

# Socioeconomic Status of Beggars: The Case of Sylhet City

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## Abstract

Begging is a frequent scenario in Sylhet city. Recently plethora of beggars has been seen at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST); Sylhet campus that's why the study has grown more attentive where as no study has conducted yet in this study area. This study intends to investigate the socioeconomic status of beggars in SUST campus. The Case Study method has been conducted by using in depth interview schedule in time of the survey and Accidental sampling has used where 8 sample size taken into consideration as a single case basis. From the study it has revealed that most of beggars lead a miserable life due to low socioeconomic conditions depriving from minimum education, food, shelter facilities from the city where they live in. Some are physically unable to do the work. Divorcee and widow female beggars expressed that they are compelled to beg as they have no way of bringing up their children. They are deprived of old age allowance and rehabilitation programme arranged by the government. Due to the failure of government to rehabilitate them also causes beggary and lots of sufferings to them. The relevant authorities should think how beggars can be made productive force and ensure human dignity.

## Keywords

Beggars, Socioeconomic Status, SUST

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## 1. Introduction

According to Asian Development Bank, In Bangladesh, 21.8% of the population living below the national poverty line and unemployment rate is 4.2%. As a result a large portion of unemployed poor people chooses begging as their profession others are in compulsion [1]. Macdonald said that asking for alms or charity or giving out of sympathy to the poor is called begging. Begging is also to ask for money without any return of services. Beggars are the members of the society who have been neglected entirely in many spheres in our country [1]. Both socioeconomically and humanly they have no pride and dignity to live in a society due to their begging engagement [2]. The overall socio-economic condition of the country is hugely

questionable to create beggars. Students, pedestrians are being annoyed by the increasing the number of beggars. As per the source of World Bank, in Bangladesh poverty has been reduced to fewer than 40% (among 150 million) from 49% where beggary is one of major problem - recognized as a so-called profession and way earning money to fulfil the family needs [3]. In Dhaka City above 700 thousand people living by begging [4]. Begging is a social problem, considering as a violation public order and it is prohibited by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance III of 1976. According to the finance minister, Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, beggars were around 6, 00,000 to 7,00,000 across the country a few years ago [2]. In his budget speech also said that most of the beggars are professional and among 6 lakh beggars most of them are professional beggars. People get involved in crime due to poverty.

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These people are living in our society by depending on others, who live in a different way and a different class of survival human. For this, begging is considered as a scandal for the society or nation [5]. Yes, it is possible to reduce the extent of begging though not completely eliminate. Mohiuddin Khan said that No matter how much the beggar has the quality; there is no social status for him [6]. Although there are a number of obvious reasons that lead to begging depending on the socio-economic condition of the country in question, several factors are repeatedly identified in numerous studies [7]. A Research conducted by authors where they tried to explore the major factors (causes) of beggary of Sylhet city [4]. A similar study has done to identify the existing situation of child beggar of selected area in Sylhet City [8]. A study done to find out whether the beggars in Dhaka city are involved in begging finding no other alternatives or willing to do something else or they are taking this as their profession and enjoying it [9]. Another study has accomplished entitled with ‘*Exploring Cruel Business of Begging: The Case of Bangladesh*’, tried to know the nature and extent of cruel trade of begging and to find out the gangs who are engaged with this begging trade [10]. They explored that some are forced to beg but most of them are engaged in Begging due to poverty and the low socio-economic condition [11, 12]. This present study has similar results in terms of socioeconomic conditions of the beggars comparing those above all mentioned study has done by different authors choosing different methods to find out the consent result.

## 2. Methodology

The selected study area of this study is Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.

Qualitative case study approach has been considered to get in depth idea about socio-condition of beggars which is a threat to a developing country and what are the guidelines for government to reduce the extend. It has been used in this study because in-depth investigation is required and allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues. Having the above objectives in mind, data were collected through in-depth face to face interview (one to one case basis) with SUST beggars. Mostly the primary data have been collected from the field level population through in audio recorder, in-depth interview and observation from the beggars of SUST. The secondary data has been collected from the Department of Social Services: Sylhet Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, previous research paper, different related articles, journals, reports etc. The collected data has been recorded through audio recorder and transcribed those recorded data into text. After collecting

data using the case study method, data has been analyzed thematically to get maximum outcome of this study.

## 3. Result

Beggar people in the lower middle income country like Bangladesh are the victim of an unbalanced socio-economic system. Most of the participant is engaged in begging due to their low socio-economic condition.

### 3.1. Socioeconomic Condition of Beggars

#### 3.1.1. Poverty

*Case Study-1: Rahima Bibi (Pseudo name), 70 years old.*

*She is a beggar of Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet. For 8 years she regularly comes there. He is very familiar face to all SUST populations. "My opinion on begging is that gives us some hope to live because we have no option.*

*"We are living on hand to mouth. Poverty forced to beg".*

*She was crying while expressing that due to poverty they compel to beg and have no ability to build a own living house . Poverty makes her life miserable.*

One of the major factors that are responsible for begging as mentioned by the participants is poverty. The participants see themselves as poor so as bound to beg as they are aged and lucrative earning without working. The issue of poverty being one of the reasons begs however became a contentious issue among the male participants with two of them having strong opposing views. Whilst one strongly believed it was poverty the other one said it could not be poverty at all.

#### 3.1.2. Daily Income

Respondents (5 cases) have their daily income minimum Tk. 100 and highest 500 tk. And others (3 cases) have their daily income in between Tk. 200-250. Daily income is depending on lot of variables like weather, physical fitness and crowd of campus. During the exam period in different departments campus were less crowded and Income becomes very low.

#### 3.1.3. Begging Hours

Most of the respondents involve in begging about 5 to 10 hours in a day. They said that we come to the campus at 9/10 am until 4 pm. Begging hours depend on various factors such as some are disable can't walk long time, student appearance, weather etc. That's why their belongings to campus are varied.

"I am suffering from different physical problem like waist pain for that reason I cannot move on long time". (Case Study 2: Golabjan (Pseudo name), Female, 60 years old).

#### 3.1.4. Child Upbringing

I engaged with the female participants in the friendly discussions as a way of getting in-depth knowledge on the issue of root causes of begging and it was also to explore

why they are going to beg. The all 3 female beggars in the discussions they expressed actually knew their obligations as mother and they had to find a way to raise their children.

*Case Study 4: Anu (Pseudo name), Female, 80 years old*

*She said this "Daily income is 300-400 which is spent to buy livelihood and also have to keep money for my two sons. I am ready to starve to educate my children"*

### 3.1.5. Homelessness

When the residential locations are considered, it is observed that most of the beggars live rent house. They have no own living house. To manage the house rent they come to beg. So, it is understood that homelessness is the one of the major factors of begging among the interviewed participant.

*Case 5: Najma, Female, 65 years old*

*She said "I have to pay 1500 tk per month as house rent though the house is very tiny and tin-shaded house. I live with my two autistic daughters and paralyzed husband. It is tough for me to bear the house rent and I choose the begging since 6 months."*

### 3.1.6. Family Disorganization

The relationship of husband-wife in these families also plays a major role in their act of continuous begging. The husband sometimes talks to the wife and children in a manner that will definitely compel them to go and beg. Again some female got divorced from their husband where or sometimes wife leave the husband because her husband none more girl without convincing present wife. I asked Ana 71, he said that one day his wife called him and told him to help her (wife) by going to beg because she would not be able to fulfil the needs after paying housing rent (2000 tk).

*Case Study 7: Faizun (Pseudo name) said that.*

*"I have no own living house. I have place (Vita) for building house but no financial ability to build that house. Now I am living on my sister's house with one son and one girl. My husband left me around 12 years ago"*

*He explained that "My wife called me one day and told me that I should assist her because the way it is, it will be difficult for her to take care of me so I should start to go and beg. He explained to me that begging was not willing job for 70 years old man they compel to beg". (Ana, a participant)*

### 3.1.7. Uneducated / Poor Education

The fact is that most of the beggars have little or no education at all makes it a bigger problem for the society. Because an educated although poor people can solve his/her problems by using his merit. It is interesting to see that they even did not receive any obligatory primary school education. All data we collected on the issue and understand that some of them do not even have basic identity records or documents.

## 3.2. Way of Begging

### 3.2.1. Religious Sentiment

The biggest income source of beggars is the moral and religious feelings of people. They used to beg by using the name of Allah. The interesting fact is that all of the beggars are Muslims. Accordingly, the begging of women with their children increases the pity of people towards them.

*When a participant was asked that please don't mind, Which Way you beg? He replied that I am asking money by saying "Allah wastey I ta taka den mama". (a participant)*

*To get money and sympathy from people they use this kind of religious word. Religion plays a part to involve in beggary.*

### 3.2.2. Physical Inability

Majority of the beggars are not capable to work due to their physical inability in SUST which is not only crucial factor to involve in beggary but also a major obstacle beyond their overall progress. Beggary is a means of earning money which is associated with suffering from various kinds of disease. It is the result of staying with dust, rain, heat of sun. Some aged person like Amu (age 65) has also involved with begging due to his physical disability.

*Case-3: Abu (Pseudo name), Male, 80 years old*

*"I have so many diseases like eye problem, Asthma. As I am aged person I am a patient. I am taking medicine regularly. To buy medicine daily there is always a pressure on me. This force me to do something".*

*Case Study 2: Golabjan (Pseudo name), Female, 60 years old*

*"I am suffering from different physical problem like waist pain for that reason I cannot move on long time".*

### 3.2.3. Old Age

Most of the participants were above 60 years old. They said that aged person can't find work or people don't give them work or unable to do the work as they are vulnerable. So they think will kind of them seeing that old age.

*Case 6: Motin, Male, 80 years old*

*"I am a blind person by birth. I have four daughters and they got married, being old can't do any hard work and my wife is also aged. I worked as a rickshaw puller and my wife worked as a servant. But now both of us are getting old and we are begging in campus since last year."*

### 3.2.4. Reactions of Passersby to Beggars

In terms of observations, it is find that some beggars beg from passersby by stretching their arms out and speaking phrases like "Give me alms," "Give me money for shelter or medication," etc. People usually responded by saying either "I have nothing" or "Let God helps you." "Come later;" or "Go away from here," just to make beggars move away from them. These persons who have lost their sense of dignity must not be turned down their attention with harsh words and they will continue to bother or disturb you. Income instances,

beggars have experienced aggressive comments and unkind responses from passersby.

### 3.2.5. Working Inability

Beggars face multiple kind of disease at the time of begging as well as- fever and headache waist pain respectively which is not only harmful for their physical condition but also a threat for the capability to work. Working inability is one of the most prominent factors of compulsion of beggary if it is true for the respondents.

### 3.3. The Government and Non-government Initiatives for the Beggars

The government has a major role to play to eradicate begging and take necessary steps to rehabilitate the beggars. We find that plenty of beggars wherever we go especially in SUST campus.

#### 3.3.1. Vocational Training

Bangladeshi Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haque Mostafa Shaheed says the aim is not to drive away beggars but to find ways to help them. "We will help those who want to go back to their villages to restart their lives," he said. "We will give them vocational training. For some others, we are ready to give old-age pension. For the rehabilitation programme, we need precise information about the beggars [13].

#### 3.3.2. Difficulties in Accessing Government Grants

When participant was asked that old age allowance is arranged by the government mostly answers that it is a critical process. Some people take taka from them to manage vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) card but result is nothing. It is unknown to them Government has rehabilitation programme for the beggars. They think that government is not for poor people.

#### 3.3.3. Beggars Rehabilitation Project

The "Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM)" site (2010) indicated that Begging is a national problem. Many of us in our society are involved with begging willingly or unwillingly. Begging can be eradicated from the society through improving socio-economic condition of these beggars and establishing their human dignity. In order to create opportunities for those who want to quit begging and return to normal life, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) has initiated a project to rehabilitate the beggar through DAM Foundation for Economic Development (DFED). This project has started its full-fledged activities with a view to donating one-time grant money among beggars and involving them in income-generating activities and gradually including them into social safety net programs, offered by public and private institutes, and involving them

into 'Ultra Poor Scheme' of DFED and thus bringing them back to mainstream in the society.

### 3.3.4. Negligence from Relatives (No Financial Support)

Negligence by relatives is one of the common factors for poor people who earn the livelihood by begging and hand to mouth. Beggars stay in their existing society along with poverty, low income, lack of proper basic demand and low social status etc. This situation displays the real social position of beggars where they also denied out by nearest relatives who able to help their poor relatives (beggars). A participant said that "*beggars unable to get financial support from their rich relatives which are one kind of negligence toward them*".

## 4. Discussion

This study was conducted on the beggars of the SUST which mainly focused in the socio-economic condition and way of begging of the SUST. Before observing and knowing about the opinion through interview various criteria was designed and many information was came out from the respondents. Beggary seems to be indispensable for those who are poor and disable. From observations and interviews, it is clear that the participants continue to beg because the factors that facilitate this practice (i.e., unemployment, poor educational level, disrupted family backgrounds) remain unalleviated, therefore continuously supporting the practice of begging.

Every day, some beggars can be seen on the roadside, "Tongs" in SUST. Many of them are physically disabled, old aged. Before going to interviewed, the literature review assumed that most of beggars are taking this as a profession. But after observation it has to be said that most of the beggars of the study area are in a compulsion. They are compelled to beg.

The number of female beggars is more than the male in the begging profession. They are more vulnerable than the male and others segment of the society. A female respondent named Fuljan (age 55) mentioned that she was compelled to come in this profession. She told the researcher that after her husband passed away, she has been deprived from her home and her property by her children. She then migrated to Sylhet city from Chatok (Sunamgoj), for survival and started begging in SUST campus finding no option. She is not happy at all with her condition but not eager to change begging profession as well if offered another income source. It is found that they are in begging as compulsion not taking as profession. Situation made them beggar. Their family expenditure and failing to maintain all the essential needs which push them to involve in



begging and various starve in their family life.

Some aged person like Rashid (age 65) has also involved with begging due to his physical condition. But the difference from other respondents is that he is very happy with his present condition and is not likely to change it.

They think beggary is easier than working in the age of 80/60/70 years. They are not able to accept an alternative working profession only if they are offered. It is also found that government has lot of duty towards these poor people because are deprived of old age allowance and rehabilitation programme arranged by the government. Due to the failure of government to rehabilitate them also causes beggary and lots of sufferings to them.

## 5. Conclusion

Begging is a complex social problem. Because with begging financial and social status are involved. Inadequacy religious discipline, Social values, Social safety net programs has further expanded begging in Bangladesh. SUST is also not free from this problem. The overall socio-economic condition of SUST beggars are not satisfactory at all which is represented the situation of other part of the country. Sometimes they are humiliated by well educated modern person. They are deprived of governmental facilities. If the proper steps are taken by government and NGOS to develop their socio-economic condition it will reduce in some extent. Because in an educational institution like SUST it is Annoying that students are busy with their friends, group study or in important discussion while beggars asking money to them continuously after having said that please come later. They are acting like a Stubborn. Beggary problem caused due to the poor socio-economic conditions, poverty, lack of working opportunities etc. It must be removed from the society through appropriate rehabilitation and alternative employment of the beggars. Government and no government institution should come forward in this regard. Finally it can be said that if the government think about them more seriously their sufferings will reduce in some extent. Nowadays, Bangladesh government has taken a particular decision so that anybody doesn't become jobless.

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