



Who Begg and Why? Understanding Diverse Pathways into Beggary and their Policy Implications

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1 Introduction

Beggary remains one of the most visible manifestations of poverty, social exclusion and livelihood insecurity in India. Existing research has shown that people engaged in beggary often live in highly precarious conditions, characterised by inadequate housing, poor health, exposure to harassment and victimisation and limited access to social protection. Studies further indicate that a significant proportion of this population comprises older persons, women, and children, many of whom are either unable to work or lack the skills and opportunities required to secure alternative livelihoods (Bangalore Based NGOs, 2010; Khan and Menaka, 2013; Menka and Khan, 2014). Despite this diversity of circumstances, policy responses have largely been based on the standardised approaches of rescue, institutionalisation and rehabilitation.

This study used a survey to identify and map people who beg across the Bengaluru metropolitan region. The main aims were to spatially profile them, understand their living conditions and needs, examine options for vocational rehabilitation and develop strategies to help trafficking victims and those in trouble with the law. The study covered all 198 Wards in eight zones of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). The study began with a visual survey of key locations, including religious sites, traffic junctions, dumping yards, bus and railway stations, markets and commercial areas. The mapping later included

beggars' colonies, shelter homes, observation homes, old-age homes and other centres for destitute people.

2 Key Findings

The survey mapped key hotspots and identified 4,676 alms-seekers across the eight BBMP zones. While 3,863 alms-seekers were identified directly by the survey, 813 alms-seekers were identified from 40 shelter homes (see Table 1).

Figures 1 and 2 present the spatial map of individuals engaged in begging across BBMP zones and wards. In the Yelahanka zone, Ward 4 recorded the highest concentration (127 alms-seekers), followed by Wards 1, 9, and 8. In Dasarahalli, Ward 15 reported the most (49), with Wards 41 and 71 following. In RR Nagar, Ward 130 had the highest count (73), followed by Wards 160, 37, and 159. The East zone exhibited the highest number in Ward 92 (137), with Wards 78, 63, and 32 next. In the West zone, Ward 120 reported the most (56), with Wards 94 and 99 following. The South zone had the overall highest concentrations, particularly in Wards 171, 151, 153, 134, and 172. Bommanahalli recorded higher counts in Wards 184, 195, 175, 193, and 196. Most alms-seekers were concentrated around marketplaces, restaurants, and commercial streets (47.1%), with fewer at religious places (27.2%) and traffic signals (12.3%). The highest concentrations were observed near religious places, footpaths, streets, residential neighbourhoods, and traffic intersections. Transport hubs such as bus stands and railway stations were also significant locations.

Out of the 3,863 people surveyed, about half had some form of physical or mental disability (see Figure 3). This group included people of all ages and genders. Almost 20% of alms-seekers aged 19-59 did not have a visible disability and about 11% of elderly respondents also had no disability. Around 7% had some involvement with the law. Some people begged while selling small items or performing acrobatics at roads and traffic signals; these were called "disguised

Table 1: Respondents mapped by BBMP zones

Zone	Newly Mapped	From Shelter Homes	Total
Bommanahalli	620	112	732
East zone	652	39	691
Mahadevapura	286	45	331
Rajarajeshwari Nagar	453	52	505
South zone	917	125	1042
T Dasarahalli	201	227	428
West zone	307	80	387
Yelahanka zone	427	133	560
TOTAL	3863	813	4676

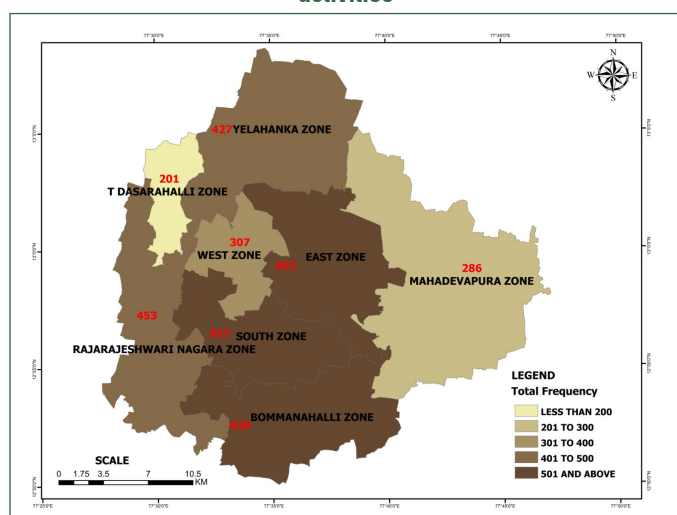
Sources: Primary Survey and data obtained from CRC

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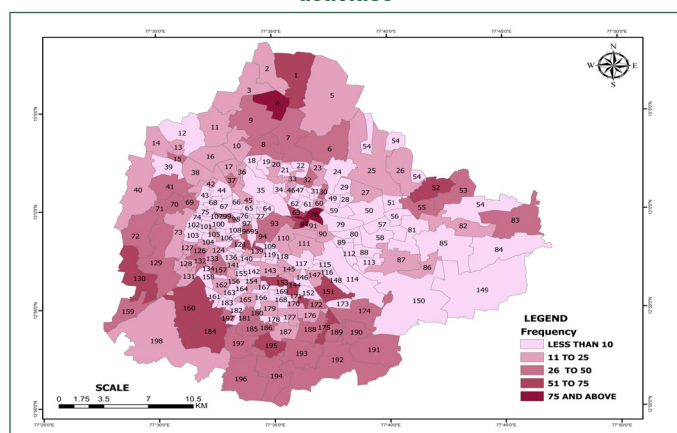
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Figure 1: BBMP zone-wise mapping of people into begging activities



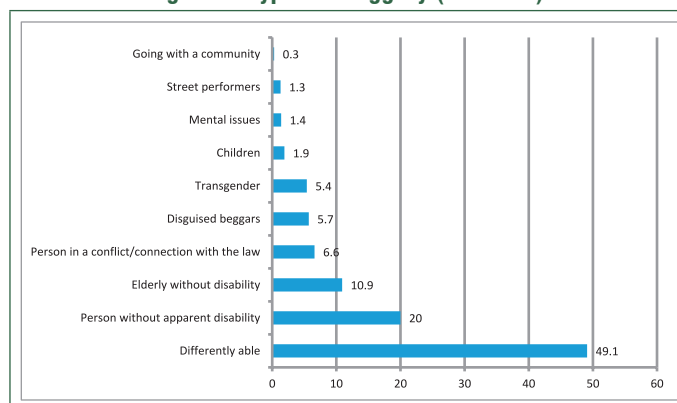
Source: Survey data

Figure 2: BBMP ward-wise mapping of people into begging activities



Source: Survey data

Figure 3: Types of Beggary (N=3863)



Source: Survey data

beggars” and made up about 7% of the group. Nearly 4% begged with children and about 2% were child beggars.

Drivers and Forces behind begging

The study found that financial crises, disability, chronic illness, job loss, death or abandonment by family and poverty are the main

reasons people turn to begging (see Tables 2 and 3). Some also said that abuse and violence forced them to leave home and rely on begging. Moving to cities and the need for finding additional income was another key factor. While poverty, disability, health problems and family traditions of begging were the main reasons for child begging, being abandoned by children and insecurity were the major reasons reported by the older people for relying on begging. There were also gender differences, with women more often started begging because of poverty, tradition, disability, illness or being abandoned by children, while men more often mentioning financial crisis, poverty, abandonment and the death of the spouse.

Table 2: Reported Reasons for Begging by Age Group (N=3863)

Reason for Begging	Age				Total
	0 to 18	19 to 59	60 to 79	80 and Above	
Abuse/Violence at home	0.00	5.20	5.00	12.50	5.90
Financial crisis	0.00	41.40	36.70	43.80	39.00
Financial crisis/Abuse/violence at home	0.00	10.30	8.30	6.20	8.80
Financial crisis/Left by children	0.00	1.70	5.00	18.80	5.10
Financial crisis/Parent/spouse death	0.00	5.20	3.30	0.00	3.70
Left by children	0.00	3.40	6.70	0.00	4.40
Migrated with family	0.00	10.30	5.00	0.00	6.60
Migrated with family/financial crisis	0.00	0.00	5.00	6.20	2.90
Other (Poverty, Traditional practice, Physically challenged, Health issues etc)	100.00	13.80	16.70	12.50	16.20
Parent/ spouse death	0.00	3.40	6.70	0.00	4.40
Ran away from home/place of residence	0.00	5.20	1.70	0.00	2.90
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Survey data

Table 3: Reported reasons for Begging by Gender (N=3863)

Reason for Begging	Gender			Total
	Female	Male	Transgender	
Abuse/Violence at home	7.80	4.90	0.00	5.90
Financial crisis	27.50	45.70	50.00	39.00
Financial crisis/Abuse/violence at home	9.80	8.60	0.00	8.80
Financial crisis/Left by children	11.80	1.20	0.00	5.10
Financial crisis/Parent/ spouse death	0.00	6.20	0.00	3.70
Left by children	3.90	4.90	0.00	4.40
Migrated with family	7.80	6.20	0.00	6.60
Migrated with family/financial crisis	2.00	3.70	0.00	2.90
Other (Poverty, Traditional practice, Physically challenged, Health issues etc)	23.50	11.10	25.00	16.20
Parent/ spouse death	3.90	3.70	25.00	4.40
Ran away from home/place of residence	2.00	3.70	0.00	2.90
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Survey data

Categorisation based on levels of vulnerabilities

The study used Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to find hidden groups of social vulnerability in the data. This was based on factors like age, gender, education, disability, housing, ability to work, how long someone had been begging and whether they had identity documents. LCA grouped people with similar patterns into three classes, making up 18.3%, 29.7%, and 52.0% of the sample, based on their level of vulnerability (see Table 4). These are discussed below:

Class 1: Chronically Vulnerable and Family-Dependent

This group comprises nearly 18% of respondents and is the most vulnerable. Most of them are older, with a majority being women (61.6%). As many as 65% of this group cannot work, indicating serious physical, social, and economic challenges. Many have been begging for over 20 years, and for them, begging is a long-term way to survive. A regular job-based rehabilitation may not work for this group due to their extreme vulnerabilities.

Class 2: Homeless, disabled but can be employable

About 30% of respondents are in this group, characterised by severe housing shortages and social isolation. Almost 93% are homeless, which is the main feature of this class. Most are men (71%), and many have moderate to severe disabilities. Nearly all live alone, showing weak family and social support. Still, 85% can work. Most have only recently started begging, so it seems to be a new response to difficult life events and not a long-term job. Begging is mostly done alone (96%), and mainly for their own survival, not as a family activity. Also, 34.8% lack valid identity documents, limiting their access to welfare, healthcare, housing and jobs. This group faces serious homelessness and social disconnection, but many could benefit from assistance with housing, identity documents, disability support and employment programs.

Class 3: Economically precarious but socially connected and employable

This group has the largest share of the population engaged in beggary (52%) and lower levels of vulnerability than the other classes. Members are predominantly younger individuals, particularly within the economically active age group, and most live with their families (79%). Homelessness is relatively low (16.9%) in this group, with the majority residing in rented or slum housing. Most of them are capable of work (86%) and possess valid identity documents (90%). Most individuals have entered begging relatively recently, indicating that begging may be a recent livelihood response. However, it should be noted that this group exhibits very high levels of illiteracy (79.1%), which may limit their access to stable, better-paying employment opportunities. Overall, this group represents individuals and households experiencing economic precarity and livelihood insecurity rather than extreme social exclusion, suggesting that factors such as unemployment, underemployment, low wages, informal labour-market instability and limited educational attainment may be important drivers of their engagement in beggary.

Table 4: Categorisation of vulnerability using LCA (N=3044)

	Class1	Class2	Class3
Proportion	18.30%	29.70%	52%
Vulnerability	Highest	Moderate	Low
Living conditions	Homeless (39.7%), Rented/slum housing (45%)	Extremely high homelessness (93.3%)	Mostly rented/slum housing, low homelessness (16.9%)
Age	Mostly older adults (50–60 and >60)	>50 old adults (60%)	Younger aged group 18-50 (44%)
Gender	Predominantly female (61.6%), plus noticeable transgender presence (8%)	Predominantly male (71%); transgenders present	Male and Female almost equal; no transgender
Education	Very high non-literacy (71%)	Very high non-literacy (76%)	Very high non-literacy (79.07%)
Disability	No disability (78.2%)	66% with moderate or severe disability	Mixed mild/severe
Status of living	Living alone (78.7%)	Almost entirely living alone (98.9%)	Living with family (79%)
Work ability	Mostly not able to work (65%)	Able to work (85%)	Mostly able to work (86%)
Possessing Identity Documents	Valid ID proof for 88.7%	No valid ID proof for 34.8%	Valid ID proof for 90%
Years begging	20 or more years in begging for 21%	Begging for up to 10 years (80%)	Mostly for 1-5 years
Begging status	Mostly group-based (57%)	Mostly alone (96%)	Mostly alone (95%)
Family members begging	Multiple family members involved (42%)	Mostly for self (93%)	Mostly self with one family member
Remarks	Limited work capacity, begging as family	Potential for rehabilitation via employment	Employable

3 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Begging is often viewed as a social problem that needs institutional interventions for rehabilitation. However, the present study shows that people who beg are not all the same and they have different layers of vulnerabilities, challenges and needs. The results highlight the need to move away from one-size-fits-all solutions and use policies that address their specific vulnerabilities. The following are the specific policy suggestions based on the study.

Adopt a differentiated rehabilitation framework

The findings show that people who beg show notable differences depending on their levels of vulnerability. While some are old, ill, disabled and cannot work, others are homeless and isolated. Some have families and access to housing but still face economic insecurity. For instance, older persons with disabilities who are unable to work and belong to the first group need support, including aids to reduce the effect of disability, medical care, food and shelter, along with pensions, disability benefits, healthcare services, nutrition support and community care. On the other hand, the rescue and education of child beggars need to be important components of their rehabilitation. Strategies for able-bodied beggars who can work should be different, as they could perform various tasks, which

can be improved by expanding livelihood opportunities through skill development and self-employment support. There were also alms-seekers who were willing to work but experienced rejection in the labour market, especially transgenders (Madheswaran, George and Kusanna 2023). Using the same rehabilitation program for everyone could undermine these differences. It is suggested that policymakers should carefully assess each person's situation and needs and tailor support to help them.

Strengthen social protection for the chronically vulnerable

The most vulnerable group that the study identifies includes older persons, women, transgender people and those who cannot work and have depended on begging for a long time. For them, begging is closely linked to poverty, exclusion and lack of welfare support. Hence, the policies should focus on strong social protection such as pensions, disability benefits, nutrition programs, healthcare and community support.

Address homelessness

Nearly 36% of the alms-seekers in the city are homeless, and the share of the elderly homeless is nearly 47%. It is, hence, important to make effective use of the available facilities at shelter homes in the city. The study showed that nearly 40% of the total capacity of shelter homes is unutilised (Madheswaran, George and Kusanna 2023). The reluctance of alms-seekers to go to shelter homes is a major reason for their underutilisation. There is a tendency among alms-seekers to relate shelter homes to sites of detention, surveillance and lack of freedom. The study suggests that the idea of shelter homes needs to be reconstructed as a place of care and support so that they will be considered better shelter options.

Enhance livelihood opportunities and economic security

The largest group in the study comprises individuals who possess housing, family support, valid identification documents and the ability to work, yet continue to beg. Their participation appears to stem primarily from livelihood insecurity, unemployment, underemployment and low earnings from available work opportunities. Policies targeting this group should focus on strengthening livelihood opportunities through vocational training, skill development, urban employment programmes, self-employment support and access to affordable credit. Strengthening economic security is likely to be more effective for this group than conventional rehabilitation measures centred solely on welfare assistance.

Break the cycle of educational exclusion

One key finding is that all three groups have very high rates of illiteracy. Low levels of education limit job options and can keep families in poverty for generations. To address beggary, efforts should support both adult literacy and children's education. Helping children from families who beg can break the cycle of vulnerability.

For adults, linking literacy and skill programs to job opportunities can improve long-term security and inclusion.

Pay attention to gender and social marginalisation

The fact that women and transgender people are overrepresented among the most vulnerable shows the need for more inclusive and gender-sensitive policies. Many face extra challenges because of age, gender, stigma and limited job options. Rehabilitation programs should address these overlapping disadvantages and make sure women, transgender people and older adults have access to safe housing, healthcare, social security and job support. Programs that consider these real-life challenges are more likely to work.

To conclude, the findings show that beggary is not just a personal failure but a result of wider social and economic problems. Homelessness, ageing, disability, unstable work, low education, and weak social protection all play a role. Policies that criminalise or remove people from public spaces do not solve these deeper issues. A better approach is to see people who beg as citizens with rights and dignity. Policy responses should focus on more social protection, housing support, livelihood promotion, access to labour market, education, community-based rehabilitation and most importantly, helping alms-seekers to be part of society.

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