

Beggary in the Society: A Sociological Study in the Selected Villages in Sri Lanka

Dr. SM. Ayoob

Head/Senior Lecturer in Sociology

Department of Sociology

South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

Abstract

Beggary is a great socio-economic problem found in many of the underdeveloped countries of the world. It is a symptom of personal as well as social disorganization. Beggary in a street at once remind us of an ill-organized society (Rao, 2003). Begging has reached the highest position in the category of social evils in the human society. Sociologists and social scientists view beggars as a burden wedged in the shoulder of the society. The objectives of this research are to identify the different age categories of beggars, types of beggars and the reasons behind begging in the selected villages in Sri Lanka. This research was accompanied among 185 beggars by providing questionnaires who have begged from December 2018 to November 2019 by using convenience sample method. Along with that, 16 key informant interviews, 02 focus group discussion (FGD) and observation methods were used as primary data collection tools. Economic causes, social causes, physical causes, religious causes and natural calamities are the basis of increasing beggars in the society. Legislation on beggary prevention, establishment of protective rehabilitation centres, forming care homes, providing financial assistance, incorporation into the National Development Plans, provision of workhouses and schemes to collect donations are some suggestions to control beggary in the society.

Keywords: *Beggary, Poverty, Social disorganization*

01. Introduction

Religions and social reformers are working hard to build a prosperous society without having prostitutes, orphans, beggars, thieves and murderers. However, the thought of having such kind of world has become a dream to the society changers and reformers. People that have previously mentioned still exist directly or indirectly in the world every day. The society consist massive social problems, which are threatening the precious life of humans and their belongings. Prostitution, drug addiction, divorce, dowry, child delinquency, child and elderly abuses, crimes, poverty and unemployment are the major reasons behind the social problems in the world. Social problems severely affect the every individuals and groups of people in all societies. Begging has become one of the social problems that affect the modern societies since the beginning. "A beggar is one who asks for alms or charity or performs such actions which derive sympathy from others and who give something in return" (Rao, 2003).

Begging is considered as a degenerated and downfall activity of individuals because it creates unsupported situation, disease, dishonor, derogatory, poor appearance and depletion in personality. Not

all those who beg are considered as beggars in the strict sense of the term. A person to be branded as a beggar should satisfy some conditions. Such conditions are mentioned here as follows.

- I. A beggar is one who lives by soliciting alms in every public place like temples, mosque, hotels, bus stops, market places, etc.
- II. One who wanders from door to door or place to place for begging alms in order to support himself, his family and dependents, and
- III. One who lives without any visible substances. (Rao. 2003)

Notable studies were carried out previously about begging and beggars lifestyles in the global and Sri Lankan context. Nandesena Ratnapala who is a professor in Sociology and Anthropology did an ethnographical study on “The beggars in Sri Lanka” (1999) which is fully based on beggars. Here, he discussed about the forms and mode of begging, types of begging, the organization of beggars, the family of beggar, sex life of beggar and etiology of begging. Professor Nandesena Ratnapala changed his identity as a beggar and wandered in the streets of Colombo district for three months to write this book on beggars.

A book on “The beggars; A Sociological perspective which was written by Ayoob (2006) also spoke about beggars in sociological perspective. This book deals the beggars and their problems lengthily. Ashanthi Warunasuriya (2018) has mentioned about beggars in Sunday Leader newspaper that beggars have increased in Sri Lanka over the past few years especially in the roads of urban areas. She mentioned that Mafia is misusing beggars as a means of income. She also pointed out that beggars are seen in massive amount in every religious occasions and difficult to distinguish the genuine beggars and crooks.

Jelili, M.O (2013) also presented a paper on “Street-Begging in cities which attempted to unveil the cultural, socio-political and socio-economic correlates of begging in cities in developing countries. This study established the impacts of different composite factors of religion, culture, polity, and socio-economy on begging. This study found out that poverty and other socio-economic factors as central issues in addressing the problem of begging in cities.

02. Research Objectives

In this respect, this research was conducted to identify the different age categories of beggars, types of beggars and the reasons behind begging.

03. Research Methodology

This research was conducted in Ampara and Batticaloa districts in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. This research was accompanied among 185 beggars by providing questionnaires who have begged from December 2018 to November 2019 by using convenience sample method. Along with that, 16 key informant interviews, 02 focus group discussion (FGD) and observation methods were used as primary data collection tools. Books, magazines, government reports, records of Divisional Secretariat reports of each division were utilized as secondary data of the research. The collected data were analysed using computer software and presented descriptively. The following figure 01 portrays the study area of the research.

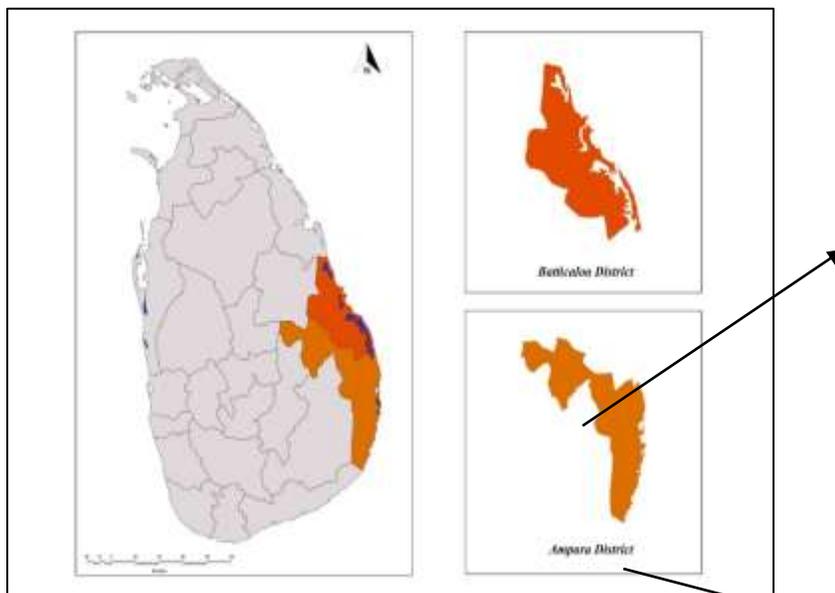


Figure 01: Ampara and Batticaloa Districts in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka

04. Results and Discussions

A. *The Beggars based on Age*

The study focused on the different age categories of beggars who have begged in the study area for a period of December 2018 to November 2019. The following table 01 clearly explains the age differences of the beggars in the study area.

Age	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Below 10	1	4	5	2.7%
10 - 20	2	4	6	3.2%
20 - 30	4	8	12	6.4%

30 - 40	6	12	18	9.7%
40 - 50	15	30	45	24.3%
50 - 60	25	45	70	37.8%
Above 60	14	15	29	15.6%
Total	67	118	185	100%

Table 01: Age categories of Beggars

As mentioned in the above table, the study found out that the involvement of female beggars (63.78%) is higher than the male beggars (36.21%) in the study area. Moreover, 50 to 60 years old elderly people (37.8%) engage more in begging and only 2.7% of children are used to go for begging in the study area. The figure 02 clearly expresses the age differences as follows.

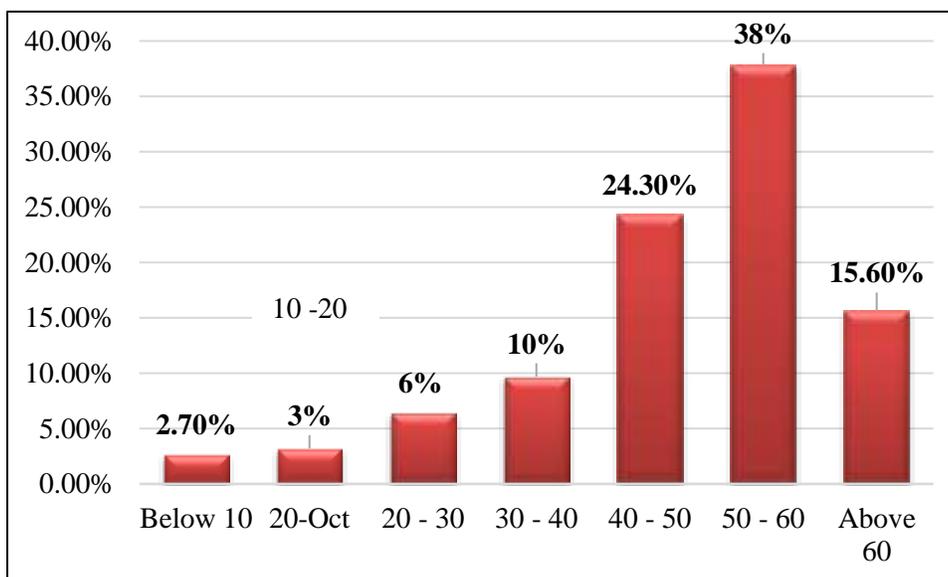


Figure 02: Age categories of Beggars

Types of Beggars

The study explored the following types of beggars.

i. Religious Beggars

This kind of religious beggars could be found in every part of the study area. They possess disbanding beard and mustaches. They often entreat and spell some invocations while begging. They pray for the people who provide monetary and other supports. On the other hand, they curse the people who do not provide anything to them. This kind of beggars trusts that begging is permitted in the religions. These religious beggars are wander in the study area under the name of 'Pakkeer' (the poor or low-income or indigent).

ii. Small Merchants Beggars

This kind of beggars keeps some small goods in their hand force the passers-by and the local people to buy those goods. The appearance of this type of beggars and their impetrate activities make people to buy those unwanted items. The goods sold by the beggars are viewed as a tactics of begging rather it has no values in the market and among the normal people. Therefore, the people just buy one of those goods from these beggars and provide the money whatever they wish to give. If people do not buy those items, they just beg for money and other supports directly.

iii. Physically Disabled Beggars

This type of beggars is often found in the study area. Most of them have physical disabilities in the sense they have become handicapped by losing hands and/or legs, some of them are visually impaired and deaf. Some those do not have any disabilities but they act as disabled person to crook the people for begging.

iv. Child Beggars

This type of beggars is found in the streets who solicit their hands to beg among the passers-by. Their parents abandon most of them since their early ages and some are begging to look after their sick parents too. Child beggars fulfill their food and other necessities by using the money collected from begging.

v. Story Narrators

This kind of beggars often narrates stories among the people by visiting the every houses in the areas they have selected to beg. They use systematic ways to narrate the stories in an interesting manner. They wear good-looking dresses in order to attract the people. They also practiced to speak in English and often mix English acronyms when they talk with people while begging. Mostly they beg for food and medical purposes.

vi. Aggressive Beggars

Aggressive beggars often try to get money from the people in an aggressive manner compare to other types of beggars. They show intimidation and aggression towards the public to gain some amount of money. If people give a small amount of money, the aggressive beggars throw that money on the ground and start to use threatening words and scold the provider of the money. Threatening behaviour is the tool that they use for begging here. Male beggars are higher in this type of begging where they threaten the women at home and streets with their aggressive behavior.

vii. Family Beggars

These family beggars usually come to the streets and houses with one or two children in their hand or more children. There can be found the whole families who are begging on streets and houses displaying their children to gain sympathy. They do begging by telling their situation of poor economic and social conditions. They beg repeatedly with pitiful appearances until they received the money and other necessities or until the passers-by disappear from their sight. They often touch and pull the clothes of others while begging and their children's pitiful faces make people to help them.

viii. Elderly Beggars

The elderly people those who are unable to work in their older age and having no any support come under this category of begging to lead their rest of the life. The parents who were abandoned by their children and do not have any caregivers are also fall under this type of elderly begging.

ix. Sick and Disease Beggars

These type of sick and disease beggars engage in begging by explaining their sickness and exhibiting their wounded parts over their body. This type of beggars serves as transmitters of different communicable diseases in the society.

x. Insane Beggars

These types of beggars are viewed as the people who lost their mind due to different reasons. Insane beggars are seen on the streets and roadside with awkward, clumsy and unnatural looking. Continuous drug addiction and neglected by the family members are also found to be the reasons behind their situation. The insane people since the birth also come under this type of begging.

xi. Testimonial Beggars

Testimonial beggars beg for money among the people by showing evidences like certified documents from the government officials, religious institutions and the doctors. These documents usually display the poverty and/or the severity of the disease and/or help to do the marriage of their aged daughter, which could be overcome through financial assistance from the well-wishers of the society.

xii. Seasonal Beggars

Seasonal beggars show up in the special occasions such as religious function, seasonal get-togethers and other occasions. Mostly in the religious occasion like Haj festivals and Ramazan festival, these seasonal beggars appear to get money and other necessities. Especially, in the 30 days of fasting period of Muslims can observe more people visit houses and streets for begging. As well as in the harvesting period and the highest level of fishing period can also find the seasonal beggars in the relevant areas.

B. The Reasons behind Begging

Begging is not a natural or unintentional phenomenon. Begging is viewed as a sinful and shameful activity in most of the societies, which should be abolished in the initial stage. Most of the people highly discourage begging and really hate beggars on their sights. Poverty and impoverishes are often referred as the backbone reason for begging in most of the studies. Along with that, there are some other common factors or causes contributed to this existence of beggars in our society. Economic causes, social causes, biological causes, religious causes and natural calamities are found to the basis of growing number of beggars in the society.

i. Economic Causes

Poverty has become one of the primary reasons behind the increases in begging and beggars in the society. There are people in the society who do not have any mode or ways at least to fulfill their basic needs to survive. In this situation, the excessive poverty pushes people to choose begging as the final option to survive and earn something by soliciting their hands. The limited amount of job opportunities and the lack of resources for self-employment forced poor people to engage in begging. At the beginning, these poor people begged only to quench their thirst and alleviate hunger. Later on people started to go for begging because it is found out to be a job that does not require any investment and provides good profit to them.

ii. Social Causes

The destruction of family structure, the death of breadwinner of the family like father, husband and brothers, uncontrolled situation of parents and guardians, abolition of joint family lifestyle and increasing number of parents abandoned by their children persuade the chances to involve people in begging.

iii. Biological Causes

Along with other reasons, biological causes like disabilities, chronic illnesses, psychological disorder and ageing also make people to go for begging.

iv. Religious Causes

All religions encourage charitable activities and alms giving to poor and needy. These activities give soul satisfaction, merits, and rewards from the God too. Even the disease person also wishes to give charities when the disease is cured. In this cause of situation, poor people changed themselves into beggars to get these philanthropic goods and other necessities from the providers. Moreover, these

charitable goods are often distributed by the religious institutions such as Church, Mosque and Dharmashala in numerous ways to the poor in the societies.

v. Natural Calamities

Natural calamities such as earthquakes, flood, tsunami, snow enclave, hurricane and draught, etc. also create the chances of new beggars in the society. People who are poor and vulnerable highly threaten and severely affected in the disaster period. This condition makes those affected people into penniless further lead them to ask help from others through begging. In this situation, this affected people go for begging to continue their life. The beggars who were selected for the study mentioned the below reasons behind their act of begging.

The table 02 indicates as follows.

No	Reasons for Begging	Percentage
1	I am very poor; There is no ways to get income.	12%
2	I am forced to beg.	10%
3	I do not know the means to earn money.	05%
4	I do not like to depend on others.	06%
5	My family members also do the same begging.	09%
6	I help my family through begging.	08%
7	My parents are not alive.	03%
8	My parents have fall in disease	08%
9	I am begging because of the war.	04%
10	My husband abandoned me	04%
11	I am begging for medical purposes.	07%
12	Begging is easy and profitable work.	08%
13	I cannot work because of my elderly and sickness	16%
Total		100

Table 02: Reasons for Begging

Based on the above table 02, most of the beggars engage in begging to fulfill their needs and wants. The highest percentage of the beggars (16%) reported that they do begging because of their elderly and sickness which made them to not to go for hard works as what they did before. 12% of the respondents said that they beg because of poverty and impoverishment. Moreover, they do not have the

other ways to earn income. 10% of the beggars reported that they are forced to beg by their relatives and their own children. These kind of beggars live with their children and relatives as dependents, so for their food and other purposes they are asked to beg for money. 09% of the respondents said they always do begging because of their other family members also beg to earn something.

08% of the beggars are helping their family through begging and another 08% of the beggars do begging because of their parents are fall in ill. Not surprisingly, another 08% of the beggars said asking money and goods from others is an easier job and they do not want to put more efforts for begging. In addition, they emphasized that begging provides a good profit to them without any investments. There are people in the society who beg others to help them for medical purposes too. 07% of the respondents said that they beg to treat their diseases and cover the medical expenses. 06% of the beggars said that they do not like to depend on relatives, so they do begging.

05% of the respondents said they have not known the ways or means to get an income, so they are begging. 04% of the respondents reported that they beg because of the ethnic conflict which was destructed all of their properties and livelihood activities. After the war, they have started to ask help from others and still they are begging. Another 04% of the beggars, especially female beggars said that their husband abandoned them without any supports. Therefore, they have started to beg to lead their rest of life. Only 03% of the respondents mentioned that they beg because they do not have parents where both mother and father had died.

05. Conclusion

Begging has become one of the social problems that affect the modern societies in since the beginning. This study on beggars tried to identify the different age categories of beggars, types of beggars and the reasons behind begging. There are 07 different age categories of beggars are found in the study area, below 10 years old, 10 to 20 years old, 20 to 30 years old, 30 to 40 years old, 40 to 50 years old, 50 to 60 years old and above 60 years old. 50 to 60 years old elderly people engage more in begging and only 2.7% of children go for begging. The engagement of female beggars (63.78%) is higher than the male beggars (36.21%). There are 12 different types of beggars exist in the study area as religious beggars, small merchant beggars, physically disabled beggars, elderly beggars, insane beggars, child beggars, story narrators, aggressive beggars, family beggars, testimonial beggars, sick and disease beggars and seasonal beggars. Economic causes, social causes, physical causes, religious causes and natural calamities are the basis of increasing beggars in our society.

06. Remedial Measures for Preventing Begging

It is impossible to overcome the existing social problems in the world completely. However, the controlling measures and preventing strategies could be designed in order to mitigate the effects of the social problems. The problems of begging and the number of beggars who beg along with their family members are also increasing every day. New forms of beggars also increase and they use new strategies and tactics to collect money from the people in any ways. The incidents that induce the people to go for begging are also happening every day. The controlling measures and preventing strategies should focus and consider attentively to those issues too. The Sri Lankan government has also taken considerable initiatives to control beggars and their problems all over the island.

1. Legislation on Beggary Prevention

Most of the people consider that legislation is one of the best ways to overcome beggary problem in the country. Through effective laws and regulations, the country could overcome the beggary problem and could mitigate the number of people involve in begging. Some of the developed nations consider begging is an offence within their countries. For instance, the law on prohibition of begging inside and outside of the train was implemented in India in 1941 (Rao, 2003). On the other hand, laws and legislation cannot fight alone to overcome beggary. Legislation on prohibition of begging will make beggars to suffer in hunger and poverty without having any income.

2. Establishment of Protective Rehabilitation Centres

The problems on beggary could be solved and controlled through forming protective rehabilitation centres in the relevant areas. The rehabilitation centres should provide vocational trainings and should guide the beggars to do self-employments when they are released to the society again. This would become a good opportunity for the people come out from the rehabilitation centres to continue their life with job opportunities (Rao, 2003). These initiatives of rehabilitation centres help people to find a place to rest rather than homelessness. However, it also has some drawbacks.

3. Forming Care Homes

Most the time, the rehabilitation centres do not provide the desired outcomes. Forming elders home in the nearest places of religious places would be considered as another solution to overcome elderly beggars in the society. These elderly homes could get financial assistance from religious institutions. For instance, most of the people visit Kathirkamam for the religious purposes, the elderly beggars could be looked after through the alms giving and collected funds from this religious institution.

4. Providing Financial Assistance

Some considerable amount of nuclear families abandoned their elderly parents and relatives because of the poor economic conditions. Therefore, these elderly parents and orphans try to get money and other needs through begging to continue their life. This sort of beggary could be overcome to some extent when these poor families are provided with financial assistance.

5. Incorporation into the National Development Plans

Beggars are not included in the national development plans. The authorities could help these beggars to prevent from begging through including them into the Janashakthi and Samurdi schemes.

6. Provision of Workhouses

The energetic and physically fit youngsters also do begging as their jobs in our society. These youngsters could be motivated towards other jobs and self-employments when they are provided with good vocational training in the suitable job fields to them. This would create an environment of respect from the society and income too. .

References

1. Ayoob,S.M., (2006). *The beggars; A Sociological perspective*. Oluvil: Author Publication.
2. AshanthiWarunasuriya. (2016, June, 16).Beggars making a buck. Retrieved from <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2016/06/26/beggars-making-a-buck/>
3. Chaudhary, D.P. (1992). *Ageing and the aged*. New Delhi: Inter India Publications.
4. Cockerham, William C. (1978). *Medical sociology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall International, Inc.
5. Giddens Anthony. (2005). *Sociology*. Cambridge:Polity Press.
6. Haralambos M, and Heald R.M., (2004). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: Harper Collins Publishers Limited.
7. Jelili, M.O. Mnito. (2013). Street- begging in cities: Cultural, political and socio-economic questions. Retrieved from <https://github.org/resource/street-begging-cities-cultural-political-and-socio-economic-questions>.
8. Johnson, Harry, (1999). *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*. New Delhi:Aliede Publishers.
9. Landis, Paul H., (1990). *Sociology: An Introduction*. Massachusetts: Ginn and Company a Xerox Education Company.
10. Rao Sankar, (2003). *Sociology: Primary Principles*. New Delhi: S.Chand and Company Ltd.
11. RatnapalaNanthasena, (1999). *The beggars in Sri Lanka*.Ratmalana: SarvodayaVishvaLekha Publication.

12. Sharma, Y.K. (2007). *Indian society: Issues and problems*. Agra:Lakshmi: Narain Agarwal Publication.
13. Sullivan, T.J. (2016). *Introduction to social problems*. U.S.A: Pearson.
- 14.