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**PERCEIVED RISK, STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT AND THE ALMAJIRI MODEL  
SCHOOLS IN REDUCING SECURITY THREATS IN MINNA METROPOLIS**

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**Abstract**

The *Almajiri* Model school system was introduced in Niger State to provide basic education to out-of-school children and reduced the prevalence of street begging. However, there are concerns that the system may also contribute to security threats in the state. This study therefore examined perceived risk, stakeholders' engagement and the *Almajiri* Model schools in reducing security threats in Minna metropolis. The researcher employed a cross sectional survey design and adopted purposive sampling techniques to select 120 respondents from Minna metropolis. The study acquired data from both primary and secondary sources. Descriptive statistics tools such as percentages, tables and frequencies were used in presenting and interpreting the data collected. The qualitative data collected was transcribed and ordered in themes to ensure that outstanding points of the responses are noted. The study made the following conclusions: the menace of the *Almajiri* syndrome is caused by societal and cultural norms which has affected peace and security in Minna Metropolis. A social reorientation program should be developed specifically on the issue of the *Almajiri* and its negative impacts on children in the society especially in the northern part of Nigeria because the majority of the students are from there.

**Keywords:** *Almajiri*, Education, Mallam, Insecurity and Religion

**Introduction**

Since the collapsed of the Berlin Wall in the late 80's; and the end of World War II in 1945: the international community is made to face another round of serious security threat that is today becoming widespread known as terrorism. This gory act ranges from; suicide bombing, kidnapping; state sponsored terrorism like the bombing of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan during the World War II, and World Trade Centre in the United States in 2001 which has led to varying human rights abuses and the destruction of lives and properties (Ojukwu cited in Kandi, 2019). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century in which we live today is precarious, uncertain, unpredictable, unstable, insecure and more dangerous than any time in the history of the human race (Jonathan, 2011). Although, man through history has been on a long and tortuous search for peace and tranquility within society; this search culminated in the formation of state according to Hobbes; because life in the state of nature was in misery, nasty, brutish and short; where might was right all time and the powerful ruled the day. However, modern society is premised on the existence of law and order. Law and order require essentially that violence, crime and undue process are not allowed to thrive (Egwemi, 2009 cited in Kandi, 2019)

Nigeria, once the leader and security buffer in the West African sub-region, is now grappling with its own security problems. Insecurity has been a major challenge in Nigeria, with different parts of the country experiencing various forms of insecurity, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and communal clashes (Babagana, Idris, Ndagi, Mohammed & Kuchi, 2018). Niger State, located in the north-central region of Nigeria has been experiencing various forms of insecurity in recent years (Wambai, Kandi, Wakili, Kellu, 2022). The state has been affected by activities of different criminal groups such as bandits, kidnappers and Boko Haram insurgents. One of the major security challenges in Niger State is banditry.

Bandits have been attacking communities, killing and abducting people and looting properties (Wambai, *etal*, 2022). The bandits operate in different parts of the state, particularly in the rural areas, where they carry out attacks on villages and communities. The state has been hit by banditry attacks of recent; with Shiroro as the focal point of these acts that terrorize public peace and unity. Bandits have been laying siege on Niger State for about seven years now. Eighteen out of Niger state's 25 Local Government Areas have come under attack by bandits with Local Government Areas like Shiroro, Munyan, Rafi, Mashegu and recently, Paiko and Lapai frequently being attacked and almost completely overrun by said bandits (Kandi, Ibn-Mohammed & Eikojonwa, 2021). In 2020, the attacks took on a different dimension. Excluding Bosso, Chanchaga, Suleja, Gawu Babangida, and Tafa, the remaining local government areas in Zone B Senatorial District of Niger state have been taken over by bandits (Kandi, *etal*, 2022). Insecurity is a major concern in the city of Minna, with cases of armed robbery, kidnapping and other criminal activities reported in different parts of the metropolis. The Niger State government has been working to improve security by deploying more security forces, implementing community policing and other measures.

Additionally, cultism and youth violence have also been a major security concern in Minna Metropolis. Cultist have been engaging in violent clashes, leading to loss of

lives and properties. As such, youth violence, particularly among unemployed youths, has also been a concern, with reports of gang-related violence and attacks on residents. Similarly, Armed robbers have been attacking residents, particularly at nights, and looting properties, the robbers operate on the highways and within the city, making it difficult for security agencies to track and apprehend them. Contrastingly, *Almajiri* schools are a longstanding issue in the northern parts of Nigeria, including Niger State. *Almajiri* schools are Islamic schools that provides basic education to children, but many of these schools have been accused of neglecting the welfare and education of the children. The children in these schools are often left to fend for themselves and are exposed to various dangers, including poverty, abuse and exploitation. The Niger State government has taken steps to address the issue of *Almajiri* schools by banning street begging and closing down unregistered *Almajiri* schools in the state. However, the closure of these schools has led to an increase in the number of children on the streets, which is a cause for concern (Kandi, etal, 2022).

#### Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced a significant increase in insecurity, particularly in the form of violent crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry and communal clashes. These issues have affected many states in the country, including Niger State. According to the Global Terrorist Index 2023, Nigeria is ranked eighth in the world for the number of deaths caused by terrorism with 385 fatalities recorded in 2022. Recent reports by Global Terrorism Index 2023 showed that there has been a decrease in the impact of terrorism in Nigeria as evident by a reduction in total deaths by 23% from 497 in 2021 to 385 in 2022. In addition, the number of terrorist attack in Nigeria has also significantly reduced, with only 120 cases recorded in 2022 as opposed to 214 in 2021 (Global Terrorism Index, 2023)

The reports highlights that this is the smallest number of terrorist attacks and deaths that have been recorded in Nigeria since 2011. However, in Niger State specifically, there have been reports of increased banditry and kidnapping incidents in recent years. According to a report by the Nigeria Security Tracker, there were 57 reported incidents of banditry in Niger State in 2020. These incidents have led to the displacement of many people and the destruction of social and economic activities in the affected areas. The *Almajiri* Model school system was introduced in Nigeria as a means to provide formal education to children who are being raised in traditional Islamic schools known as "Tsangaya". These children are often from poor families and are sent to these schools to receive Islamic education from scholars (Akubor, 2016). However, the *Almajiri* system has come under scrutiny in recent years due to the high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, as well as the security threats posed by some of these schools (Akubor, 2016). Niger State, located in the north-central region of Nigeria, has been particularly affected by the security threats posed by some of these *Almajiri* schools. The state has witnessed several cases of kidnapping, thuggery,

banditry; and other forms of violent crimes in recent years, with many of these crimes being linked to some the Almajiri schools in the state. Some of these schools have been accused of radicalising their students and promoting extremist ideologies (Kandi, Ibn-Mohammed & Eikojonwa, 2022). This sad situation has made some of the *Almajiristo* engage in undesirable acts that are dangerous to the peace and stability of the country (Kandi, et al, 2022). Thus, the security threats posed by the Almajiri to the Nigerian state cannot be overemphasized. In this direction, Aghedo and Eke (2013) cited in Akubor (2016) asserts that jihadist insurgency in northern Nigeria is better understood as a consequence of youth bulge syndrome, particularly the low-cost availability of foot soldiers from the *Almajiri* demographic cohort. The problem, therefore, is that the *Almajiri* Model Schools, which were designed to provide formal education to children and reduced the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, have become a source of security threats in Niger State. This has led to concerns about the safety of students who attend these schools, as well as the need for government to take urgent steps to address the security challenges posed by these schools. It is against backdrop that this paper interrogates the perceived risk, stakeholders' engagement and the *Almajiri* Model schools in reducing security threats in Minna metropolis

### Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the perceived risk, stakeholders' engagement and the Almajiri Model schools in reducing security threats in Minna metropolis. Specifically, the paper objectives are:

- i. To examine the security risks associated with the *Almajiri* Model schools in Minna metropolis
- ii. Ascertain the impact of the *Almajiri* Model Schools in reducing the security threats in Minna metropolis

### Research Questions

The paper is guided by the following questions:

- i. What are the security risks associated with the *Almajiri* Model schools in Niger State?
- ii. What is the effectiveness of the *Almajiri* Model Schools in reducing the security threats in Minna metropolis?

### Conceptual Framework

#### *Almajiri*

The term 'Almajiri' is an adulterated Arabic word '*AlMuhajir*' meaning a person who migrates for the reason of propagating Islamic knowledge or learning of it (Sarkingobir, Nahantsi, Shehu, Sadiq, Malami, Saadu & Hamza, 2019). The Hausa tribe of Nigeria refer to Almajiri as children who are beggars or students

(Muhammed, 2020). Almajiris are children and adolescent who are sent far away from home to study in an Islamic school under the guidance of a Muslim scholar also known as a Mallam (Abbo, Zawiyah, & Salim, 2017). According to (Joda, 2021), school children aged five years and over, are handed over to a *Mallam* to teach them how to read and write Arabic alphabets. This is done yearly among people living in particular neighborhoods. They remain with the *Mallam* for 10-15 years, depending on their mastering speed of the curriculum (Joda, 2021). The *Mallam* serves as a role model to the children and an in loco parentis- implementing the curriculum process and policies. The children are usually taken to a camp away from their home, and the *Mallam* does this in an attempt to help the child escape from the distractions of life. Regardless of the location, the Quran is the central text resource- they develop gross motor skills through repeated writing of Arabic inscriptions. Also, oral recitations are learnt through teacher scaffolding- in a sing-song model. Nigeria has a significant population of *Almajirai*. Other few West African countries such as Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali with a sizeable Muslim population have *Almajirai* as well. The *Almajiri* system was imported into the Northern part of Nigeria from North Africa. During the pre-colonial era, the Kanem-Borno Empire of Northern Nigeria established the *Almajiri* education system which was initially called *Tsangaya* (Jimba, 2021). It was set-up as a comprehensive educational system that facilitated the learning of Islamic values, principles and theology. As well as getting support from the community, this educational system was funded by the state treasury under the control of the traditional rulers- the Emirs. Traditionally, *Mallams* had various farms from which they would harvest and feed the pupils and even their own families.

### Empirical Review

*Aliyu (2018) conducted a study on the socio-economic implications of the Almajiri practice in Minna metropolis. The researcher employed a cross sectional survey design and adopted multi stage sampling techniques to select 270 respondents from the sample Almajiri Schools in Chanchaga Local government Area. The first stage involved the splitting of Chanchaga Local Government into wards. The second stage entails selecting streets, while the third stage was sampling the Almajiri schools. In all, 6 wards were selected for the study. The study acquired data from both primary and secondary sources. Two hundred and seventy (270) structured questionnaires were administered while twenty Mallams were interviewed. Descriptive statistics tools such as percentages, tables and frequencies were used in presenting and interpreting the data collected.*

*The qualitative data collected was transcribed and ordered in themes to ensure that outstanding points of the responses are noted. The study made the following conclusions: the menace of the Almajiri syndrome is caused by societal and cultural norms as well as low socio-economic status of parents, high level of the parents' illiteracy and ignorance on the negative impact of sending their children away in the*

*name searching for religious knowledge at very young age, because the children suffer emotional and physical abuse and are also in most cases hindered from getting a good education or none at all capable of making them productive members of the society. The study made the following recommendations: Integrating the Almajiri schools into the conventional school system; Government and its development partners should embark on aggressive campaign to discourage parent from sending their wards far away as Almajiris; the mallam should be discourage to admit manageable size of students; parents should also provide up keep for their children while Almajiri schools; government at all levels should introduce a realistic poverty alleviation program in the country.*

Babagana, Idris, Ndagi, Mohammed and Kuchi (2018) conducted a study on Almajiri system of education: It's implication for child, family and national development in Minna metropolis, Niger State, Nigeria. A hundred and twenty questionnaires were distributed among people from selected towns in Niger state, Nigeria. Interviews and surveys were also conducted. The instrument for the study was a self-designed questionnaire. A sample of 120 people in the selected areas was drawn using simple random sampling. Data was analyzed using frequency Tables, percentage and mean. It was observed that Almajiri system of education have a strong and positive impact on the child, family and the nation at large. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that government should consider addressing the feeding and welfare needs of the Almajiri and their Mallams, infrastructural facilities should also be provided.

Kandi, Ibn-Mohammed and Eikojonwa (2022) examined from bowls to arms: The Almajiri school system and the challenges of internal security in Niger State, Nigeria. The paper used a survey design in which data were gathered through personal observations by the authors and also the use of anin-depth interview of selected respondents. The study discovered thatthe cultural practice in which parents especially from the country side send their children at a very tender age to the cities under the Almajiri school system pave way for the concentration of a large youth cohort with strong sense of identity in those cities, in which factors such as unfavorable economic, poverty and political atmosphere combines with the prevailing cultural resistance against western education and value system to facilitate the process of radicalizing these youths. The authors recommends that it is important for the Nigeria state to comes up with a policy for compulsory and free primary and secondary school to all the Almajirai and not in separate schools as it is at present being practice but in an inclusive one.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The functionalist theory is greatly related to Durkheim (1858-1917) due to the fact that he frequently made use of analogies with biology with the organic theory analogy wherein he sees the society as an organic whole with each sub system

working to maintain other sub systems, just as the human parts also work to maintain the entire body. Similarly, the idea is fundamental to Durkheim concept of organic solidarity and differentiates between functional and historical explanations and recognized the need for both (Ndem, Micheal& Awa, 2012). Durkheim believed that for every phenomenon that exists or an occurrence of an action in terms of its effects and contribution in maintaining a stable social whole there exist a functional account. According to the functionalist theorists, societies and individuals exist and work to sustain each other in an organic matter. The functionalist sees every member of the society as performing a particular function that keeps and sustains the whole of the society. To the functionalists, the inability of one member to perform results in a breakdown of the entire society; to them every part (no matter how small) plays an important role so as to achieve desired sustenance and unity as a whole (Ndem et.al, 2012).

Furthermore, based on the theory, the *Almajiri* syndrome is a consequence of the failure of the society to perform its function normally, thus not been able to provide these groups of people means of enrolling their children into formal education system. The society has also failed to provide and help push for reforms and restructuring of the *Almajiri* system of education to includes social and economic empowerment for the *Almajiri*'s in other to enable them earn a living and sustain themselves without being a burden and social disorder to the society.

Similarly, it explains that the *Almajiri* syndrome exists because their families who are mostly poor also had failed equally to perform their parental functions and roles. Therefore, are responsible for the prevalence of the *Almajiri* syndrome in the society.

### **Method**

The research design employed for this study is a descriptive survey research. Survey research investigates the existing situation and attitude based on information collected directly from the people involved. This kind of research method is mostly concerned with how, what, and why questions. It interprets and establishes the course of actions. Khotari, (2018) defined descriptive research as a process of data collection in order to test hypothesis or to provide answers to research questions. The area chosen for this research is Minna metropolis of Niger state, due to the fact that the state is one of the places identified with the problem of *Almajiri* system of education and the government has made little or no efforts to address the situation. The target population of this study comprises of selected persons in Minna metropolis with a total number of 180 parents, mallams, security personnel's who have been resident in the study area for at least 11 years prior to the survey. One hundred and twenty-three (123) structured questionnaire was administered to the residents of Minna that constitute the sample. Hence, the sample size for the study is 123 respondents derived from the target population (180) with the used of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table.

Similarly, 2 *Mallams* and 1 security personnel each from the Civil Defense, the Nigerian Police Force and Nigerian Correctional Service Minna command were interviewed within the study area. In composing the sample of the study, the researcher adopted purposive sampling techniques, followed by random sampling from some selected settlements in Minna metropolis.

For the purpose of this study, a self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A is concerned with the bio data of the respondents while section B was used in answering the questionnaire. A four-point Likert scale with strongly agree (SA) agree (A) disagree (D) strongly disagree (SD) with total number of 22 items. The questionnaire was validated by three lecturers in the department of Political Science, IBB University Lapai, Niger State. Useful corrections were made, which led to re-construction of the words that were corrected. For reliability, before the actual data collection piloting of instruments was done in one of the settlements based on convenience sampling involving five (10) families and five (5) *Mallams*. The area did not participate in the final study. Piloting enabled the researcher to test the reliability of the instruments. The questionnaires were given to the families and *Mallams* at the same time of the study. The researcher used pilot testing to identify uncertainty and also make all corrections during the final data collection, the result of the pilot indicated that the instrument was reliable. The researcher administered the questionnaires to the sampled groups in the selected areas in Minna metropolis with the help of some friends who served as research assistants. *Mallams* and families were given the questionnaires to tick their best options while the researcher waited to give necessary assistance where needed. In this study descriptive statistics using frequency distribution, tables, percentage and mean were used for computation.

## Results

The respondents were required to indicate their age, gender and occupation as a source of information, the summary of respondent's responses to item of their background information is shown in tables 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.

**Table 4.1. Distribution of Respondents by Age**

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-30	41	34.2
31-40	47	39.2
41- above	32	26.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, February, 2023**

Table 4.1 showed that (34.2%) of the respondents are within the age of 20-30 years, (39.2%) of the respondents are within the range of 31-40 years, (26.6%) of the respondents are within the range of 41 years and above.



**Table 4.2. Distribution of Respondents based on Occupation**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Trading	32	26.7
Civil servant	25	20.8
Farming	26	21.7
Others	37	30.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, February, 2023**

Table 4.2 showed that (26.7%) of the respondents were civil servants, (20.8%) of the respondents were mallams, (21.7%) of the respondents were housewives while majority (30.8%) were engaged in other things.

**Table 4.3 The Security Risks Associated with the *Almajiri* Model Schools in Minna Metropolis**

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Freq.	No.	Mean	Remark
The operation of the <i>Almajiri</i> system leads to "Yan Daba" groups in Minna	304	90	16	6	416	120	3.50	Accepted
Families sometimes loss their loved ones through the <i>Almajiri</i> system e.g. kidnap, death	208	168	12	6	394	120	3.30	Accepted
The system leads to thuggery	248	147	2	8	404	120	3.40	Accepted
<i>Almajiri</i> system leads to theft and armed robbery	220	162	12	5	399	120	3.30	Accepted
A generation of labor force is being wasted	404	45	9	1	459	120	3.8	Accepted

**Source: Field Survey, February, 2023**

Table 4.3 showed that all the given variables have a mean rating above 3 points; 5<sup>th</sup> variable is highly rated by 3.8. Commenting on the linkage between the operations of the *Almajiri* Model Schools and security threats in Minna Metropolis; the PA to the commandant NSCDC, Niger State command stated that "the high number of out of school children is a ready-made market for recruitment into crime syndicates in the state." (KII, 2023). Supporting the above, the Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Correctional Service, Niger State stated that: *Almajiri* model schools have increased banditry and kidnapping in the state because a lot of villages have *Almajiri* schools and some of them are usually recruited and used for operations by bandits concluded that at the moment a lot are in our custody for reformation and rehabilitation (KII,2023).

**Table 4.4 Impact of the *Almajiri* Model Schools in reducing the security threats in Minna metropolis**

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Freq.	No.	Mean	Remark
The curriculum provides opportunity for literacy, numeracy	240	150	12	4	406	120	3.38	Accepted
The curriculum of <i>Almajiri</i> offers opportunity for career guidance	320	75	20	10	425	120	3.5	Accepted
The curriculum of the <i>Almajiri</i> provides vocational training	360	78	6	1	445	120	3.7	Accepted
The curriculum of <i>Almajiri</i> system of education prepares the learners for total development of the individual	356	60	18	2	436	120	3.6	Accepted
The curriculum offers experiences that enable the <i>Almajiri</i> fit well in the society	308	99	14	3	424	120	3.5	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, February, 2023

Table 4.4 showed that the distribution of respondents by the adequacy of *Almajiri* school's curriculum. The result showed that all variables had a mean rating above 3 points. The highest variable is the 3<sup>rd</sup> variable rating 3.7 while the lowest variable is the 1<sup>st</sup> variable rating 3.38. This means that the *Almajiri* School's curriculum has an impact in reducing insecurity in Minna metropolis.

The skills learnt include basically truck pushing, cobbling, nail cutting, tailoring, hawking, trading and carpentry among others. Most of the *Mallams* interviewed said their students were taught one form of trade or vocation depending on their ages for survival as they grow up. The majority accepts the fact that there is need to strive to earn a living as begging is dehumanizing and demeaning. They also agreed that search for religious knowledge should not stop individuals from seeking other skills to be self-reliance in future. One of the *Mallams* has this to say: "It is good for the *Almajiri* to acquire some form of skills before graduation to enable them to be self-reliance in the future"

#### Discussion of Findings

The findings on table 4.2 showed that items 1-5 which focused on the security threats associated with the operations of the *Almajiri* schools in Minna metropolis was all accepted by the respondents who observed that the *Almajiri* schools have a linked to insecurity in Minna metropolis. The above finding is line with the study by Aliyu (2018) which showed that *the menace of the Almajiri syndrome is caused by societal and cultural norms as well as low socio-economic status of parents, high level of the parents' illiteracy and ignorance on the negative impact of sending their children away in the name searching for religious knowledge at very young age, because the children suffer emotional and physical abuse and are also in most cases hindered from getting a good education or none at all capable of making them productive members of the society. Supporting the above, Kandi, Ibn-Mohammed and Eikojonwa (2022) discovered that the cultural practice in which parents especially from the country side send their children at a very tender age to the cities under the Almajiri school system pave way*

for the concentration of a large youth cohort with strong sense of identity in those cities, in which factors such as unfavorable economic, poverty and political atmosphere combines with the prevailing cultural resistance against western education and value system to facilitate the process of radicalizing these youths.

The findings on table 4.4 showed that items 1-5 which are, the curriculum provides opportunity for literacy, numeracy, the curriculum of Almajiri offers opportunity for career guidance, the curriculum of Almajiri provides vocational training, the curriculum of Almajiri prepares the learner for total development of individual, the curriculum offers experiences that enable the Almajiri put well into present society, were all accepted by the respondents who believed that the Almajiri curriculum has these variables in its content. Supporting the above findings, Babagana, Idris, Ndagi, Mohammed and Kuchi (2018) observed that Almajiri system of education have a strong and positive impact on the child, family and the nation at large.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that the menace of the *Almajiri* syndrome is caused by societal and cultural norms as well as low socio-economic status of parents, high level of the parents' illiteracy and ignorance on the negative impact of sending their children away in the name of searching for religious knowledge at very young age. Furthermore, it is also concluded that the Mallams are conservative in nature and resistance to modernization of the *Almajiri* system of education, the menace of the *Almajiri* would continue to affect the whole society. Although, the government has made efforts at integrating the *Almajiri* system of education with western education through the Universal Basic Education, lack of proper implementation of the policy and awareness is hampering its success and there is need to put in more effort to control the dwindling fortune of the *Almajiri* system of education. The following recommendations are made to mitigate the syndrome of Almajiri in the study area: A social reorientation program should be developed specifically on the issue of the *Almajiri* and its negative impacts on children in the society especially in the northern part of Nigeria because the majority of the students are from there. Integrating the *Almajiri* schools in the federal government school feeding program of primary schools so that the *Almajiri* students below and within that age bracket can benefit, this would reduce the rate of begging in the society and further reduces insecurity in Minna metropolis.

#### **Limitations and Guide for Further Studies**

The findings of the paper cannot be generalised to other populations or contexts beyond the specific study. Also, time constraint limited the scope of the study to Minna, Niger State as well as leading to limitations in the analysis and interpretation of the results. In the light of this, this paper suggests a further study on *Almajiri* begging system and food security in Niger State.

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