



EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE BEGGARS IN ISLAMABAD

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Abstract

Begging, a prevalent social issue, affects both men and women, often driven by poverty, unemployment, and psychological distress. While poverty remains the primary driver, other factors like mental health challenges and social exclusion can also contribute. Addressing this issue requires a multi-pronged approach, prioritizing poverty reduction and social upliftment. Government intervention is crucial, with a focus on implementing policies that improve living standards by ensuring access to basic necessities like food, shelter, and healthcare. Furthermore, strategies aimed at generating sustainable livelihoods are essential. By providing access to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities, individuals can transition from informal income sources like begging towards more stable and dignified employment. Previous research consistently demonstrates the potential for higher earnings through formal employment compared to informal activities like begging. My own observations and insights gained from interviews further reinforce this understanding. Begging often intersects with homelessness, highlighting the urgent need for integrated social welfare programs that address both housing insecurity and poverty.

Keywords: Begging, Poverty, Homelessness, Social Exclusion, Livelihood

Introduction

The problem of begging is a universal phenomenon. Begging is one of the age-long activities. It is a practice whereby a person obtains money, food shelter or other things from people they come across by request. Begging is a complex and many-sided problem that is most often caused by multiple and connected individual and structural deficiencies. It is not found in our society alone but rather it is found everywhere, in both developed and developing countries, though the nature and type of begging is different. Beggary is a problem that is so deep rooted in our culture. I select this topic because it is one of the main issues of our society and we want to research on beggars but mostly on female beggars. Because beggars are the poorest of the poor's and the most hurtful section of the society, living in such a deprived condition that they are even unable to fulfil their basic needs of life. Begging has now become a profession since no Physical and mental effort is required to earn one's bread.

Begging, a deeply ingrained social issue, transcends geographical boundaries, affecting both developed and developing nations. While the specific manifestations may vary, it essentially involves individuals soliciting for money, food, or shelter from others. This practice, often rooted in poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, highlights the stark realities of societal disparities (Mock et al., 2011; Royle et al., 2002).

Beggars, particularly female beggars, represent one of the most vulnerable segments of society, struggling to meet even their basic needs. While genuine need undoubtedly exists, it's crucial to acknowledge that in some instances, begging may have transitioned into a means of livelihood, albeit a precarious one. This can involve employing various tactics to maximize alms, potentially diminishing the focus on genuine rehabilitation and self-sufficiency.



The pervasiveness of begging across public spaces, such as filling stations, restaurants, and religious sites, underscores its significance as a social concern. Understanding the complexities of this issue, including its root causes and the diverse experiences of those involved, is crucial for developing effective and sustainable solutions (Royle et al., 2002).

This profession is based on the helpful behaviour of the public towards the deprived people. No doubt, beggars are the needy persons, but up to some extent majority of them has adopted many tactics to collect more charities only to save themselves from physical works. In many areas beggars are found everywhere in public spaces, such as filling stations, restaurants, banks, markets, mosques, etc.

Broad Problem Area

Begging is one the major problems of our society we need to find the reason why people involved such type of activities and what are the possible ways to resolve this issue. People are continuously engaged themselves in informal activities like begging and other crimes to make money to live life. So, these problems arise because of poverty.

Research Question

1. What are the Existing experiences of Female beggars in Islamabad?
2. What are the reasons behind female begging in Islamabad?

Objectives of the Research

1. To explore the cause and reasons of their begging profession.
2. To find out the hurdles they face during begging.
3. How people treat them.

Significance of Study

The main purpose of the study is to discover the causes which enforce the females to beg. And also find their experience of begging at Islamabad and the behaviour of students toward them. To find out the hurdles they face during begging. It is difficult to give a particular cause to begging. A set of causes such as physical inability, personal and social maladjustment, unemployment etc. But one of the main cause of females begging at QAU is poverty. They have no significant means to support themselves or their families. So that's why they resort to begging. There is needed to clear cut employment opportunities for females' baggers so that they can avoid begging and earn money by doing something except begging.

Literature Review

A beggar is a person who lives by asking people for money or food to survive (Oxford Dictionary, 2001). Beggars are all over the globe, in developed countries begging rate is low as come to other underdeveloped countries. In Pakistan we see this informal activity daily people asking for help coming out on roads even in our streets by knocking our doors asking for basic necessities like foods, cloths etc.(Weevers, 2012). Studies shown that Women's are officially designated as beggars or vagrants, by saying that the professions of their parents and husbands are low and ill paid. Those women's who are officially designated as beggars by Oegstgeest State Labour Institution are fall in the category of old women and single women. Lack of family support and admission to other informal support networks are some reasons highlighted and such women are supported by other charitable institutions.

In past many studies has been done on begging whereas (Portes, 2005) by the help of their study come with facts that beggars are users of a violently competed public space, and also come to know that begging is a part of survival activity. Because if in the economy living standard are lover and poverty is rate is high the people start an informal work activity to generate income or as a source of income On the other hand (Smith, 2005) also said that begging is a survival activity but added that begging is informal work. Moreover, Smith (2005) said that income from begging is considered lower than income generation from other formal activities. So, it means that if we come out of informal activities like begging and start making income through formal work activities.

Begging, a complex social phenomenon, transcends geographical boundaries and socioeconomic



contexts, persisting as a significant challenge in both developed and developing nations. While the specific manifestations and underlying causes may vary, it generally refers to the act of soliciting for money, food, or other forms of assistance from the public. Poverty is widely recognized as the primary driver of begging. Studies consistently link poverty, unemployment, and lack of social safety nets to increased vulnerability to begging. Individuals and families facing economic hardship, particularly those lacking access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, are more likely to resort to begging as a means of survival (Patel & Patel, 2010).

Social and cultural factors also play a crucial role. Discrimination, social exclusion, and stigma associated with certain social groups can increase their vulnerability to begging. For instance, studies have shown that individuals with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and marginalized communities are disproportionately represented among the begging population (UNHCR, 2015). Psychological factors, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and trauma, can also contribute to begging. Individuals experiencing mental health challenges may face difficulties in maintaining employment and may resort to begging as a coping mechanism. Similarly, individuals with substance abuse issues may engage in begging to support their addictions (Krug et al., 2002). Child begging is a particularly alarming issue, raising serious concerns about child labor, exploitation, and human rights violations. Children involved in begging often face increased risks of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including trafficking and forced labor (UNICEF, 2019).

Female beggars are almost everywhere in the city. The ratio of the beggars is increasing in Pakistan day by day. Today our country is suffering from poverty which has forced many people to sell their kids and forced young generation to start begging. Large number of people in Pakistan is living under poverty line earning just 150 per day. This is the major reason due to which they are unable to live a reasonable life on the other hand a street beggars are earning more than a normal person, so people are frequently moving toward this profession. Begging is considered as an easy way of earning a reasonable amount. This is the major reason that mostly young people are seen begging on the streets. This profession has now become mafia where young males, females and children are trained, located to specific stations. Beggars are mostly from backward areas where people are not familiar with their basic rights.

They earn around 400-1000 rupees per day. And they handover that money to the head of that mafia. This beggar's mafia exploiting the children. If someone takes that money to his home, he or she will be punished, and some beggars are affected with some painful treatments. So that people give them more in sympathy. Some people beg on their own risk. They are not working under any professional (mafia). They are just begging because they don't have any job so that they earn halal money for them. NADIA AZAM in his article said that in Pakistan beggary is an economically beneficial business and often provide a substantially higher income compared to what an up-skill labour can otherwise command in the market. Begging can be more profitable than domestic work e.g. a female full-time domestic worker makeup to 3500-5000 rupees per month whereas a female beggar in Islamabad makeup 12000-40000 rupees per month. RACHYAL investigated the profile and economic yield of beggars in Pakistan. His reports show that beggars on the streets of Pakistan are fraud beggars. Beggars who pretend to be handicapped, blind, injured or hurt are in fact professional beggars and are turning into a mafia. He interviews old, young, male, female, and child beggars, uncovering their drama. Most beggars come from other places. They utilize transportation systems to reach urban areas to beg.

In Islam, begging is discouraged and in fact it is considered as a sin. Prophet Muhammad PBUH stressed to earn a living by working not by begging. Corruption in government institution primarily within the police forces is one of the main reasons for continuous and growing begging. The police are not doing their duty, as they are not enforcing the laws concerning beggars and criminal begging rings. Beggars are involved in a number of illegal activities that are taking place right under the noses of police officials, activities in which they are complicit. Police let beggars occupy land and use electricity illegally. It is reported that in one case a police officer was involved in transporting and selling drugs and alcohol, which is not only illegal,



but also immoral.

Begging may thus represent a form of direct competition between young. This situation matches the assumption of classical modal sibling competition. As compared to competition sibling model (God Furcy, 1992).

Almost to and billion throughout the world mostly the poor and very poor do not have a formal account at a financial institution.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Researchers used qualitative research methodology in this mini research. Qualitative research method will provide in depth information for the researcher which fulfil the primary and secondary key components for the study.

Universe

The location for my research is selected sectors of Islamabad.

Target population

Target population were female beggars in G-10 and G-11, Islamabad.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling and convenient non-probability sampling techniques were used to interview the respondents.

Sample Size

Researcher conducted five interviews from female's beggars.

Tools for data collection

The in-depth semi structured interview was much helpful for data gathering so that I could understand the experiences of female beggars in Islamabad. Each of interviews took approximately 15-20 minutes.

Techniques for data collection

Techniques for data collection are pen, and notebook. My respondents don't allow me to record their interviews. So I note all their interviews in notebook by using pen and writing pad to write down their responses.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Respondent No. 1

Age: 28, married, 4 children

According to the 1st respondent, the main reason behind this begging process is poverty and she said that her husband is drug addicted and we have no money and work or job through which we can earn and full fill our basic needs so that's why me and my 2 sons start begging at G-10 and G-11. They live in small house made up of wood and mud. And she is satisfied in this situation because we have no other way to earn money. She wants to do domestic work at home in this locality, but the people don't give us work to do they said that we are cheap and dirty people. People are so rude with us. Some people are kind they know our situations and they also give us money and mostly female students give us money. Behaviour of police with us is also very bad. And they also tax us. Sometimes they harassed us. If we don't give money to them, they give threats. She begs 400 rupees per day. And she gives half money to her husband.

Respondent No. 2

Age 16, unmarried,

According to 2nd respondent, she also begs because of poverty. She said that I don't want to beg I want to go to school and to get education. Mostly students are kind and they help us. I earn 500 to 800 per day. And the largest amount people give to me is 50. She said that I give this money to my mother. Sometimes we get only 60 or 70 rupees than my father start beating me. We are living a very difficult life we face many problems. After one week we also give tax to police because by not giving them money they don't allow us to beg in these huts. Rich people don't trust, and they hate us that's why they don't allow us to do their domestic work.



Respondent No.3

Age 10, Unmarried,

According to respondent 3rd, her father was died and there is no one in the family who could earn. I get 500 rupees per day from begging and from this money I buy pens, pencils or sometimes I buy flowers and sell at road signals. Some people give us money without buying things. The reason of begging in this university is that there is large population and few beggars, so we get large money from the people. My mother wants to do work at colonies, but they give less money. She said that my mother want that we get education, but we are very poor and we can't afford.

Respondent No. 4

Age 14, unmarried, 3 siblings

According to 4th respondent, the main reason behind this begging is that my parents were died, and I live with my uncle. With this reason I'm begging outsidess the roads in streets in markets and especially my area. Where students and the teachers and mostly families give me money. But this is not limited for me because my uncle doesn't allow me to live at their home due to that I'm struggling for getting money by choosing different strategies. She said that on daily basis I get maximum 1000 rupees and minimum 300 rupees and the largest amount people give is 20-30 rupees. She gives this money to his uncle. She also faces problems. Sometimes boys harassed me physically as well. She avoids those peoples who use harsh language.

Respondent No. 5

Age 35, divorced, four children's

Our last respondent is divorced and has 4 children's. For her children's she starts begging because her parents are also very poor, and they can afford her daughter needs. She said that the behaviour of people with me is good I don't face any problem here. This area is safe for me. She is not satisfied with this situation and said that when I see the students of university, I feel very sad and disappoint because I also want to educate my children's but I have no money. She gets 700-1200 rupees per day. Her sons also begin university and sometimes he does some work in main huts.

Key Findings

Key findings of this research study are as follows:

1. All respondents cited poverty as the main reason for engaging in begging activities. This includes loss of income due to unemployment (Respondent 1), the death of parents (Respondents 3 & 4), and the inability of family members to provide support (Respondent 5).
2. Respondents 2 and 5 expressed a strong desire for education for themselves and their children, but poverty severely limits their access to educational opportunities.
3. Respondents face various forms of exploitation, including police harassment (Respondent 1), physical abuse by family members (Respondent 2), and physical harassment by strangers (Respondent 4).
4. Respondents reported facing discrimination and limited employment opportunities, with many experiencing rejection for domestic work due to perceived social and economic status.
5. While some respondents encountered kindness and support from students and individuals, others faced rejection and discrimination.

Specific Observations

Respondent 1: Emphasizes the impact of her husband's drug addiction on their family's economic situation and highlights the challenges of finding alternative employment.

Respondent 2: A young individual, expresses a strong desire for education but is forced into begging due to poverty.

Respondent 3: A young child, emphasizes the need to support her family and highlights the importance of education.

Respondent 4: An orphan, struggles to survive and faces challenges such as abuse and limited support from family members.



Respondent 5: A divorced woman, highlights the challenges of single motherhood and the importance of education for her children.

These interviews provide a poignant glimpse into the lives of individuals forced into begging due to poverty, lack of opportunities, and societal discrimination. The narratives emphasize the urgent need for social support, access to education, and the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities to address this complex issue.

Conclusion

The research involved gathering data from respondents of varying ages, each sharing their personal experiences with begging. Poverty emerged as the most significant driving factor. Many reported facing harassment and extortion from the police, who often demanded "tax" from beggars under the threat of being barred from certain areas like sectors G-10 and G-11 in Islamabad.

While acknowledging the moral implications and the desire for a more dignified livelihood, many beggars continued to engage in begging due to a lack of viable alternatives and a bleak outlook for the future. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive support programs.

The government has a crucial role to play in addressing this issue. Implementing targeted policies and allocating resources, such as utilizing Zakat funds, can provide much-needed assistance to those in need, potentially reducing their reliance on begging. Furthermore, strict measures must be taken to curb the activities of those who exploit vulnerable individuals through organized begging networks ("begging mafia"). These measures should focus on protecting the rights and dignity of those who are forced into begging while simultaneously addressing the underlying social and economic factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Main Questions of Interviews are as follows:

- Q. 1) What is the main reason behind this begging process? And what is the attitude of people with you while begging?
- Q. 2) Why you choose this area for begging? Do you face any problem, or someone harassed you here?
- Q. 3) Are you satisfied with this situation and do you have any fear while begging?
- Q. 4) How much money you earn in a day and to whom you give this money and how much you retain?
- Q. 5) What is the reaction of your parents when you go to home without money?
- Q. 6) What is the behavior of male and female students with you and how police treat you? Do they tax you or harassed you?
- Q. 7) Do you fulfill your basic needs with this money?
- Q. 8) Why you don't earn money by doing work at people home?
- Q. 9) Which types of people you avoided?