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Criminalisation of Poverty: A Study on Beggars in Dhaka City

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Abstract

Begging is a cross cutting issue that has implications across many different strategies including loneliness, antisocial behavior and crime. The objective of the research was to find out the Criminalisation process of beggars and the nature of their activities. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect the data in Dhaka city. Respondents were administered a structured questionnaire asking them about their socio economic background. Focus Group Discussion and Case studies were conducted to explore their affiliation with criminal activities and the process of entering in this profession. SPSS was used to run frequencies and examine descriptive statistics for all examined variables. Using the data collected in January 2005 to May 2005, the researcher found that the beggars were in a vicious circle of crime, which was the result of poverty.

Introduction

Beggars and begging has always been a contentious issue. Begging is an activity, which most people like to think they would never engage in: like prostitution, it still carries a stigma in our society. We are confused about how to respond, and our reaction can take the form of embarrassment, confusion, guilt or even anger. Begging is not a new, but ancient practice. As such it is associated with all kinds of tradition, myths and imagery.

One way to understand the development of modern welfare state is in terms of a transition "from begging bowl to social wage" (Dean, 1991). Associated with the transition, there have been other transitions: a transition from corporal to pecuniary sanctions and from repression to discipline in the sense that (Foucault, 1977) has accorded to that term. Sociologist variously argues that we are living through an age of late modernity (Giddens, 1990), post modernity (Lyotard, 1984), the consumer society (Bauman, 1988), or the risk society (Beck, 1992). The apparent rise of begging is to be understood as part of the fall-out from economic globalization and growing inequality (Dean, 1999).

There has been suspicion that poverty favors criminal activity, but hard evidence of this is difficult to come by. There are several reasons for this state of affairs, all having to do with the join causality between poverty and crime (Ehrlich 1973). First, the prevalence of crime in an area discourages business, hence contributing to poverty. Secondly, high crime areas may also attract criminals because they find it easier to elude detection or because these areas constitute

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focal points for customers- think of prostitution or of the drug trade, for instance (Freeman, Grogger and Sonstelie 1996). Finally, individuals with a high predisposition for crime are likely to have unobservable traits (e.g., lack of discipline) that make them less employable and thus would make them poorer even if they did not resort crime. For all these reasons, analyses of the relationship between crime and poverty are often regarded with skepticism (cf, Fafchamps Bart Minten 2002,)

Background of the study:

Dhaka is a capital city of Bangladesh with a population of nearly 10 million where 90 percent of the wealth is consumed by one percent of people. Beggars are the problem of most cities, in Dhaka even worse. If we look around Dhaka city, we will see hundred of floating beggars. The number of beggars is increasing day by day. As a capital city, Dhaka is an exceptional. The homeless beggars along side the sky scrappers and five star hotels most of the beggars live in squatter settlement. A hues network has been established centering these beggars. Professional Godfathers controlled this network. They have been perpetuating this with the help of political leaders and law enforcing agencies. Godfathers master beggars from across the country and set them at different location in the city after imparting training.

Different organized group of beggars run their activity at different Thana. These beggars are generally dropped at specified spots by these networks. The income is distributed among the beggars according to the gravity of spots and skill of the beggars. "Organized beggars earn tk 30 million in Dhaka city per year. A beggar approximately earns tk one hundred to four hundred fifty per day. The number of organized beggars in Dhaka city is five thousands" (Khondokar Tajuddin Ullash, 2005)

These organized begging networks are criminalizing the begging profession by using beggars in various criminal activities. There is no doubt that begging is a problem that must be tackled head on, not because people who beg are criminals, but because they are caught up in an activity that is dangerous and humiliating and are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and deprivation. The researcher tried to determine the nature and causes of crime of the beggars and the network in which they are trapped.

The Social Dynamics of Begging & Crime:

Though some may question, as did Marx, the system's fairness in applying its rules, today most people don't question the basis of the system itself. That is, people don't question the relationship between those who own and those who don't. Though many people vote every five years on who governs, they never vote on and rarely question what governs. People don't challenge the legitimacy of the system they accept it. Emile Durkheim argued that crime is "normal" and necessary social behavior. "According to Durkheim, the inevitability of crime is linked to the differences (heterogeneity) within a society.

An alternative way to understand begging is not a failure of inclusion in the Durkhemian sense (Levitas, 1996), but as the result of an axiomatic exclusion. The nature of the beggar's deprivation is his or her exclusion from the ordinary realm of citizenship (cf Scott, 1994). The beggars' lies beyond the pale of citizenship: by their behavior or their status beggars place themselves, or they are to be placed on the outside of any society or citizen-community. (Dean, 1999) Since people are so different from one another and employ such a variety of methods and forms of behavior to meet their needs, it is not surprising that some will resort to criminality. Thus as long as human differences exist, crime is inevitable and one of the fundamental conditions of social life."

When the government fails to be responsible to its citizens and ignores the social dynamics of poverty, people are generally forced to seek illegitimate means to eke out an existence. In this case, it is a question of national oppression, whereby the imperialist government maintains exploitative relationships. Too many of these "rejects" of society are caught in the vicious web of the criminal justice system. But the real criminals are those who create the socioeconomic conditions that perpetuate impoverishment. The real criminal is the colonial government itself. It then becomes necessary to assess the pathology of the capitalist and social policy makers that make crime big business, and reflect culpability of their criminal behavior.

Study Methodology:

Taking in to consideration that a typical research needs to design an investigation suitable to such research, the forgoing research, with a view to find out the Criminalisation process of beggars and the nature of their activities in Dhaka city, had mainly relied on qualitative methods while quantitative data was also used.

120 people were interviewed who had experience of begging in central Dhaka. The interviews took place between January 2005 to May 2005: on the streets, in slums and in Railway station. The aim was to connect with as broad a range of individuals as possible: of different ages, sex, and background. No names were asked. The method of sampling for the study was not random, rather than selective based on purposes of the research. The researcher forms his sample by selecting cases he thinks are representative of the population.

The survey instrument was based on a standardized questionnaire used by International Labor organization in numerous Countries in Asia. Based on the purposes of the study some new variables were included. The instrument was used to gather data on socio-demographic characteristics, knowing someone who was in this profession, criminal activities, risk perceptions and process of entering in this profession.

There was much concern about whether people who were begging would be willing to talk about such a sensitive subject. Along with the researcher all

interviewer were university graduates, from all different walks of life, chosen for their friendly manner and experience with working in data collection. This made a major contribution to the success of the fieldwork, which about three months, spread over a mixture of mornings, afternoons, evenings and weekends.

During the course of investigation, 120 beggars were interviewed and 10 case studies with FGDs were taken in ten different location. Locations for conducting the fieldwork were eventually arrived at by devising broad criteria, which aimed to ensure a wide geographical spread, a mix of crime and semi-crime zone, a good representation for Dhaka because of its perceived problems. The location for interview was old and new areas of the city as well as high and low-income groups. The areas included

- Kamlapur Railway station,
- Tejgaon Railway station,
- Farmgate,
- Shahabag,
- Katabon,
- Dhaka University Campus,
- Azimpur, Newmarket,
- Highcourt Majar and
- Gulshan.

A study of 120 people who beg cannot in any way claim to be comprehensive. Unfortunately there are many more people than this currently begging in Dhaka, as well as in the rest of the country. It is also possible that specific groups within the begging population are particularly hard to reach: for example those with involve in child trafficking, prostitution, drug dealers, mental health problems or people deliberately deceiving the public about their situation. However the very strong impression given (and supported by cross-checking questions) was that the people who did answer the extremely detailed questionnaire were giving a true picture of their situation.

Results:

The interviewed people who were begging were all of different ages: from 10 up to old age. Twenty percent of the interviewed people less than 19 years. Most of these beggars were disabling and worked under the guidance of beggar's sarder. There were forty-two people between 30 to 39 years old. Eighteen percent of the beggars were old (above 50). Almost every other interview was in a mixed age setting. (Table-1) Of the 120 beggars participated in the research, 42 were women and 78 were men of which 92% were Muslim and 8% were Hindu & others. It became clear that Muslim men were the dominating position in begging and thus they formed the majority of the sample selected for interview.

Table 1 Age and Sex

Age (Years)	Men (%)	Women (%)
10-19	14	6
20-29	6	4
30-39	24	11
40-49	11	6
50above	10	8

Eighteen percent of the beggars were old and many of them started this profession due to river erosion

"The river took my house, I was on the streets. I needed money and I was so old to work at the time ... its part of my life now. I suppose"

Overall, age made strikingly little difference to how often people begged, the income they gained from begging, their attitudes to begging, their attitude to work, their involvement with criminal activities or to their level of alcohol and drug use.

Causes and responsible person for entering in begging profession

People were asked what set them on the road to begging. The most obvious answer came from a 21-year young women interviewed at Highcourt majar-

"I only do it because my stepped mother oppressed me severely. Once I left my house, came here and started to begging"

However, more detailed patterns did emerged. Thirty nine percent had come to this profession only to live whereas 21% beggars had come to live a better life and earn money in an easy way. Twenty percent of the respondents had to help their family and one respondent had become beggar as a result of leaving their parental home. Six percent of the respondents had come to this profession by force and thirteen percent for drug/alcohol uses (Table -2).

Table-2: Causes of begging

Cases	Percent
Only live	39
Better life	21
Help family	20
Leaving home	1
By force	6
Drug/alcohol	13

Among these beggars, 15% blamed their parents that they were responsible to make them beggars. Five percent came to this profession because of their stepmother and father. Seven percent identified their friends and relatives and 8% mentioned their husbands and partners for entering in this profession. Five percent of the beggars reported that beggar Sarder is responsible for their

begging. Seven percent reports that they came to this profession by the persuasion of other beggars.

"My father was in jail. My mother did not do anything at the time. The sarder took me from my mother as I was disable and set me in the street. I have been begging since then"

Begging and homelessness:

There was a very close association between begging and homelessness. Almost 60 percent of the beggars had no home. Forty-five percent of the beggars resided in slums and 43% were in streets. Others resided in Mosque and employers home. In the study, there were some beggars who commute from their homes in to the city for a certain period, put on scruffy clothes, pretended to be destitute, earn money by begging and then return home with lot of money.

The beggars were asked if they would get better opportunity to live then what would they do? Forty five percent of the respondents demonstrated that they had no means to earn except begging. Twelve percent reported that *sarder* would not allow them to leave this profession where as 7% did not know where they would go after leaving this profession. Five percent reported that they had to help their family and 2% did not know how to go to their parents. Seven percent of the respondents could not leave the profession, as they had to pay the employers debt and 15 percent had to continue their drug habits.

Income:

In the contemporary days, begging has emerged as a profitable business. The people who begged in Gulshan area made tk300 to tk700in an average days begging. It mainly increases before the festivals---

"In the last Ramadan a man gave me tk3000 to buy this wheel chair. In the month of Ramadan I usually earn tk12000 to tk18000"

Twenty-eight of the respondents earned money between tk50 to tk100 on an average in a day and 48% earned between tk100 to 200. Fifteen percent of the beggars earned money near tk300 and 7% earned tk300 above in a day. This money distributed among the beggars and police and sarders (table 3).

Table 3: Beggar's income

Average daily income	Percent
Tk50-100	27
Tk100-150	22
Tk150-200	27
Tk200-250	15
Tk250-300	2
Tk300 above	7

Fifty five percent of these respondents got total amount of their income, but they had to pay to the police. Only half of their income were consumed by 35% of the respondents and 4% did not get any money from their income. Most of these beggars were highly disabled and couldn't move alone. The begging networks maintained them and took major share of their income---

"The boy who pushed my perambulator took forty percent of my income. I also had to pay tk20 per day who is the owner of this perambulator. I spend rest of money in foods, clothes, tobacco and others".

Types of drugs used the beggars: Cigarette and ganja emerged strongly during course of the research factors, which shaped people's experiences of begging. Table 4 summarizes the interviewees self reported current use of substances. Of the 94 respondents reported they as having drug habits, cigarette were used by 22 percent of beggars and 9% were in the habit of Huqqa. Twenty three percent smoked Ganja. People who smoked Ganja was particularly to regard it as a limited activity, often used simply as a means of relax. Two percent of the beggars reported that they took Heroin and 38% were in drug use. Seven percent drink alcohol (Table 5).

Table 5: types of drug used.

Types of drug	Percent
Drugs	38
Alcohol	7
Cigarette	22
Hukka	8
Ganja	23
Heroin	2

Some respondents said that they drank or used drugs to numb the mind, counter depression, and deal with pain or generally for relaxation-

"It makes me happy, don't it? It gets rid of pain. You can forget all your woes"

As far as the relationship between begging and substance abuse is concerned, most of this interviewed people said that they begged because of a need to fund their alcohol or drugs.

Nature of crime the beggars self reported

The main findings of the research on Criminalisation process of beggars and their criminal activities achieved from Case studies and FGDs.

Child trafficking: Child trafficking is the most dangerous tradition in begging. There were some beggars in the study who were actually engaged in child trafficking—

"I know there are some beggars who are engaged in child trafficking, only a few days ago one of our professional lost her baby from here".

According to the respondents the trafficked children were used in begging because it represents cheap basic capital. To them child begging is profitable to the begging network. A child forced to go into begging is "reusable" as many time as may be wished without need for further investment. This is a crime under the section 360 of the Bangladesh penal code.

Theft: Theft was a common crime (Crime, section 378 Bangladesh Penal Code.) among the respondents. Most of the respondents had the criminal justice experience. In Focus Group Discussions, the respondents said that they stole money, clothes, bags and other easily transportable materials. They had also the experience of steeling materials of other beggars i.e., bowl, plate, clothes and money—

"I just take what I need.... clothes, money, toothpaste".

Prostitution:

Beggars prostitution is as old as the civilization. There were so many beggars who begged at daylight but they were engaged in prostitution. Dhaka University Campus and Sohorawordy Uddan were the place where most of these prostitute beggars resided...

" My mother got married again and the man don't want me as part of their new family. I left the family and come to Dhaka with a girl who is also a prostitute. One day I...now it is my profession"

The Sardarni guided them. The sardarni gave bribe to the police and local mastan and got support to continue her business.

Baby abuse:

Babies were used as a means of begging among some respondents. The respondents said that the baby's got more sympathy. But the matter of danger was that they fed the baby opium to make it asleep all day long. It was found that the old beggars hired adolescents to push their perambulator. Begging with a child or young person under age of 16 years is an offensive under section 4 of the children and a young person Act 1933.

Fraudulent:

It was found that there were some beggars who deceived others by pretending to have disabilities, disease that he or she doesn't really have. During the data collection it was found that the beggars collected an old person and got him laid in the street as if it were a dead body. The beggars were crying by saying that her mother/ father had died and they needed money to bury it. Section 415 of the Bangladesh penal code lays down that whoever, by deceiving any person fundamentally or dishonestly induces the person is said to cheat.

Drug peddlers

The beggars were found the more frequent medium of drug peddling. In the FGDS it was clear that the beggars sold Ganja, Tablets and Heroin. They got it from the intoxicant circle. Not only the beggars but also the addicted people bought ganja from these peddlers. They had a good communication with the law enforcing agencies. Knowingly selling, offering or exposing alcohol/drugs (misuse) is crime under the section of 276.

Discussions

Beggars do not grow criminal in a vacuum; they are the product of society. There is axiomatic belief in our country that people begged as a means of survival rather than accumulate wealth- it is overwhelmingly driven by 'need' not 'greed'. But the findings of the current study suggested that beggars in Dhaka city are completely different. The beggars beg not only to survive but also accumulate wealth. As it is a profitable profession, the beggar's godfathers make it commercial and profitable business. During data collection it was found that beggars often feigned illness, which was also found in Garraty's study (Garraty, 1978).

In this study, the majority of the respondents have the habit of smocking and substance misuse. A small people who did not have a substance dependency cited the expensive nature of surviving in Dhaka city. A major portion of female interviewees were involved in prostitution. It was fairly easy to make sexual relation with the single and distressed women in the study area (Murdock, 1994). Attempts should be made to fight against this problem. But attempts to stop people begging without addressing the reasons why they engage in these criminal activities seem likely to force at least some of them turn in to more criminal activities.

To day it is difficult for us to draw any distinction between organized begging where one or more parsons are compelled to beg by force and people who begged to sustain them. People who are driven to begging many of whom are unable to find work because of poverty, old age, physical disability and drug problems. No body can beg without the permission of the leader who maintain of that particular area. Without the consent of the leaders, the new one will not be allowed to beg. From the above, begging is a problem that must be tackle head on.

Conclusion

Begging is actually the oldest profession, but historical text document that begging is as old as the government itself. From the nomadic existence of mankind to post industrial living, there is a continuous flow of beggars in this subcontinent. In globalize the world; the modern social and economic structure creates the widest gaps between the rich and the poor which perpetuating the

crime and Criminalisation process of beggars. The situation of beggars in Dhaka city is really exceptional than that of any other societies around the world.

So what are the solutions to begging? The first step must be recognition that begging is in and itself a criminal behavior in most cases and as consequences should be treated as such. People who beg are first and foremost extremely vulnerable individuals. The beggar's godfathers take opportunity of their vulnerability. We have to make them free from the grief of their criminal networks.

Within this framework the researcher would suggest the following steps need to be taken in order to deal with the problem of begging---

Participation of beggars in tackling the issue and give them a say in developing a solutions: people who understand better than anyone the causes and consequences of begging.

To give them support services i.e., accommodation, detox services and primary health care. (CARE Bangladesh is providing this)

Create employment opportunity so that they can rebuild themselves, their skills and self-esteem that cater for different levels of need and different levels of ability.

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