently appealed for humanitarian sympathy, while business owners and police personnel were more focused on upholding urban order. Poverty, rural-urban migration, and displacement brought on by socioeconomic and environmental causes are important drivers. Children may be forced onto the streets because of the socio-economic vulnerability of the migrant families. Consequently, this may cause them to face various forms of exploitative activities, stigma, and health complications. The issues are even more complicated by gender dynamics, which add more risks to the female child beggars.

Due to resource limitations and poor coordination between governmental and non-governmental players, sustained interventions are still few, despite the efforts of several community and religious organizations to offer short-term assistance. Longitudinal research to trace the histories of child beggars after reintegration is going to give information

on what can enhance lasting recovery and re-entry into society. The need to include Local implementation of child protection laws only exacerbates the issue, which means that the policy has to be rewritten and the institutions have to work in better cooperation.

The paper highlights the need to adopt a balanced solution to meet the welfare and rights of the child beggars and the issues of urban management. Things such as public awareness, family support services, and educational opportunities became very important elements of a sustainable solution. There is also an urgent requirement of a rights-based approach that would focus on the welfare of children and not punitive approach but social reintegration and empowerment. Conclusively, the multi-stakeholder approach involving social policy reforms, community involvement and effective urban management platforms are some of the measures to address the phenomenon of child begging in the Ghanaian metropolitan areas. Society will be able to make significant strides in ensuring that an inclusive environment is formed, where every child is able to flourish and achieve their potential after promoting empathy, understanding and shared responsibility. Further studies should further be conducted on long term approaches to reintegrating the child beggars into mainstream education and back into the society as well as dealing with the structural issues that contribute towards the problem.

Recommendations

Cash transfers, vocational training, and microcredit are targeted interventions that could reduce the financial difficulties that lead to child begging. Both governments and non-governmental organizations should create these for low-income families. Monitoring will guarantee the usage of resources and stop abuse.

Mobile units and drop-in facilities offer free, high-quality healthcare, education, and food before formal education. For everyone to overcome trauma and reintegrate into society, psychological counselling and mentorship are essential. Nationwide media and forum campaigns increase awareness of socioeconomic difficulties, foster empathy, and guarantee shared responsibility for children who fall victim to abuse. Involve religious and traditional leaders through collaborations, such as the early warning system for identifying and connecting at-risk families with social resources.

Create child-friendly zones that are staffed by qualified professionals and serve as secure after-school programs for education, fun, and life skills. In order to achieve humane results, law enforcement should engage with social workers to connect families to shelters, food, healthcare, and education. Provide resources like technology and transportation for pre-emptive interventions; educate volunteers, social workers, and law enforcement about kid rights, trauma care, and ethical tactics. Encourage NGO-government collaborations to develop community-specific, scalable initiatives; put in place monitoring systems for frequent evaluations and modifications. Engage communities, including former child beggars, for culturally acceptable solutions and conduct long-term studies on intervention outcomes.

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How to Cite This Article

Daitey W, Owusu Panin R, Owusu Panin KB. Exploring public opinion on migrant child beggars in metropolitan areas in Accra, Ghana. *Int J Humanit Sustain Innov.* 2025;1(6):7–16.

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