

Street Begging in Accra: Multidimensional Security Implications

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ABSTRACT

Street begging in Accra has increasingly emerged as both a manifestation of socio-economic vulnerability and a growing urban security concern. The study examines the patterns, drivers, and security implications of street begging in Accra between 2010 and 2025, situating the practice within the broader contexts of urban governance, human security, and public order. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates field observations, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and documentary analysis. The findings reveal that street begging in Accra is geographically concentrated in high-traffic commercial areas, transport hubs, and major intersections, with intensity closely aligned to daily mobility patterns. The practice involves a heterogeneous population, including children, persons with disabilities, migrants, and unemployed adults, and in some cases operates within organised and exploitative networks. While begging functions as a survival strategy for vulnerable groups, the practice simultaneously generates multidimensional security risks, including traffic hazards, harassment, petty crime, and declining public confidence in urban governance. Drawing on Urban Disorder Theory and the Human Security framework, the study demonstrates that the visibility of begging contributes to perceptions of disorder and weak state control, while also reflecting deeper structural inequalities and gaps in social protection. Despite existing legal provisions, including the Beggars and Destitutes Decree, 1969 (NLCD 392) and the Children's Act, 1998, enforcement remains inconsistent and largely ineffective, resulting in cyclical patterns of displacement and re-emergence. The study concludes that street begging in Accra represents a multidimensional urban security challenge that cannot be addressed through enforcement alone. The study recommends integrated policy responses that combine regulatory measures with sustained social protection, targeted action against organised exploitation, and inclusive urban governance strategies. The research contributes to emerging scholarship on urban security in Africa by reframing street begging as both a governance and security issue rather than solely a humanitarian concern.

Keywords: Street begging, Urban security, Human security, Public safety, Urban disorder

INTRODUCTION

Urban life in Ghana, particularly in Accra, has long been characterised by both dynamism and vulnerability. On one hand, Accra represents a hub of economic opportunity, cultural vibrancy, and political centrality. On the other hand, the city grapples with persistent challenges of poverty, unemployment, migration, and fragile urban governance. Among the most visible manifestations of the challenges is the phenomenon of street begging. While begging is often framed as a humanitarian or socio-economic issue, the growing prevalence of the practice in Accra raises concerns about urban security, governance, and social cohesion. The act of begging in public spaces such as markets, and traffic intersections, has become a defining feature of the city's landscape, reflecting deeper structural vulnerabilities while simultaneously generating new forms of insecurity (Agyemang et al., 2024; Ahinsah-Wobil, 2022).

The past decade has witnessed a notable increase in begging across Accra, driven by rural-urban migration, economic hardship, and the influx of vulnerable populations, including children, persons with disabilities, and migrants from neighbouring countries (Marshall, 2024; Tetteh, 2025). The trend has challenged municipal authorities, law enforcement agencies, and social welfare institutions, exposing tensions between humanitarian imperatives and security concerns. Begging is not merely a matter of poverty alleviation; the practice intersects with issues of public safety, organised exploitation, and urban governance. Reports of child trafficking, forced

begging, and harassment of pedestrians highlight the security dimensions of the practice (UNICEF, 2025; Kyprianides & Bradford, 2024). Furthermore, the visibility of beggars in commercial and tourist areas raises concerns about the city's image and economic prospects (Agyemang et al., 2024; Kakale, 2025; Jelili, 2013). The phenomenon, therefore, represents not only a social problem but also a security challenge that demands scholarly attention.

The central thesis of the study is that street begging in Accra reflects both structural insecurity and emergent urban security risks. Begging exposes the limitations of existing social protection systems and reveals the strains within urban governance frameworks. While state authorities have sought to regulate begging through decrees and enforcement measures (Accra Metropolitan Assembly, 2018), such approaches often clash with humanitarian concerns and fail to address the root causes of vulnerability. At the same time, the persistence of begging underscores broader tensions between informal survival strategies and formal governance structures. The study contributes to the literature on urban security by situating begging within the wider discourse on human security, urban disorder, and institutional resilience. Additionally, the study offers insights into how informal practices reshape the governance of public space in Ghana.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past decade, Accra has experienced increasing challenges in managing the visibility and security implications of street begging. Despite the existence of state regulations and social welfare interventions, the phenomenon has persisted and, in some instances, expanded (Ghana Statistical Service, 2025; UNICEF, 2025). The persistence reflects a complex and evolving urban reality shaped by rapid urbanisation, socio-economic disparities, and migration dynamics. The continued presence of street begging in major commercial and transport hubs raises critical concerns about public safety, urban order, and the effectiveness of governance mechanisms.

The persistence of street begging reveals a dual challenge. First, institutional limitations have constrained the capacity of state authorities to deliver effective social protection and enforce urban regulations. Existing measures, including policing, metropolitan bye-laws, and intermittent welfare interventions, have not adequately addressed the structural drivers of begging, such as poverty, unemployment, disability, and rural–urban migration (Agyemang et al., 2024; Kakale, 2025; Jelili, 2013). Second, emerging dynamics such as organised begging networks and the exploitation of vulnerable groups have introduced new dimensions of insecurity within the urban space (Semprebon et al., 2021). The developments not only intensify public safety risks but also threaten social cohesion and undermine public confidence in governance institutions. Furthermore, the situation highlights tensions between social welfare obligations and law enforcement responsibilities, as well as the challenges of balancing compassion with the need to maintain public order. Consequently, street begging is no longer solely a socio-economic concern but also a significant urban security issue with implications for governance, development, and city management.

Although existing studies have examined poverty, migration, and informal economic activities in Ghana, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the security dimensions of street begging and their implications for urban governance. In particular, there is a notable gap in understanding how begging intersects with public safety, organised crime, and human security, as well as the effectiveness of current policy responses. Moreover, insufficient research has explored comprehensive and sustainable strategies for mitigating the phenomenon within rapidly urbanising contexts.

In response to the gaps, the study seeks to examine the security implications of street begging in Accra. The study analyses the patterns, drivers, and impacts of begging, with particular emphasis on the links to public safety, organised activity, and human security concerns. The study further situates the dynamics within broader historical and socio-economic contexts to provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. While acknowledging the existence of begging in other Ghanaian cities, the study does not undertake a detailed comparative analysis beyond Accra. Instead, the study situates the experience of the city within the broader discourse on urban security in Africa, highlighting the challenges associated with managing informal practices in rapidly urbanising environments.

Historical Context

Street begging has long been recognised as a global urban phenomenon, often linked to poverty, migration, and social exclusion. Semprebon et al. (2021) and Agyeman et al. (2024) posit that in many African cities, begging

has become a visible feature of public spaces, reflecting both structural vulnerabilities and governance challenges. Scholars have traditionally examined begging through humanitarian and socio-economic lenses, focusing on poverty alleviation, social welfare, and the rights of vulnerable populations. However, the linkage between begging and urban security governance remains comparatively underexplored, particularly in the Ghanaian context.

Historically, begging in Ghana has been shaped by multiple factors, including rural-urban migration, economic hardship, and the presence of vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and children. The Ghana Statistical Service (2025) highlights that rising urban poverty and unemployment have contributed to the persistence of informal survival strategies, including begging. Migration flows from northern Ghana and neighbouring countries have also played a role, as Accra attracts individuals seeking economic opportunities but lacking formal training (Agyemang et al., 2024; Kakale, 2025; Jelili, 2013). Begging thus reflects broader socio-economic dynamics, including inequality and weak social protection systems.

Internationally, studies on begging have emphasised the dual character as both a humanitarian issue and a potential security concern. Research in cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, and Dakar has documented how begging is linked to organised crime, trafficking, and urban disorder (UNICEF, 2025). The findings resonate with emerging evidence from Accra, where reports of child exploitation and organised begging networks suggest that the practice is not merely spontaneous but sometimes coordinated for profit (Ahinsah-Wobil, 2022; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2018). Such dynamics complicate the traditional framing of begging as a purely humanitarian issue, underscoring the implications for public safety and governance.

Policy responses in Ghana have historically oscillated between welfare-oriented interventions and regulatory enforcement. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly introduced bye-laws aimed at curbing begging in public spaces, while social welfare programmes sought to provide support to vulnerable populations (Donkor, 2020). However, the measures have often been fragmented and limited in scope, failing to address the structural drivers of begging or the security dimensions. Scholars argue that the persistence of begging reflects the inadequacy of existing interventions and the need for more integrated approaches that balance humanitarian concerns with urban security imperatives (Agyemang et al., 2024; Kakale, 2025; Jelili, 2013; Kyprianides & Bradford, 2024).

In general, the literature reveals that begging in Accra is both a symptom of structural insecurity and a source of emergent urban security risks. While socio-economic studies provide valuable insights into the drivers of begging, there remains a significant gap in understanding the implications for urban security. The study seeks to address the gap by situating begging within the broader discourse on human security and urban disorder, thereby contributing to scholarly debates on informal practices and urban security in Africa. Against this backdrop, a robust theoretical and conceptual framework is required to systematically analyse how street begging translates from a socio-economic condition into a multidimensional urban security concern.

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

Understanding the security implications of street begging in Accra requires both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Begging is not only a socio-economic phenomenon but also a practice that is interwoven with urban security and social cohesion (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2018). Analysing the issue through established security and urban studies frameworks offers insight into why begging persists, how begging generates insecurity, and what institutional responses have emerged. The following sections outline key theoretical and conceptual approaches that inform the study.

Security Contagion Theory posits that insecurity in one domain or group can spread to others, creating ripple effects across society (Blumer, 1939; Le Bon, 1982). Applied to street begging, the theory suggests that the vulnerabilities of beggars such as poverty, homelessness, exploitation, can spill over into broader urban insecurity. For instance, organised begging networks and child trafficking not only endanger beggars themselves but also contribute to public safety concerns, harassment, and petty crime. The visibility of begging in commercial and tourist areas can further erode perceptions of safety, undermining trust in governance institutions. Security Contagion Theory thus highlights how localised vulnerabilities can escalate into systemic urban security challenges.

Human Security Framework emphasises the protection of individuals from threats to their survival, livelihood, and dignity (UNDP, 1994). In the context of begging, the framework focuses attention on the vulnerabilities of beggars themselves. Beggars face risks of exploitation, abuse, poor health, and social exclusion. At the same time, the presence of beggars in public spaces raises concerns for the wider community, including traffic safety, harassment, and sanitation. Human security provides a lens for balancing humanitarian imperatives with security concerns, underscoring the need for policies that protect both vulnerable populations and the broader public.

Urban Disorder Theory examines how visible signs of disorder, such as begging, street vending, or homelessness, can undermine perceptions of safety and contribute to crime (Kelling & Coles, 1996). In Accra, begging is often concentrated in transport hubs, markets, and busy intersections, where such visibility reinforces perceptions of urban disorder. Such perceptions can weaken public confidence in municipal governance and contribute to a cycle of insecurity, where disorder attracts further informal practices and erodes formal regulation. Urban Disorder Theory thus situates begging within the broader dynamics of urban governance, highlighting how informal practices challenge the regulation of public space.

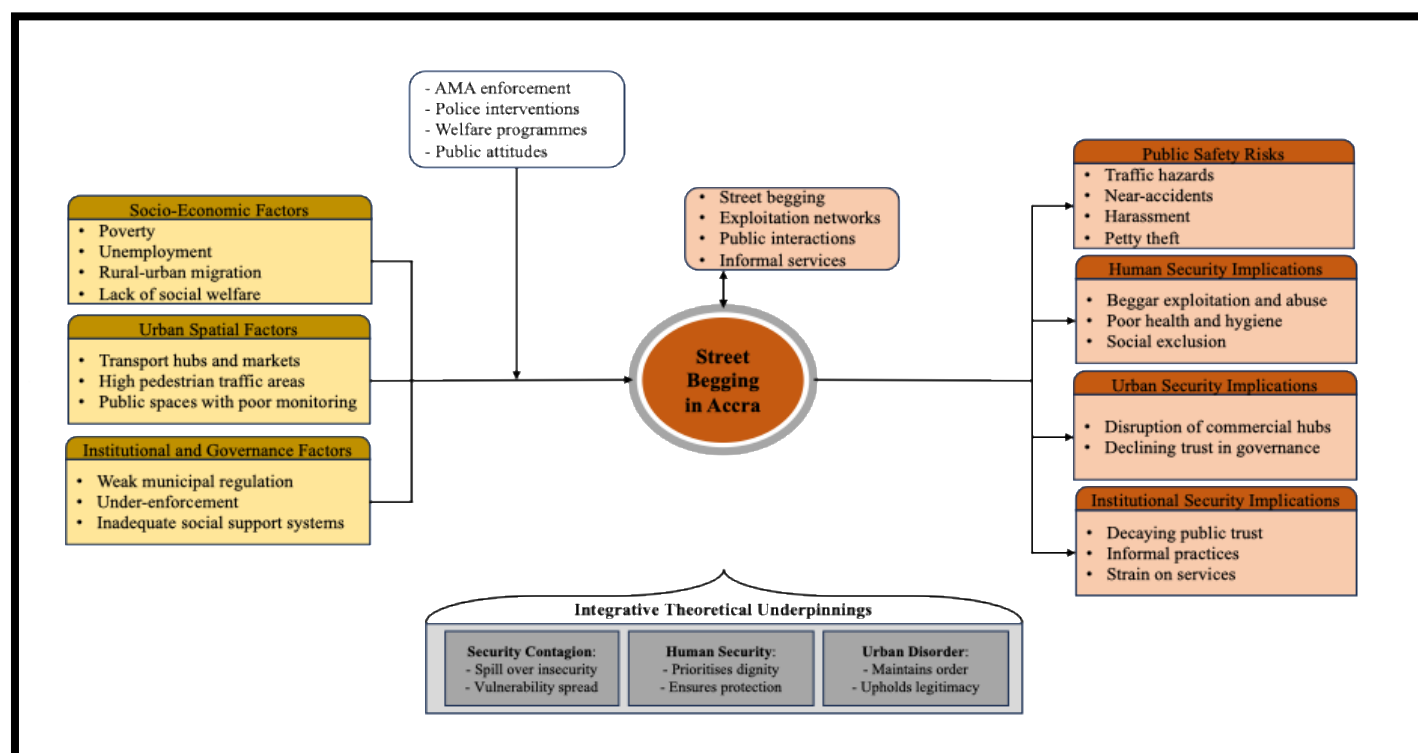
Integrative Theoretical Approach

No single theory fully captures the complexity of begging in Accra. The study therefore adopts an integrative theoretical approach. Security Contagion Theory explains how vulnerabilities associated with begging spill over into broader urban insecurity. Human Security highlights the risks faced by beggars themselves and the need for inclusive protection. Urban Disorder Theory situates begging within the governance of public space, emphasising the impact on perceptions of safety and institutional legitimacy. Collectively, the theories provide a multidimensional lens for understanding the security implications of begging and for evaluating policy responses that balance enforcement with social welfare. Building on the theoretical insights, the conceptual framework outlines how key variables interact to shape the security dimensions of street begging.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework illustrating the complex ecosystem of street begging in Accra. The framework maps the trajectory from underlying causal factors to the resulting security and social implications, whilst highlighting the institutional interventions that moderate the dynamics. The model integrates socio-economic, spatial, and governance variables to provide a holistic view of urban vulnerability and public order.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Street Begging Drivers and Security Implications in Accra



Source: Author's Construct (2026)

Figure 1 conceptualises street begging in Accra as the outcome of interacting socio-economic pressures, spatial dynamics, and governance conditions that generate layered security consequences. The framework begins with three sets of independent variables. Socio-economic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, rural-urban migration, and weak welfare systems, cause economic insecurity that encourages informal survival strategies. Such conditions are reinforced by spatial conditions, including concentration around transport hubs, markets, and poorly monitored public spaces that offer visibility and limited regulation. Institutional and governance weaknesses, under-enforcement of bye-laws, weak municipal capacity, and inadequate social protection, further entrench the practice by constraining deterrence and rehabilitation. The factors are shaped by key moderating variables, including AMA enforcement, police interventions, welfare programmes, and public attitudes, which influence the intensity, organisation, and visibility of street begging, as well as the effectiveness of control and support measures.

Street begging is positioned as the intervening phenomenon through which these forces operate, expressed in routine street interactions, informal services, exploitation networks, and sustained presence in commercial and transit areas. The model then identifies four interconnected categories of dependent variables: public safety risks (traffic hazards, harassment, petty theft); human security concerns (exploitation, health risks, social exclusion); urban security effects (disruption of commercial hubs and declining confidence in city management); and institutional pressures (erosion of trust, growth of informality, and strain on municipal services). Underlying the framework are three theoretical lenses that guide interpretation: security contagion theory (spillovers of disorder), the human security approach (dignity, protection, and welfare), and urban disorder perspectives (perceptions of authority and legitimacy). Generally, the model presents street begging as a multidimensional urban phenomenon shaped by structural drivers and producing cascading security effects across public, human, urban, and institutional domains.

Operationalisation of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 was operationalised by translating each category of variables into observable indicators and empirical measures drawn from multiple data sources. Socio-economic drivers were measured using indicators such as employment status, income levels, migration history, education, and access to social welfare, based on interviews with beggars, and municipal officials. Locational factors were operationalised using the geographic concentration of begging activities around transport terminals, markets, major intersections, and commercial corridors, identified through systematic field observation and mapping of hotspots. Institutional and governance variables were measured through assessments of bye-laws enforcement frequency, availability of social intervention programmes, municipal capacity, and reported interactions between authorities and beggars. The indicators were derived from policy documents and semi-structured interviews with city officials, law-enforcement personnel, and social welfare agencies. Street begging, as the intervening phenomenon, was operationalised through counts of beggars at selected sites, typologies of activities, duration of presence, and forms of interaction with the public, recorded via structured observation protocols and short surveys. Evidence of exploitation networks or organised facilitation was examined qualitatively through interview narratives and case reports.

The dependent variables, security implications, were measured across four domains. Public safety risks were assessed using traffic incident reports, police records, and perception surveys of motorists and pedestrians. Human security outcomes were captured through self-reported experiences of abuse, health conditions, access to shelter, and social exclusion. Urban security effects were examined through reports of commercial disruption, and resident perceptions of order and governance. Institutional pressures were analysed through trends in service demand, budgetary constrain, complaints to municipal authorities, and indicators of public trust drawn from surveys and media reports.

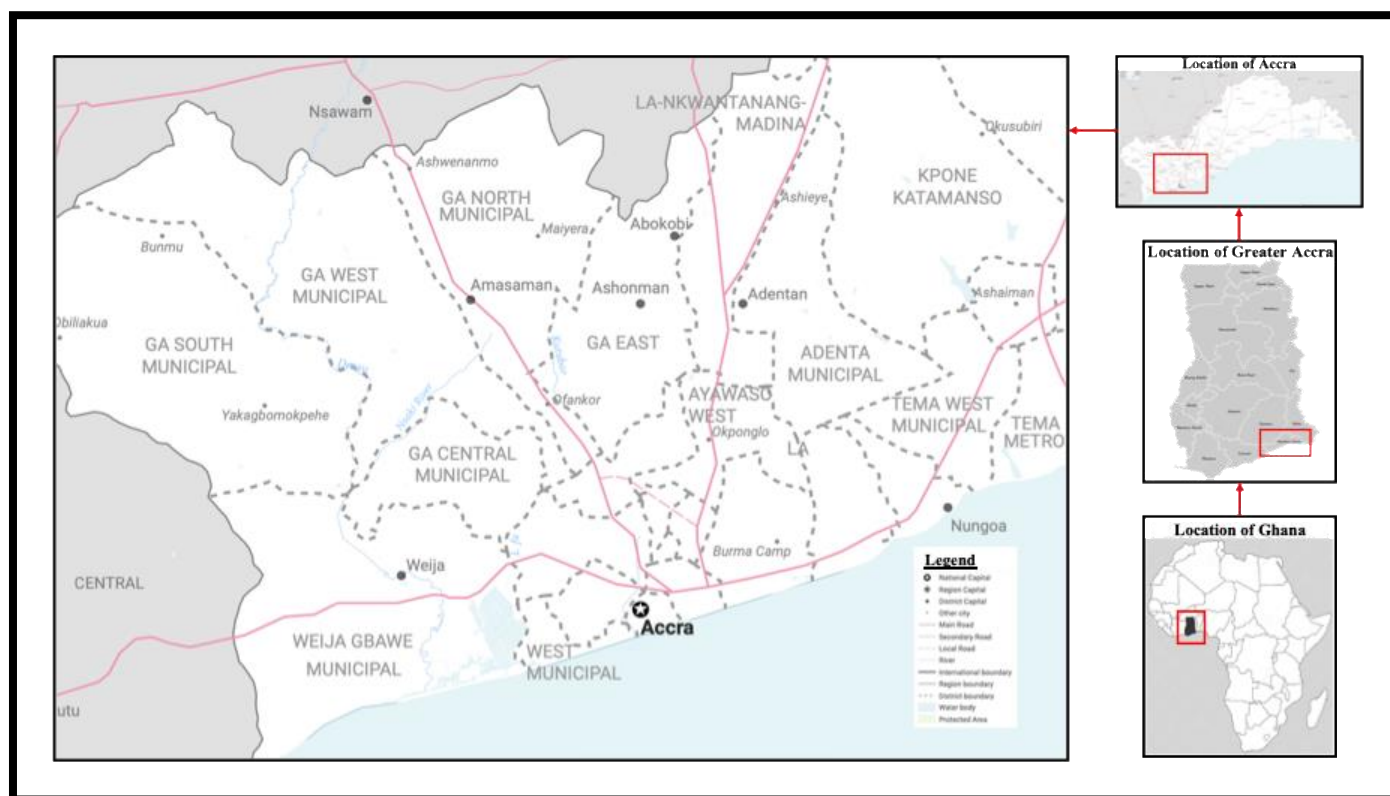
Finally, the theoretical lenses guiding the framework informed coding and analysis rather than serving as variables themselves. Security contagion theory shaped locational and network analysis of spill over effects; the human security approach guided the selection of welfare-oriented indicators; and urban disorder perspectives structured interpretation of perceptions of authority and public order.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods design to examine the security implications of street begging in Accra between 2010 and 2025. A case-study approach was adopted given Accra’s prominence as Ghana’s capital and the visibility of begging in public spaces. The design integrated primary field data, collected through interviews and systematic observation, with documentary analysis, thereby combining lived experiences with institutional perspectives. Data were drawn from three principal sources. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders, including street beggars (adults and youths), market traders and shop owners, motorists, commuters, traffic police and municipal guards, and social welfare officers. Second, systematic observations were undertaken at major intersections, markets such as Makola, Circle, and Kaneshie, lorry stations, and traffic-light zones. Observations documented the number of beggars present, peak periods of activity, interactions with motorists and commuters, incidents of conflict or harassment, enforcement activity by police or municipal guards, and near-accidents associated with roadside begging. Third, documentary sources were analysed, including police records on traffic incidents and public safety, AMA enforcement reports, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection documents on child protection and poverty alleviation, as well as peer-reviewed academic studies and reputable media coverage.

Interpretation was guided by an integrative theoretical framework. Security Contagion Theory informed assessment of how vulnerabilities associated with street begging spilled over into wider urban insecurity. Human Security perspectives structured analysis of risks faced by beggars themselves, including exploitation, abuse, and social exclusion. Urban Disorder Theory shaped evaluation of how visible street-level practices contributed to perceptions of insecurity and eroded confidence in municipal governance. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentary sources enhanced analytical robustness and internal validity. Figure 2 shows the study area. The Figure illustrates the geographic location of Accra within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, as well as the position within the wider West African and African context. The map highlights key administrative boundaries and provides spatial orientation for understanding the study area in relation to national and continental frameworks

Figure 2: Study Area Map Showing Accra in National and Continental Context



Source: Author’s compilation. Base map adapted from OCHA (2024); overlays adapted from Columbia Mailman School of Public Health (2026), and Dreamstime (2026).

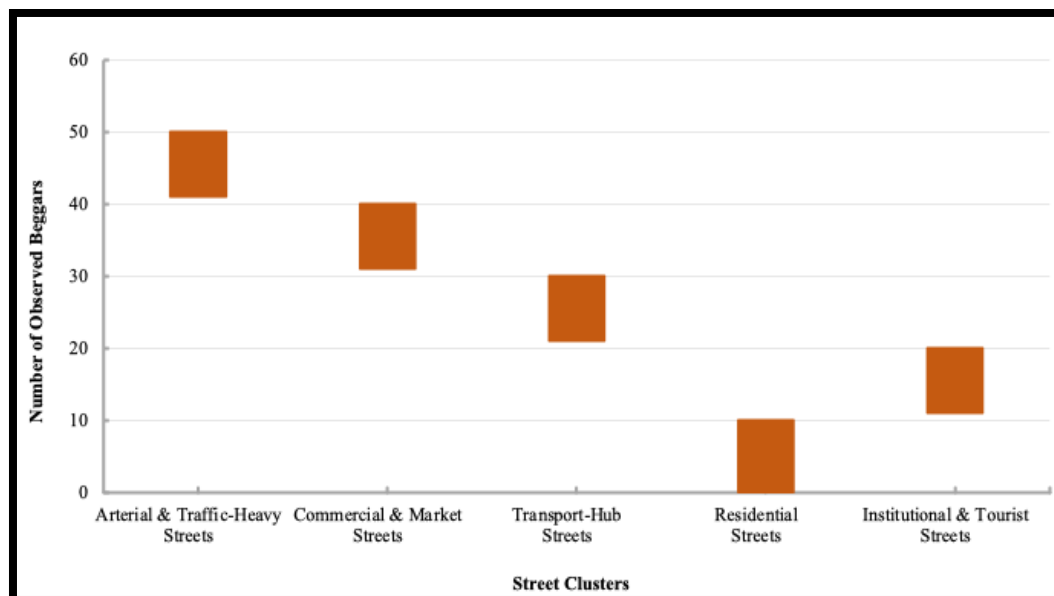
Patterns and Dynamics of Begging in Accra

Street begging in Accra manifests as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon shaped by socio-economic vulnerabilities, migration flows, and weak urban governance. Field observations and interviews reveal that begging is concentrated in specific urban spaces, involves diverse demographic groups, and is increasingly linked to organised networks.

Locations and Visibility

Street begging in Accra exhibits marked variation across five street clusters, closely linked to traffic flow, pedestrian density, and economic activity. Arterial and traffic-heavy streets show very high and persistent visibility (41–50 beggars), particularly at major streets and intersections such as Osu Oxford Street, Ring Road Central, and Ring Road East, where beggars target stationary vehicles. Commercial and market streets, especially around Makola Market, record high visibility (31–40 beggars) driven by pedestrian solicitation. Transport-hub streets demonstrate moderate presence (21–30 beggars), while institutional and tourist streets show low visibility (11–20 beggars), often framed around charitable appeals. Residential streets exhibit minimal or rare presence (0–10 beggars). The pattern suggests that begging activity is opportunity-driven and geographically concentrated rather than randomly distributed, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Visibility Levels of Street Begging Across Street Clusters



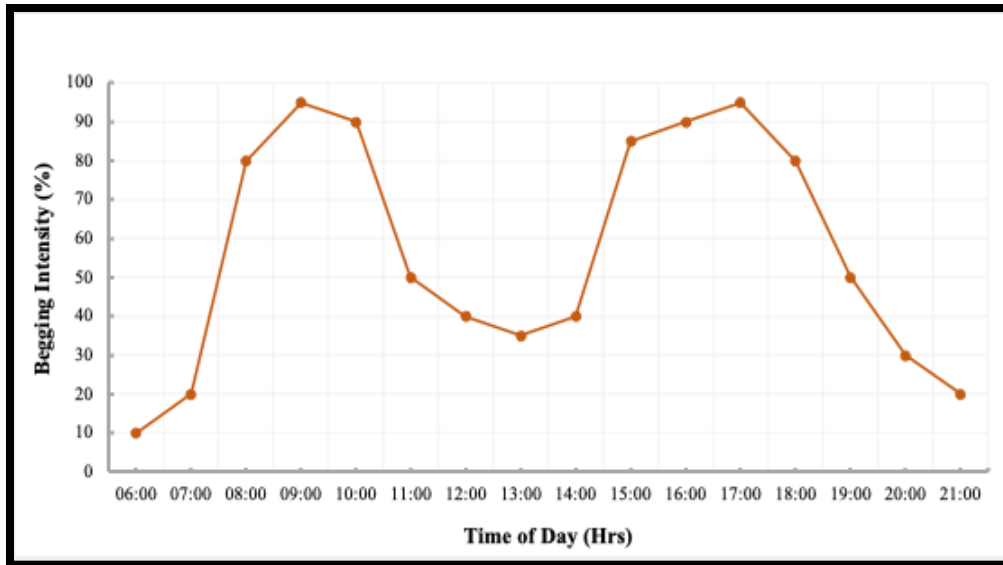
Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Begging Intensity by Time of Day

Begging intensity in Accra demonstrates a clear temporal pattern aligned with daily mobility cycles. As shown in Figure 4, activity is lowest in the early morning hours (06:00–07:00), with intensity levels below 20%, reflecting limited traffic and pedestrian flow. A sharp increase occurs between 08:00 and 10:00, corresponding with the morning rush period, where intensity peaks between 90–95%. Activity declines steadily from late morning into early afternoon (11:00–14:00), reaching moderate levels (35–50%) as commuter flow stabilises and disperses. A second surge is observed from 15:00 to 18:00, coinciding with the evening rush hour, with intensity again reaching very high levels (85–95%). After 19:00, visibility drops progressively, falling to low levels (20–30%) by 20:00–21:00. Generally, the pattern reveals a bimodal distribution, with peak begging activity concentrated during morning and evening congestion periods. Such a pattern reinforces the opportunity-driven nature of street begging, indicating that intensity closely tracks commuter density and vehicular traffic cycles rather than remaining constant throughout the day. The temporal strategy is further illustrated by respondents’ experiences. For instance, a 37-year-old mother with three children explained why she selects specific periods to beg:

“As you can see, there are a lot of people moving around during these times, so it is easier to get help. In the morning and evening, the cars stop more often because of traffic, and that gives me time to go from one vehicle to another. People are also in a hurry, so some just give something small and move on. If I stay out at the wrong time, I can spend many hours and still not get enough to buy food...”

Figure 4: Hourly Distribution of Begging Intensity

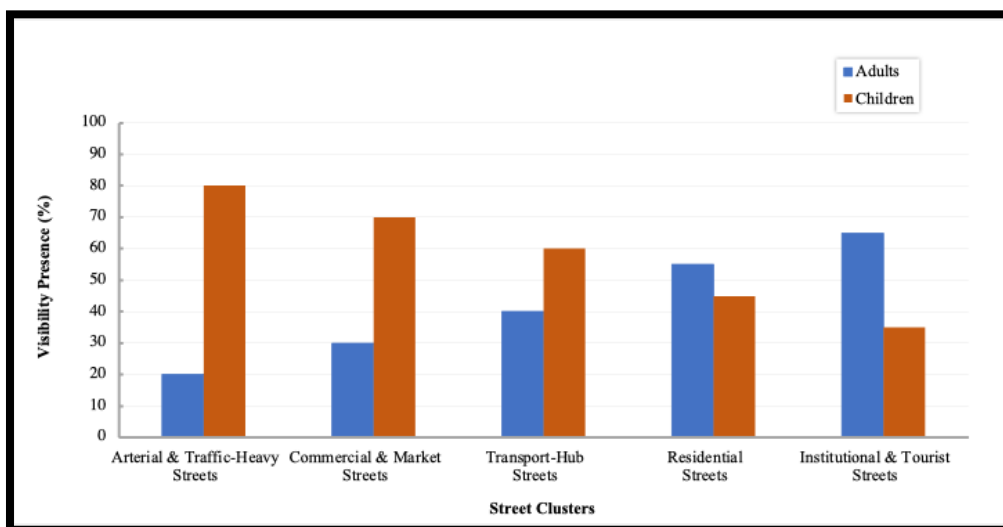


Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Demographics of Beggars

Figure 5 depicts clear age-based differences in begging locations. Children are most visible on arterial (80%), commercial (70%), and transport hub streets (60%) where traffic is high, but child presence declines in residential (45%) and institutional areas (35%). In contrast, adults are less visible on busy streets but increase in residential (55%) and institutional or tourist areas (65%). The pattern suggests differentiated spatial strategies shaped by both opportunity and risk. Children tend to occupy high-traffic zones where rapid interactions and visibility increase the likelihood of receiving alms, while adults may prefer relatively less congested spaces where interactions are more prolonged and less hazardous. The distribution also reflects varying levels of mobility, supervision, and perceived vulnerability, indicating that location choices are not random but strategically aligned with age-specific capacities, safety considerations, and expected returns.

Figure 5: Comparative Visibility of Adult and Child Beggars by Street Type



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Field observations reinforce the above trends. As shown in Figure 6, children were actively engaged in begging along the Oluṣẹgun Ọbasanjọ Highway, occupying busy traffic zones and interacting with motorists. The image illustrates the high-risk environments in which child beggars operate and complements the quantitative patterns observed in Figure 5.

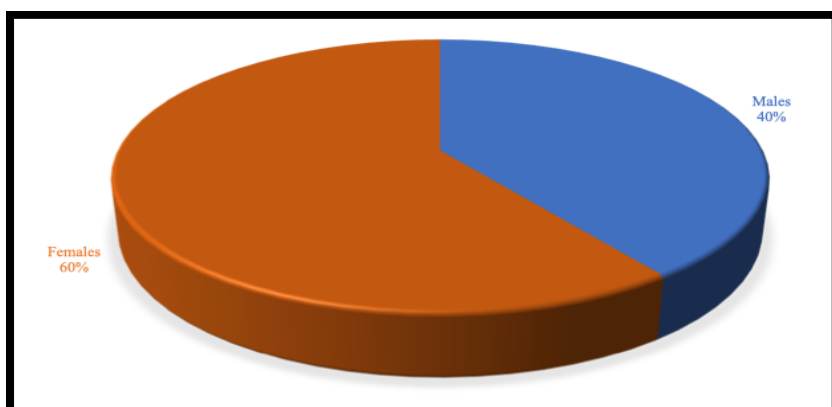
Figure 6: Children Begging Along the Oluṣẹgun Ọbasanjọ Highway (5.5951° N, 0.1888° W)



Source: Author’s fieldwork (2026)

Figure 7 indicates that females constitute the majority of street beggars (60%), compared to males (40%), pointing to a clear gender imbalance in participation. The higher representation of women reflects deeper socio-economic vulnerabilities, including limited access to stable employment, lower income-earning opportunities, and disproportionate caregiving responsibilities within households. Such conditions often compel women to adopt coping strategies that rely on public sympathy, including begging with children or positioning themselves in high-visibility locations. The pattern further underscores the gendered character of street begging, where social norms and economic pressures shape both participation and visibility. Women are more likely to be perceived as deserving of assistance, which may increase the likelihood of receiving alms and reinforce continued engagement in begging as a livelihood strategy. In contrast, the lower proportion of males may be linked to greater participation in alternative informal activities such as head portering, street vending, or casual labour, as well as higher mobility in seeking income opportunities. The observed imbalance reflects broader structural inequalities, particularly gender disparities in access to education, employment, and social protection systems. Women, especially those with dependent children, face compounded vulnerabilities that limit exit options from street-based survival strategies. In general, the trend highlights the importance of designing gender-sensitive policy interventions that address the specific needs, risks, and constraints faced by women engaged in street begging.

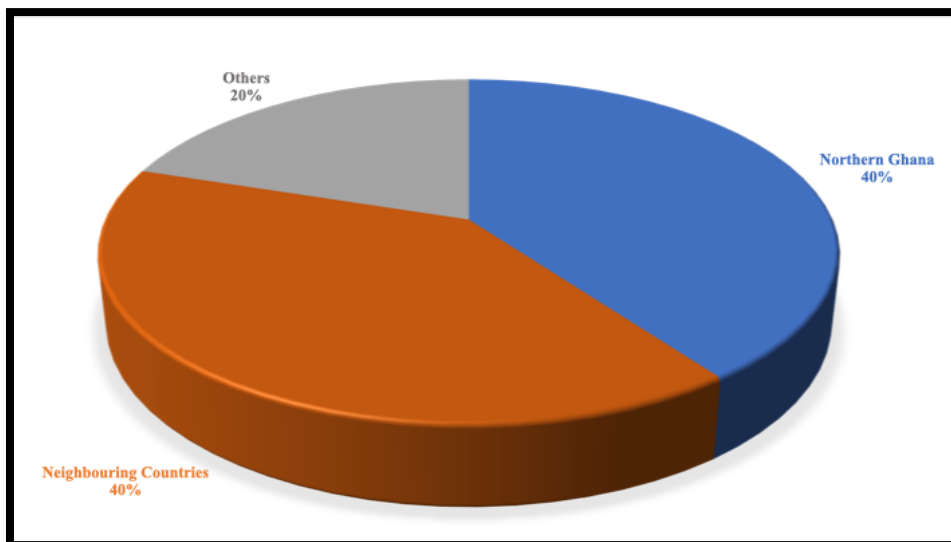
Figure 7: Gender Distribution of Street Beggars in Accra



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Figure 8 demonstrates that street beggars originate equally from Northern Ghana and neighbouring northern countries, each accounting for 40%, while the remaining 20% come from other regions. The distribution reflects the strong influence of both internal migration and cross-border mobility in shaping begging patterns in Accra. The equal proportions suggest that the phenomenon extends beyond localised urban poverty and is closely linked to broader regional movement driven by economic disparities, limited opportunities, and social networks. The significant share from neighbouring countries points to the permeability of borders and the role of transnational linkages in sustaining street begging, including possible organised or facilitated movement into urban centres. At the same time, the substantial representation from Northern Ghana aligns with long-standing patterns of rural–urban migration, where individuals relocate in search of livelihoods but encounter barriers to formal employment. The smaller proportion from other regions indicates a more diverse, though less dominant, contribution to the overall population. Largely, the pattern underscores that street begging in Accra is both a domestic and regional phenomenon, shaped by interconnected socio-economic and mobility dynamics. Addressing the issue therefore requires coordinated responses that combine local social protection measures with broader migration management and regional cooperation strategies.

Figure 8: Geographic Origin of Street Beggars in Accra



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

To contextualise the numerical distribution shown in Figure 8, the following statements provide first-hand perspectives from individuals engaged in street begging in Accra. The accounts illustrate the diverse origins, motivations, and challenges faced by beggars, highlighting both domestic and cross-border dimensions of the phenomenon. One 46-year-old father of six from Northern Ghana stated that:

“I came to Accra hoping to find work and support my family back home. Life in the village is hard, and opportunities are limited. I never intended to beg, but without jobs or support networks, I had no choice. Many of us from the north end up in the streets simply trying to survive and send something back home...”

Similarly, a 52-year-old father of eight from Niger stated that:

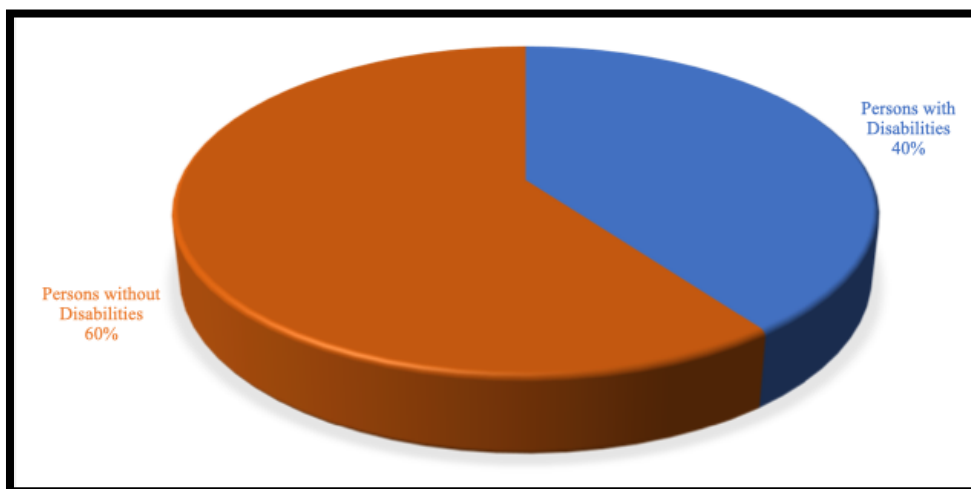
“I crossed the border into Ghana because life in my town was very difficult. I heard that there are people here who help newcomers, and some of us rely on those connections to get by. On the streets, we face many challenges, but it is often the only way to make ends meet when there are no formal jobs or support systems for outsiders...”

Equally, a 28-year-old mother of three from Burkina Faso stated that:

“I travelled to Accra to look for work because conditions in Burkina Faso are tough. I didn’t plan to beg, but the cost of living and lack of opportunities pushed me here. Many of us rely on small networks and community ties, but survival is a daily struggle. The streets become our last resort when everything else fails...”

Figure 9 illustrates that 40% of the observed population are persons with disabilities, while 60% are persons without disabilities, indicating that street begging is not limited to any single vulnerable group. The significant proportion of persons with disabilities highlights the extent to which physical limitations, stigma, and restricted access to employment and social services compel reliance on street-based survival strategies. Such individuals often face compounded disadvantages, including limited mobility, discrimination, and inadequate institutional support. At the same time, the majority of beggars without disabilities points to broader structural drivers such as unemployment, poverty, and rural–urban migration, which push otherwise able individuals into informal and precarious livelihoods. The pattern suggests that street begging is both a disability-related coping mechanism and a wider economic survival strategy. On the whole, the distribution underscores the heterogeneous and vulnerable nature of populations engaged in begging. The finding also points to the need for multidimensional policy responses that combine disability-inclusive interventions with broader socio-economic measures, including targeted welfare programmes and improved access to employment opportunities.

Figure 9: Disability Composition of Street Begging Population in Accra



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Patterns of Interaction

Systematic observations indicate frequent interactions between beggars, motorists, and commuters, ranging from direct requests for money to the provision of small services such as windscreen wiping and the sale of assorted items. The activities typically occur within the short window of the average traffic light cycle, which lasts between 60 and 120 seconds, requiring quick engagement and movement between vehicles. While many of the exchanges are peaceful, conflicts occasionally arise when beggars persist after refusal or when motorists decline assistance. Near-accidents have been observed at busy intersections, particularly when children move quickly between vehicles during active traffic phases. Market traders and shop owners report mixed experiences; some express sympathy, while others highlight concerns about harassment and disruption to business activities.

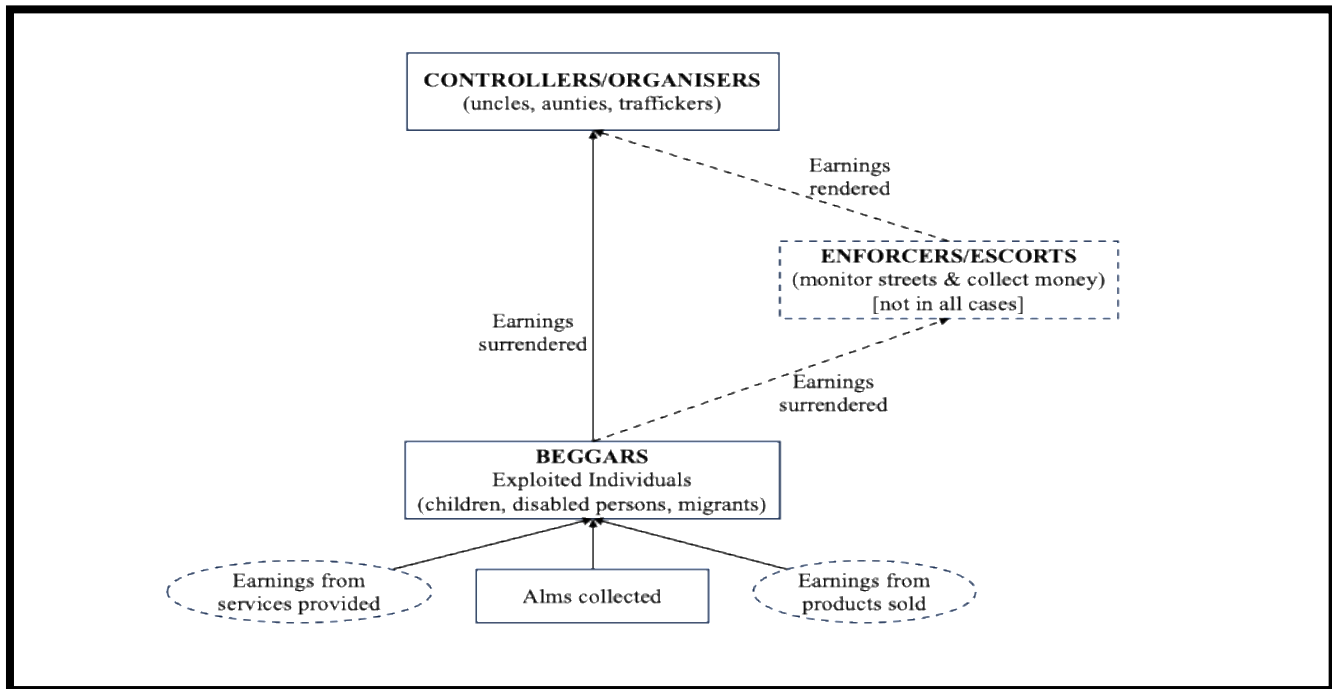
Organised Networks and Exploitation

The findings indicate that street begging is not solely a spontaneous livelihood activity but, in some instances, operates within organised and controlled structures. Child respondents reported being required to hand over all alms received from motorists or commuters to adults referred to as “uncles” or “aunties,” a pattern suggestive of coordinated control and systematic organisation. The arrangements typically involve the extraction of a substantial proportion, if not all, of earnings in exchange for minimal provisions such as protection, shelter, and food.

As illustrated in Figure 10, the phenomenon can be conceptualised as a hierarchical and controlled system in which authority flows from controllers or organisers at the top to beggars at the bottom. Figure 9 highlights the structured nature of the networks, with clear lines of control, supervision, and dependency. The illustration

reinforces the argument that street begging, particularly involving minors, is embedded within exploitative systems rather than being purely incidental or individual survival behaviour.

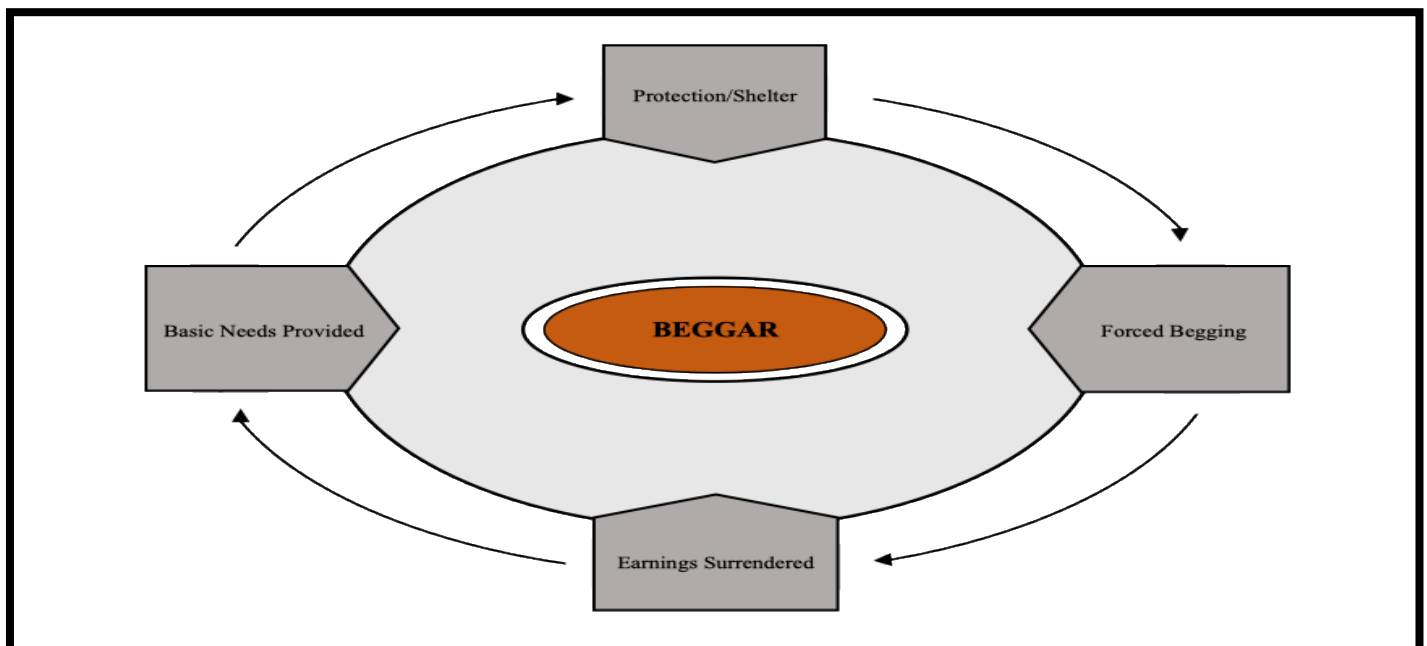
Figure 10: Hierarchical Structure of Organised Street Begging Networks



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Further elaboration is provided in Figure 11, which depicts the functional dynamics of exploitation within the networks. At the centre is the beggar, surrounded by interconnected elements, forced begging, earnings surrendered, basic needs provided, and protection/shelter. The cyclical arrangement demonstrates how minimal welfare provisions are used to legitimise and sustain exploitative practices, effectively trapping individuals, especially children, in a cycle of economic dependency and coercion. The continuous exchange between earnings and basic survival needs underscores the asymmetrical power relations inherent in the system.

Figure 11: Cycle of Exploitation and Dependency in Organised Begging Systems



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

Field evidence further substantiates the conceptual depictions. As shown in Figure 12, controllers or organisers were observed positioned strategically near active begging points at the 37 Hospital Intersection. The proximity to child beggars and visible oversight of movements and interactions with motorists suggest monitoring and coordination rather than casual association. The image provides empirical grounding to the hierarchical and cyclical models presented in Figures 10 and 11, visually capturing the operational presence of supervisory figures within the street space.

Figure 12: Controllers/Organisers at 37 Hospital Intersection (5.5748° N, 0.1928° W)



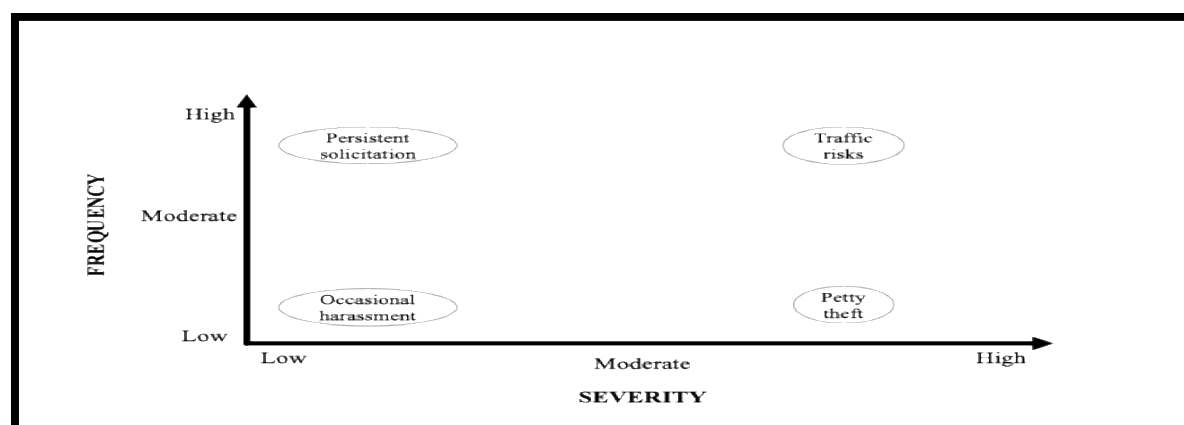
Source: Author’s fieldwork (2026)

The findings are corroborated by reports from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (2018), the Ghana Immigration Service (2025), and Daitey et al. (2025). Additionally, the trend is consistent with UNODC (2024) reports, which characterise forced begging and trafficking networks in West Africa as systemic rather than incidental phenomena.

Public Perceptions and Concerns

Interviews with motorists and commuters reveal ambivalent attitudes toward street begging, reflecting a tension between empathy and concerns over public order. While some respondents view beggars as vulnerable and deserving of support, others associate the phenomenon with disorder and emerging security risks. As shown in Figure 13, the matrix provides a structured visualisation of how different issues are prioritised within everyday urban experiences. Figure 13 maps key concerns based on the frequency and perceived severity. Persistent solicitation appears in the high-frequency but moderate-severity quadrant, indicating that persistent solicitation is common yet generally tolerated. Traffic risks fall within the high-frequency and high-severity quadrant, representing the most critical concern due to the dangers posed at busy intersections. In contrast, petty theft and occasional harassment are less frequent but carry moderate-to-high severity, reflecting the stronger impact on perceptions of safety and urban order. The matrix highlights that while some aspects of street begging are routine, others pose significant public safety and urban management challenges, with broader implications for governance and the city’s image.

Figure 13: Public Perception Matrix: Frequency and Severity of Begging-Related Concerns



Source: Author’s illustration (2026)

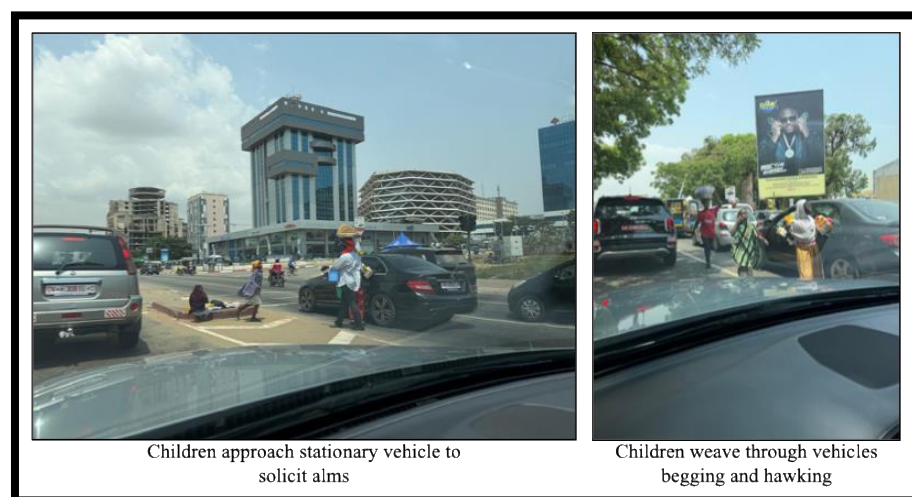
Security Implications of Street Begging in Accra

The findings indicate that street begging in Accra is not merely a socio-economic phenomenon but also a multidimensional security challenge with implications for public safety, governance, and social cohesion. Guided by Security Contagion, Human Security, and Urban Disorder frameworks, the analysis identifies multiple, interconnected dimensions of insecurity associated with begging.

Public Safety Risks

Begging at intersections, traffic lights, and high-traffic corridors poses direct hazards to both beggars and road users. Field observations documented near-accidents involving children as well as adults darting between vehicles, and conflicts arising from motorists or commuters refusing to give alms or assistance. Such incidents underscore the contribution of begging to traffic insecurity, increasing the risk of injuries or fatalities. Beyond traffic risks, market traders and shop owners reported harassment, obstruction, and disruption of commercial activities, illustrating how street begging undermines perceived safety and order in urban spaces. Figure 14 provides visual evidence of the dynamics. The first image captures children approaching a stationary vehicle to solicit alms at a traffic intersection, illustrating the proximity between vulnerable minors and active traffic lanes. The second image shows children weaving between vehicles while simultaneously begging and hawking small items, demonstrating the dual exposure to economic precarity and physical danger. The convergence of vehicular movement, pedestrian congestion, and informal economic activity creates a high-risk environment in which both children and motorists must navigate unpredictable interactions.

Figure 14: Beggars at Opeibea House Intersection along Liberation Road (5.5997° N, 0.1790° W)



Source: Author's fieldwork (2026)

Organised Exploitation and Criminal Dynamics

Interviews reveal that begging is sometimes coordinated through structured networks. Vulnerable populations, particularly children, are coerced into daily solicitation, with proceeds collected by adult controllers who exert authority over participants. The pattern aligns with broader concerns about trafficking and forced begging, situating street begging within the domain of organised crime. The networks amplify contagion effects, spreading insecurity from individual beggars to the wider urban environment and creating conditions conducive to exploitation and coercion.

Human Security Concerns

From a human security perspective, beggars themselves experience heightened vulnerability. The study indicates frequent exposure to abuse, exploitation, neglect, poor health, and social exclusion. Specific groups, including persons with disabilities and migrant populations, rely on begging as a survival strategy due to gaps in social protection. The persistence of street begging highlights inadequacies in welfare interventions and underscores

the failure to safeguard the dignity, livelihoods, and basic rights of vulnerable groups. Figure 15 provides a visual example of the vulnerability, showing children running through traffic in the road median, exposed to moving vehicles and other hazards. The image illustrates both the immediate physical danger and the broader human security concerns inherent in street begging.

Figure 15: Children Running in the Road Median (5.5748° N, 0.1928° W)



Source: Author's fieldwork (2026)

Urban Disorder and Governance Challenges

Street begging contributes to visible urban disorder in Accra, particularly in high-traffic commercial streets and major market centres such as Makola Market, Kwame Nkrumah Circle, and the Kaneshie Market. The concentration of beggars at intersections, transport terminals, and pedestrian routes reinforces perceptions of congestion, informality, and weakened control of public space. Consistent with Urban Disorder Theory, the visible signs of disorder signal gaps in regulation and enforcement, shaping perceptions of limited state capacity to manage urban order. Legally, begging is criminalised under the Beggars and Destitutes Decree, 1969 (National Liberation Council Decree 392) which permits arrest without warrant and prescribes penalties including fines or imprisonment. The Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (Control of Children, 2017) Bye-Laws further prohibit child begging and emphasise child protection. Notwithstanding the clear statutory framework, enforcement by the police remains intermittent and largely reactive, often limited to short-term decongestion exercises with little lasting impact. A Human Security perspective indicates that begging is driven by structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, disability, and weak social protection, highlighting the limits of punitive measures alone. Consequently, the persistence of street begging reflects gaps in enforcement capacity and contributes to the normalisation of urban disorder, with implications for declining public confidence, heightened perceptions of insecurity, and increased exposure to petty crime and related urban security risks.

Societal Perceptions and Legitimacy

Public attitudes toward street begging are uncertain, reflecting the tension between humanitarian concern and demands for order. While some residents express sympathy and compassion for beggars, others perceive them as contributors to urban insecurity and disorder. The duality reflects broader challenges of governance legitimacy, as authorities must balance the protection of vulnerable populations with the enforcement of public order. The visibility of begging in commercial and tourist areas also raises questions about Accra's urban image, with implications for economic activity and city branding.

Synthesis and Interpretation

The preceding sections outlined both the patterns of street begging and the associated security implications in Accra. The subsequent section synthesises the findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, examining how socio-economic vulnerabilities, urban governance challenges, and public perceptions interact to shape street begging. The analysis highlights the broader implications for urban security, social policy, and community well-being.

Street Begging and Urban Insecurity

The findings demonstrate that street begging in Accra occupies a transitional position between humanitarian crisis and security concern. Consistent with the Human Security framework, beggars, particularly children, migrants, and persons with disabilities, are exposed to profound risks, including exploitation, poor health, and social exclusion. The vulnerabilities reflect wider structural conditions such as unemployment, rural-urban migration, and weak welfare provision, reinforcing existing scholarship that situates begging within broader patterns of urban poverty and marginalisation in Ghana (Cuesta et al., 2021). At the same time, the concentration of begging in specific locations such as traffic intersections, transport hubs, and markets transforms individual hardship into collective urban challenges. Security Contagion Theory provides a framework for understanding how vulnerabilities associated with begging extend beyond the individuals directly involved, generating traffic hazards, confrontations with motorists, and anxieties among traders and commuters. The study thus supports the argument that informal survival strategies can acquire wider security significance when embedded within high-visibility urban spaces.

Organised Begging and Security Risks

One of the most significant contributions of the study lies in the documentation of organised dimensions of begging in Accra. The evidence of adult supervision of children, collection of proceeds, and coordinated spatial deployment suggests that some forms of begging have moved beyond spontaneous individual action toward networked exploitation. Such findings align with regional research on trafficking and forced begging in African cities, yet extend the literature by demonstrating how the practices operate within Ghana's capital and interact with municipal governance structures. From a contagion perspective, organised networks amplify insecurity by institutionalising exploitation and embedding criminal logics into everyday urban interactions. The presence of such networks complicates humanitarian responses, as welfare-oriented interventions may fail to disrupt exploitative structures, while enforcement-driven approaches risk penalising victims rather than organisers. The tension underscores the need for differentiated policy responses that distinguish between vulnerable individuals and those who profit from coercive arrangements.

Urban Disorder and Governance

The visibility of begging in Accra's commercial areas and transport corridors reinforces perceptions of urban disorder, echoing propositions advanced by Urban Disorder Theory. Market traders' complaints about harassment, motorists' fears of accidents, and concerns about the city's image illustrate how informal practices reshape public understandings of safety and authority in urban space. However, the findings also suggest that disorder is not merely a product of individual behaviour but is co-produced through institutional limitations. Sporadic enforcement by state authorities and under-resourced rehabilitation programmes create cyclical patterns in which beggars are removed temporarily only to return shortly thereafter. Such cycles erode public confidence in governance institutions and highlight the structural constraints facing municipal authorities in rapidly urbanising contexts. Rather than restoring order, fragmented interventions may inadvertently reinforce perceptions of state weakness.

Comparative Implications for African Urban Security

Situating Accra within wider African debates on informal urban practices reveals both commonalities and distinctive features. Similar to Lagos, Nairobi, and Dakar, Accra exhibits a convergence of poverty-driven informality, migration pressures, and contested regulation of public space. Yet the Ghanaian case is marked by pronounced tensions between humanitarian discourses and security-oriented governance, alongside a reliance

on periodic crackdowns rather than sustained social protection strategies. From an Urban Disorder Theory perspective, the persistence and visibility of street begging across cities reinforce perceptions of weak regulatory control and contested authority over public space. In Accra, as in other major African urban centres, inconsistent enforcement and the rapid re-emergence of informal practices contribute to cycles of disorder that shape public perceptions of insecurity. Additionally, the limited integration of welfare-based interventions in Accra further deepens the dynamics, allowing visible disorder to persist and potentially intensify. The comparison therefore highlights the need for more balanced approaches that combine regulation with long-term social support to enhance both urban order and governance legitimacy.

Implications for Policy and Scholarship

For policymakers, the study underscores the limits of narrow enforcement-led strategies and highlights the necessity of coordinated interventions linking policing, child protection, migration management, and livelihood support. The findings suggest that durable solutions require sustained welfare investment alongside targeted action against exploitative networks. For scholarship, the article contributes to emerging work on African urban security by reframing street begging as a security issue rather than solely a social welfare concern. The study demonstrates how informal survival practices intersect with legitimacy, authority, and public space regulation. The study also calls for further comparative research across cities and longitudinal study of how security reforms reshape such dynamics over time.

CONCLUSION

Street begging in Accra emerges as both a symptom of structural vulnerability and a source of urban insecurity. The findings demonstrate that begging is driven by poverty, unemployment, migration, and disability, yet the practice's persistence generates risks that extend beyond individual survival. Through contagion effects, begging spills into broader insecurity, creating hazards for motorists, undermining commercial activity, and eroding public trust in governance institutions. From a human security perspective, beggars themselves remain exposed to exploitation, abuse, and exclusion, while the wider public experiences insecurity through harassment, traffic risks, and sanitation concerns. Urban Disorder Theory further illustrates how visible begging contributes to perceptions of disorder, weakening confidence in state authorities and reinforcing the cycle of insecurity.

In general, the study underscores that begging in Accra is not merely a humanitarian issue but a multidimensional security challenge. Addressing begging in Accra requires integrated responses that balance enforcement with social protection, and humanitarian imperatives with urban governance. The persistence of begging reflects the inadequacy of current interventions and highlights the need for more holistic approaches that safeguard vulnerable populations while maintaining public safety and order.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study of street begging in Accra underscores the complex interplay between socio-economic vulnerability, security, and urban governance. The following recommendations seek to strengthen social protection, enhance regulatory frameworks, and promote inclusive urban management, while balancing humanitarian considerations with the imperatives of public order.

Strengthen Social Protection Systems

The Government of Ghana, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and Department of Social Welfare should expand welfare programmes targeting vulnerable groups such as children, persons with disabilities, and migrants. The expansion should include access to healthcare, education, and vocational training to reduce reliance on begging as a survival strategy.

Enhance Enforcement and Regulation

The Ghana Police Service should improve the consistency and effectiveness of by-law enforcement. Enforcement should be coupled with rehabilitation and support programmes rather than punitive crackdowns, ensuring that beggars are redirected toward available social services.

Address Organised Exploitation

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana Police Service, Ghana Immigration Service, and Department of Social Welfare should collaborate to develop targeted interventions against organised begging networks and trafficking. These actors should work together to dismantle exploitative structures and protect vulnerable populations.

Promote Inclusive Urban Governance

Community-based organisations, local leaders, market associations, and transport unions should be engaged to manage public spaces inclusively. The stakeholders should foster initiatives that balance humanitarian concerns with the need for urban order and safety.

Public Awareness and Sensitisation

Government agencies and media organisations should launch awareness campaigns to foster empathy for vulnerable populations involved in begging, while advising the public not to give alms directly. Campaigns should emphasise the risks of child begging, show how direct giving can sustain exploitative networks, and promote constructive alternatives such as supporting social welfare programs or rehabilitation initiatives.

The views, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of any government, organisation, or institution mentioned. Additionally, the study relies on publicly available sources and data, and any interpretations or inferences drawn are subject to the limitations inherent in such materials.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All procedures complied with institutional ethical guidelines and standards for academic research. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, and minors provided assent with parental or guardian consent where applicable. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and observations were conducted in public spaces without compromising privacy. Special measures were taken to protect vulnerable participants, including referrals to social welfare services when urgent needs were identified.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest. The views, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in the study are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of any government, organisation, or institution mentioned.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The datasets generated and analysed during the study are available from the author on reasonable request. Due to the sensitive nature of the information, including data involving vulnerable populations such as children, persons with disabilities, and migrants, access is restricted to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance. Aggregate data, anonymised interview transcripts, and observational summaries may be shared with researchers who agree to uphold the same ethical standards and protections for participants.

Artificial Intelligence Use Declaration Statement

This article, which examines the multidimensional security implications of street begging in Accra, was developed with limited support from artificial intelligence (AI) tools to enhance language clarity, coherence, and overall presentation. AI-assisted tools were used primarily for grammar checking, paraphrasing, and improving the structure of selected sections of the manuscript. All core aspects of the study, including the research design, data collection, analysis, theoretical framing, and interpretation of findings, are the original work of the author. The arguments concerning public safety, urban governance, and human security in relation to street begging in

Accra were independently developed and critically evaluated by the author. The author has carefully reviewed and validated all AI-assisted outputs to ensure accuracy, originality, and compliance with academic integrity standards. The use of AI did not replace independent scholarly judgment, and full responsibility for the content of this article rests with the author.

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