

Measuring Socio-economic Conditions of Street Beggars at Dhaka City in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

KAZI SHAHDAT KABIR, Ph. D.

Associate Professor

Department of Development & Governance Studies

Coordinator, Centre for General Education

Northern University Bangladesh

Road # 4A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

E mail: kazi.rimon@gmail.com

MD. ABDULLAH AL HELAL

Senior Lecturer in Social Work

Centre for General Education

Northern University Bangladesh

Road # 4A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

E mail: helalabdullah@gmail.com

MD. MAHBUBUR RAHMAN

Senior Lecturer in Anthrology

Centre for General Education

Northern University Bangladesh

Road # 4A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

E mail: jillurmahbub@gmail.com

Measuring Socio-economic Conditions of Street Beggars at Dhaka City in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

Dr. Kazi Shahdat Kabir¹
Md. Abdullah Al Helal²
Md. Mahbubur Rahman³

Abstract

The article explores the living standards, health conditions, education background of street beggars in Dhaka city. It illustrates that compared to the increasing population in Dhaka city capital of Bangladesh; beggars are also increasing in an alarming rate. It is such a life style in which one kind of people depends on other to earn their livelihood. Though beggars are the part of human society, they can not enjoy their rights properly. Even they lead a miserable life depriving from education, food, shelter facilities of the city. Better treatment is beyond their means. Besides, many social crimes are also being committed by them. A large number of beggars mean non utilization of available human resources and drag upon the existing resources of the society. Basically they are the victim of vicious cycle of poverty. Apart from this some are forced to beg by vested quarter. Besides, we have suggested some possible solutions to protect of increasing beggars. In this regard a questionnaire survey study has been conducted to explore the socio-economic conditions of street beggars in Dhaka city.

Key Words: Beggar, Beggary, Street beggar, Socio-economic condition, Cruel Trade

1.1 Introduction

Nowadays the low income countries of the world are experiencing several problems without adequate solutions such as poverty, malnutrition, unemployment etc. Bangladesh is not exceptional of these. Associating with these problems beggary has created a grave concern in Bangladesh especially in the city of Dhaka, which is one of the megacities in the world. In Bangladesh about 1,141 persons living in per sq km in the countryside whereas 18,055 persons living in Dhaka city with a birth rate of 1.4 per couple, there would be about 20 lakh new mouths to be added every year (Khan, Asaduzzaman 2011). Experts opine that according to the infrastructural facilities and carrying capacity maximum 50,0000 people can live in Dhaka city. Another report shows that in Dhaka there are more than 13 million inhabitants. Moreover daily 2136 people are newly entering in capital. According to the statistics it is supposed to add 7,080,000 people annually in Dhaka city (K. Zehadul, 2010). With a population of more than 13 million,

¹ Associate professor, Dept. of Development & Governance Studies, Northern University Bangladesh

² Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Center for GED, Northern University Bangladesh

³ Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, Center for GED, Northern University Bangladesh

Dhaka has been ranked the most densely-populated city in the world. Along with bulk inhabitants higher beggar population creates manifold problems such as traffic congestion, proliferation of slums and heightening pressure on utility services.” They cause troubles. Sometimes they cause accident (Ahmed, K. Neaz). Pedestrians and passengers are being annoyed by the increasing beggars. It is said that Beggars are also liable to demolish beautification of the city. In abroad, the beggars beg of showing or doing some activities for giving pleasure to the mass people, but in Bangladesh things are totally different. This large number of beggar has questionable contributions in the overall socio-economic development in the country. Rather they consume a great percentage of our national income. Thus they are treated as unused human resource in the society as well as burden in the national life.

1.2 Rationale of the study:

In the capital and other major cities in Bangladesh, various government agencies said that the number of beggars will be not less than one million and it is increasing in an alarming rate. Although there is no specific documents about the number of beggar in the country, yet approximately around 6,00,000 to 7,00,000 were living across the country a few years back, but has increased substantially (<http://balita.ph/2010>). For this reason, the street beggars have become a socio- economic and policy issue of Bangladesh government and they have planned to eradicate begging in the next five years, in addition to the national parliament passed anti beggar bill on 1st April 2009. As the citizen of Bangladesh the street beggars have right to get facilities from the government in order to fulfill their basic needs. The development initiatives of the government will not be successful if this segment of people is excluded from the government support. For the betterment of the street beggars it is necessary to know their overall condition such as demographic information, livelihood patterns, family background, housing condition etc. So far we know no study was conducted especially on this area. We have found very few studies which have covered some of the above aspects. So, to address the problem of the street beggars first it is necessary to conduct some primary studies, so that the policy makers can take some steps on the basis of the findings. Considering these necessities the present study leads to be one of the pioneers in this arena.

1.3 Beggar and Its correlates

(i) Socio-economic Condition

The term Socio comes from social, and refers to any number of demographic and social conditions, such as the age structure, racial composition, sex ratio, marriage & divorce rates and so on. Economic refers to the economic conditions, such as income, unemployment rates, savings rates, and so on. Social scientists use socioeconomic as an umbrella term to cover a wide variety of interrelated social and economic factors that might tend to explain an observed phenomenon, event or set of events. Social scientists have long observed that crime rates are associated with low income, birth rates, the divorce rate, and other factors. None of these occur in isolation. They are all related to each other.

(ii) Street Beggar

A street beggar is a person who begs in the street and asks for alms or charity or performance such actions which derive sympathy from others and who give something in return. So, street beggar refers who beg in the street requesting a donation in a supplication manner. Beggars are commonly found in public places such as street corners of public transport, where they request money, most commonly in the form of spare change. They may use cups, boxes or hats to collect donations (wiktionary.org).

(iii) Beggary

Beggary means begging on the roads or on door to door standing or entering a dwelling, house or a place of business or otherwise for the maintenance of himself and his dependants (Hyderabad Beggary Act, 1941). In addition to, soliciting or receiving alms, in a public place whether or not doing such as singing, dancing, fortune telling, performing or offering any activities for sale. It also denotes, having no visible means of subsistence and wandering, about or remaining in any public place in such condition or manner, as makes it likely that the person doing so exist soliciting or receiving alms.

1.4 Beggary: A Common Scenario of Dhaka City

The vast rural population often undergo natural calamities, mainly river erosion which render millions homeless and without provision for earning livelihood. A sizeable portion of such rootless people find its way into cities and towns in search of jobs. They work as day laborers, domestic helps, rickshaw-pullers and vendors. Those who are physically disabled and too old find begging as a profession. Their numbers are on the rise (*The Financial Express*, 2012). There is no place in the Dhaka city where beggars are not found. Mainly they gather on Friday near the mosques in the towns, bus stand, and railway stations, in front of markets and in the traffic signals. Almost all of the city's intersections, including Sonargaon Hotel, Sheraton Hotel, Kakrail, SAARC Fountain, Gulshan 1, Gulshan 2, Shahbagh, Motijheel and Baitul Mukarram, buzz with the whining beggars. Typical locations include -office building entrances, ATMs, parking meters, cultural precincts, particularly locations where there are queues for entry by tourists, major sports venues, petrol stations, fast food venues and restaurants, convenience and grocery stores (G. Rabbany 2007).

1.5 Beggars Classification and Way of Begging

The Following types of beggar can be seen in the street of Dhaka city. (i) Able-bodied adult beggars: They beg because they are unemployed or underemployed and have no other sources of money to support themselves. On the other hand some lazy who are not prepared to work hard are also tempted to become beggars. ii) Able-bodied child beggars: they are forced to beg due to family disorganizations. iii) Hereditary beggars: they consider begging as their hereditary profession. They beg without any hesitation. iv) Sick or Diseased beggars are suffering from chronic and incurable disease such as leprosy, T.B, skin diseases etc. v) Physically disabled beggars include blind, deaf, dumb and crippled. vi) Mentally retarded beggars are found to be mentally deranged. vii) Old and incapable beggars beg due to incapacity to work and earn a living. Viii) Religion mendicants beg because they believe that beggary has the sanction of religion. (Rao, C.N. Shankar: 2000) Many of them recite verses from the holy "The Quran" and some are found singing *Gazal* (Islamic song). While begging in the street some of them utter peculiar sound to draw the attention of the passers-by. Some of them carry testimonial of

the local chairman or from any important person, or from the physicians to help them for the time being. Some beg for the treatment, some for the help of his daughter's marriage. Nowadays they play many tricks to draw the attention of the people. Many falsehoods are being played by them. There are countless false tricks they apply. Children also take some tricks to beg. Sometimes they sell used/stale flowers during traffic signal, seeking alms by washing glass of car during traffic signal. Sometimes they beg in the park saying false story like as "I have not taken any food whole day, my step mother does not give me food etc", then they try to cry but few minutes later they laugh. In some places some beggars are proved cheaters. Some able bodied are found pretending lame, blind or dumb. Some healthy beggars pretend to be patients ((G. Rabbany 2007).

1.5 Cruel Trade behind Beggary

It is found that children begging on the streets whose arms are amputated from the elbow or legs amputated from the knees. These children offer a very melancholic site and any soft person passing them cannot but help giving alms to them. These children are trained to play even musical instruments like a harmonium which they sometimes carry along. Some sing as well as they could, others play pranks and entertain the people mostly in rail compartments. Children are also trained how to cry and make melancholic faces so that people give them more alms. There are team leaders around them to watch the performance of these beggar children. Those who do not cry properly or beg properly are taken to task and their performance is monitored until they improve. In addition to, a vested syndicate is actively involved in this trade. They are adopting heinous strategies such as kidnapping children and making them disabled forever in order to deploy them in beggary. This sort of monstrous incidents has occurred in different parts of country. Last year on September 06, 2010, the media reported one such incident where a man named Omar Faruq kidnapped a seven-year-old named Niyamul from Kamrangir Char in Dhaka. The thugs severely injured the children with sharp blades. A case was lodged in this regard. However, the victim's family was threatened, allegedly in cooperation with the police. Some human rights organizations raised their voice against such barbaric activities. In the end, Law enforced group (Rapid Action Battalion) arrested Omar Faruk, who confessed involvement with many illegal businesses. Reportedly, he used to

intentionally impair healthy children in various cruel methods and forced them to get into beggary (Weekly Robbar 2011).

There are more than 30,000 beggars, under the control of about a hundred unscrupulous influential people, have been begging in groups in different places in Dhaka. The groups that trade in beggary collect paralyzed, blind, disfigured children, men and women and deploy them to beg at public places on a salary or commission basis. The owners of the beggars take all the money from them except their contractual salary or commission. The money earned in hardship by these beggars has turned these bosses into millionaires with luxurious houses and cars. There are lots of complains against the syndicate in the capital city. Some people have been arrested several times but released through bail after sometimes. Not only do they get the beggars into begging, but also they involve them in terrorist activities. They are also involved with drug business. In connection with some dishonest government officials, the bosses of beggars allegedly earn money in illegal ways (Daily New Age 2011).

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess the socio-economic conditions of the street beggars of some selected areas of Dhaka city. To achieve the major objective, the study also sets the following specific objectives. These are

1. to find out the root causes of seeking alms;
2. to explore their livelihood (daily income and expenditure) pattern;
3. to examine their educational and health facilities;
4. to investigate the unmanageable problems they are to face usually security, police torture etc;
5. to know the policy initiated by government and non-government organizations for them;

1.7 Literature Review

In the article “Categories of Street Beggars and Factors Influencing Street Begging In Central Tanzania” 2102 Baltazar M.L. Namwata et al. showed that street beggars fell into four categories namely beggars on the streets, beggars of the streets, beggars in the

streets, and beggars of street families, based on where they slept after begging hours and contacts with their families. Furthermore, the phenomenon of street begging is an outcome of many factors, including poverty, unemployment, physical challenges, death of parents and family disintegration. The study recommends that to address the phenomenon of street begging, policy planners and local government authorities must adopt multi-faceted, multi-targeted, and multi-tiered approaches in the form of preventative and responsive interventions.

CSID 2008 investigated that due to unfavorable situation many persons with disabilities (children, men, and women) are being bound to start begging on the street just for survival. Street beggars are being treated as lower cast in our society and they are being isolated. They do not have values and not even having minimum respect in the society. So, many disabled persons who are street beggar living inhuman lives. Their rights are being violated in every sphere of lives. The paper suggests that earning money and economic independence is the way to establish a person's self-confidence, self-esteem, acceptance and dignity in the family as well as society, but that must be in a dignified way or profession. Inaccessible infrastructure, transport system, unfriendly workplace environment and office equipment and inaccessibility in the financial support are the major barrier for employment of persons with disabilities in a dignified way. There is hardly any place in the world where beggars cannot be found. Even begging exists in the "advanced countries" of Europe and America. In some Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia where begging is officially outlawed, still one can still find some people begging. If they are not Saudi Arabian citizens, they are foreign nationals who come purposely to beg. This shows how serious the problem is (Omotosho A. O 2001). People are doing beggary for many causes. Usually, people adopted begging because of destitution, broken homes, diseased, physical handicap and unguided childhood etc. Generally they are available at rubbish dump, road sides, and traffic lights and under flyovers. The term varies in terms of connotation, degree and kind (Devi Shanti 1962).

A Worldwide NGO World Vision (2010) explored that poverty, domestic abuse and violence, broken families or death of a caregiver(s) are some of the reasons why people

become homeless and children unaccompanied. While some people are forced into begging, others turn to begging as a way to make money because there are few alternatives. The majority of adult beggars are disabled, elderly, mentally ill or afflicted with a stigmatized illness, such as leprosy. Children may also accompany adult beggars either through necessity or to be used to elicit greater sympathy from passersby.

Ojo, Y. A. (2005) showed that regardless of the reasons for which begging is taken to, the state of anomie of the city allows the beggar (of whatever category) to remain shameless, unidentifiable and 'faceless'. This attribute of facelessness resulting from the population thickness and heterogeneity of the city makes it difficult for the power that be and other concerned parties to get the urban street cleansed of beggars. It is no sooner that some of the state governments in the federation evacuate the beggars from the city than they re-appear. Swanson, K. (2007) examined that indigenous beggars and street vendors are perceived to threaten the "proper" meaning of urban space or, rather, threaten the dominant ideological construction of space. If the ideological construction of urban space is to be a space of "beauty" or a space for tourism then, "ragged" beggars become incompatible with this meaning. These taken-for-granted aspects of place are thus used to turn attention away from social problems and reframe the issue in terms of the quality of a particular place. The issue thus becomes more about removing indigenous street vendors and beggars from the streets (framed in the common sense discourse that "the streets are no place for a child", for instance) rather than trying to alleviate the larger forces that push them there in the first place.

Baltazar M.L. Namwata, et al. (2011) showed that the appearance of beggars who seemed to spend most of their time on the streets and public spaces in many urban areas of developing countries can be traced back to the late 1960's. This situation is a reflection of urban complexities worldwide and has become a very common and familiar phenomenon for a long time. The population of beggars on our streets is growing exponentially. Today, their presence in the streets of urban areas of developing countries is recognized to be a serious problem that requires urgent redress. Not only have their numbers grown over the years, their lifestyles and the display of overtly aggressive behavior make them

the subjects of suspicion and hostility by the public at large and the law enforcement agencies in particular. The menace of street begging as a potential threat to the environmental, economic and social survival of humanity societal fabric is evident. Jelili MO (2006) suggested that begging also constitutes economic threat to the society as beggars are not economically productive in any way since they contribute nothing to national economy. The city and national economy is retarded as considerable proportion of beggars population depend on the already overstretched workforce. The environmental implications of begging is made manifest not only in beggars' tendency to obstruct free flow of human and vehicular traffic but also their high tendency to generate dirty materials either as waste or as parts of their belongings to their regular routes and stations. Although, the negative implications of begging discussed above have generated research efforts of various scholars, much has not been done on the social etiology of this social phenomenon.

Hitchcock, Tim (2005) examined that in the case of begging, we are confronted with a phenomenon that helps to remind us of the continuing importance of a moral economy in determining the everyday behavior of individual men and women. However compelling the new discourses of capitalism and utilitarianism might have been, most people, both beggars and almsgivers, continued to respond to the claims of social obligation and Christian charity. In the process, beggars were able to use subtly the varied rhetoric of social obligation to force the hands of their social superiors.

1.8. Methodology of the Study

This study is basically quantitative based on both secondary and primary data. A structured questionnaire was prepared to collect primary data considering the objectives of the study. A draft questionnaire was tested with 10 baggers to find out whether the questionnaire was understandable to them or if any changes were necessary. All the beggars of Dhaka city have been considered as population of the study and every street beggar aged 30 to 50 has been considered as unit of analysis. Cluster sampling has been used to select the respondents. Firstly, all the important points of Dhaka city, where

significant number of street beggars live, have been identified. Secondly, twenty (20) significant points have been selected purposively i.e. New Market, Sodorghat, Baitul Mokaram Mosjid, Komlapur Railway Station, Shah Jalal International Airport etc. The total number of sample for the study was 200, which were drawn from the selected 20 different places of Dhaka city five (5) respondents have been interviewed [20x5=100] from each 20 places and another 100 beggars have been selected as respondents randomly/ accidentally at any place of Dhaka city. They have been interviewed under questionnaire survey method. So, total sample size is two hundred 200.

1.9. Limitations of the Study

The beggar problem as such has seldom been a subject of rigid scientific inquiry. No doubt, there have been a few local studies and regional investigations but no definite research has been conducted on the problem in its entirety and proper perspective in our country perspective. On the other hand beggars do not want to disclose their real information due to fear of being cheated or being eradicated by government or vested syndicate.

2.0. Major Findings of the Study

2.1. Respondents Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	120	60
Female	80	40
Total	200	100%

Table-1

The data were collected from the significant points of Dhaka City Corporation area where street beggars are available. Among them 60% respondents were male and 40% were female.

2.2. Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
30 – 34 Years	34	17
35 - 39 Years	26	13
40 - 44 Years	52	25
45 - 49 Years	41	21

50 - 54 Years	29	15
55 - 60 Years	18	9
Total	200	100%

Table-2

Data shows that majority respondents (25%) were 40 to 44 years of old while 21%, 17%, 15%, 13% and 9% were 45-49, 30-34, 50-54, 35-49 and 55-60 years of old respectively.

2.3. Residential Status

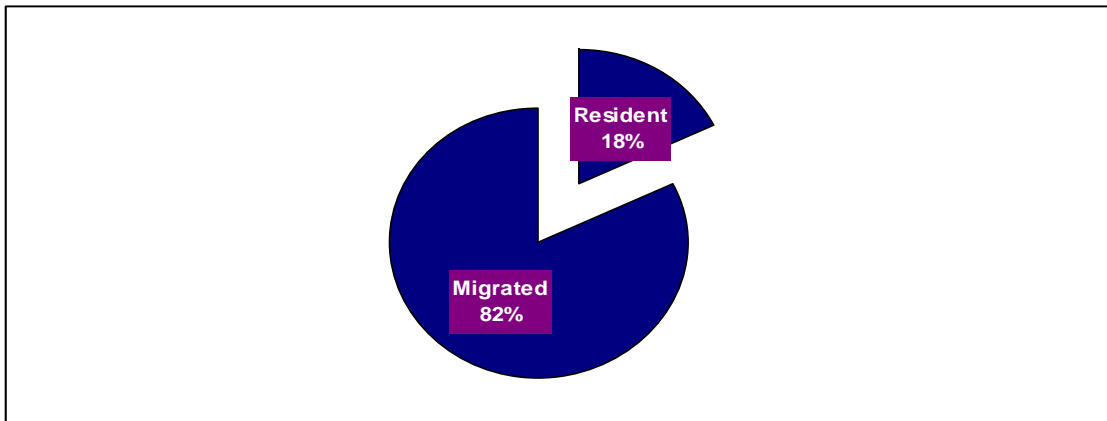


Figure-1

The above figure shows that only 18 percent beggars claimed that they are resident of Dhaka City Corporation. On the other hand 82 percent beggars confessed that they have migrated to Dhaka city from the country side. Among the migrated beggars 64 percent migrated with family and 36 percent migrated alone. Poverty, rural unemployment and frequent visit of natural disaster are the root causes of migration to Dhaka they mentioned.

2.4 Sleeping Arrangement

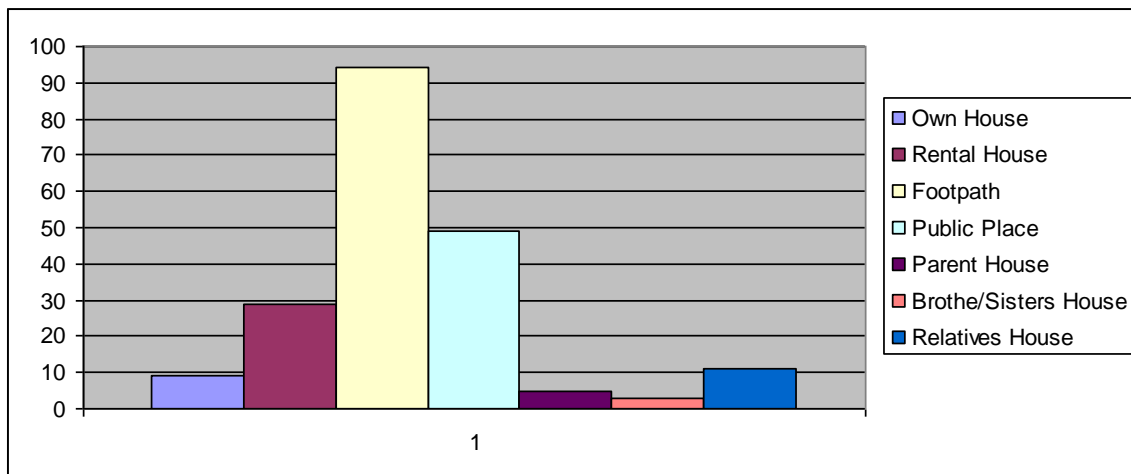


Figure-2

The survey reveals most of the street beggar's (46%) sleeping place at night is footpath. The second most (24%) sleeping position is public place such as bus terminals, rail stations etc. and do not use pillow or mat during sleeping. Mosquito appears their main enemy at sleeping time. Only a fraction of street beggars found in the survey who sleep in own house (5%), parent house (3%), sister/brother's house (2%) and relative's house (6%) as well.

2.5 Educational Background

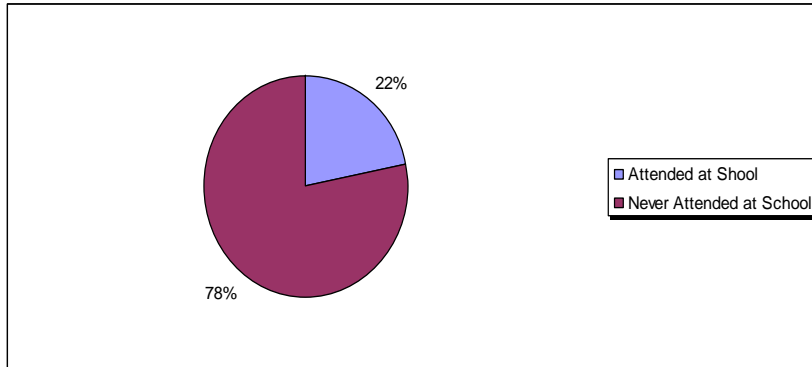


Figure-3

According to the survey, 22% street beggars of Dhaka City Corporation area attended at primary school where 3% completed class five which was the highest class they completed and the rests dropped out before that. In contrast 78% respondents never attended at school.

2.6 Reason of Begging

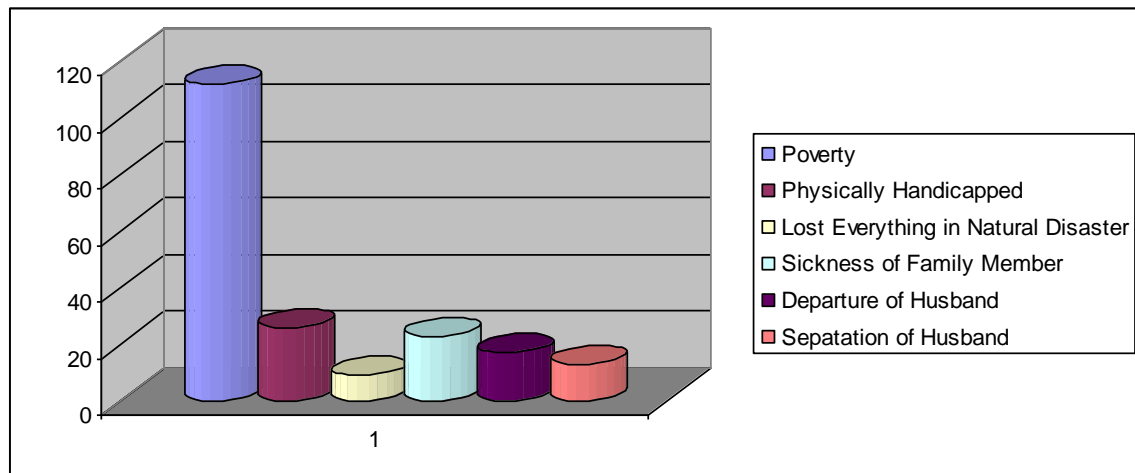


Figure-4

The survey shows that most of the beggars are the victim of vicious cycle of poverty. 55 percent street beggars disclosed that they beg due to poverty. In addition to, 12 percent forced to beg due to their physical impairment. Others also indicated natural disaster

(5%) specially river erosion and famine what made them destitute, sickness of family member (12%), departure of husband (9%) and separation of husband (7%) as additional factors behind their beggary.

2.7 Percentage Distribution of the Years of Begging

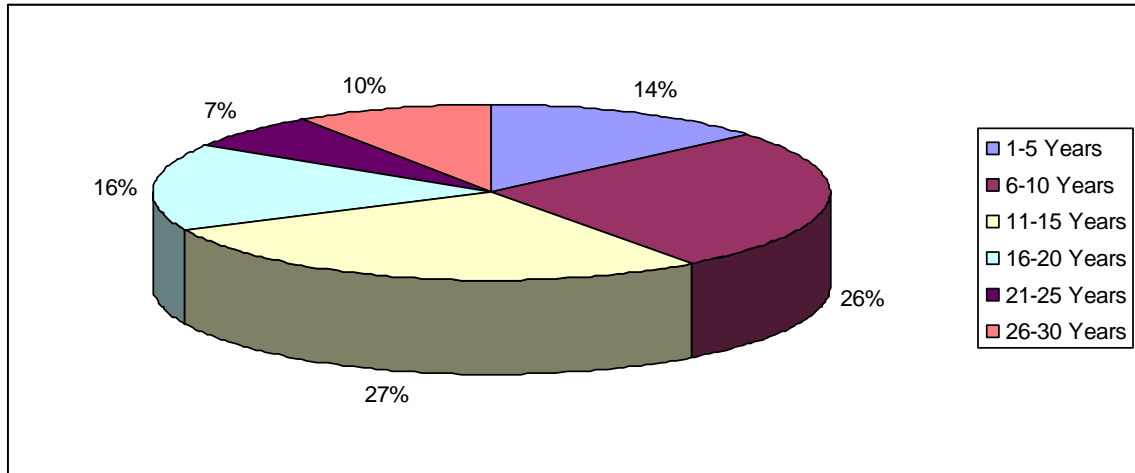


Figure-5

Among the respondents 14 percent had been begging around 1-5 years whilst 26%, 27%, 16%, 7% and 10% had been begging almost 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25 and 26-30 years in that order.

2.8 Begging Hours

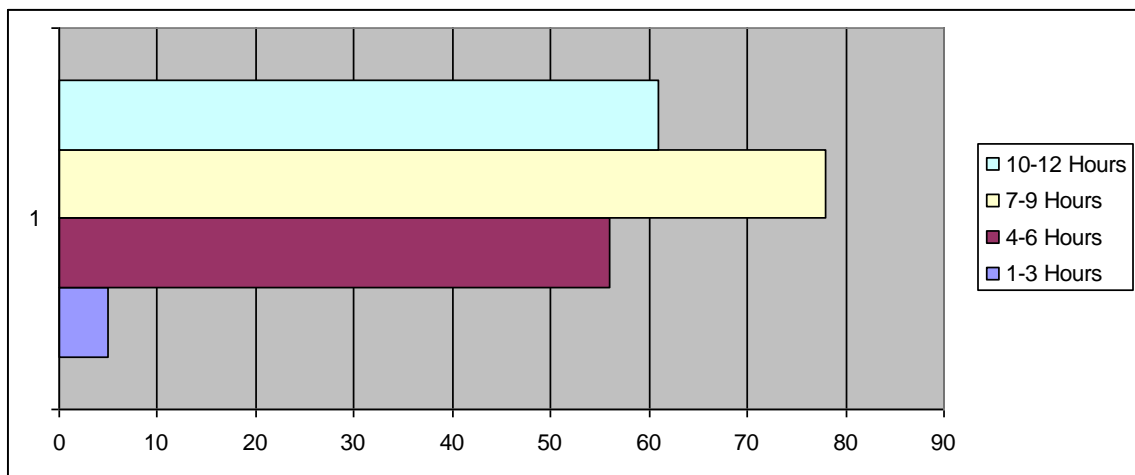


Figure-6

Figure shows that 31% of the street beggar interviewed in the survey was found to 10-12 hours per day. Besides, consequently 38%, 28% and 3% was seen to beg 8-10, 4-7 and 1-3 hours.

2.9 Percentage Distribution of Money Earned by Respondents

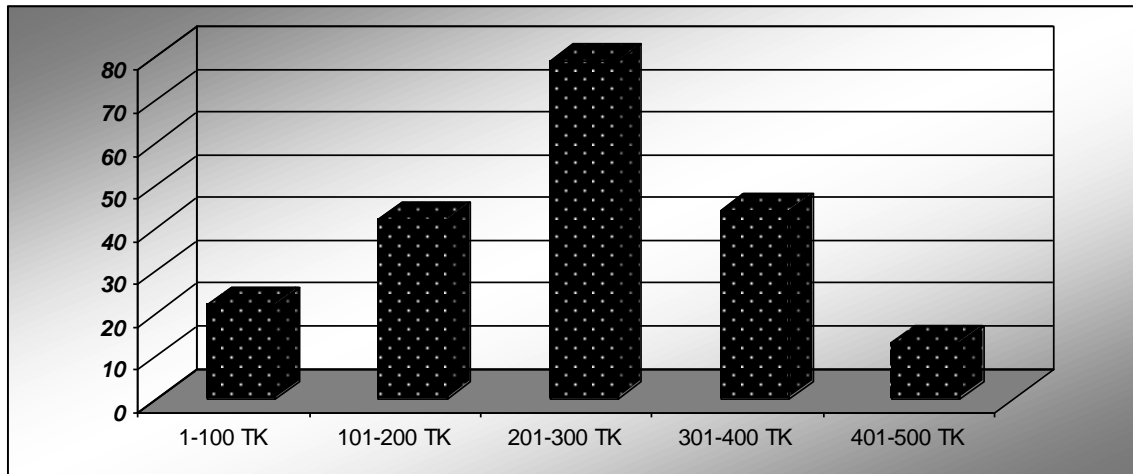


Figure-7

Highest amount of money earned by street beggars in Dhaka city is 401-500 TK daily basis and percentage 7% but average figure of earning of the beggars in the city is 201-300 TK per day and 39 percent beggar earn that sum of money

2.10 Nature of Expenditure

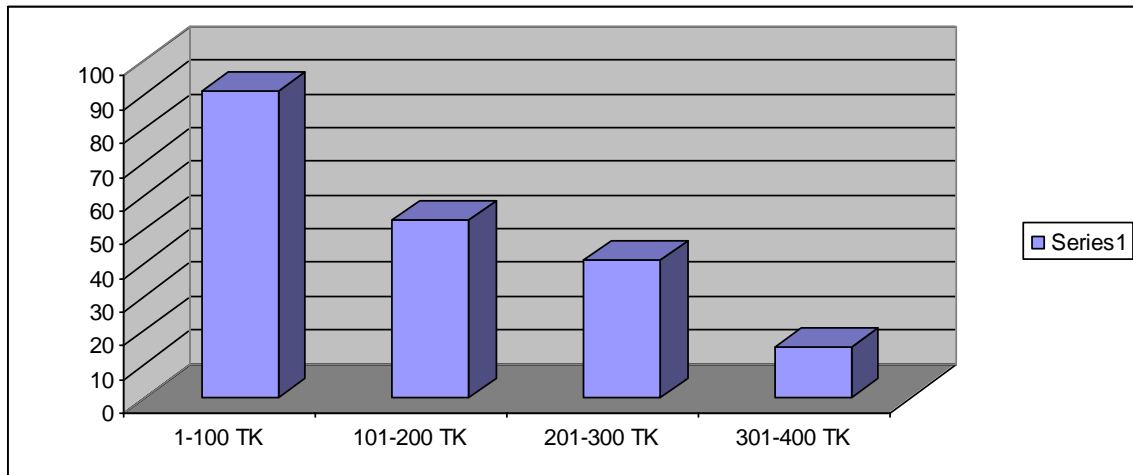


Figure-8

45% respondents said that they spend 1-100 Tk per day. Furthermore, 26% and 21% claimed that their each day expenditure 101-200TK and 201-300 respectively. Only few respondents (8%) informed, their daily disbursement 301-400 TK.

2.11 Major Sectors of Expenditure

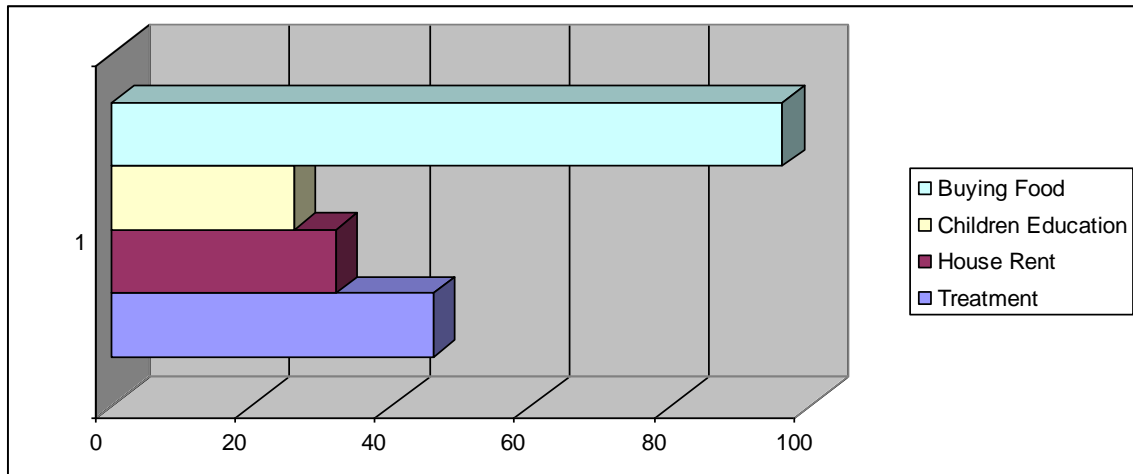


Figure-9

Most of the street beggars (48%) in the survey were found to spend for buying food. 23% and 13% used up for receiving treatment and children education purpose. 16% was also seen to spend house rent purpose who would live in rental house.

2.12 Access to Pure Drinking Water

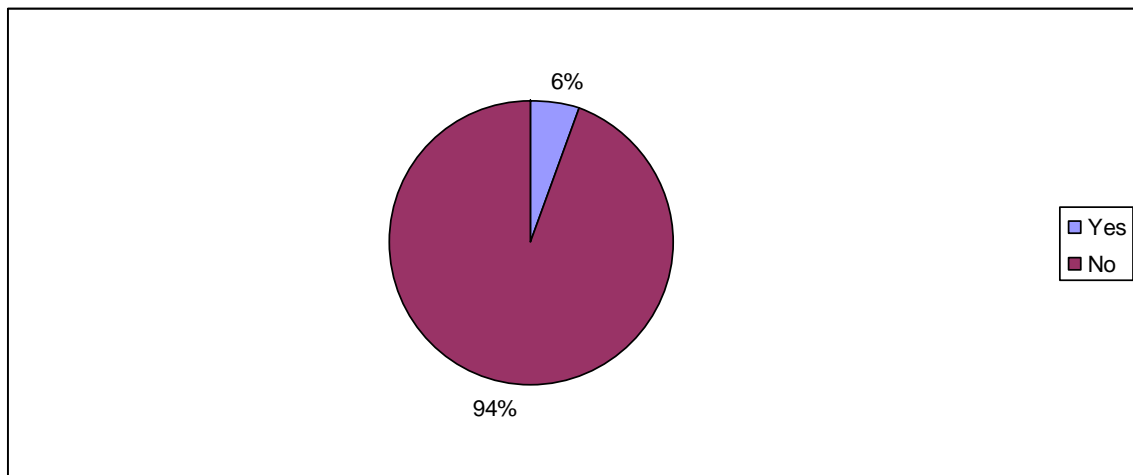


Figure-10

Street beggars have limited access to pure drinking water. Figure shows that only 6% percent drink pure drinking water. Others do not boil water for him as well as for family members. Commonly they drink water directly supplied by WASA. And very often they suffer from water born disease. Even they have limited access to hygienic latrine. Only 15% beggars depend on sanitary latrine.

2.13 Treatment Receiving Centre

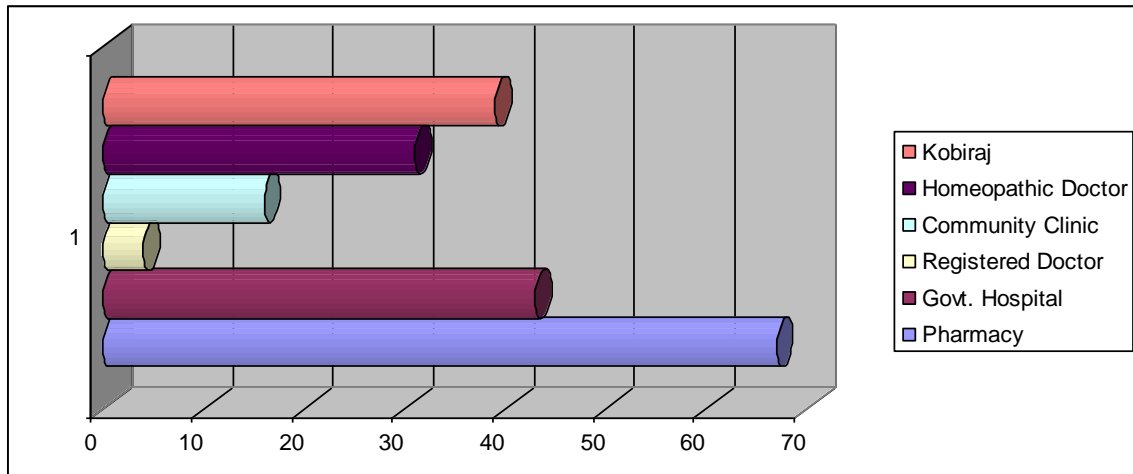


Figure-11

They usually depend on low cost treatment facilities such as pharmacy (33%), homeopathic doctor (16%), community clinic (8%), and government hospital (21%). They have the tendency to see the Kabiraj (20%) as well. Very few street beggars go to registered doctor (2%) in case of sickness because it is beyond their means to afford the charge.

2.14 Nature of health facilities provided by government

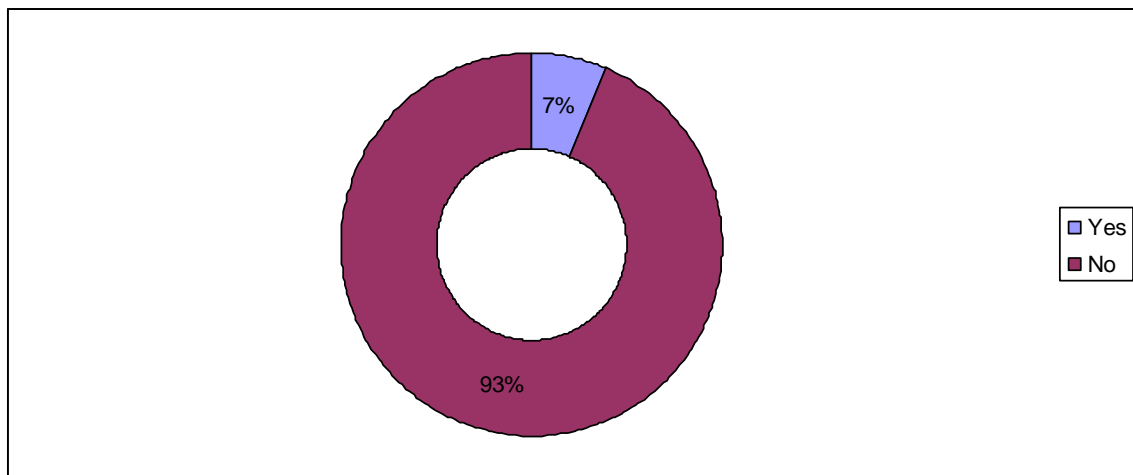


Figure-12

Regarding health service provided by government 93% unfortunate street beggar claimed during interviewed period that they never get such kind of health facilities. Only a fraction of street beggar (7%) fortune enough is getting government health facilities.

2.15 Source of Entertainment

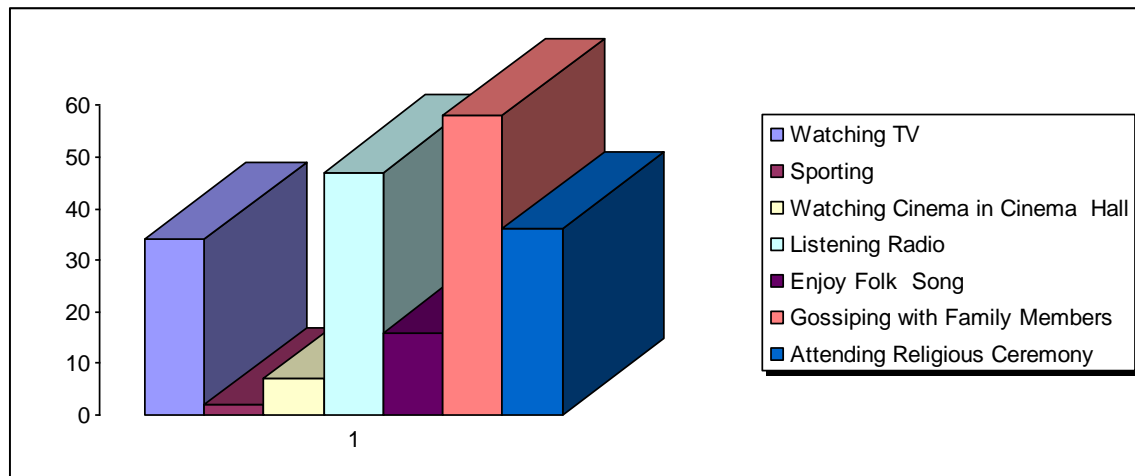


Figure-13

Gossiping with family members is the main source of entertainment to 28% street beggar. Others also depend on sporting (1%), watching TV (17%), listening Radio (24%), Folk song (8%), Religious ceremony (18%) and cinema hall (4%) for recreation.

3.0 Recommendation and conclusion

1. Now they have no opportunity to get back in normal life or independent work who are deployed as the raw materials by powerful person. Government, various NGOs or wealthy people have to take their responsibility.
2. Making the family self reliant by creating job opportunity for their family member then the person, who is involved with begging, can be hand over to their family.
3. Training like weaving, spinning, dyeing, tailoring, carpentry, basket making, brick making, toy making, washing cloths and pressing them, cooking etc. should be arranged so that they can be involved in any profession. In this regard Ministry of Social Welfare and different social service institutions can play a pioneer role.
4. Rehabilitation program should be designed and implemented. Otherwise beggar's eradication program by law enforcement force will not come to work.
5. It is also necessary to provide economic assistance to the widow and aged person.
6. In addition to, government have to take steps to alleviate poverty properly supervise the policies and programs taken for poverty alleviation. Because through the vicious cycle of poverty most of the beggar turns into beggary. In this regard government can collect Zakat and distribute properly among needy to alleviate poverty

7. At best we can create some rules for begging, for example a beggar will sit on a predestined place and will not reach out for people.

8. Moreover, those mastermind of begging business, who get the poor-helpless people in begging by stolen or making physically impaired as well as alluring them bread and butter, have to be brought under judge and have to be given exemplary punishment.

The overall socio economic condition of beggars in Dhaka city is not satisfactory at all. Beggars are the people who have no dignity in the society. They are always undermined and humiliated by the well off people. They are depriving all the civil facilities from the country. They are considered themselves as stumpy categorized people in the society. But it is a noticeable matter that they can be the integral part of overall development of the nations, if they are properly trained up and utilized. Furthermore, Government and NGOs should take necessary steps to uplift their socio-economic conditions.

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