



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

* ¹SARKINGOBIR, Y; ²SAHABI, M; ³SAADU, A; ⁴BELLO, MM; ¹BAKWAI, MS

¹Department of Biology, ²Department of Integrated Science, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria

³ General Studies Department, College of Agriculture Wurno

⁴ Sultan Abdurrahman College of Health Technology Gwadabawa, Sokoto, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author Email: Superoxidedismutase594@gmail.com

Tel: +2349096266980

ABSTRACT: This paper aimed to assess food insecurity among *Almajiri* in Sokoto metropolis and its environs using a structured questionnaire on 120 respondents. The respondents were Muslims, Hausa/ Fulani, males and Nigerians. The occupations of *Almajiri* fathers were ,farming (66.7%) , business (16.7%) , and 16.7% were doing nothing. 33.3% of their fathers were married to two wives, 25.0% married to three wives , 16.7% married to one wife each and , 16.7% married to four wives .33.3% of the *Almajiri* said their fathers have two children, 25.0% said their fathers have three children, and 8.3% have four kids ,and 8.3% have one child .None of the participants attended western school ,but only 25.0% admitted that they like " *Boko* " (western education) ,while 75% said they don't like " *Boko* ".58.3% goes home only after one year stay at the school ,25.0% return after graduation , 16.7% return home after 3years stay at school. 50.0% said they always come with insufficient food from home, but 41.7% said they come with nothing.7.3% come with insufficient money from home, whereas, 41.7% come with nothing. 41.7% eat food thrice ,25.0% eat twice, and 16.7% eat once .58.3% earn through begging, 25.0% earn through domestic work ,and 16.7% earn through external work .75.0% eat *tuwo* ,and 16.7% eat Gari ,and others. All the respondents echoed that the system hurt them psychologically. The findings revealed that *Almajiri* children were unable to come with enough food or money to sustain them throughout their stay at school. Thus, this depicts food insecurity, which in turn can invariably lead to hunger. Parents should give sufficient provisions to their wards whenever sending them to *Almajiri* schools. The government, wealthy persons and relations should fully put hands on deck to help *Almajiri* child.

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Knowledge is a special gift and wealth that distinguished humans from other creatures. It is a wisdom and the highest pinnacle that can be attained in life and is obtained through school and grapple. That is why in Islam, it is exhorted that Muslims must seek knowledge of various fields of human endeavours. In fact, the first message descended to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a stimulation to stand up and seek for knowledge. All the past prophets (peace be upon them) flourished because of knowledge (Ali,1987; Abd, 1996). The word *Almajiri* was drawn from Arabic word *Almuhajir* the migrator .It entails a person who abandoned his home and went to another town or village in the cause of religion. Whereas, *Almajiri* (the Hausa word) refers to a pupil or student who left his hometown to another town in search for knowledge (at *Makarantar Allo* or *Zaure*) .The plural are *Almajirai* and are taught by *Malam* or *Alaramma* etc. The practice has a long tradition and history in Hausa land ,probably since the advent of Islam in the region .In the olden days , the *Almajiri* practice worked smoothly without hitch ,because there was surplus funding from government (by the Emirs), wealthy people and the public. When the colonial forces took over the mantle of affairs ,the usual *Almajiri* funding

halted ,because the Western education has more attention. The wealthy individuals too halted the payment of Zakat and the public neglected the *Almajiri* practice. Since then, the practice is languishing helplessly (Amzat, 2016). Sokoto caliphate (as ceremoniously and traditionally called) serve as the centre and pivot of Islam in the olden and present days in Nigeria .It is a mother of the North ,thus it is a typical place where the *Almajiri* is currently been practiced. Like in other places, the *Almajiri* system of nowadays is decisively marred by many problems. You can see the children and young ones wander for food ,begging ,labouring , some live or sleep on the streets, their garments are looking very untidy and unkempt. They can be source of labour or recruits for various crimes and vices in the society. These are some of the unfortunateness *Almajiri* is sinking in nowadays, albeit there are some good sides in the system and some few of them are not affected by these bad situations (Aghedo and Eke,2013; Nigeria Research Network, 2013).

Islam see childhood with hope and inspiration, as something to safeguard .It is a gift that should be protected, reared and guarded. That is why, the

*Corresponding Author Email: Superoxidedismutase594@gmail.com; Tel: +2349096266980

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

Children or teen who strive with hunger are sick more often, recover more slowly and are more likely to be hospitalized. They lack enough biological fuel to concentrate and perform less in school. They have higher levels of behavioural, emotional, aggressive and anxious problems. Their academic is usually low (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2015). Hunger and food insecurity can excavate *Almajiri* to indulge in various acts that are harmful to their health and the public (Food Research and Action Centre, 2017). One of the things that is also harmful to health ,which hunger and food insecurity plunged *Almajiri* into is the child labour (begging ,domestic work and street work) (Onoyase ,2010;Amuda , 2015; Nwazuoke and Igwe , 2018 ,). Begging can expose them to several hazards such as accident, rape, kidnapping, trafficking, violence, drug use etc. Domestic child labour remain source of exposure to long working hours and hardly quantifiable. The practice is prone to, rape, drug, and relations (Fassa *et al*, 1999; Agbo, 2017). Consequently, this paper determined the level of food insecurity among *Almajiri*, hunger potential, causes, compensation (adaptive) mechanism (begging and domestic work, parables of child labour) and suggestions for curtailing the issues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area: The study was conducted in Sokoto Metropolis, Gwadabawa and Kware local governments, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Study design: The type of study design used in this work was descriptive survey .Therein, an interview of participants was carried out .The 120 *Almajiri* were drawn using simple random sampling strategy.

Data instrument and management: The collected data was obtained in semistructured questionnaire .Then, treated using thematic network analysis and descriptive parameters of frequency and percentage were yielded.

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

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result for this study was presented in table 1.The respondents were Muslims, Hausa/ Fulani, males and Nigerians. The major occupations of *Almajiri* fathers were, farming (66.7%), business (16.7%), and 16.7% were doing nothing. 33.3% of their fathers were married to two wives, 25.0% married to three wives, 16.7% married to one wife each and;16.7% married to four wives .33.3% of the *Almajiri* said their fathers have two children, 25.0% said their fathers have three children, and 8.3% have four kids, and 8.3% have one child. Pertaining western education, none of the participants attended western school ,but only 25.0% admitted that they like *Boko* (western education), while 75% said they don't like *Boko* .58.3% return home only after one year stay at the school ,25.0% return after graduation ,whereas, 16.7% return home after 3yrs stay at school. 50.0% said they always come with insufficient food from home ,but 41.7% said they come with nothing.7.3% come with insufficient money from home ,whereas , 41.7% come with nothing. 41.7% eat food thrice ,25.0% eat twice, and 16.7% eat once .58.3% earn through begging, 25.0% earn through domestic work ,and 16.7% earn through external work .75.0% eat *tuwo* ,and 16.7% eat *Gari* ,and others. All the respondents echoed that the system hurt them psychologically. American Psychological Association (n.d.) said the children with food problems experience psychological effects .From these findings, it can be seen that, *Almajiri* children failed to come with enough food or money to sustain them throughout their stay at school .Moreover, this determined that, the main food of the *Almajiri* children is the carbohydrate, which they got in an uncertain, unacceptable and socially problematic way. Remnants, lowly, and unchosen food is served to the pupils. Thus, this depicts food insecurity, which inturn can invariably lead to hunger .They have to embroiled in child labour to succour some of the situations. Children are precious , and gifts that need care " Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is accountable for his or her flock"and Allah has made for you wives of your kind and has made for you from your wives, sons and grandsons and has bestowed on you good provision. Qur'an:Nahl, 74 (Ali, 1987). "Wealth and children are the adornments of the life of this world" Qur'an: the Cave, 46 (Ali, 1987). The Islamic Shari'ah assures the child's right. He has the right to be born, the right to be protected from any harmful exposure. A child has the right to have intellectual training and education, he has the right to health. "And do not throw yourselves into destruction "Qur'an:The Haifer, 195.Islam instruct that children and adults should be protected from violence, sexual abuse ,social abuse ,psychological abuse

,infliction of hardship or harm are all forbidden in Islam . In the same vein, the right of children to education should be reserved. (Saiful, 2015) .Holy qur,an says he keep her with dishonour ,or bury her

in earth ? (Ali, 1987).This is a strong criticism and warning at those that maltreat female scions, and male alike. All the aforementioned are from the Islamic perspective.

Table 1: Assessment of food insecurity determinants among *Almajiri* in Sokoto Metropolis and its selected environs (Gwadabawa and Kware) , Sokoto state ,Nigeria

	Frequency	Percentage
Demography		
Age		
1-6	10	8.3
6-9	10	8.3
10-12	10	8.3
13-16	40	33.3
Sex		
Male	120	100.0
Religion		
Islam	120	100.0
Tribe		
Hausa/ Fulani	120	100.0
Occupation of father		
Farming	80	
Business	20	16.7
Nothing	20	16.7
No of wives of father		
One	10	8.3
Two	40	33.3
Three	30	25.0
Four	10	8.3
Number of children of father		
Three	10	8.3
Five	30	25.0
Six	50	41.7
Literacy of children		
Do you like western education?		
Yes	60	50.0
No	50	41.7
Do you come with food from home ?		
Yes	10	50.0
No	50	41.7
Do you come with money from home ?		
Yes	10	8.3
No	50	41.7
How many times do you eat daily ?		
Once	20	16.7
Twice	30	25.0
Thrice	50	41.7
I'm psychologically hurt by my situation	120	100.0
Source of food while at school		
Begging	70	58.3
Domestic work	30	25.0
External labour	20	16.7
Type of food mostly eaten by <i>Almajiri</i>		
Tuwo / gari	90	75.0
<i>Gari</i>	20	16.7
Other	10	8.7
Which time do you return home ?		
Yearly	70	58.3
After three years	20	16.7
After graduation	30	25.0
Do you like boko		
Yes	30	25.0
No	90	75.0

Based on this work, these *Almajiri* were exposed to food insecurity, hunger, begging, child labour and psychological hurt .This is contrary to Islamic and Public Health provisions .Food insecurity refers to limited or uncertain availability of adequate safe food nutrients. It also includes the limited or uncertain ability to get food in a socially acceptable ways (Okolo and Obidigbo, 2015).Food insecurity have direct and

indirect impacts on children in short and long terms .These impacts includes on physical, psychological, and mental health .It excavates malnutrition, lower food insecurity is associated with higher probability of hypertension, coronic heart disease, hepatitis, stroke, cancer, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, and kidney disease. Thus, food insecurity is a strong predictor of higher hospital use and increased health costs (FRAC, 2017).

Globally, 1 out of 3 persons are in food problem. In response to that so many steps were taken, one of which is the Sustainable Development Goals. Therein, a call is displayed seeking to end hunger (SDG2) (Okolo and Obidigbo, 2015; Olomola, 2017; Abubakar, 2018). Food insecurity is closely linked to hunger and malnutrition and is of serious public health concern in Nigeria. Here, there are about 17 million people that are experiencing food insecurity. This prevalence is projected to increase to 43 million in 2022 if the trend persists (FAO, 2018). Like the adults, the children have many problems because of food insecurity. Some of the public health concerns about the *Almajiri* child are

Psychological effects:

- Food insecurity and hunger can cause toxic stress (Chilton and Jenny, 2012)
 - It affects cognitive capacity
 - Food insecure individuals are stigmatized
 - Food insecurity is associated with high risk of sickness, such as stomachache, headache, cold etc. Severe form is associated with anxiety, low academic achievement
 - It also leads to shame on children (APA, n.d.)
- b. Behavioural effects
- Make children less attentive, independent and curious
 - Make children to lose self-confidence and self-esteem
 - Make children prone to irritability and nervousness (K-State Research and Extension, 2013). Workers who were exposed to hunger as children are not prepared like their counterparts. Workers who were exposed to hunger as children are less competitive, and seriously restrict human capital (Cook and Jeng, 2009). Children who experienced severe hunger are five times more likely to need counselling. They have more risks of chronic diseases, and more consumers of healthcare resources (Gundersen *et al.*, 2011).

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

.They can be cut in accident, and sex exploitation (Amzat, 2008; NRN, 2013). The food insecurity, hunger and labour among *Almajiri* was begotten by culture, poverty, and lack of awareness (Ojo and Adebayo, 2012; Ene *et al.*, 2018). To decisively deal with the problem, government, Nongovernmental Organizations, should use Islamic teachers and other means to subvert the lack of awareness among parents, so that they become aware of the consequences of sending children to schools without provision, both in Islamic and other perspectives. They should know that the norm is unislamic. The community should be enlightened using some sheikhs, because the easiest way of doing that is through Muslim clerics and leaders (the *Almajiri* accept words from the duo). Additionally, poverty should be addressed, more opportunities for western education should be given to children (Ogunkan, 2011; Otaha, 2013; NRN, 2013; Maigari, 2017).

Conclusion: Based on the findings of this work, food insecurity and hunger remain one of the public health concerns experienced by *Almajiri* in Sokoto metropolis and its environs (Gwadabawa and Kware) of Sokoto State.

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