

Review

An *Almajiri* Student in the Northern Nigeria: The Neglected Vulnerable For Sexual Abuse (Rape)

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Almajiri system of Islamic learning is an old practice which persists to nowadays. In the past the practice was good and without hitch, but on the advent of colonialism, the system suffers from the neglect by the government and the whole society. Thus, the children become neglected and vulnerable to diverse abuse forms. This paper investigated sexual abuse of *Almajiri* child by gay rapists in Northern Nigeria. In the course of the investigation, some cases reported by media were included and related literatures were used for analyses. This paper found out that, the *Almajiri* is neglected and vulnerable to gay-rape. Anal cancer, Chlamydia, viral hepatitis, scabies, HIV, syphilis, herpes simplex virus, salmonellosis, shigellosis, cryptosporidium, and meningitides can easily be contracted by the *Almajiri* through rape. Moreover, there is stigmatization, and further neglect upon the victims. The government, parents, and society need to redirect attention on the plight of *Almajiri* child.

Keywords: *Almajiri*, Islamic education, rape, gay, sexual abuse, physical health

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INTRODUCTION

Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) got inspiration from God that he was a prophet, sent to divulge the word of God. The pagans did not gave him a conducive place to preach and teach. His disciples were attacked and killed. He fled to Medina with his disciples and continued teaching. At the time such gatherings took place, people who sat round the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) to learn were called '*Almuhajirun*' which means emigrants. These were people that went to Medina because of the assault in Mecca (Ogunkan, 2011; Maigari, 2017). This delineated the importance of knowledge seeking. Those *Almajiri* schools are very important as they try to impart knowledge on the *Almajiri*

Muslim child.

Almajiri is a Hausa word derived from Arabic word *Almuhajir*. *Almajiri* refers to a person (mostly child) who left his home to attend an Islamic boarding school to learn Islamic knowledge. The *Almajiri* abandoned his home for many months or years in the course of study. It is a predominant system of Islamic education among Muslims in Northern Nigeria and other neighbouring countries like Niger Republic, Chad, Ghana, etc. It is an ancient practice and has been successful over the years with the support of government and wealthy people. But nowadays, because of shift of consciousness to the western education, the government and people left the system to languish. The *Almajiri* schools are now in deplorable conditions, likewise the teachers and students

(*Almajiri*).Children of 4 and above years are allowed to seek for living and study through begging and other forms of labour. Thus, they are vulnerable to abuses. The present problems of *Almajiri* are in contrary to the Islamic teaching and principles. Islam give children the rights to health and be nurtured in a very good environment and manner.They have the right to be educated in a socially acceptable fashion (Abd Arrahman,1996; UNICEF / Al-azhar University 2005; Amzat, 2008; Okugbeni, 2013 ; Saiful Islam, 2015; Tijjani, 2017).

It is well-known that, in the past, male children were taken to areas other than their birth places and they stayed for years under the care of a scholar who fed and clothed them as they acquired Koranic knowledge. This shows the institution was an organized boarding school system. Today, the system is devastating, the *Almajiri* has to sleep on the bare floor in the school or street. The *Almajiri* is not properly fed and clothed as it was in the past, but he has to engage in various odd labours like begging, domestic work and street work (Otu, 1992; Onayase, 2010; UNICEF, 2012; Dalhat, 2016; Kankara, 2016; Muhammad, 2015).

The schools have no organized boarding facilities, even though it has in the past boarded the *Almajiri* with a much better boarding condition than it is presently. The payment of school fees, and scholars was done based on the individual *Mallams* discretion, therefore; he depend on some bountiful givers of alms in the form of clothes, food and money; for both the *Mallam* and the *Almajiri*. The condition that guides the Traditional Quranic Schools has made the boys to be abused by various social miscreants. They are also denied of years of constant emotional and physical contact with their families, which affect them psychologically; leaving them at the mercy of the negative minds of the society (Muhammad, 2015; Ashishana, 2019; Sarkingobir *et al.*, 2019). These are some the concerns about the *Almajiri* .Thus, the objectives of this paper was to critically analyzed the issue of rape faced by many *Almajiri* because of their weak status.

ALMAJIRI ARE NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN THE NORTH

Negligent treatment is continuously meted upon the *Almajiri* child in the North. Negligent treatment or maltreatment refers to an act of or failure to act, or the cumulative effects of a pattern of a conduct ,behavior , or inaction , on the part of a child's parents, legal custodian ,guardian, or caregiver that shows a serious disregard of the consequences to the child and creates a clear and present danger to the child's health ,welfare , or safety (Washington Department of Social Services, n.d.).Child neglect in laconic form refers to the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility before the child to provide food, clothing, shelter, healthcare or care to the extent

that the child's health, safety, and wellbeing are threatened with harm (WHO, 2002).

Almajiri are left without means or ability to obtain basic necessities of life such as food water ,shelter, clothing, hygiene ,healthcare etc .The consequences are seen in their deplorable conditions .They are ubiquitous in our streets, markets, houses, garages etc wandering in dirty clothes and ugly display in search for livelihood .This is a sheer display of neglect by the governments, parents, wards, and the entire society (Otu,1992; Nigeria Research Network, 2013; Muhammad, 2015; Kankara, 2016).

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully understand, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot yield consent, or that violates the laws of society or social norms. The abuse occurs between an adult and a child, between a child and an older adolescent or relations; it can happen between trusted, known or unknown or relations. The abuse may occur serially or once, and in most cases the abuse remained undisclosed because of fear. When it is disclosed, it happened as a process, not as an event (Lippert et al., 2009; Priebe, 2009; International Rescue Committee, 2012; Cashmore and Shackel, 2013; Townsend and Rheingold, 2013; WHO, 2015; Greijer, 2016).

IMPACTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child abuse is traumatic experience with many negative impacts on the victims. Some of the impacts are:

- It affect physical and mental health
- The victims are more prone to develop mental problems and harmful behaviours, suicide, depression
- Victims of sexual abuse suffer physical injuries
- The victims are more likely to stimulate drug abuse
- The victims have shorter lifespan
- Sexually transmitted infections can easily be transmitted to the victim
- Epidemic diseases of among the gay people: anal cancer, Chlamydia, Giardia lambia, herpes simplex virus, HIV, Isospora beli, Microsporidia, Gonorrhoea, hepatitis, syphilis, hemorrhoids, anal fissures, anorectal trauma, retained foreign bodies, are problems predominant among sodomy practice.

Economic impacts

- Increase health spending on abused children

Social impacts

- It affects the family of the survivor ,and even his coming generation
- It causes stigmatization, discrimination, and traumatization of the victim or his upcoming progenies
- It encourages promiscuity in sex, which undermine health and lifespan (Anne,1990; Diggs, 2002; Crome, 2006; Tewsbury, 2007; Cashmore and Shackel, 2013; ChCherue and Berhane, 2012).

RISKS OF ANAL SEX / HOMOSEXUALITY/ CHILDREN SEXUAL ABUSE, PARTICULARLY *ALMAJIRI*

Young people (10-24 years) make 1/4 of the world's population and they are the most affected by this epidemic.

- People who engaged in sexual activities with male are more prone to HIV
- People who engaged in sex with male involved more on unprotected sex
- Homosexual (male-to-male sex) is more likely to increase the risk of selling sex(prostitution) ,thereby calling for related consequences. Thus the *Almajiri* living in deplorable situations can be lured to sell sex despite the unbearable consequences.
- Because of youngness ,they don't have the requisite sex education, which can lure them to any risk
- Stigma, discrimination, and homophobia. *Almajiri* child that is involved in rape ,or conscious sexual activities with male or female is more likely to see homophobia, stigma ,and discrimination; then ultimately worsening the condition
- It increase the chances of becoming homeless and street child (WHO, 2002; WHO, 2015; Woog and Kagesten, 2017).

ISLAM ABHORS SODOMY

Islam rejected sodomy (anal sex) or raping of children in a vehement sense .The Prophet Muhammad said "whosoever has intercourse with his wife through the anus is accursed ". This made anal sex forbidden even with the legal wife. In the Quran, 23:5-7, Allah said " And they who guard their wives or their right hands

possessed, certainly they will not be criticized. But, whosoever seeks beyond that, then they are the transgressors ". This plainly shows that sex is only allowed between married men and women couples and through the vagina; the raping of *Almajiri* child or any child is strongly condemned and criminalized (Ali, 1987). Similarly, sodomy was condemned and prohibited in the Quran and Hadith. Quran, 7:80-84, says "Do you approach males among the worlds and leave what your lord has made for you as mates? But you are transgressing ". So we save him and his family, all, except an old woman among those who remained behind. The We destroyed the others. And We rained upon them a rain of those who were warned ". We can see how these people were destroyed because of sodomy and lesbianism. The strong convert is death as punishment (Miguel Antonie De Freitas, 2014; Wester, 2017).

RAPING OR SODOMIZING MALE *ALMAJIRI* IS AN INFLICTION DEVIANT FROM HIS BODY BIOCHEMISTRY (BIOLOGY)

The sodomy or rape on children is very dangerous especially unto the recipient, because the practice is entirely assaulting the natural biology of the victim .These are some of the deviations and assaults:-

- Anal-genital sex

Most of gay people practice anal sex, albeit gay activities are defiant to body physiology and anatomy. The rectum is different from vagina, it is not meant for penetration by penis or any object .Thus gay-sex lead to trauma, causing faecal leakage, it also give fertile ground for any infectious agent .Also semen has immune suppressants which undermine the immunity of the sodomized child. Thus, there are excess frequency of diseases in the victims, such as : anal cancer, chlamydia trachomatis, cryptosporidium ,Giardia lamblia, HIV, viral hepatitis, Isospora belli, Microspodia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes simplex virus (Anne,1990; Diggs, 2002; Tewksbury, 2007; Priebe, 2009; WHO, 2015).

- Oral-anal sex

Extreme occurrence of parasitic and other intestinal infections among oral-anal sex practitioners have been documented. The diseases include Entamoeba histolyca, Neisseria meningitides, scabies, salmonellosis, shigellosis, Epstein-Barr virus, typhoid fever, rediculosis, herpes type 8, Kaposi sarcoma (State of Network Department of Health, n.d.; Diggs, 2003; Cherie and Berhane, 2012 ; Cashmore and Schackel , 2013; Chinawa *et al.*, 2013; WHO, 2015; Woog and Kagesten, 2017).

RISK FACTORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG ALMAJIRI

The *Almajiri* child has weaknesses that made him more vulnerable to child abuse. Some of these factors are listed below:

- They are unaccompanied children in most cases moving around freely and alone
- History of past abuse-Some of them have been abused earlier
- Poverty-Many of them come from poor families
- Begging-Many of them are into begging
- Children in foster care-Some of them are in foster care
- Psychological /cognitive vulnerability
- Social isolation (lacking an emotional support network)
- Living outside home-majority of them are living away from their homes
- Victim of familial abuse- Some are victims of violence at their families (Crome, 2006 ; WHO, 2015).

CASE REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF ALMAJIRI ACROSS THE COUNTRY

It is difficult to gather data on real occurrence of sexual abuse of *Almajiri* boys because of many impediments, but it is well-known that the boys are neglected by the society, community, individuals, wards, and the government; thus predisposing them to so much abuse, including the sexual abuse (sodomy).Some of the impediments are: It is difficult to contact the pupils because of ethical reasons; the resources are limiting to conduct a wide survey. Thus, this paper relied on secondary data posted online by various newspapers and relations. These reports cited here are just sample of the entire problem, there are others that we could not reach out to, and there are indeed cases which were not published due to the said impediments.

In one related incident, one trader hid an *Almajiri* and serially abused him for a period of 2 months .The incident happened in Suleja Niger state, Nigeria. The Sexual abuser was nabbed by the police for an offence of sexually abusing a 14-year old minor *Almajiri* boy by incarcerating him for 2 months. The boy was from Kano state, his school was in *Lambata*, along *Minna* way. The victim was admitted at the Hospital for complaints of stomachache, constipation and inability to walk properly (Mustapha, 2015).

In 2016, in Nasarawa, a *malam* was cut sexually abusing his student. The teacher serially abused his student and prevented him from disclosing it .Fortunately

on 16 August the civil defense officers nabbed the teacher to answer his sins (Labaren Hausa/ News, 2016).

Punch Newspaper online reported "Police hunt for nail-cutter who raped *Almajiri* boy" in 2017. A 13-year old *Almajiri* in Bauchi state was sexually abused by an undisclosed nail-cutter, by luring him with #40 and told him not to disgorge it to anyone. As a result of the abuse the boy's stomach got swollen, which called for his admission at the hospital (Bakam, 2017). Alabi (2017), reported that, a male fish seller in Kaduna raped 7-year old *Almajiri* pupil more than 10 times. The boy said he was lured by fish-head whenever he was abused .The abuser also threatened the boy.

In Sokoto Metropolis, at Arkilla Area, one *mallam* was arrested by the police on an offense of sexually abusing more than 30 of his pupils. He echoed his act, that he abused them sexually, he even went to the point of lending them to others for prostitution (Muhammad, 2019).

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) had arrested one 21 year old house help who is an *Almajiri*, for the sake of sexually abusing 10 children of his master in Sokoto Metropolis. The *Almajiri* said he was recruited into the act when he was just 5-years old by one trader, whom he always went to his place for begging .The trader used that opportunity and abused the *Almajiri* sexually (Instablo9ja, 2019). Daniel (2019) had cited a report titled "Man, who raped over 30 *Almajiris* in Niger, bags 7-year jail term ". Therein, the man was their teacher in Minna, Niger state. He was in the habit of luring them into his room and having anal-sexual intercourse with them. He did that violence to 35 of his pupils (age 9-14 years) between March and July 2019. The sexual abuser pleaded guilty and he was sentenced to 7 years jail term.

From the aforementioned case-reports is evident that *Almajiri* rape is been perpetrated by diverse people, some are their teachers, some their seniors, and some are from the external environment. The youngness (minor ages) ,the weakness of been alone or away from home, the food insecurity ,and relations are the causes of *Almajiri* sexual abuse, which emanated from the neglect faced by *Almajiri* by his parent, government and the entire society. Certainly, the practice will affect the development of our young people, and will negatively impact on the Islam, Islamic community, and Islamic education. It portrays Islam and Muslims in bad shape. The parents should endeavour to take all responsibilities of their wards when sending them to *Almajiri* schools, in a similar fashion they treat the Western education. The government needs to set rules, laws, and systems to guide *Almajiri* practice. Material support is also needed from the government, and wealthy people. These will improve the system and save the image of Muslims, Islam and Education (Fatah Yasin and Jani, 2013; Liman, 2014; Oseni, 2016; Ashishana, 2019).

REQUIRED RESPONSES TO CONTROL THE SEXUAL ABUSE FACED BY *ALMAJIRI*

Below are responses that should be implemented to tackle the issues of rampant abuse of *Almajiri*:

Laws

There should be proper laws that strictly deter child rape . And there should be full implementation (Oseni, 2016).

Community

Community should accommodate the rape victims, support them, and try to close all rooms that could trigger child sexual abuse (Save the Children International, 2018).

Government

Government should make proper laws and ensure implementation to curtail child neglect and sexual abuse. Accessible and efficient rehabilitation and healthcare services are on the shoulder of the government (WHO, 2015; International Rescue Committee, 2012; OUR WATCH, 2014; Save the Children International, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This paper revealed that the violent practice of *Almajiri* child sexual abuse by gay people has been trending in Nigeria, the fear has led many reports to be swept under the carpet .The *Almajiri* sexual abuse is spurred because the child is vulnerable and neglected by all parties.

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