



BEGGING IS A CURSE ON SOCIETY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract: *Begging is a practice whereby a person obtains money, food shelter or other things from people they encounter by request. Begging is a complex and multifaceted problem that is most often caused by multiple and interrelated individual and structural deprivations. 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. Religious faith has encouraged begging in India, believing that it is one way to please the Almighty God.*

In the present paper an attempt has been made to analyze the socio-economic causes of begging, bad habits and consequent diseases, the problems of beggars and their remedial measures. The present paper is based on primary data, collected through the field survey and direct questionnaire to the respondents. The survey was carried out during the months of January and February, 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Census of India, beggars are “vagrants, prostitutes and person having unidentified source of income and those with unspecified source of subsistence and not engaged in any economically productive work during reference period called beggars.”

Beggars are the poorest of the poors and the most disadvantageous section of the society, living in such a deprived condition that they are even unable to fulfill their basic needs of life (food, shelter, health and protection). Begging has now become a profession since no physical and mental effort is required to earn one's bread. This profession is based on the sympathetic behaviour of the public towards the deprived people. No doubt, beggars are the needy persons, but upto some extent majority of them has adopted many tactics to collect more alms only to save themselves from physical works.

Beggars are an inescapable part of our society and we have to deal with this reality. Begging is a global phenomenon and not found in our society alone but rather it is found everywhere, in both developed and developing countries. Among beggars there are old people in ill health, the handicapped, the blind, retarded people, children and even the able bodied. A large proportion of beggars are the people who are unable to get on with life in a normal passion because of poverty, disability or other reasons. They can find no way out but to live on alms of others at the expense of their dignity.

The problem of begging is a universal phenomenon; it is not peculiar to any part of the country. Although, the problem of begging is a worldwide phenomenon but it is more pronounced in third-world countries. In many urban areas, beggars are found everywhere in public spaces, such as filling stations, restaurants, banks, super markets, mosques, churches, etc. Deviant behaviors such as theft, thuggery, violent and criminal behavior, and vandalism are listed as some of the vices associated with street begging (Adedibu & Jelili 2011, 17-24; Tambawal 2010 cited by Namwata et al. 2012, 133-143; Adedibu 1989, 25-40). Begging has been a traditional profession in India as charity is considered one of the noblest of human virtues according to Hindu tradition (Dhruvasan 1963, 10-12).

According to Census of India, there were 7, 50, 307 beggars and vagrants in India in 1981 which declined to 6, 27,688 in 2001. Out of the total, about 2/3 beggars were in rural areas while 1/3 in urban areas. However, there are some people who think that begging is an easy way to make a living and earn money without doing any physical work; as a result, the

number of beggars has been increasing day by day. The matter of begging is not the ignorable issue of the society, but in fact, the begging has become one of the most problematic social issues of India. It is, therefore, necessary that empirical studies have to be undertaken aimed at collecting relevant data on subject.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the socio-economic causes of begging.
2. To identify the socio-economic problems and prevalent bad habits among them and also highlight the implications arises out of this profession on the health of beggars.

STUDY AREA

Aligarh, a medium sized city, is spreading over an area of 36.10 sq. km. in the Western part of Uttar Pradesh situated at $27^{\circ}88'N$ latitude and $78^{\circ} 08'E$ longitude given in fig 1. It is situated along the New Delhi - Howrah railway line at the distance of about 126 km. from New Delhi and about 1500 km. from Kolkata. The city is consisting of 60 wards,

SAMPLED LOCATIONS OF FIELD SURVEY IN ALIGARH CITY, 2009

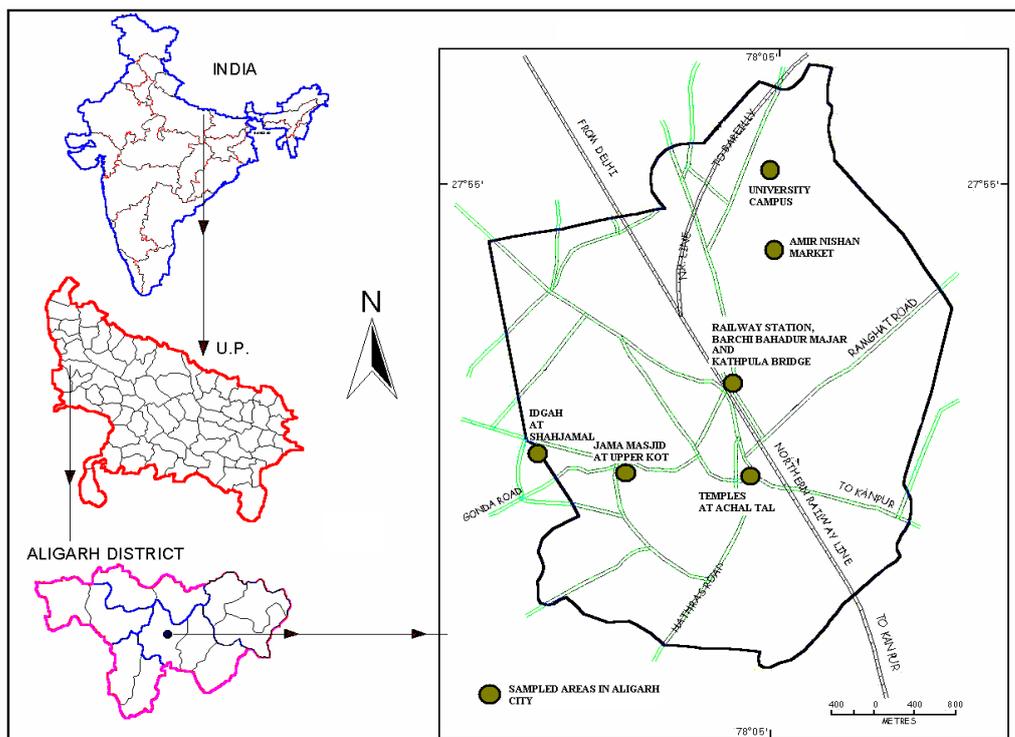


Figure 1



accommodating a residential population of 6, 69,087 of which 3, 56,725 are males and 3, 12,362 females (Census of India, 2001). The literacy rate in the city is 63.92 per cent of which the male literacy rate is 70.63 per cent and females are 56.23 per cent literate. Muslim constitutes nearly one-third of the total population of Aligarh city. There are three factors, which have contributed to the development of Aligarh. These include the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) during pre-independence period, the growth of trade through the establishment of light industries, and its demarcation as the district headquarters which gave it administrative importance.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the primary data generated through field survey and the direct questionnaire to the respondents in the Aligarh city, carried out during the months of January and February, 2009. 200 beggars were interviewed from the various parts of the city for collection of information regarding their socio-economic causes of begging and problems faced by them etc. After the field work, the data collected by using individual slips were scrutinized and were processed in tabular forms according to the various aspects of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicts the percentage distribution of social, economic and biological causes which lead a person towards begging. Poverty, unemployment and inadequate earnings are the major economic causes which forced about 44 per cent of the beggars for the begging, while, among the social factors, namely, illiteracy, Migration Customs, disruption of joint family and death of parents compelled to nearly 21 per cent of the beggars to beg. Alcoholism is also one of the social cause and drove 2.85 per cent of the beggars towards begging. Old age, diseases, disability and mental illness are the main biological factors which shared about 20 per cent of the total causes of the begging in Aligarh city. Religious mendicancy contributes 5.07 per cent in begging and it is generally practiced at the vicinity of religious places like temples, mosques, etc.



Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Causes of Begging in Aligarh City

Type	Causes	Percentage
Economic	Poverty	19.36
	Unemployment	13.96
	Inadequate earning	11.11
	Unremunerative agriculture	2.53
Social	Customs	2.50
	Migration	5.10
	Disruption of joint family	3.17
	No parental care	3.80
	Tempted by others	1.58
	Illiteracy	6.03
	alcoholism and drug abuse	2.85
	Individual beliefs	3.17
Biological	Aged	6.03
	Diseased	7.40
	Mental illness	2.22
	Disability	4.12
Religious	Religious mendicancy	5.07
	Total	100

Source: Based on field Survey, 2009

The percentage distribution of types of problems faced by beggars is given in Table 2. An examination of data given in Table 2 reveals the fact that the most serious problem faced by beggars is economic in nature i.e. insufficient income. Out of total sampled beggars, two-third (66 per cent) of them reported it. The next major problem of beggars is related to health that contributed 59 per cent. It is only because of their poverty and dependency on the mercy of citizens. As a result, they lived in unsanitary living conditions with chronic food shortage which directly affects their health status. Moreover, 45 percent beggars faced the problems of lack of shelters, food and clothes. While 35 percent had the problem of ignorance of passers-by and 27 percent reported about the rude behaviour of donors. However, 25 percent of beggars feel ashamed or embarrassing for begging, but because of their needs and deprived living conditions pull them towards this menial job,



**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Types of Problems Faced by
Beggars in Aligarh City**

Problems	Percent
Insufficient income	66
Health problem	59
Lack of food, clothes and shelter	45
Ignorance of passers-by	35
Rude behaviour of donors	27
Feeling ashamed or embarrassing	26
Torture by police	15

Source: Based on field Survey, 2009

while, 15 percent of them have been tortured by the police because it is an act of crime. In short, Beggars, facing the problems caused by the widening gap between the basic needs and the resources available and they cannot afford the rapid rising cost of living.

The percentage distribution of practices of bad habits among beggars is given in Table 3. Beggars beg because of money but many beggars reported addiction to one or other substances. Out of total sampled beggars, 34 per cent smoke (Low grade cigarette), 17 per cent use gutkha, 13 percent chew the *panmasala* and 20 percent take tobacco. 3 per cent beggars have the addiction of drinking *daru* (locally made beer) and 2 per cent have the bad habit of gambling. However, 34 per cent of them have no bad habits.

**Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Practices of Bad Habits among
Beggars in Aligarh City**

Bad Habits	Percentage
Smoking	34
Tobacco	20
Gutkha	17
Pan Masala	13
Drinking(Daru)	3
Gambling	2
No	34

Source: Based on field Survey, 2009

Table 4 shows the percentage distribution of diseases among beggars in Aligarh city. Health problems are very common among beggars because these people suffer from many diseases due to their unhygienic living conditions, poor nutrition and bad habits. They, generally, eat



and drink without washing their hands. Most of them are the victim of various infectious diseases. The proportion of beggars suffered from diseases, like, asthma, tuberculosis, gout and rheumatism and eye diseases has been recorded 49 per cent, 39 per cent, 23 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. Out of total, 20 per cent of them were physically handicapped. In addition, 8 per cent of them have venereal diseases and 4 per cent leprosy. However, 25 per cent beggars have no disease and 12 per cent did not give any response.

**Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Incidence of Diseases among
Beggars in Aligarh City**

Incidence of Diseases	Percent
Asthma	49
Tuberculosis	39
Gout and Rheumatism	23
Physically handicapped	20
Eye diseases	15
Venereal diseases	8
Leprosy	4
Not known	12
No disease	25

Source: Based on field Survey, 2009

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study reveals that the high concentration of beggars is found near railway station along bridge, followed by religious places and slum areas. The central southern part of the city has higher concentration of beggars because of the favorable location of Jama Masjid, a number of temples at Achal Tal and Idgah at Shahjamaal Area. These places are considered the daily money earning places for beggars. Insufficient income, health problem, lack of food, clothes and shelter, ignorance of passers-by, rude behaviour of donors, feeling ashamed or embarrassing are their major problems. According to beggars of railway station, generally police officers torture and send them into jail. Generally, it is not an offence to ask money in public places with in Aligarh city but According to Railway Act (1989), it is an offence to ask money at railway station.

Because of their miseries they generally indulge themselves in bad habits like smoking, drinking, drug addiction, gambling, etc. The major causes which compelled them to engage themselves in begging activity are poverty, unemployment, Inadequate earning, Diseased,



Illiteracy, Religious mendicancy, Aged, Migration, Disability etc. Majority of them suffer from asthma, tuberculosis, gout and rheumatism, physically handicapped, eye and venereal diseases which lead to their untimely deaths.

It may be summarized from the above analysis that the beggars are the poorest of the poor, deprived and most disadvantageous section of the society, living in unhygienic conditions without sufficient income for their means of livelihood and inaccessibility in basic civic amenities and used as a voting bank for the political parties due to their ignorance and illiteracy. Nobody cares about that they are being exploited by the society and treated as an animal. They are also humans and the citizen of India who have the right to live with dignity and respect.

The following remedial measures may be adopted to overcome the problems of beggars and to contain the practice of begging.

- To provide accommodation and medical facilities to the beggars at cheaper rate.
- To provide financial assistance and social security to the beggars.
- To improve the literacy level of beggars and to make them aware about the various government poverty alleviation programmes.
- To provide assets to make enable them for earning the means of their livelihood.
- To bring change in the negative attitude of general population towards the beggars.
- To pass an ideal Vagrancy Act for the rescue of beggars.
- Last, but not the least, it is the responsibility for every citizen of India that they give respect beggars because they are also the part and parcel of the society, help them with responsibility not with sympathy, and tried to employ them in productive works according to their potentialities and skill rather than give kind and cash to get rid of them.

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