

## The Lived Experiences of Quranic Boarding School Pupils in the Bawku Municipality, Ghana

Fiasorgbor A. Doris<sup>1</sup>, Atibilla Rukaya Mangotiba<sup>2</sup>, Tettey Caroline<sup>3</sup>, Botchwey Tuah Francisca<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Dept. of Rural and Community Development, Faculty of Development Studies, Presbyterian University College, Ghana*

<sup>2</sup>*National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), Bawku*

<sup>3</sup>*Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources Management, Faculty of Development Studies, Presbyterian University College, Ghana*

According to the Human Rights Watch here are about 5 million children attending thousands of residential Quranic schools across the globe. On continents like Africa and some parts of the Middle East where Islam is dominant, the Quranic teachers leave their homes for weeks to recruit children, placing them as young as four (4) years. For centuries, the Quranic schools have been a central institution of learning Quran recitation in Ghana. The study sought to assess the lived experiences of the Quranic boarding school pupils in Bawku. The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. A combination of purposive, random and snowball sampling technique were employed to sample the respondents for the study. A total of fifty (50) participants were interviewed for the study using semi structured interview guide. The study found that only boys were sent to Quranic schools. It was further revealed that most of the children were between the ages of 10 to 19 when they are taken to live with the Quranic teachers. The majority of the children who were sent to the Quranic boarding schools were Ghanaians with quite a number coming from Burkina Faso and Togo. This study recommends that human rights activists, the Ghana Police Service and all stakeholders should enforce domestic laws that criminalize forcing another into begging for economic gain. This should include investigating and holding accountable in accordance with fair trial standards Arabic teachers and others who force children to beg for alms.

*Key Words:* Quranic boarding schools, makarantar, karimbiis, Mallams, lived experiences, Bawku

### Introduction


According to the Human Rights Watch (2010) there are about 5 million children attending thousands of Quranic boarding schools across the globe. These children are subjected to conditions similar to slavery and forced to endure often extreme forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by the teachers (mallams), who serve as their guardians. By no means do all Quranic schools run such regimes, but many teachers (mallams) force the children to beg on the streets for long hours; a practice that meets the International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition of a worst form of child labour and subject them to often brutal physical and psychological abuse. The teachers are also grossly negligent in fulfilling the children's basic needs, including food, shelter, and healthcare, despite adequate resources in most areas and also brought in primarily by the children themselves (Balde, 2010). In many cases, it is the children who provide for the teachers while they live in complete deprivation. The teachers demand considerable daily sums from dozens of children in their care through which some enjoy relative affluence.

On continents like Africa and some parts of the Middle East where Islam is dominant, the Quranic teachers leave their homes for weeks to recruit more children, placing them as young as four (4) years old (Human Rights Watch 2010). In most Quranic boarding schools, the mallams appear to prioritize forced

begging over Quranic learning. With their days generally consumed with required activity from the pre-dawn prayer until late into the evening, the children rarely have time to access any form of education that would equip them with basic skills, or for normal childhood activities and recreation. The length of elementary education varies between four and ten years (Diop, 2010), depending on the child's aptitude, the mallam/marabout's pedagogical skills and the time devoted to studying. Only the younger students (under 15 years of age) beg. Older students are less numerous as they have proceeded to more advanced studies or have left the schools to work (Perry, 2004 and Delap, 2009). In the literature on forced begging the time dedicated to studying is often used as an indicator of whether a mallam has genuine educational motives or is primarily interested in the money the children can bring to them from the streets. Delap (2009) indicates that Talibés/karimbiis who study the

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**Corresponding author:** Fiasorgbor A. Doris, Department of Rural and Community Development, Faculty of Development Studies, Presbyterian University College, Ghana  
Email: dfiasorgbor@presbyuniversity.edu.gh

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Quran most of the day and only beg around meal times are usually seen as being in accordance with tradition and not as involved in forced begging. In some places, traditional Quranic schools have transformed to give children the possibility of studying the Quran outside normal school or work hours, as is the case in Ghana.

In Ghana, the exploitation and abuse of children who are sent to mallams for Quranic studies occurs within a context of traditional religious education, migration, and poverty. For centuries, the Quranic schools (makarantar) have been a central institution of learning Quran recitation in Ghana. Traditionally, children focused on their studies while assisting with cultivation in the mallam's farm, begging, if performed at all, was rather about collection of meals from families. Today, hundreds of thousands of children in Ghana makarantars, many in combination with state schools, and the practice often remains centred on religious and moral education. Mallams have profited from these Arabic students by twisting religious education into economic exploitation. Since the seeking of knowledge is a religious duty in Islam, parents are expected to provide education for their children as they take their first steps in life. Negligence in carrying this out compromises the parent's responsibility, leading to possible further negligence later on for their children (Human rights Watch, 2010).

Forced begging, physical abuse, and dangerous daily living conditions endured by these children violate domestic and international law. Ghana is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and all major international and regional agreements on child labour and trafficking, which provide clear prohibitions against the worst forms of child labour, physical violence, and trafficking. International law also affords children the rights to health, physical development, education, and recreation, obligating the state, parents, and those in whose care a child finds himself to fulfil these rights (Balde, 2010).

In the northern part of the country, there is a growing concern about the use of these children's time and energy, particularly in activities that may be injurious to their health, formal education and development. Typically in Bawku, the teacher (mallam) requires the children to bring him an amount of money, rice and sugar every day, but little of this benefits the children. Many children are terrified about what will happen to them if they fail to meet the measure. For the punishment physical abuse by the mallam or his assistant is generally swift and severe, involving beatings with electric cable or a cane. Those caught after a failed attempt to run away suffer the most severe abuse (Ghana Statistical Services, 2014; Al-Hassan and Abubakari, 2015).

Furthermore, the daily life for these children is one of extreme deprivation. Despite bringing money and rice to the house, the children are forced to beg for their meals on the streets of Bawku. Some steal or dig through trash in order to find something to eat.

The majority suffer from constant hunger and mild to severe malnutrition. When a child falls ill, which happens often because of long hours on the streets and poor sanitary conditions in the community, the teacher only offers occasional healthcare assistance. The children are forced to spend even longer hours begging to purchase medicines to treat ailment such as malaria, and skin diseases that are common in the Bawku municipality. This study therefore seeks to assess the lived experiences of boarding makarantar pupils.

### Research Questions

This research, seeks to establish the causes of the above problem by answering the following questions:

- Why do parents send their children to live with Mallams for Quranic studies?
- What are the child's care arrangements in the makarantars in Bawku Municipality?
- What are the conditions in boarding makarantars in Bawku?
- What can parents and Mallams do to stop child abuse in Quranic studies?

### Objectives of the Study

The study sought to assess the lived experiences of Quranic boarding school pupils in Bawku. Specifically, the study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To identify the reasons why parents send their children to live with mallams for Quranic studies.
- To ascertain the child's care arrangements in Quranic Studies in the homes of their Arabic teachers (mallams).
- To examine the conditions in Quranic boarding schools in the Bawku Municipality.
- To assess what parents and mallams can do to stop child abuse in Quranic studies.

### Study Area

Bawku Municipality is among the thirteen (13) administrative districts in the Upper East Region. It has a total land area of 247.23720 (sq.km) and located approximately between latitudes  $11^{\circ} 11'$  and  $10^{\circ} 40'$  North and longitude  $0^{\circ} 18'W$  and  $0^{\circ} 6' E$  in the north-eastern corner of the region. It shares boundaries with Pusiga District to the North, Binduri District to the South and Garu-Tempene District to the East. It should also be noted that it border's Togo to the North and that of Burkina Faso to the South internationally (Bawku Municipal Assembly Profile, 2014). The population of Bawku Municipality is about 205,849 (48.0% male, 52.0% female) representing 9.4 percent of the Upper East Region's total population. About 64 percent of the population is residing in urban localities. The Municipality has a youthful

population with 40.3% below 15 years with 5.2% elderly persons (60 years +) (BMA, 2014).

The ethnic groups in the Municipality are the Mole-Dagbon, Grunsi, Mande-Busanga and Gurma. The major tribes being Kussasis, Mampruis, Bissas and Moshies. However, there are quite a number of migrants from other parts of the country especially the south (most of whom are civil servants) and the neighbouring countries like Togo and Burkina Faso

(GSS 2010). Ethnic heterogeneity has had implications for harmony in the municipality. It is expected however that inter-marriages among the diverse ethnic groupings will provide the impetus for peaceful co-existence. The District has more than eight ethnic groups which also include Akan, GaAdangbe, Ewe, Guan and others (GSS 2010). Below is a map of Bawku in Figure 1.

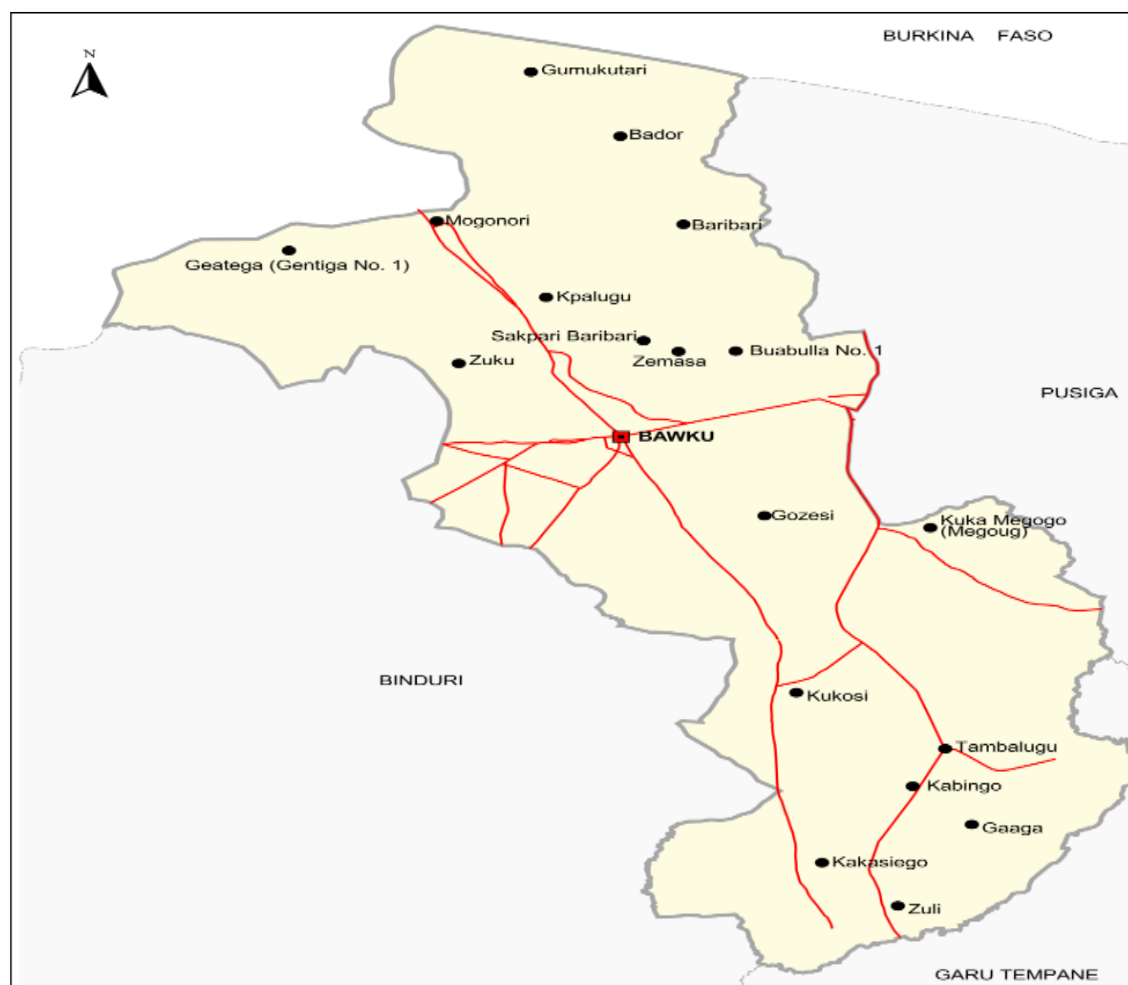


Figure 1: Map of Bawku Municipal. Source: Bawku Municipal Assembly Profile, 2014

In the Bawku Municipality, out of total population of 205,849 in the municipality, 3.7% are Traditionalists, 80.9% are Muslims and 14.7% are Christians. Less than 1% (0.6%) indicated not belonging to any religious group; thus the predominantly Muslim.

### Methodology

The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. A review of literature on methodology for research shows the results of a study are as good as the methods used to obtain them. Ghosh (2001:185-195) in emphasizing the importance of the correct choice of research methodolo-

gy states that “A correct methodology is required for arriving at a correct knowledge which a science wants to establish”. Further he argues that what really determines the choice of methodology is what the research seeks in the end. Both primary and secondary research methods were employed by this study. The secondary data for this study focused on a literature review on the subject matter.

A combination of purposive, random and snowball sampling technique were employed to sample the respondents for the study. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to capture mallams who are operating the informal training centers, pupils and some parents. A total of twenty five (25) pupils were

purposively and randomly selected from the streets of Bawku municipality, while snowball sampling technique was employed to locate the Quranic pupils and mallams. The study population was the informal Quranic teachers (mallams), residential Quranic pupils and some parents. A total of fifty (50) participants were interviewed for the study using semi structured interview guide.

Primary data included personal interviews with five (5) Quranic teachers (mallam), twenty five (25) karimbiis/pupils and twenty (20) parents in the Bawku Municipality. Also, two (2) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted for the Karimbiis. Each of the FGD groups was made up of ten (10) participants. The research maintained smaller groups to ensure effective participation by all members of the group and to get more information on what was produced based on the outcome of the earlier techniques as there was the need for further probing to validate what was gathered with the questionnaire. SPSS version 20.0 data analysis software was used for the analysis of the data and the results are displayed in the form of frequency tables and percentages.

### Ethical consideration

Informed consent was sought from community leaders and study participants. Great care was taken to include only those who consented and the information part of the informed consent was taken very seriously. All the study participants were repeatedly told the purpose and methods of the study. Care was taken to exclude those who either failed to understand the purpose of the study or did not consent to the study.

In the process of conducting ethnographic research, the researchers were confronted with a number of ethical issues such as confidentiality, consent, safety, and reciprocity. These issues were taken seriously in the research design, and during the field research there was a deliberate attempt to forge a relationship based on respectful collaboration between the researchers and the participants. A respectful and collaborative approach to knowledge production, involving constructive dialogue minimised the risk of misinterpretation. This included clearly outlining the research objectives, the structure and focus of the exercise, the rights of the respondent and the practical importance of the research. The research also allowed

respondents to ask questions in the process. Written and oral consent of the respondents were sought before each of the interviews or focus group discussions. Measures to ensure the confidentiality of respondents included the assurance of anonymity of key informants and focus group participants, the use of pseudonyms, and re-wording of identifying characteristics in the presentation of results.

## Result

### Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

#### Gender

The study found that, out of a total of twenty five (25) children interviewed, all of them (100%) were males with none being a female. Also, 22 (73%) of the adult participants out of a total of 30 mallams/parents interviewed were males, 8 (27) were females. Men seem to have all the power to decide on the future of their children and this is evident in the statement of most of the boys interviewed. One of the children had this to say to confirm the assertion above. *"I am from Zebilla, my father decided to send me to learn the Quran when I was six. My mother did not want me to leave but my father controlled the decision. The mallam's house is not a good place, and there were more than ten (10) of us there sleeping on the floor of one small room"*.

The majority (60%) of the karimbiis were within the 6-15 age group. 25% were within 16-19 age group and 15% were within the 20-22 category. It was also revealed that most of the students were between the ages of 6 and 15. Interviews with parents and mallams suggested that some of the children began living at the Arabic schools as early as five (5) years.

#### Educational status of mallam/parents

Most (63) of the participants in the category of mallam/parents did not have formal education while a minority of 3% attained tertiary level education. Also 17%, 10% and 7% have been to primary, Junior High and Senior High schools respectively. Table 2 below presents data on the educational levels attained by parents and mallams.

Table 2: Educational status of mallam/parents

Educational level	Frequency	Percent
Primary levels	5	17
JHS level	3	10
SHS level	2	7
Tertiary level	1	3
Not educated	19	63
Total	30	100

### Occupation of mallams/parents

50% of the participants were farmers, 23% traders, 20% not actively engaged in any economic activity

and 7% was working in the formal sector. This is illustrated in table 3 below.

Table 3: Occupation of mallams/parents

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Civil servant	2	7
Trader	7	23
Farmer	15	50
None	6	20
Total	30	100

Table 4: Nationality of children

Nationality of students	Frequency	Percent
Ghanaian	12	48
Burkinabe	9	36
Togolese	4	16
Total	25	100

Investigating the place of birth of the children in residential Quranic schools in Bawku is very necessary in the study. The majority of respondents were Ghanaians with a frequency of 12 (48%) out of a total of twenty five (25) children participants. 36% of the children came from the neighbouring Burkina Faso and a few of them (16%) came from Togo. The study found that most of the children who were in residential Quranic schools in Bawku were Ghanaians. Some of them were even natives of Bawku township while the others were from surrounding communities like Zebilla, Bongo, Nalerigu and Bolgatanga. It was also revealed that it is not all the boys on the streets that came from Quranic schools rather some children were purposely on the streets to beg for alms and also engage in other economic activities such as selling. However, children from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Togo who were in the Quranic schools were also found begging in the streets of Bawku.

### Care arrangements

The study revealed that the parents of the karimbiis are normally poor and thus do not pay fees to the mallams for teaching their children, when the children are sent to live with the mallams the parents rarely remit the mallams for the upkeep of the chil-

dren. One of the boys indicated that when he initially came to live with the mallam, his father sent them some millet and money on tow (2) different occasions but since then nothing has been sent whereas he has been living with the mallam for four (4) years.

An interview with one of the mallams running a Quranic boarding school only confirmed what the little boy said. *I am a mallam, I have a makarantar with about thirty (30) pupils however, as the parents do not have the means to help me take care of the children, I am obliged to feed the children, buy clothes, medicines, etc. for them, pay my rent and teach them the Quran. Some parents after the annual harvest send some grains to me. The grains can only sustain us for two (2) to three (3) months, so I have no option but to ask the children to go on the streets to beg for alms especially on Fridays.* He also asserted that begging does not belittle a child but makes him humble and resistant and therefore it should not be considered exploitation or suffering.

### Children's lived experience: Lived experiences analysis framework

The lived experiences are discussed using the following variables in the analysis framework in figure 1 below.

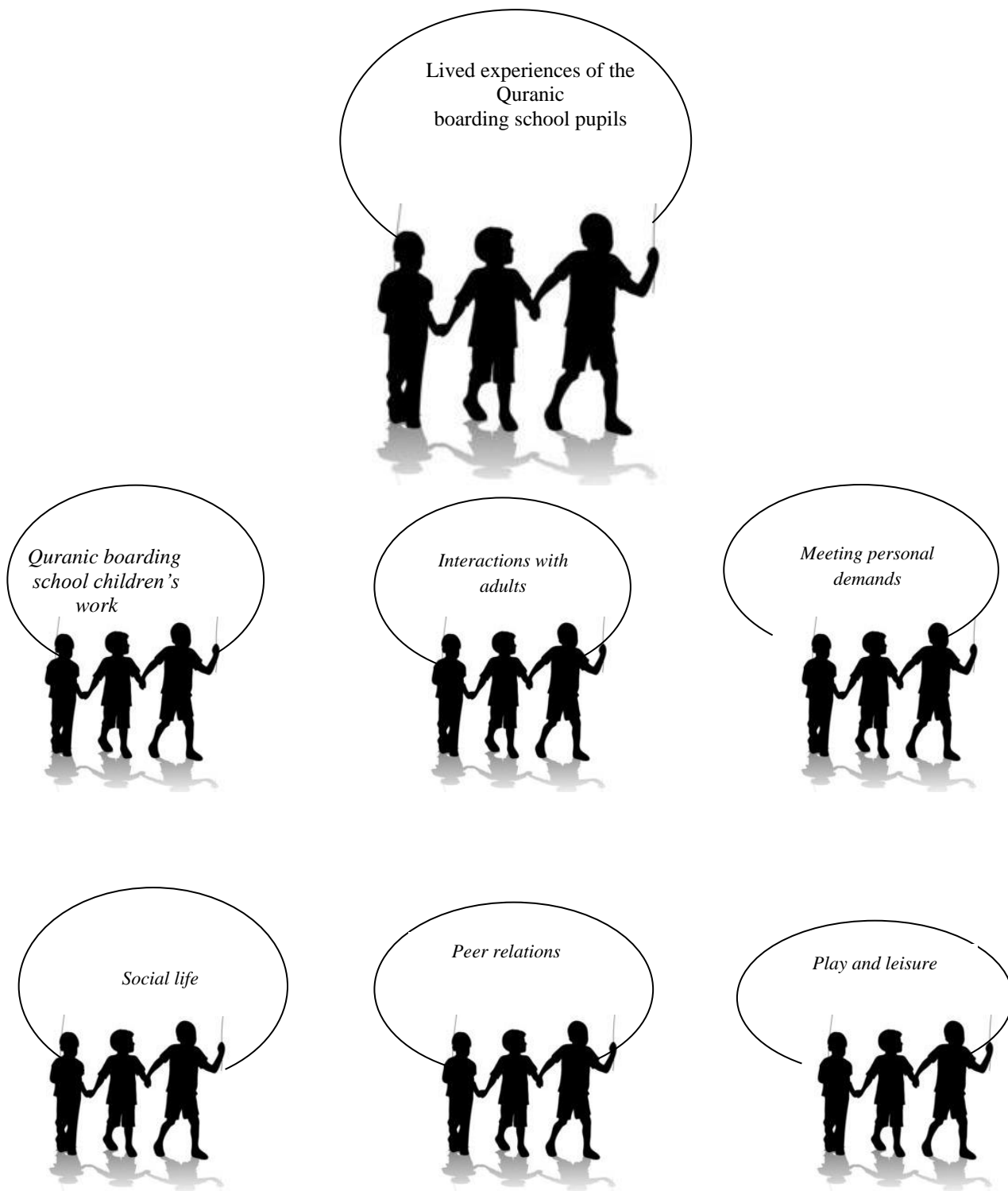


Figure 2: Lived experiences of the Qur'anic boarding school pupils

*Quranic boarding school children's work*

Work can never be excluded from the lives of the Quranic boarding school pupils because it is one of the major activities that occupy the bulk of their daily lives on the street. The results indicated that unlike other children in the streets of Bawku who are engaged in all sorts of economic activities, the karimbiis are basically into begging for alms in the streets. Karimbiis begging in the street walk long distances to stand at crossroads, mosques, pass restaurants, markets, banks and bus stations where they hope to receive alms in food or cash. This is consistent with the findings of Human Rights Watch (2010) which said that it is a common sight to see children, some as young as six years old, moving insecurely between cars on major streets, approaching cars as they pull in and out of drive-ways and in the transport hubs and sticking their hands or bowls into car windows in the hope that

alms will be given. It is also consistent with a study on begging children in Dakar by IRIN (2014) which noted that the conditions on the street inherently expose begging children to dangers, particularly illnesses and car accidents. Beside working in the dangerous streets, these children also work on the farms of their masters and attend to their animals too. Interviews with some parents and mallams, especially the uneducated ones revealed that they did not know that allowing children to beg on the streets amounted to child abuse which was punishable by law. The study also revealed that Quranic education provided in traditional Arabic schools were perceived as an educational system aimed at diffusing religious, cultural and social values and they do not follow any standardized curriculum. In such schools, the aim is for the students to memorize Quran written in classical Arabic. Also, an interview with the children revealed that they were not enrolled into formal schools.



Figure 3: Quranic school children begging for alms Source: Google Images, 2015

*Interactions with adults*

As part of the lived experiences of the study informants on the street, coming into contact with adults is something that they have to encounter every day because of the nature of their work. The children mentioned they interact with adult beggars and clients everyday on the street. Their relationship with some adults is characterised by generational conflicts, where the adults always want to play the master role and the children the servants. The adults do not get it easy whenever they want to cheat the children.

*Meeting personal demands*

Children's needs such as feeding, healthcare, place to sleep, personal hygiene etc are supposed to be provided by their parents or guardians. Unfortunately, this is not the case of most of these Quranic boarding school children. In most cases they leave their masters' homes early in the morning after the morning prayers and only go back in the evening, thus they would have to feed themselves in the streets. However, the lucky ones are given evening meals at home by their masters' wives; they indicated that the quality of the food is poor but you



should consider yourself blessed to have this kind of system running in your school.

During one of the focus group discussions (FGD) with the children it was found that some of the mallams were not even responsible for providing healthcare for the children when they get ill. This is consistent with the findings of Fiasorgbor and Fiasorgbor (2015) in their study on the health coping strategies of street children in Accra where these children only bought drugs and herbal medicines from peddlers in the markets places and lorry stations. Most (85%) of the children informants

indicated that they bought pain killers from drug peddlers in the streets whenever they are sick. These are all part of street children's daily commitments, although health care is not a daily issue; one cannot afford not to plan for it whether one lives at "home" or on the street. The study found that the boys take their bath 2-3 times a week and all in the evenings. In the mornings the boys only wash their faces, brush their teeth and off they leave to start begging for alms in the streets. Below in figures 1 and 2 are some karimbiis in their sleeping places.



Figure 4: Sleeping place of the Quranic students. Source: Human Rights Watch, 2015



Figure 5: Quranic school children taking lessons from their teacher in their dormitory . Source: Google Images, 2015



The sleeping places of the boys is another issue of concern; all (100%) the children indicated that their sleeping places were very bad with more than eight (8) children in a small room with a tiny window, no beds (they sleep on torn mats on the floor) and no cloth to even shield themselves from the cold during the raining season or from the cold harmattan wind.

#### Peer relations

As part of their lived experiences, Quranic school children have a network of friends which they associate with on daily bases in the streets. In some cases they form a gang of friends which they use to perpetuate all sorts of activities to help them feel at home. Peer relationship is one thing that can be considered as important in the lives of these children. The children cling to their peers because of the lack of families in their destination point/Bawku. In certain circumstances, the study informants call their friends “brothers”. They have a sense of security in such relationships because they become each other’s keeper and support one another during difficult times. According to the children, they support each other in many ways including buying medicine for sick friends, sharing food, adding money and items to those of their friends who could not make it on some days and companionship. In our conversations with Malik (a 13 years old boy) about his friends, this is what he said; *anytime I fall sick, it is my friends who buy medicine. We sometimes eat together when we buy different foods. Also, there was a day I didn’t get enough money and food stuff to take to my teacher but that day was good for Abass and Ahmed so they gave me some of their items and money to take so my master would not beat me.* These children usually begin their relations in the Quranic schools and some while they are in the streets with children from other Quranic schools and non Quranic school children in the streets. In most cases they move in twos or threes from their master’s homes the study found from Jihad (14 years old).

#### Social life

Discussing the issue of their social life in Bawku, the children were quick to mention that they do not have any social life. Tofiq a 9 year old boy had this to say; *since my father brought me to Bawku from Togo 8*

*months ago, I have not attended any wedding or naming ceremony which I enjoyed doing in my home town. During these occasions we had so much to eat and we danced to nice tunes. I miss my hometown very much.*

#### Play and leisure

Playing is one of the areas carved for children. It is said that the “ideal” situation of childhood is a period of play and study. Western ideologies of childhood see children’s play and study as the only things children should be doing during their childhood days. It is a common knowledge however that children in the Global South are said to work more and play less. The results of this study indicated that Quranic pupils aside their schedule of tidying their masters homes, feeding animals, working on the farms and begging most of the time, they also find some time to play. Yidana was quick to add this; *we cannot play in the compounds of our masters, we can only do this when we are alone in the streets begging but this should also not affect how much you make in a day. Actually anytime you do not get a good day and therefore go home with small money and few items our masters would beat us or ask our seniors to beat us for not working hard. It is believed that any time you come home with small money, you only went to play without working. This perception makes it difficult for us to even want to play.* He gave a little smile and continued that *anyway we still try to play when we find some time or when the sun is too scorching.* This finding is consistent with what Andre and Demonsant (2013) found in their studies that in some cases the Quranic school children are even beaten for taking time to play by the mallams who see it as a disruption from begging.

#### Reasons for begging for alms on the street

Almost all (80%) of the study participants asserted that the mallams ask the children to beg for alms. 8% of the participants said that the children beg because there is no food at home and another 8% indicated that the children beg for alms in the streets for other reasons while a few of them (4%) affirmed that that the children beg because they want to earn a living for themselves.

Table 5: Reasons for the practice

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Because they want to earn a living	2	4
Mallams ask children to beg	40	80
No food at home	4	8
Others	4	8
Total	50	100

### **Mallams/parents awareness of Quranic pupils activities**

The study found from some parents that children in the Arabic boarding schools do other work aside studying the holy Quran. Nonetheless most of the participants (82%) indicated that children in informal Arabic schools were engaged in other activities including begging for alms on the streets aside the Quranic studies. A minority 18% said that children in informal Arabic boarding schools were not doing other things besides the studying of the Quran.

### **Discussion**

The Quranic students also known as “Karimbiis” are usually young boys who are sent away from home for a couple of years and placed in the care of Quranic teachers to learn the holy Quran in traditional Arabic schools. More so, it was found that most of the children (100%) were males because in Islam female do not lead prayers and for that matter boys are the ones sent to live with Arabic teachers and to learn the principles and practices of the holy Quran so they become Islamic scholars and leaders in the future.

Most of the participants interviewed were men and this could mean that men dominate in terms of decision making concerning the nurturing of a child. Women who were seen at the time of the study directed the researchers to their husbands because they believed that the men would answer questions concerning the care of the children better.

As revealed that some of the karimbiis went to the Quranic boarding schools as young as five (5) years; this implies that they are solely dependent on the mallams and more often than not themselves for survival. The children were therefore obliged to beg for money and food and they were also often subjected to child labour.

Furthermore, the results suggested that majority of the adult respondents did not have any form of formal education and their ignorance on the children begging on the streets could be attributed to lack of knowledge on the rights of the child. When parents choose to send their children to traditional Quranic boarding schools, they are not only shaping their future in terms of educational options, but also future professionals (mallams). The fact that Arabic students do not have access to the formal educational system like other children of their age affects their future adversely because children who miss out on formal education may have no further opportunities to learn key skills and knowledge for the future. The statistics on the occupation of the participants could be influenced by the level of education of the people. The occupation of most of the people did not really require higher levels of education.

Functioning in a group of friends working in the streets can be very demanding. Each member in the group has the responsibility to relay information to other members of the group. Working in a place where both children and adults compete for the same

clients, passing information round to friends for them to locate potential givers can be very useful. New arrivals who are also Quranic pupils find such groups very useful.

The study further revealed that majority of the adult participants was aware that children were forced to beg on streets by their mallams. These children are exposed to all sorts of abuse and suffering. Interviews with some parents confirmed that the children begged on streets for long hours, but justified it as necessary for mallams to survive and pay rent. Meanwhile, parents who had entrusted children in the care of mallams knew that living conditions at the Arabic schools were indeed harsher for the children than those at home. In this case parents were not only implicated in neglect, but also complicit in abuse. Nevertheless, in most cases the parents appear to be unaware of the severity of abuses that their children suffer or are likely to suffer in a mallam’s house. The Convention on the Rights of the Child assigns to parents the primary responsibility to ensure “within their abilities and financial capacities the conditions of living necessary for the child’s development”. At present, the parents of hundreds of exploited and abused children were failing to meet this obligation. These parents provide no assistance to the mallams for the children’s physical development and also fail to maintain contact to aid the children’s emotional development, much less monitor the child’s welfare. The mallams are supposed to be responsible for imparting mastery of the Quran and a moral education to the children. In practice, the children are the mallams’ workers, forced to spend long hours each day on the streets in search for money, rice, and sugar for the Arabic teachers who use almost none of it for the children’s benefit. With education often secondary to fulfilling their part, mastering the Quran takes two or three times longer than it should if the children received a proper education. Furthermore, some parents think that it is alright for the child to experience hardship and suffering because it is seen as an integral part of a Muslim boy’s development. Others view it as fundamental to the socialization process. Besides, parents send their children to Quranic schools knowing that they will face hardships and undergo many difficulties before succeeding, since their hope is that the experience will make the child a righteous adult capable of dealing with all of life’s challenges, but more importantly, that it will turn them into better Muslims and believers.

According to tradition, a Talibé spends one hour per day passing from house to house reciting verses from the Quran to receive small gifts that contribute to the subsistence of the makarantar. In this context, begging is a means to teach the child simplicity and humility. But the way that begging has become the primary activity of karimbiis today cannot be understood as an element of religious education. Almsgiving or zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam; giving zakat therefore to those in need is considered an act of worship, and it is expected of those who could afford to give to the needy. As it would happen, the children fit in nicely with the idea of zakat; they are

young and vulnerable, far from home, at least temporarily parentless, bear the outward trappings of poverty with their unkempt appearance and tattered clothes, and have the additional attraction of being students of the Quran. Because the mallams are not paid either by the parents of these Quranic pupils or the state, society then assumes the financial responsibility by giving alms to the children because they consider the food and money given to the children to be zakat or charity that all Muslims are expected to give to the needy.

Mallams force their students to beg, imposing a daily target and the failure to meet the target results in physical punishment. This implies that the Arabic students are exposed to child labour which is both a cause and a consequence of poverty; it continues by severely compromising the children's future prospects. The children's exposure to child labour can be both exemplified by their obligation to beg or work in the farms, as both activities were time consuming, physically demanding and income generating for the mallam. The hours spent on the street begging put children at considerable risk of injury and death from car and motor accidents. However, the accidents demonstrate only one of the many ways that forced begging meets the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of a worst form of child labour and constitute a violation of the child's right to physical security and protection from injury, and in cases of death, a violation of the right to life.

Also, the children who are forced to beg on the streets are denied the rights to education and good healthcare. The result is that in many Arabic boarding schools, the children's progress in learning to master the Quran and how to read and write Arabic as well as their ability to access education in other basic skills is severely undermined by the mallam's apparent prioritization of begging over classroom time. The right to education under the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of a Child (CRC, 2001) includes an education "designed to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence." The overwhelming majority of the children interviewed reported suffering repeatedly, often severe physical abuse in the Arabic schools. Beatings were most frequently reported within the context of failing to return the daily targets, although some were also beaten for failure to master the Quranic verses. The physical abuse was perpetrated by the mallam himself or to a lesser extent, an older student who served as an assistant teacher.

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

It is only boys that are sent to Quranic schools because women do not lead prayers in Islam. Most of the pupils were between the ages of 10 to 19 year. And they normally live with their Quranic teachers also known as "mallams". The majority of respondents were Ghanaians with a few of them coming from the neighbouring Burkina Faso and Togo.

Almost all (80%) participants agreed that the mallams compel the children to beg for alms in the street of Bawku and conditions in these schools are very appalling. It is therefore necessary to take appropriate measures to ensure children rights to education, food, proper housing, and health, while guaranteeing their upbringing in an environment free of exploitation, neglect and abuse. The results indicated that unlike other children in the streets of Bawku who are engaged in all sorts of economic activities, the karimbis are basically into begging for alms. Nonetheless, these children also work on the farms of their masters and attend to their animals too. Coming into contact with adults is something children have to encounter every day because of the nature of their work. Children's needs such as feeding, healthcare, place to sleep, personal hygiene etc are supposed to be provided by their parents or guardians. Unfortunately, this is not the case of most of these Quranic boarding school children. The sleeping places of the boys an awful site where ventilation is poor, the children sleep on torn mats on the cold floor even during cold raining and harmattan seasons. The following are some recommendations made by the study;

- The human rights activists, the Ghana Police Service and all stakeholders should enforce domestic laws that criminalize forcing another into begging for economic gain. This should include investigating and holding accountable in accordance with fair trial standards Arabic teachers and others who force children to beg for alms.
- The religious leaders and Imams should denounce Arabic teachers who engage in the exploitation and abuse of children within the Arabic schools. The Imams should hold discussions on children's rights in Islam during Friday prayers (Jum'ah).
- The Humanitarian Organization (HO) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should support the Arabic teachers and schools so as to eliminate forced begging and physical abuse, and also improve living and health conditions in the schools.
- Parents should stop returning runaway children who have been victims of physical abuse or economic exploitation by the mallams. Children should be enrolled into public English and Arabic school for proper education.
- Parents should also assume their basic responsibility towards their children. They can also send the children to non residential Quranic schools in their communities.

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