

Enchained Futures: Forced Child Begging in Peshawar

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Abstract

Peshawar is the most populous and urbanized city in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Child beggars are seen everywhere. The present research study was conducted to determine whether child beggars are subjected to human trafficking by forcing them to beg. To investigate the issue, primary data was collected by in-depth interviews through a non-probability accidental sampling technique from one hundred and twenty (120) child beggars at various locations in the city. It was found that more than three-fourths of the child beggars were tortured regularly. A large majority were unable to leave the profession of begging, although some child beggars had attempted to leave the perpetual web of exploitation. In short, the future of the little angels is at stake in Peshawar.

Keywords: *Begging, Child Beggars, Human Trafficking, Torture, Peshawar.*

1. Introduction

It is the very basic instinct of every individual to try and get a decent living. Some individuals are historically unable to do so. They are dependent on others for their sustenance. This is where the question of begging emerges. It was defined by the International Labor Organization in 2004 as “a range of activities whereby an individual asks a stranger for money on the basis of being poor or needing charitable donations for health or religious reasons. Beggars may also sell small items, such as dusters or flowers, in return for money that may have little to do with the value of the item for sale (Pjano, 2011)”.

Beggars can be seen anywhere. They can be of any age and any gender.

The causes of beggary are numerous: poverty, unemployment, inequalities, higher prices of necessities of life, disabilities, broken families, religious traditions of giving, and many more (Delap, 2009).

Some beggars are genuine people who need charity for their survival. Nowadays, many people have acquired beggary as their profession. They are lazy people. They do not even try to get a decent education. In some families of professional beggars, the head of the family grooms his children to be skilled beggars. Some families deliberately disfigure their young ones so that their prospects of earning are high. Ironically, some parents lease their children to professional beggars on a fixed monthly income (Delap, 2009).

The situation is becoming worse. Beggary has become an organized profession. The begging mafia has specific procedures of control over its members, such as the rules of the

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chain of command, mobility, duration of work, help when caught in a quarrel or by the police, etc. Different mafias are operating at different locations. Beggar organizations are prevalent mainly in highly urbanized locations. A beggar of one organization is not allowed to operate in the area of a rival organization. Quarrels among the beggars on their domain of action are common. The situation becomes interesting when a nonpartisan beggar comes to operate in a place. The said beggar is given the choice to either join any organization or leave the place. This affiliation with other beggars is necessary for any beggar because s/he is expected to give a percentage of the earnings to the organization and the latter gives guarantees of protection and space of operation to the former (Groce, Loeb, & Murray, 2014). A question mark is raised over the abilities of states and societies to give safe futures to the next generations when innocent children are seen to be subjected to inhuman mistreatment by these begging mafias.

Individuals below the age of eighteen years are internationally recognized as children (Vaghri, Zermatten, Lansdown, & Ruggiero, 2022). Individuals at such age are innocent and unable to run the affairs of their lives on their own. They depend on others for their needs.

In other words, children are a very vulnerable segment of society. Professional beggars take advantage of their vulnerability. They are deprived of education, skill development, and the prospects of becoming useful individuals in society, on the one hand. They are exposed to malnutrition, scolding, a harsh environment, and many psychological complexities, on the other hand (Delap, 2009).

Begging is a detestable profession to take up. Any sane person will never adopt this profession willfully. However, beggars are still out there. In the case of an adult who adopts this profession, it is understandable that he might have calculated the advantages and disadvantages of being a beggar. The child, in this regard, is not able to do such a calculation. The decision to be a beggar is imposed on him. Those who impose that decision can be anyone. They may be parents, siblings, guardians, cousins, kidnappers, or organized beggars (Jamil, Shah, & Bashir, 2019).

Now, human trafficking means taking advantage of other individuals through force, fraud, or coercion. It is internationally defined by Article 3 of the United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children as:

- (a) "Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;
- (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;
- (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered trafficking in persons even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;
- (d) Child shall mean any person under eighteen years of age (UN, 2000)".

It is clearly explained in the above definition that the exploitation of a child will be considered human trafficking even if consent is given and if the child is not subjected to force, fraud, or coercion. It is also to be noted that some forms of exploitation are stressed

in the definition of human trafficking like prostitution, forced labor, removal of organs, etc., but forced begging is not mentioned. The drafters of the protocol intentionally mentioned some forms of exploitation while leaving the space open for adding more forms to the list by using the word “at a minimum” while defining exploitation. Here, forced child begging can be included in human trafficking. Apart from that, using children for begging can also be included in the domain of forced labor as well (Cherneva, 2011).

Begging children as a form of human trafficking is not acceptable in any civilized society. However, beggars are present everywhere around the globe. In the Global South, this phenomenon is more frequent due to the prevailing conditions of abject poverty, unemployment, and poor governance (Laila, Sadiq, Mehmood, & Fiaz, 2020). As a result, millions of children are seen begging for food and money on the busy streets of metropolitan cities like Islamabad, New Delhi, Harare, Dushanbe, Manila, Buenos Aires, etc.

The situation is not ideal in the Global North either. People who cannot afford accommodation become homeless. These people are found sitting in busy streets and squares seeking charity. They are often accompanied by their children, as people give more money to children than adults. The habit of begging is thus imbibed by their little minds. Moreover, the developed states have to deal with not only their domestic child beggars, but they have to endure the burden of foreign beggars as well. Because of the high exchange rate and the resultant huge prospect of income, beggars from underdeveloped and developing states migrate, often illegally, to the developed states (International, 2014).

Pakistan (situated in South Asia) has been facing the problem of forced child labor since its inception in 1947. It has signed and ratified various international laws and protocols to curb this menace. The domestic enactments also forbid child beggary. All four federating units (Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) have also framed laws to combat child beggary. But all these laws and enactments are unable to tame the increasing tide of child begging in Pakistan (Laila et al., 2020). Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Peshawar, Quetta, etc., are hubs of child beggars.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the four provinces of Pakistan. There are a total of 35 districts in it. The 2017 Census report shows that 30.51 million people are living in those districts (PBS, 2017a). It is an economically poor province as compared to Punjab and Sind. The less social security provided to the people by the provincial government means more abundance of child beggars in the bus stops, squares, streets and traffic signals of Bannu, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, Dir, Chitral, Malakand, Buner, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Swat, Kohistan, Parachinar, Landi Kotal, Swabi, Mardan and other districts.

Peshawar is the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Its total area is 1,257 sq.km and its total population is 4,267,198 (PBS, 2017b). Being the most populous city in the province, the beggars are most numerous in Peshawar. Qissa Khwani Bazar, Chowk Yadgar, Shoba Bazar, Dabgari Garden, Yakatoot, Ander Shehar, Hashtnagri, Pepal Mandi, Karimpura Bazar, Firdos Bazar, Haji Camp Bus Stop, Kohat Bus Stop, Namak Mandi, Jamil Chowk, Pishtakhara Chowk, Circular Road, University Road, Karkhano Market, Hayatabad Township, etc. are the places in Peshawar where child beggars are visible in abundance.

2. Literature Review

Very limited work has been done on the subject matter of beggary in Pakistan, let alone forced child begging. The crux of some of the most valuable works on the topic at hand is hereby presented:

In the research article titled *The Socio-Cultural Determinants of Begging: A Case Study of Karachi City* (Riaz & Baloch, 2019), the authors tried to know about the status of the beggars. The social and economic aspects of the lives of the beggars were especially focused upon in this study. The area chosen for this research endeavor was Karachi (the provincial capital of the Sind province of Pakistan). Being the most populous city of Pakistan (12th ranking in the world), beggars of all sorts were present on the busy streets of Karachi. The primary data revealed in the survey of 140 beggars shows that begging has become an organized profession. Moreover, it was found that great numbers of beggars had willfully adopted the profession of begging. They had their own well-furnished houses. Because of their satisfaction, they were unwilling to change their current profession. Furthermore, the beggars shockingly acknowledged that weak, minor, or undernourished children were a good source of income for them. Such children were either their own or they were hired from others. People easily took pity on them and gave them charity. The data further revealed that the majority of the beggars were grooming their offspring to adopt the profession of begging. This means that the future of the new generation is at stake in Karachi.

Moreover, in the research work *Child Begging in Pakistan: A Case Study of Gujranwala* (Ansari, Rauf, & Nazir, 2017), 150 child beggars were investigated quantitatively to determine the main reasons which force a person under eighteen years of age to beg from others. The area chosen for the research study was one of the most urbanized and industrialized cities in the Punjab province of Pakistan. After thorough field interviews, it was found out that along with many other causes of child begging in Pakistan like the demise of one or both parents, violent household environment, harsh treatment by step-parents, divorce between parents, etc., the main and foremost reason behind child begging was extreme poverty. The most shocking revelation of the research study was that the child beggars were mentally and physically sound and still, instead of getting an education, they were begging for money on the busy streets of Gujranwala.

In the same vein, the main focus of the researchers in the research article *Education and Health Status of Child Beggars in Sylhet City, Bangladesh* (Sarker, Roy, Chowdhury, Sarker, & Yasmin, 2016) was to know the levels of health and education of the child beggars in the Sylhet metropolitan city, but in doing so, very useful information about the phenomenon of forced child begging was put to light. The primary data from 90 child beggars showed that about two-thirds of the child beggars were uneducated. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents were involved in begging and nothing else. Similarly, almost three-fourths of children received regular torture at the hands of their handlers. They were often beaten physically. There was a lack of quality food for them and many of them were undernourished.

It is evident from the above discussion that the issue of forced child begging is not touched upon directly, but here and there glimpses of the issue are projected. It must be noted that the social problem of child begging is rarely seen from the vantage point of human trafficking. It is, therefore, necessary to indulge in the matter in greater detail.

3. Objective of the Research

The main objective of this research study is the following:

To find out whether children are forced to beg in the district of Peshawar.

4. Methodology

This research study was basically an exploratory research in which it was determined whether the consent of the child beggars was taken in beggary or whether they were forced to beg. To find an answer to the aforementioned question, a quantitative research

method was adopted. Moreover, a survey was used to know the answers of the respondents. The responses were, however, extracted from child beggars through in-depth face-to-face interviews. The responses were written down by the researcher as the respondents were unable to write them themselves. Moreover, the observations regarding each respondent were also recorded by the researcher immediately after each interview. Furthermore, a cross-sectional research design was used during the survey. Children under eighteen years of age from different locations and genders were selected as the research population for the interviews. The data was, of course, primary data. One hundred and twenty (120) child beggars were chosen for the interview through a non-probability accidental sampling technique. In addition to that, Karkhano market, Hayatabad Township, University Town, Peshawar Saddar, Khyber Bazar, Gulbahar, and Pishtakhara Chowk were the locations from which the data was collected. The child beggars were present at bus stops, traffic signals, U-turns, parking lots, shopping centers, mosques, and hospitals in those areas.

5. Limitations of the Study

The following were limitations faced by the researcher during the study:

- i) It was not possible to cover all the child beggars of Peshawar. Only a sample was interviewed.
- ii) The child beggars were, in many cases, reluctant to give interviews. At first, their confidence was won and then they were interviewed.

6. Results and Discussions

Data analysis is based on descriptive statistics only.

6.1. Gender of the Respondents

Both genders are exploited by engaging them in beggary. The largest part of the respondents were boys (75%) and the remaining were girls (25%). The reason behind the lower number of girl beggars is that in the patriarchal Pakhtun society, the wandering of females outside the houses is not liked.

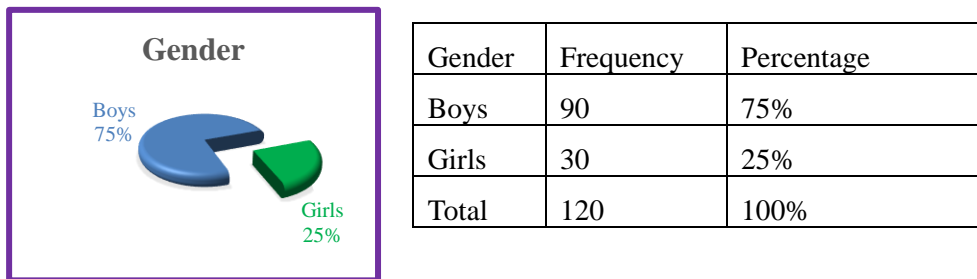
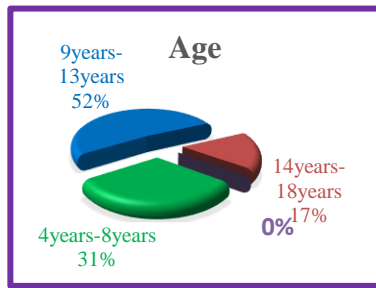


Figure and Table 1: Distribution of child beggars by gender

6.2. Ages of the Respondents

As far as the age of the child beggars is concerned, they were divided into three strata of five years each: child beggars from four years old to eight years old were 31%; from nine years old to thirteen years old were 52%; and from fourteen-years-old to eighteen-years-old were 17%. It is clearly visible from the data that the most ideal group of children for begging in Peshawar was from nine years old to thirteen years old. Children in this group are innocent as well as experts in the skill of begging. Moreover, children from four years old to eight years old are successful in the field of begging because of their innocence and helplessness. Furthermore, children of the age group of fourteen years old to eighteen years old are found less frequently because people think that instead of begging they

should earn their livelihood by proper work. In a nutshell, human traffickers use the innocence of child beggars to earn money from others.

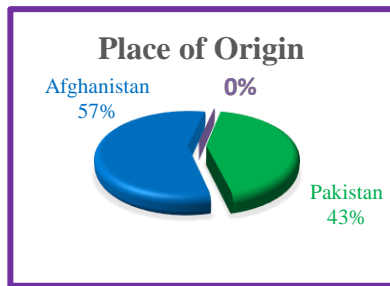


Age	Frequency	Percentage
4-8	37	31%
9-13	62	52%
14-18	21	17%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 2: Distribution of child beggars by age groups

6.3. Places of Origin of the Respondents

The great majority of the respondents were from Afghanistan (57%), while the remaining were from Pakistan (43%). The main reason behind the abundance of Afghani child beggars in Peshawar is the historically destabilized political conditions of Afghanistan. The invasion of the former USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in Afghanistan in 1979 and the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) retaliation against Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in the USA further stimulated the influx of Afghan refugees into Peshawar (Borthakur, 2017). Moreover, when children are far away from their own society, the chances of their exploitation increase as there is no place to escape.

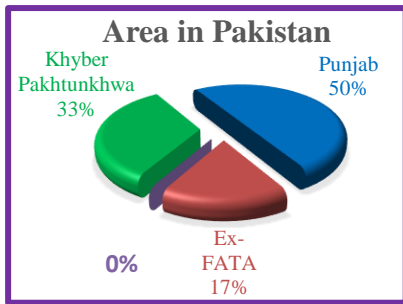


Place of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Pakistan	52	43%
Afghanistan	68	57%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 3: Places of origin of the respondents

6.4. Area of Origin of Pakistani Child Beggars

Of the total 52 Pakistani child beggars in Peshawar, half (50%) were from the Punjab province. These figures correlate with the fact that Punjabis make up more than half of the population of Pakistan, and the per capita income of the rural Punjab is very low. Again, moving away from one's own community increases the chances of exploitation. The next highest chunk belonged to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (33%), as Peshawar is the capital city of that province. Next in line were the child beggars from the ex-FATA (17%). Ex-FATA became the battleground after NATO overthrew the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The Pakistani military carried out various military operations in the said area. Consequently, thousands of tribesmen lost their means of survival. To make both ends meet, many migrated to Peshawar, and one can see their children begging in Peshawar.



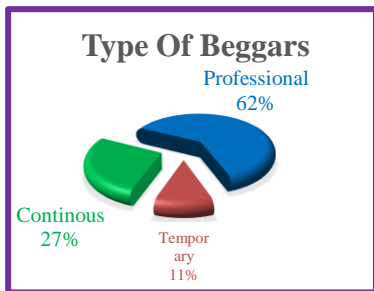
Area in Pakistan	Frequency	Percentage
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	17	33%
Punjab	26	50%
Ex-FATA	9	17%
Total	52	100%

Figure and Table 4: Area of origin of child beggars in Pakistan

6.5. Types of Beggars

Temporary beggars are those who become beggars for a very short time, mainly because they are victims of some sudden change like floods, earthquakes, and military operations. Continuous beggars are those who beg for a comparatively longer duration, but they have the goal of leaving begging once the conditions are ideal for their rehabilitation. As for this, the professional beggars have no intention of reverting back to their normal lives. They will beg all their lives, and some beggars are even hereditary beggars. It is, therefore, deduced that the more time a child spends begging, the more he is exploited. In other words, professional beggars and their children are exploited the most.

The largest proportion of child beggars in Peshawar was that of professional beggars (62%), while continuous beggars (27%) and temporary beggars (11%) were also visible.

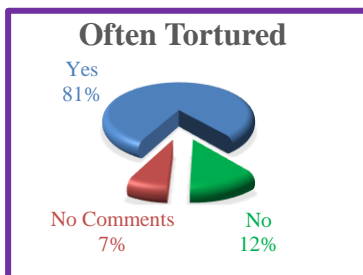


Type of Beggars	Frequency	Percentage
Temporary	13	11%
Continuous	33	27%
Professional	74	62%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 5: Different categories of child beggars

6.6. Torturing of Child Beggars

Child beggars are often tortured for the purpose of begging. It is because they will not beg without the use of force. When questioned, the majority of the child beggars (81%) confessed that they were tortured, while some (12%) said that they were not tortured. A minority (7%) chose not to answer the question.



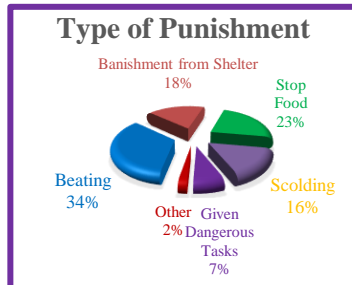
Often Tortured	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	97	81%
No	14	12%
No Comments	9	7%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 6: Frequency of torture of child beggars

6.7. Type of Punishment

Children are forced to beg by inflicting different punishments. Out of the sample under consideration, 34% confessed that they were regularly beaten. Eighteen percent (18%) said that they were banished from the shelter. Food was stopped as a punishment for 23%

of respondents, while 16% were scolded. Seven percent (7%) were given dangerous tasks as a punishment, while two percent (2%) were punished in some other way.

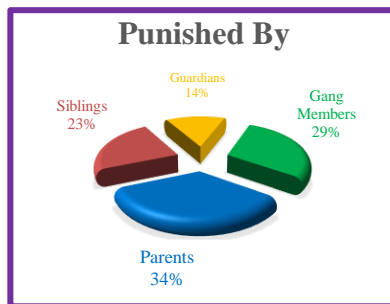


Type of Punishment	Frequency	Percentage
Beating	41	34%
Banishment from Shelter	22	18%
Stop Food	27	23%
Scolding	19	16%
Given Dangerous Tasks	8	7%
Other	3	2%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 7: Types of punishment for child beggars

6.8. Punished By

Now, the question is: who would punish the children for begging? Ironically, parents (34%) punished their own children for begging the most. The next highest number was that of gang members (29%). Siblings (23%) and guardians (14%) were the other strata of individuals who punished the children.



Punished By	Frequency	Percentage
Parents	41	34%
Siblings	27	23%
Guardians	17	14%
Gang Members	35	29%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 8: Punishment givers to child beggars

6.9. Leaving the Begging Profession

When the sample was asked whether they could leave the begging, the following answers were given. The largest majority (81%) said that they were unable to leave the profession. A minority (6%) said that they could leave begging. Similarly, some children (13%) were undecided about the answer to the question. These figures confirm the fact that children do not beg willfully, but rather they are forced to do so.



Leaving Begging	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	6%
No	97	81%
Probably	16	13%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 9: Mapping the leaving tendency in child beggars

6.10. Attempt of Leaving the Begging

A great majority of children (70%) never attempted to run away from the system of begging. Some children (30%) have, however, attempted to leave the profession of begging. Here, it is confirmed that if children run away from begging, they are brought back into the profession by force otherwise they would not have been found on the streets of Peshawar begging.



Attempt of Leaving Begging	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	30%
No	84	70%
Total	120	100%

Figure and Table 10: Measuring the attempts to leave the begging profession

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Begging is a profession adopted by weak and lazy people. It is an uncivilized act. In spite of that, beggars are present everywhere. Beggary becomes even worse when children are employed in it. Since children will not willingly adopt this way of earning, they are forced to do so. The issue then becomes human trafficking. Instead of giving them education, technical skills, and a resultant bright future, they are eternally paralyzed and forced to never stand on their feet. This atrocity against children is prevailing in the district of Peshawar in Pakistan. When 120 child beggars were enquired about forced begging at different locations in Peshawar, the following empirical pieces of evidence were collected. The majority of the child beggars in the district of Peshawar were boys (75%). Similarly, child beggars from the age group of nine to thirteen years were the most (52%). Moreover, Afghani child beggars (57%) were more common than Pakistani child beggars (43%). Out of the total 52 child beggars belonging to Pakistan, half (50%) of them belonged to the Punjab province. Moreover, professional beggars (62%) had high numerical strength as compared to continuous and temporary beggars. Eighty-one percent confessed that they were often tortured by their parents (34%), gang members (29%), etc. Among the different punishments/tortures like beating, banishment from the shelter, stopping food, scolding, giving dangerous tasks, and others, children were beaten (34%) the most. A strong majority (81%) said that they could not leave begging, while, when enquired further, some child beggars (30%) confessed that they had attempted to leave the world of begging. From all of the aforementioned data, it is concluded that the futures of the child beggars living in Peshawar are very bleak.

The following are some of the recommendations proposed to combat child begging in the district of Peshawar:

- Strong police action is needed to create fear in the minds of human traffickers against child begging.
- Effective fines and imprisonment should be enacted by the governments against those involved in the exploitation of children.
- Foreigners and the dwellers of other provinces should never be allowed to beg in Peshawar. It will significantly decrease the number of child beggars in the mentioned areas.

- State-sponsored institutions should be created which can provide education and technical skills to the child beggars.
- A strong media campaign against child begging is the need of the hour so that people may realize that employing a child in begging is equivalent to destroying the future of that child forever.

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