Research Article

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF CHILD BEGGARS IN SYLHET CITY, BANGLADESH

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to investigate the Socio-economic Status of Child Beggars in Sylhet City. In this study, total numbers of 90 child beggars were interviewed by the author during February to April in 2016. Data was collected by well-organized questionnaire and using interview schedule and face-to-face interviewed from the respondents. Simple random sampling techniques were used. Various socio-economic and demographics variables were considered at the time of data collection. But in this paper only socio-economic variables are used. The study finds that 84.4% child beggars in Sylhet city were boys and 15.6% were girls. The study also reveals that 64.4% child beggars came from the age group 10-14 years and about 54.4% respondents involves in begging approximately 6 to 10 hours in a day. They are involved in begging because of their poverty and 48.9% of them get more than 121 Tk. per day in begging. The study finds that 45.6% of the respondents live with their mother. Almost two-third of the child beggars (62.2%) lives at slum/low income settlement.

INTRODUCTION

It may surprise one, when one sees an adolescent boy or girl wants food or money. Though the boy or girl was supposed to go to school or to play in the ground, he or she begs. Like this one many children are engaged in begging but we have been overlooking it. Children are the great asset for a nation because the after-life of a nation largely depends on the children. So they are called the father of any nation (Taher, 2006). Child is a young up to 18 year's age according to the section 4 of in vogue Bangladeshi Child Act 2013. According to the ILO's Child Labour Convention and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Children are the youth belongs to less than 18 years of age. Child begging is the begging in which boys and girls under the age of 18 beg, mostly through psychological and physical oppression (Ansari, 2006).

The simplest way of defining begging is to ask for money without any return of services (Fitzpatrick and Kennedy, 2000). Macdonald defined begging as asking for alms or charity given out of sympathy to the poor (Macdonald, 1972) and it is a street level resource for the poor and powerless (Jordan, 1999) and the solicits alms receivers to sustainable livelihood are called beggars (Beggar, 2015). Child beggars are found in public places such as transport routes, urban parks and near busy markets. Some children start begging or working on the street and returning home at night eventually leave home to live on the street (UNICEF report, 2009). The UNICEF defines street children as 'who is of the street and on the street (Aktar, 2004)'. Besides money, they may also ask for food, drink or other small items (Begging, 2015). Begging destroys the future of these children because they are learning dependence rather than to be independent from childhood. The child beggars are a distinct category of the street children who are most deprived even with the basic needs and struggle to survive in different places across the globe. These children are particularly the vulnerable group; where a child is prone to abuse, deprivation of basic needs, care and protection continuing a miserable

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lower class life (CUBS, 2010). The child beggars in Bangladesh have been recognized by many literatures as such a category of the street children who lack the proper requirements of life and they are tagged as 'severely deprived' children. These severe deprivation can be found with their not having the adequate services in the provision of shelter, sanitation, water, information, nutrition, education, and health etc. At policy and program levels, there is little provision for providing shelter facilities to poor, homeless households, or children living on the streets and this picture are reflected also in the other provision of life requirements for the street children and more specifically the child beggars (Black, 1996). States parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law (http://www.ohchr.org/en/professional interest/ pages/ crc.aspx). All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. In 1948, the UN General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which referred in article 25 to childhood as entitled to "special care and assistance" (Rai, 2000; Kolosov, 2002; Tripathi and Arora, 2010). It is well known that Bangladesh is one of the poor countries in the world. There has been an alarming rise in the number of street children in the major cities of Bangladesh including in Sylhet city. In Sylhet city numerous children live as street children. They live an inhuman life and a significant portion of them are involved in begging. However, there was lack of knowledge about the status of these children. At this backdrop, the present study has been initiated for proper understanding of the existing situation of child beggars and to explore some ways out.

Objectives of the Study: The principle and general objective of this study is analysing the situation and socio-demographic condition of the child beggars of selected area in Sylhet city.

- To identify the existing situation of child beggar of selected area in Sylhet City.
- To obtain information on the socio-economic condition of the child beggar.
- To explore the reasons for engaging children in begging.
- To find out the difficulties faced by the street children.

Limitation of the Study: This study was undertaken with the selected points of Sylhet city which were Hazrat Shahjalal (R) Mazar, Kodomtoli Bus-stand, Railway Station, Bondor Bazar, Zinda Bazar and Ambarkhana Point. However, this study was not covering the whole country even not the Sylhet city. This has been done with a very limited area in limited time. The Study was carried out from February to April 2016.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

Sylhet city is known as Holy place and it is totally different from the rest of the country due to rapid urbanization, growth of investment holder, growth of business or commercial activities, liquidity of money and natural resources etc. and due to above factors the tendency of child begging in this city increasing at an alarming rate. In Sylhet city 6 (Six) child beggars crowding area such as HazratShahjalal (R) Mazar, Kodomtoli Bus-stand, Railway Station, Bondor Bazar, Zinda Bazar and Ambarkhana Point have been selected for collecting the representative and crucial data.

In this study, total numbers of 90 child beggars from 6 areas (15 respondents from each area) were interviewed by the author during February to April2016. Simple random sampling techniques were used to collect data. A prearranged questionnaire was developed containing both the closed and open ended query to collect data through face-to-face interview with the respondents. The questionnaire was pretested in areas far away from the sample areas and revised according to the feedback gained in the field level. The questionnaire was formed to obtain the relevant information considering personal, household, social and economic details. The questionnaire was checked per day taking the interview and gain these were carefully rechecked after collecting the data and coded prior the entrancing into computer technology. The data was edited in case of sighting discrepancy (doubt entry, wrong entry etc.). On the other hand, secondary data was gathered from published and unpublished research reports, journals, books, as well as from record and documents of relevant agencies. The data was processed to undergo statistical analysis using SPSS 16 windows program. Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel were used to represent the tabular and chart icon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic conditions of child beggars in Sylhet City Corporation

The author begins with a brief overview of the respondents with regarding to several focal (key) socio-economic conditions.Age of the respondents ranged from 5 to 15 years with an average of 10.56 years with standard deviation of 2.32. The majority of the child beggars (64.4%) came from the age group 10-14 years (Table 1). The study revealed that respondents involved in begging ranged from 3-14 hours per day with an average of 8.11 hours with standard deviation of 2.99. Most of the respondents (54.4%) involves in begging about 6 to 10 hours in a day. It has also been observed from Table 1 that, daily income of the respondents ranged from Tk. 30 to 350 with an average value of Tk. 128.55 with standard deviation of 62.55. About 48.9% respondents have their daily income above Tk. 121 and 35.6% have their daily income in between Tk. 71-120. Only 15.6% have their daily income in between Tk. 30-70. Table below showed that duration of child beggars staying in the street ranged from 4-120 month with an average of 37.69 month with standard deviation of 2.65. The majority of the child beggars (43.3%) came from the group 25-60 month that means they already passed 2 to 5 years in begging.

Gender of child beggars: Majority of the child beggars (84.4%) are boys and rest of them (15.6%) are girls in the surveyed city.The study of Hossain and Alamget that most of the street children in the Dhaka city areas were male (Hossain and Alam, 2016). The conducted study by us also get that most of the child beggars living in different areas in the Sylhet City were male.

Working against willingness of the respondents: It is interesting to note that 56.7% children involve in begging according to their own motivation, while 38.9% children intend to work against their willingness.

Happiness of their work: The figure below showed that about 77.8% of the child beggars are not satisfied with their current profession of begging and rest of them 22.2% are satisfied.
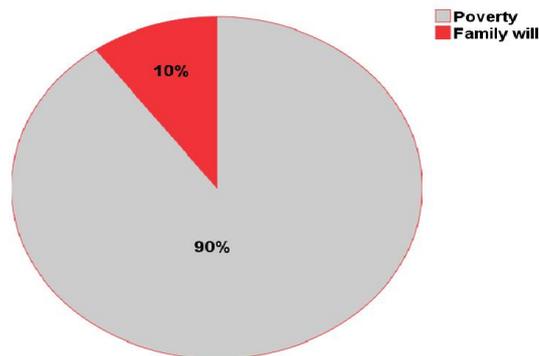
Table 1. Socio-Economic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Measuring system/unit	Observed range	Categories	Respondents		Mean	SD (±)
				No.	%		
Age	Years	5-15	5-9 years	28	31.1	10.56	2.32
			10-14 years	58	64.4		
			15-17	04	4.4		
Duration of begging	Hours/day	3-14	1-5 hours	21	23.3	8.11	2.99
			6-10 hours	49	54.4		
			11-15 hours	20	22.2		
Daily income	Tk.	30-350	30-70	14	15.6	128.55	62.55
			71-120	32	35.6		
			121-above	44	48.9		
Duration of staying in the street	Month	4-120	0-24	36	40.0	37.69	2.65
			25-60	39	43.3		
			Above 60	15	16.7		

However, it has been found in the in-depth interviews with the child beggars that apparently satisfied child beggars are not actually satisfied; rather they have considered their current status as taken for granted.
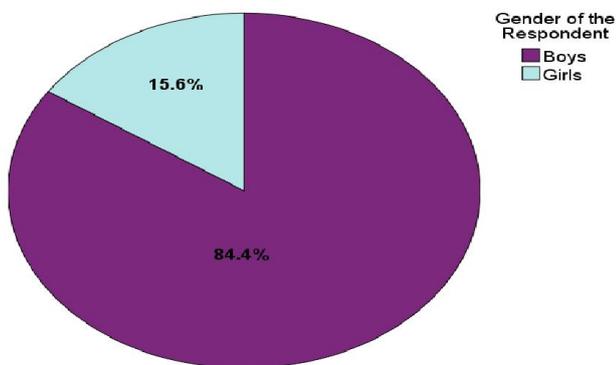
Figure 1. Gender of child beggars

Table 2. Working against willingness of the respondents

Working against willingness of the respondents	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
Yes	35	38.9
No	51	56.7
No answer	04	4.4

Figure 2. Happiness of their work

Causes of engaging the work: The survey with the child beggars have revealed that a significant number of respondents 90.0percent have to do this work for their poverty. Moreover, 10.0percent respondents were engaged this work due to their family will.

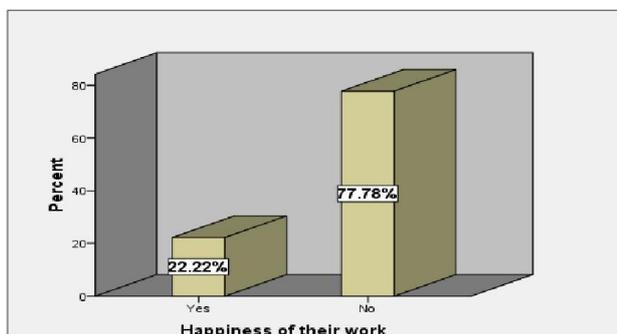**Figure 3. Causes of engaging the respondents in begging**

Aliveness of the respondent's parent: It is curious to note that, although 42.2% of child beggars have both father and mother alive but still now they are engaged in begging. Only 7.8% respondents have no parents.
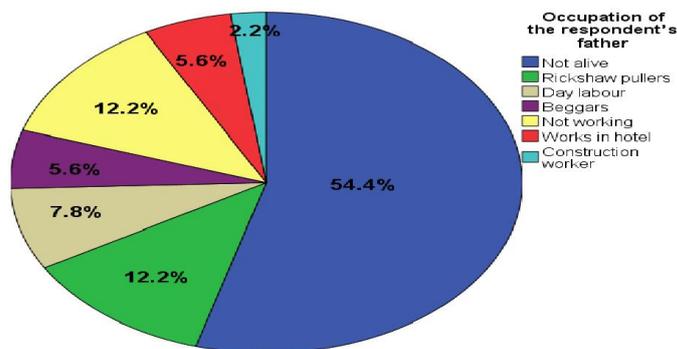
Table 3. Aliveness of the respondent's parent

Aliveness of the respondent's parent	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
Yes	38	42.2
No	07	7.8
Only father alive	05	5.6
Only mother alive	40	44.4

Occupation of the respondent's father: From the figure below, it is found that, about 54.4% of the respondents have no father. Moreover, 12.2% fathers of respondents are not engaged any kind of work and 12.2% are rickshaw pullers.


Figure 4.Occupation of the respondent's father

Occupation of the respondent's mother: From the Table 4, it is found that, about 46.7% mothers of respondents are involves in begging and 25.6% works as house servants. Moreover, 13.3% of the respondents have no mother.

Table 4. Occupation of the respondent's mother

Occupation of the respondent's mother	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
Housewives	10	11.1
House servant	23	25.6
Beggars	42	46.7
Tea garden worker	02	2.2
Construction worker	01	1.1
Not alive	12	13.3

Person(s) with Stay: The survey with the child beggars have revealed that about 45.6% of the respondents lives with their mother. Moreover, 37.8% of the child beggars lives with their parents. 5.6% lives with their father only in this city.
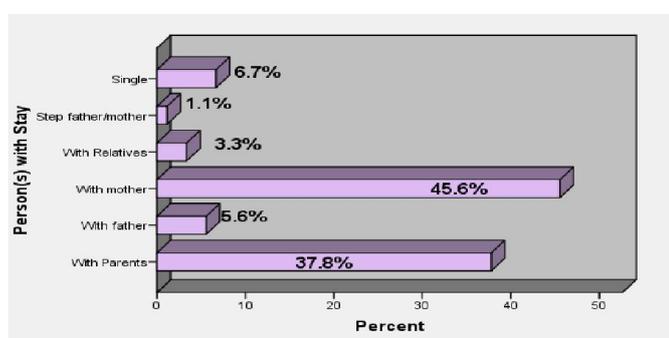

Figure 5. Respondents stay with person(s)

Place of Sleeping: About two-third of the child beggars (62.2%) lives at slum/low income settlement. One-fourth has reported that they spent the night at the railway station. One-tenth of the child beggar (11.1%) lives on footpath at night in Sylhet City.

Table 5. Place of Sleeping

Sleeping place	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
In a house	56	62.2
On footpath	10	11.1
Railway station	24	26.7

Aspiration of the child beggars in respect of changing their lives: In the figure 6, it is evident that 33.3% of the respondents wanted to save huge money for their future and 24.4% wanted to have educational facilities right now. About one-fifth (18.9%) of the respondents wanted rehabilitation facilities and 15.6% wanted to be a businessman while 7.8% have no idea about their aspirations.
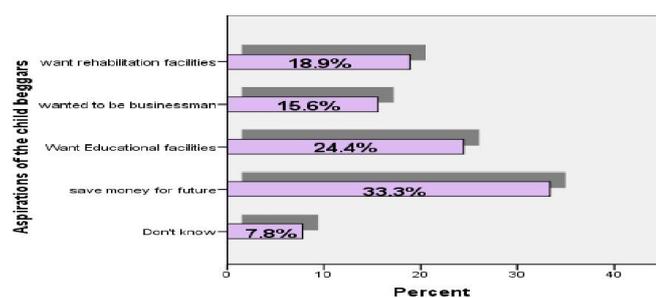
Figure 6. Aspirations of the child beggars

Ways to stop child begging: From the Table 6, it is found that, 45.6% child beggars opinion that child begging can be stopped by enhancing educational facilities and financial help. Moreover, 27.8% of child beggars gave importance about the poverty reduction. About 5.6% of them gave their opinion that if government takes serious initiatives then it is possible to stop the child begging while 16.7% have no idea how child begging can be stopped.

Table 6. Ways to stop child begging

Child begging can be stopped by	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
Poverty reduction	25	27.8
Enhance educational facilities and financial help	41	45.6
Government initiatives	05	5.6
Rehabilitation facilities	04	4.4
No idea	15	16.7

Relationship between age and month of staying in the street of the respondent

The relationship between respondent's age and month of staying in the street of the respondent was examined by testing null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between age and month of staying in the street of the respondent". The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation between the concerned variables was found to be 0.502** (in the table below). Table indicates that there was positive (+ve) relationship between the two variables which was moderate i.e., the months of staying in the street of child beggars was increased with the increasing of their age. The computed value $r = 0.502^{**}$ suggests that the relationship between respondent's age and month of staying in the street were positively significant at 0.01 level of significant. The null hypothesis therefore was rejected. Thus it might be concluded that there was significant positive relationship between these variables.

Table 7. Correlations between age and month of staying in the street of the respondent

		Respondent age	Month of staying in the street
Respondent age	Pearson Correlation	1	0.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
Month of staying in the street	Pearson Correlation	0.502**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Relationship between income of the respondent and month of staying in the street

The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation between income of the respondent and months of staying in the street was found to be 0.522** as shown in the table below. This table indicates that there was a positive (+ve) relationship between the two variables which was moderate i.e. income of the respondents increased with the increasing month of staying in the street.

Table 8. Correlations between income of the respondent and month of staying in the street

		Month of staying in the street	Income of the respondents (in Tk.)
Month of staying in the street	Pearson Correlation	1	.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
Income of the respondents (in Tk.)	Pearson Correlation	.522**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The computed value r= 0.522** suggests that the Relationship between income of the respondent and month of staying in the street were positively significant at 0.01 level of significant. Based on the above finding it may be concluded that these two variables were related with each other. The respondents who already passed a long time in the street in begging had better experience and techniques to collect money from people.

Relationship between income and hours of begging per day of the respondents

The relationship between income and hours of begging per day of the respondents was examined by testing null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between income and hours of begging per day of the respondents". The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation between the concerned variables was found to be 0.266* (in the table below). Table indicates that there was positive (+ve) relationship between these two variables which was weak i.e., income of the respondents was increased with the increasing of their hours of begging per day. The computed value r = 0.266* suggests that the relationship between these two variables were positively significant at 0.05 level of significant. The null hypothesis therefore was rejected. Thus it might be concluded that there was significant positive relationship between these variables. Based on the above finding it may be concluded that these two variables were related with each other. The respondents who spend a long time in the street in begging per day had better income than others.

Table 9. Correlationsbetween income and hours of begging per day of the respondents

		Hours of begging per day of the respondents	Income of the respondents (in Tk.)
Hours of begging per day of the respondents	Pearson Correlation	1	.266*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	90	90
Income of the respondents (in Tk.)	Pearson Correlation	.266*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	
	N	90	90

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Sylhet City Corporation is growing very fast with a mission and vision of Bangladesh government of being digitalized. The gap between rich and poor, therefore, is becoming wider and wider day by day. Lucrative mega city encouraging internal migration and lots more rural people are coming to this city, which is already over populated, with a hope of better income scope regardless the way of earning. Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. Most of the people in this country is religious minded. As Islam instructs not to ignore disadvantaged and poor people in the society and encourages to gives alms to these poor people, begging has somehow been rooted in socio-cultural realities in Bangladesh. The street children especially children involve in begging are deprived of their basic necessities. The number of child beggars is increasing day by day. Many people give money to the street children showing pity which inspires more children to be professional beggars. This problem should be targeted to abolish. These children should be given food to survive in spite of giving money. In this way they cannot fulfil their basic necessities moreover they are used economically, socially, politically by one class of people. It is very much necessary to take proper and effective steps to protect the children from all types of violations, to ensure their basic necessities properly, to ensure their well growth and development of the street children. For fulfilling the purpose, some NGOs have taken various programs to give basic necessities to the street children but it has been observed that the overall situation of the street children is not developing. On the basis of the results of the research, some recommendations to improve their position, to ensure their rights and basic necessities, stop violence against them, all over ensuring well socialization and to make them as a good citizen for the country are given below:

- The major cause of being child beggars has been identified as parents' vulnerable financial condition. It is now more important to improve their financial well-being.
- Income generating activities should be undertaken by the government and NGOs in rural areas so that migration of the poor to the cities for survival could be slowed and influx of young job-seekers in the cities may be curbed effectively.
- Learning through earning should be the attempt for special school for those children where books,food or tiffin, dress and stipend will be provided.
- Attitudinal change of the people of Bangladesh is required to get rid of religious sentiment and social tradition.
- The policy/decisions makers must adopt some rehabilitation programs. The GO's and NGO's should come forward to take necessary steps for the child beggars to give them legal aid.
- Government approved law to re-habitat them and if this act may be implemented, government should to keep the proper monitoring by various GO's and NGO's.

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