



Traffic Dilemmas: Understanding the Vulnerability of Migrant Child Beggars in Ghana's Urban Traffic Zones

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-8261

Volume: 04

Issue: 06

November – December 2025

Received: 07-09-2025

Accepted: 09-10-2025

Published: 01-11-2025

Page No: 35-40

Abstract

This study explores the reasons behind migrant children's involvement in street begging in Ghana, focusing on social, cultural, and systemic factors. Using qualitative methods such as interviews, community engagement, and group discussions, the research found that poverty, rural-urban migration, and regional inequalities contribute significantly to the issue. Many children are exploited by handlers and exposed to abuse, with girls facing more sexual harassment and boys more physical threats. Cultural and religious beliefs that promote giving further entrench the problem. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation, pushing more children into hazardous traffic zones. Despite their hardships, many children expressed a desire for education and skill development. The study recommends a multi-sectoral approach, including child protection, community development, expanded social welfare, and public awareness to create safer conditions for migrant children.

Keywords: Child Beggars, Migrant, Traffic Zones, Ghana, Dilemma.

Introduction

As urban districts in Ghana expand, the number of poor and marginalized groups such as migrant child beggars, increases. Apart from these, seeing child beggars on the streets emphasizes the need to quickly solve challenging economic and human rights problems. Many street children who beg in Ghana's cities live in poverty both inside the country and in nearby nations and they believe they may find better opportunities in the cities. Nevertheless, city life can put many of them in harm's way and make them easy targets.

These areas are the children's workplace and also endanger their lives. They go from place to place on busy streets and crowded highways, calling out to people in cars and on foot. Because of this environment, they are at risk of accidents, harassment and abuse all the time. Besides, seeing them in cities often highlights the difficulties people living in poverty face, the inefficacy of social protection and failures of policies to defend children from harm (Abebe, 2021)^[2].

There are many aspects to migrant child beggars, as they link to migration, poverty and growing cities. Many times, families move children to cities since there aren't as many jobs or ways to earn money in the countryside. Most of these children are denied education, health care and ordinary benefits, so it is hard for them to avoid poverty. The problems caused by traffic zones are unique for them, so it is necessary to study their economics and evaluate if the current steps taken help.

This research seeks to understand the difficulties faced by migrant child beggars in cities in Ghana and see how these challenges are rooted in specific systems. It strives to offer clarity on the social and economic advantages and problems, policy weaknesses and attitudes that impact what they experience. The hope is that researching the issue will contribute ideas for strategies that keep urban Ghana's children safe and respect their rights.

Literature Review

Migration and Urban Child Beggary

Many researchers have been worried about the situation of child beggars who migrate to urban centres. Most people leave rural areas for cities because they lack good income sources, are poor and perceive urban settings as places to find better jobs (Adepoju, 2010)^[3]. Those living in poverty may send their children to the city, so the children can find work to support the family at home. Children who go on these migratory journeys regularly face unstable conditions and may end up begging for money, according to Amoah (2021)^[5].

According to research, children who beg are often not with their families when they are begging on the streets. Management of the children in these situations is frequently in the hands of intermediaries known as “child handlers,” who also take a big part of the children’s gains (Gyamfi *et al.*, 2018)^[8]. By taking advantage of migrant children, they experience greater risk and very little power or help. Furthermore, many children with disabilities face social rejection, are unable to go to school or clinic and encounter people who stigmatize them (Abebe, 2021)^[2].

Urban Traffic Zones as Sites of Risk

Child beggars in cities face many kinds of physical and emotional dangers because of these areas. Being in the road around moving cars for several hours every day raises their risk of accidents and inhaling pollution from those vehicles can lead to breathing problems (WHO, 2020)^[17]. Begging in neighbourhoods where there’s traffic can be very competitive, so fights between beggars increase their risk of harm.

It is widely recognized that life in traffic places severe mental stress on child beggars. Frequent rejections, problems with aggressive drivers and difficulty earning enough each day cause many recruits to feel anxious and worthless (Kusi *et al.*, 2019)^[9]. Because of these issues, they keep living in poverty and are not well-represented in the community.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Dimensions

How child beggary works in Ghana is linked to many traditional norms and beliefs. Every year, African cultures keep up the tradition of begging for those in need. Similarly, supporting alms through religion commonly maintains child begging, Owusu *et al.*, (2017)^[11]. Addressing the problem is made more difficult because it means adapting society’s attitudes along with policy solutions.

For many extremely poor families, child beggars are what keeps the family alive by bringing home most of the money they need. That’s why children find themselves expected to keep begging, in spite of all the dangers waiting for them (UNICEF, 2019)^[15]. Alternative income sources for families appear to lower child beggary, but such efforts only work if implemented well and continuously (Amoah, 2021)^[5].

Policy and Institutional Gaps

Although many policy solutions have been put in place for controlling child begging in other circumstances, migrant child beggars are often still left out. The Children’s Act in Ghana (1998) outlines that, children have the right to learn, healthcare and freedom from being exploited through work. Yet, it is hard for street children to get their rights realized due to inefficient enforcement and small resources (Gyamfi

et al., 2018)^[8].

Because social welfare systems in Ghana lack proper funds and can rarely cope with the workload, they are unable to give enough attention to child beggars. However, large differences between groups are best bridged when public and private organizations team up, yet these collaborations are not very common (Abebe, 2021)^[2].

Theoretical Perspectives

Migrant child beggars’ vulnerability is well understood using the social exclusion theory which holds that individuals are excluded from basic opportunities and a say in their decisions (Silver, 1994)^[14]. The theory shows why child beggars are faced with such precarious lives.

In the same way, according to Amartya Sen’s capability approach, a main aim is to increase opportunities for children to live with dignity. For this reason, taking care of child beggars requires giving them better access to things like education, healthcare and secure living places (Sen, 1999)^[13]. Many studies of child beggars among migrants in traffic-heavy parts of Ghana suggest that several socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors are to blame for their difficulties. While a lot of effort has gone into solving this concern, more organized and joined-up action is necessary to protect these children’s rights and health. More research is needed that focuses on creating interventions for each situation that handle the reasons for child beggary and favor solutions that support children’s welfare.

Methodology

Research Approach

Researchers gathered qualitative data to uncover the weaknesses of migrant child beggars in Ghana’s urban traffic areas. It was picked for this reason: to fully understand both the experiences and problems these children face. Complex social situations involving combined human actions are most suitably studied through qualitative research (Creswell, 2014)^[7].

Research Method

To explore the situation of migrant child beggars deeply, a case design approach was chosen for select urban traffic zones. With case studies, researchers can examine a situation very closely and gain insights into the main causes of vulnerability in the community being studied (Yin, 2018)^[18]. The research included major intersections in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi, since these parts of the city are notably popular places for street begging.

Population for the Study

People covered in the study were migrant child beggars between 8 and 16 years old who begged in urban traffic zones. Among others, social workers, drivers and NGO members active in child welfare were included in the research to hear a range of perspectives.

Sampling Techniques

Participants were chosen for the study by using purposive sampling. The reason these types of samples suited the study was that they made it possible to select—deliberately—participants who could provide detailed, important and diverse details on the issue (Patton, 2015)^[12]. Researchers interviewed 30 child beggars and 10 stakeholders as part of

the study. Visibleness and availability during typical traffic hours were testing criteria for identifying child beggars, while

stakeholders were chosen based on what they do to help with child welfare.

Table 1: Population Distribution for the Study

Category	Target Population	Accessible Population	Sample Size
Migrant Child Beggars	500	150	30
Social Workers	50	20	5
NGO Representatives	30	15	3
Drivers	100	40	2
Total	680	225	40

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data Collection

Both semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation were used to gather data. Semi-structured interviews helped me address participants' experiences in detail and moved the conversation to match the main goals of the study. If a child beggar did not speak the chosen language, interviews were done using an interpreter to ensure ease and full understanding. The team observed children at several traffic zones to see how they interacted with their surroundings and what problems or risks they met there. We used field notes in addition to our interviews to gather information.

Validation and Reliability

We made sure the study was reliable by triangulating the data. The information gained in interviews was confirmed by cross-checking against observations and other data materials (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) [10]. The team also carried out member checking, giving participants a chance to look at and confirm their responses during analysis.

In order to have a reliable study, the researcher logged all steps, including guides for interviews, plans for observations and notes from the field. In addition, colleagues and I participated in peer debriefing to make sure that the meanings we assigned to the results were not influenced by personal bias.

Ethical Considerations

The research project needed self-approval before it could start. Consents were received from all participants and for child beggars, we understood this by getting assent with consent from their guardians or caregivers. Everyone was made aware they would have confidentiality and their identities would remain anonymous. It was made certain by the researcher that participation was by choice and, if participants decided to leave, they faced no consequences.

Results and Discussion

1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Migrant Child Beggars

According to the study, the majority of migrant child beggars were between 5 and 14 years old and males and females appeared in roughly the same numbers. Majority of the children came from Northern Ghana and neighbouring countries Burkina Faso and Niger. Many of these kids said that poverty, parents who didn't pay attention and friends

who lived in cities made them migrate to the city. Almost three-quarters of the children did not get a formal education, consequently having few different ways to make money.



Source: Photographed by researchers, 2025

Fig 1: A young boy maneuvering his way through vehicles to beg for money at a busy traffic intersection in Kumasi.

2. Risks Faced by Child Beggars in Traffic Zones

Youngsters in crowded streets were in danger from both injury and mental stress. The main research method found cases where children only narrowly escaped being hit by cars. Spending many hours near trucks could harm people's health, as some children had trouble breathing. People sometimes yelled nasty remarks at them and some would resort to pushing or physically harming them. Thanks to those motorists who challenge road rules by driving in the middle lane while begging, some of these children recount accidents during their days of alms-begging.

3. Economic Exploitation and Dependency

The study showed that children usually had little control over the income they received. Most of them had handlers take a big chunk of their earnings. A number of the children explained that if they didn't work, their handlers would threaten to use violence against them.

4. Impact on Psychological and Social Well-Being

The interviews found that being rejected so often and experiencing the disapproval of begging made people feel unimportant. Several children told us they did not have friends and felt alone. A handful continued to see hope ahead and told us they were strong enough to cope with what was happening.



Source: Photographed by researchers, 2025

Fig 2: A group of young child beggars sitting on a curb after a long day of begging, illustrating social isolation

5. Stakeholders' Perspectives on Interventions

Social workers and NGO representatives explained that facing child beggary is hindered by inadequate financial support, lack of teamwork and attitudes that accept giving to beggars. Many drivers complained about sharing the roads with children, but they also saw that the system created those conditions for them.

6. Cultural Perceptions of Begging

Societal views about child begging were often shaped by cultural and religious ideas, the study showed. Many persons, notably those who fed the beggars, were persuaded that offering help to child beggars was a moral duty. Because of this belief, those who handled children often profited from their crimes.



Source: Photographed by researchers, 2025

Fig 3: A driver handing money to a child beggar, illustrating cultural attitudes toward almsgiving in Ghana

7. Children's Aspirations and Hopes

Most of these children still want a better future for themselves. A lot of adult learners wanted to try their hand at teaching, becoming doctors or entering business careers. Even so, they believed the goals were unreachable because they did not have much education or financial help.

8. Gendered Experiences in Begging

Researchers found that the two genders have different experiences. Begging made them suffering harassment and abuse; however, they rarely spoke about it because of fear and

negative stigma. Peer or handler aggression against boys often involved a hard knock on the head. It became clear from these findings that different interventions are needed for women and men.

9. Impact of COVID-19 on Begging Activities

The study found that the pandemic made things worse for child beggars. The lockdown, less income and fewer movements outside made more children turn to begging on streets or highways. Even so, taxi companies saw a lower income during the time when many places were locked down and people stayed at home.

10. Limited Access to Social Services

Ghana has programs to support children, but very few of the children in the study knew about them or could get help. A lot of the trouble came from bureaucracy and the fact that sufficient outreach was not provided for migrants.

Discussion

1. Migration and Urban Poverty Dynamics

Our research shows what other studies have found: child migration occurs more in urban areas with wide financial and social divisions (Adepoju, 2010) [3]. Many people from the Northern area and adjoining countries travel here because there are fewer chances and resources where they come from. Any push to curb migration from rural to urban areas should start with better education and medical services as well as improvements to earning opportunities in these communities.

2. Risks in Traffic Zones

The ongoing risk to child beggars encourages us to find and adopt strong protective measures. The rising levels of road pollution and increased accidents support the WHO's finding that street-level air pollution can harm people living in these cities. A good urban plan includes clear zones for people walking and makes sure traffic does not include child beggars, all enforced firmly and effectively.

3. Economic Exploitation and Power Dynamics

Evidence of adults using child beggars indicates that the informal economy is unequal. The research demonstrates that children are kept in exploitation because of the threats and pressure they receive. To help, intervention efforts should

both stop handlers and give children a secure way to escape these harmful networks.

4. Psychological and Social Impacts

The mental effects seen in child beggars are consistent with what was found in many earlier studies on street children. Counselling and programs where the kids support each other help children make positive changes and feel like they belong to a group.

5. Stakeholders' Roles and Policy Gaps

By talking with stakeholders, we discover that there are important issues with how policies are carried out and with involvement among parties. Scattered actions by governmental and non-governmental organizations weaken the outcomes of ongoing efforts. UNICEF (2019) ^[15] recommends that several sectors cooperate to handle the problems of child begging. When stakeholders work together, they should also offer community educational sessions to help change the perspective of society supporting begging.

6. Cultural Beliefs and the Normalization of Begging

The belief that giving money to beggars is charitable keeps child begging alive. This discovery matches the research of Agbenyega and Deku (2020) ^[4] that recognized that there can be conflicts between cultural practices and efforts to protect children. Officers should address cultural needs while also teaching about the danger's children may experience.

7. Aspirations and Structural Barriers

Their vision for a better future, along with their effort to learn, is admirable, but no education and very few resources lock them into poverty. In his 1999 paper, Sen argued that what really matter for human development are capabilities and opportunities. For empowerment to work, these children must be given equal opportunities for gaining knowledge and skills.

8. Gender-Based Vulnerabilities

Child beggars face various challenges because their vulnerability involves gender. Evidence that girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse and boys may be harmed through aggression requires gender sensitivity in interventions. The results reflect the recommendations made by Anyidoho *et al.* (2019) ^[6] about helping to reduce gender differences for these children.

9. Impact of COVID-19

The rise in child begging during COVID-19 is a result of the large economic barriers faced by those on the margins. According to UNICEF's (2021) ^[16] study, the pandemic had a worse influence on vulnerable children than on other groups. Help for these groups should be a top priority in plans to manage the lasting outcomes of the pandemic.

10. Barriers to Social Services

The fact that many Ghanaian children do not receive help from social welfare schemes means there are holes in the child protection system. Mobile outreach units, combined with a decentralized system, can improve the way services are delivered. Abebe (2020) ^[1] supports these results by discussing the value of using strategies designed for each country in Africa to protect children.

Conclusion

Research has clarified that urban traffic zones in Ghana expose migrant child beggars to various types of risk. Many of these kids are overlooked and at high risk of harm, both physically, mentally and in their dealings with people every day. This call for urgent efforts that handle child begging both on a daily and fundamental level.

It was found that migrating from rural to urban areas, plus regional imbalances, are driving the growth in urban populations. Having few opportunities, little education and not enough money pushes families and children to migrate and frequently leaves them at risk for exploitation. As a result, supporting rudimentary access to education, healthcare and decent jobs should be at the heart of rural development in low-resource regions. A way to reduce children begging on the streets is to reduce the barriers that lead to such actions.

Studies have documented that, cities put young children at risk of accidents, harassment and exposure to poor air quality. People's misguided views often make the risks greater, as they encourage the behaviour by giving to street kids. Although animals are treated kindly through these practices, they actually keep it, mistreatment. Social campaigns aimed at both educating and persuading people to help with donations to welfare, rather than support begging, may help curb child begging.

What is most concerning is how often these workers use children which clearly highlights a weakness in safeguarding those who need the most protection? It is hard for many children to get rid of poverty and abuse without help. Increasing laws for child protection, improving enforcement and making sure rescued children have a safe environment play key roles in fighting this type of exploitation. Together, government organizations, non-governmental groups and leaders from communities are crucial to ensuring these actions are effective.

Begging has a strong psychological impact on kids. Being separated from family and peers, tossed aside and losing self-esteem together with the common social stigma make their mental health worsen and limit their future options. Counselling, being part of a peer support group and moving forward in the community are important for dealing with these mental effects. Noticing what these children aspire to, we should strengthen their skills and offer education, so that poverty and marginalization do not continue.

Ghana's social welfare system still has areas where support for migrant and street children is weak, the study found. It is hard for many programs to achieve good results because of paperwork, budget shortage and too little effort at outreach. If we focus on mobile outreach units and building networks of support at the local level, it becomes easier for everyone to use important services. Working together, policymakers, social workers and community organizations can give children a better and more lasting solution to child begging. In short, to address these issues, we should use many approaches, include everyone and include both quick actions and long-term reforms. By solving the problems, reducing risks and helping children with education, Ghana can make its society more just so no child must cope alone in traffic areas. Ensuring every child grows up in safety and has an Education calls for the support and constant dedication of everyone from the community.

Recommendations

A solution to protect migrant child beggars working near Ghana's busy traffic areas must come from many directions. The top priority is to put policy and law into action. All laws for protecting children such as the Children's Act (1998), should be strengthened by authorities to secure the rights of the country's children. Amendments must address the particular problems faced by migrant and street children. Strict rules are required to ban child begging on roads within the city, as well penalties for adults who exploit those kids in this way. A specialist team needs to be formed to check compliance, rescue children hurt by the industry and protect them.

When poverty and unequal regions are tackled, the number of migrant and begging children should also decrease. Adding educational opportunities and meals to communities in remote areas encourages children to go to and keep, attending school which reduces the chance of them moving to cities. Supporting people in vocational classes, microfinance and agriculture will provide them financial help, so less children are driven to join begging.

Changing people's views about child beggars is best helped by public information campaigns. Across the country, extra education should highlight the benefits of eliminating child begging and give tips on other, smarter ways to help. Together with cultural and religious officials, it is important to find ways to guide people towards alternatives like helping reliable welfare groups which may to slow down the habit of telling children to beg.

Increasing the range of social welfare programs is also very important. Setting up safe places for rescued children where they can find food, health care, counselling and education will quickly protect them and meet their needs. Outreach teams working with mobile units should go into urban traffic areas to locate and help vulnerable children. Well-planned price of reintegration programs should focus on both allowing children to see their families again and providing foster care if this is not achievable.

By bringing together government officials, non-governmental groups and community leaders, it becomes easier to implement a response that lasts. Through multi-sectoral cooperation, interventions can benefit from a wide range of skills, networks and the supplies needed. To ensure all children are included, these recommendations focus on tackling both social, economy and systemic problems that encourage child begging.

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How to Cite This Article

Daitey W, Owusu PKB, Bonnah N. Traffic dilemmas: Understanding the vulnerability of migrant child beggars in Ghana's urban traffic zones. *Int J Soc Sci Except Res*. 2025;4(6):35-40.

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