

Journal of Applied Sociology

21th year, Vol 39, No3, Autumn 2010

Received: 88/10/1

Accepted: 89/1/31

PP 135-148

A study of beggars characteristics and attitude of people towards the phenomenon of begging in the city of Shiraz

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Abstract

This research was based on the culture of poverty and social disorganization theories, using a survey method. The sample of the study included 330 beggars and 1000 non-beggars shiraz. The research findings revealed that 64/4 percent of the beggars aged lower than 20 years and most of them were mentally and physically healthy. Most of them live in the suburbs of the city where the culture of poverty is prevalent. The results of multiple regression implied that there is meaningful relationship between the factors of "being religious," marital status", "levels of education", "being rural or urban", "occupation" and "social class" of the participants and their attitudes toward the phenomenon of begging. It also shows that the factor of "degree of religion" explained the maximum amount of the dependent variable (tendency to help the beggars). variance (18/3%)

Keywords: beggar, begging, the cultural of poverty, social disorganization theories

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Introduction

Begging is a social problem which has not only psychological consequences such as the development of inferiority complex in the beggars' family members and their network of kinship, but also will affect, as a unpleasant problem, the geographical and social structure of the cities. This social issue and its unpleasant consequences is of considerable importance in terms of the effects it will have on the face of the city, especially in metropolises like Shiraz which are magnets for domestic and foreign tourists. Moreover, the increasing number of beggars in metropolises of Iran, their tendency towards committing offences and crimes and the lack of an organized and purposeful management in solving this social problem is indicative of the necessity of studying this issue. The increasing growth of urbanization and the increase and the excessive density of Iran's population have caused problems such as suburbanization, hidden unemployment, false jobs, and the development of social problems such as begging in city environments. Since suburbanites, slum dwellers, rural migrants and some Afghan refugees are mostly poor and unemployed, some of them make a living, by engaging in false jobs such as selling cigarettes, some do smuggling and illegal activities especially selling drugs, and some others who suffer from severe fanatical poverty resort to begging. The lengthiness of poverty period which is mostly found in developing societies (Alavitabar, 1997). And in Lewis's (1959) terms is one of the signs of the culture of poverty, prepares the ground for people to engage in begging and adapt to it. Most of the characteristics Oscar Lewis had enumerated, for example, the feeling of anonymity in the urban society, suffering from some social problems such as addiction and physical disability are among the indices of the culture of poverty found among beggars (Ahmadi, 2005). In the meantime, the ecological theory of the "Chicago school" in explaining the phenomenon of begging, has emphasized the variables related to the phenomenon of urbanization such as ethnicity, migration, regions of residence, population density and social disorganization (Ahmadi, 1998).

For instance, separating the people suffering from financial poverty from their ethnic, tribal and neighborhood networks increases the tendency towards begging. Based on Merton's (1957) "means – ends", theory beggars may be the people who have not been able to achieve cultural goals such as welfare and material comfort using legitimate means. In terms of the theoretical foundations stated above regarding the phenomenon of begging, this study is seeking answers to the following questions:

1. what are the demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of the beggars?
2. what are the attitudes of people towards beggars? And why do they help beggars?

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Oscar Lewis's theory of the culture of poverty, the views of the Chicago school and Robert Merton's means-ends theory. Lewis's theory of the culture of poverty indicates that poverty as a subculture passes from one generation to another and becomes institutionalized in the poor some characteristics which prepares the ground for the phenomenon of begging. Some of these characteristics are:

1. nonparticipation in public activities
2. low level of associations and lack of voluntary associations
3. feeling of anonymity in the urban society, social isolation and tendency towards hermitage.
4. suffering from some chronic illnesses and sometime malingering
5. lack of professional skills.
6. experiencing long-term unemployment periods (Lewis, 1998)
7. existence of some spiritual and psychological characteristics such as low self esteem; weak self – concept; tendency towards indolence, lack of cognitive psyche; feeling of incapability; dependence on others and the feeling of unworthiness (Ahmadi, 2003).

Begging develops in societies where there is not the appropriate job for the people with a special

profession or skill and the society can't effectively solve the problems of the poor. However there are materialities and values dominating the society which consider the poor's low level of life as the result of their own incapability. In such conditions, begging is both a means for adaptation to the environment to survive and a reaction which the poor individual reveals against his/her feeling of unworthiness in order to resist hopelessness. Hopelessness results from knowing the reality that achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society is impossible for them. The Chicago school emphasizes, the development of urban space and its effects on social relations and man's life style. According to this theory, one can say that the rapid and inconsistent development of urbanization in the developing countries, including Iran, causes social disorganization, increases migration and the appearance of abnormal phenomena such as begging. The large size of population and its density in cities causes, first, people to keep away from the social control forces and second their relationships with their previous cultural systems. Such a person feels that he belongs to both cultural systems simultaneously however, at the same time he thinks that he neither belongs nor is inclined to either of these cultures (Piran, 1989). These people usually isolate themselves from the active urban life and are prone to begging.

Robert Merton emphasizes the social structure and anomie. He believes that the social structure brings about anomie (Ahmadi, 1998). For begging, this happens in this way: society encourages all its members to possess wealth and social status in different ways, but it doesn't facilitate the way to achieve these goals for all of them. Therefore most of them resort to illegal, unconventional and abnormal ways such as begging in order to achieve these goals.

In examining people's attitudes toward the phenomenon of begging, the theory of Alport (1935) regarding attitudes has been used. Based on this theory, people's attitudes towards begging is a kind of positive or negative orientation and view of the people towards this phenomenon, which forms a kind of social behavioral pattern in this area. Social psychologists such as Alport believe that people's attitude towards social phenomena (phenomenon of begging) is

measurable in the following three dimensions: cognitive or perceptual (the awareness and knowledge of people towards the phenomenon of begging), emotional (pleasant or unpleasant feeling towards helping beggars) and action tendency (tendency toward helping beggars) (Baron & Byrne, 1978).

Literature review

The domestic studies done on begging as a social issue have not been able to address this phenomenon using a sociological approach in a way to cover the different kinds of beggars such as children vagabonds, street children, mendicants and runaways with different physical and mental disabilities. Some studies have defined begging in terms of sociology and Islam (Behravan, 1991) and some others have considered the different ways of dealing with begging in terms of sociology and Islam (Behravan, 1991). Sobhani (2008) deals with the issue of street children who clean the glasses to cars in intersections, some of whom beg for money, he believes these children have grown up in disorganized families and therefore material and immaterial support for their families is a first step in reducing this social problem. Najafi and colleagues (2004), in a study, concluded that since begging is a behavior in conflict with the ethical principles of the society, it should be considered as preventive/deterrent crimes. Furthermore, they believe that considering it as a crime is not logically justifiable and its range should be limited by no criminal and preventive actions.

Methodology

This study has been done using the survey method, which is one of the most popular methods in quantitative methodology. The statistical population is the total number of males and females aged 15 and over in Shiraz, Iran. Shiraz has been made homogeneous based on socio-economic status and divided into six socio-economic areas each recognized as a socio-economic stratum. Therefore, the concerning sample has been selected using "stratified random sampling". In each of the urban areas, the people of the sample were selected using the Lean table and considering different proportions in terms of the size of population aged 15 and over

in the area. The sample size was estimated to be 1000. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire which was complemented by face to face interview with each of a sample people which was done by trained interviewers. Another sample contained 330 beggars who were selected from different areas of shiraz using the Quota sampling method, then they were questioned in a face- to – face interview . the software used was SPSS/PC and the analysis of the data was done in two sections: descriptive statistics and analytical statistics.

Description and analysis of data.

The findings of this study indicated that of the 330 beggars that were studied, 75.5% were male and 24.7% female . half were married, 51% were under the age of 20, 33.5% were between 20 and 59 years of age. Only 15.5% of them aged 60 and over and were superannuated. Sex and age distribution of beggars indicate that 84.5% of them were in the working age, above 75% were male. This issue is worthy of consideration. The education level of about 75% of them was primary school and lower , 25% or middle school, and high school and or had high school diploma . The mean of their daily income was 5000tomans, which as they said , was more than their daily expenditure

Table 1: Distribution of beggars in terms of residential area.

Residential area	Number	Percent
Suburban periphery areas	171	51.8
Areas other than suburbs with low social – economic status	129	39.1
The homeless (nomadic etc)	30	9.1
Total	330	100

Table 1 illustrates that the residence of 51.8% of the beggars is in suburban (periphery) areas where its resident suffer from the culture of poverty more than other areas. 39.1% of the beggars live in the poor areas of the city, which are mainly

southern areas other that suburbs and the rest of them are nomadics or live on the streets. Therefore the culture of poverty and poverty are important factors which cause begging.

Table 2. Distribution of beggars in terms of kind of begging

Kind of begging	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Beggar whose name and address in known	120	36.6	63	25.3	57	70.7
Wagabond	18	5.5	18	7.3	0	0
Fortune – teller	15	4.5	0	0	15	18.5
Street child	147	44.5	141	56.6	6+	7.4
Mendicant	15	4.5	15	6.00	0	0
Runaway	6	1.8	6	2.4	0	0
Abandon by family	6	1.8	3	1.2	3	3.7
Unanswered	3	0.9	3	1.2	0	0
Total	330	100	249	100	81	100

Table 2 indicates that 36.6% of the respondents introduce themselves as beggar when asking people for help, 5.5% of them work as Wagabonds under various pretenses such as needing help to continue their journey, being ill

etc., 44.5% of the respondents are Afghan and Iranian children asking for money in intersections in different ways such as cleaning the windsheilds of cars. 5% of the people were working as fortune-teller , all of whom were females.

Table 3 . Distribution of beggars in terms of physical and spiritual characteristics.

Physical and spiritual characteristic of the beggars	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Able – bodied	213	64.5	168	67.5	45	55.6
physically illn	21	6.4	12	4.8	9	11.1
Physical disabled	36	10.9	24	9.6	12	14.8
Mentally illn	12	3.6	12	4.8	0	0
Elderly and superannuated	21	6.3	12	4.8	9	11.1
Addict	27	8.2	21	8.4	6	7.4
Total	330	100	249	100	81	100

Table 3 indicates that 64.5% of the people working as beggars are able- bodied, 17.1% are suffering from chronic illnesses or physical disability . 6.3% of respondents were superannuated or elderly and 8.2% were addicts. The attitudes of respondents towards begging and giving help to beggars is considered next.

To examine the attitudes at the respondent toward bagging and helping beggars, Likert scale was used and to examine the construct validity of the test, factor analysis test was used. This test is seeking answer to the question of whether the items theoretically considered for measuring peoples attitudes toward beggars and begging (Alprot theory in measuring attitudes with the components of cognition, emotion, and tendency

to action) are in practice categorized in one group. For this purpose , varimax rotation was used. The results of this test indicate that the items of the scale for measuring peoples attitudes towards beggars and begging can be categorized in two groups : the first group includes 6 items which have been considered theoretically to measure the attitude of the respondents towards helping beggars. Other two items have been , selected to measare the respondents attitudes towards the phenomenon of begging (items 2 and 8). They have been categorized in group 2. The factor loadings of items 2 and 8 are larger in group 2 while the factor loadings of other items are larger in group 1.

Table 4 : results of factor analysis of the scale of measurement of attitudes towards beggars and begging.

Items	Factor loading in group 1	Factor loading in group 2
To what extent are you inclined to help beggars in cash?	0.81	0.11
To what extent do you consider begging as indecent and despicable?	0.24	0.83
To what extent do you agree with the sentence : people should help beggars	0.83	0.22
To what extent do you believe that begging is something natural and an act of providence?	0.67	0.1
To what extent are beggars' reasons about their problems believable?	0.64	0.18
To what extent do you believe that helping beggars has positive effects on people's lives?	0.82	0.02
To what extent do you consider beggars as deserving to receive help?	0.83	0.17
To what extent are you bothered by seeing the phenomenon of begging in the city?	0.03	0.89

The results of the pearson correlation test (table 7) indicate that education, social class, number of children and degree of being religius have a

significant relationship with respondents attitudes toward begging, while age and income don't have a significant relationship with it.

Table 8: The significance test of the mean difference of the score of the respordents' attitudes towards beggars and begging.

Variable	Number	Attitude towards beggars			Attitude towards begging		
		Mean	F	Sig	Mean	F	Sig
Sex:		16.08	2.10	0.147	8.03	0.02	0.887
Male	502	16.60			8.01		
Female	470						
Birthplace	807	15.83	46.04	0.000	8.14	17.57	0.000
City	154	19.14			7.46		
Village							
Marital status single	422	17.77	57.66	0.000	8.078	0.383	0.536
married	532	17.5					

Comparing the mean score of the attitudes of males and females as well as those born in the city and village towards beggars and the phenomenon of begging (table 8) indicates that , considering the amounts of F obtained from the analysis of variance, the difference between the means is significant . In other words males in comparison with females, and these born in the village in comparison with those born in the city have a more positive attitude toward beggars and begging. Table 8 , also , indicates that married people are more inclined towards beggars than single. However , regarding attitudes towards the phenomenon of begging no significant difference

was found between the means of single people and married people.

Multiple regression analysis

The degree of being religious is the first variable entering the explanation equation of respondents' attitudes toward beggars. This variable alone accounts for 18.3% of the variation in the dependent variable ($R^2=0.183$). Based on the coefficient B of the equation, for each unit increase in the degree of being religius, 0.29 is added to the score of people's attitudes towards, beggars ,and increases in religious attitude among people increase their favorable a Hitudes toward beggars (table 9)

Table 9. regression equation of respondent's attitudes towards beggars at the first level.

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Degree of being religius	0.29	0.43
Constant	7.27	-
R=0.43 $R^2= 0.183$	d.p=1.524 sig=0.000	F= 11.7

The second variable entering the equation is the social class of people (Table 10). The entrance of this variable to the equation causes the explanatory power of the equation to increase from 0.183 to 0.227 ($R^2 = 0.227$). In fact, the entrance of this variable into the equation increases its explanatory power by 4.4% based on coefficients B of the equations, one unit increase in the respondent's score on the being religious

increases their inclination to help beggars by .353 and causes increase in the respondent's social class from low to average or from average to high adds 2.27 score to their inclination to help beggars. Based on the coefficient, B of the equation, the effect of peoples, being religious is about 2 times the effect of their social class (Table 10)

Table 10 : Regression equation for explaining respondents inclination to help beggars at the second level based on the coefficients b and β .

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Being religious	0.353	0.384
Social class	2.27	0.216
Constant	3.35	-
R= .43 $R^2=0.227$	d.p=1.524 sig=0.000	F=11.7

The last variable entering the equation is the education level. The entrance of this variable into the equation causes its explanatory power to increase from 0.227 to 0.241 ($R^2=0.241$) Based on the coefficients B and the equation, for one unit increase in the amount of the respondent's religious tendencies, 0.31 was added. to the amount of their inclination to help beggars. Also increase in the participants social class from low to average or from average to high adds 1.27 to

the amount of their inclination to help beggars and finally one year increase in the participants education level subtracts 0.14 from the amount of their inclination to help beggars. Based on the coefficients B of the equation, the size of religious effect in accounting for participants' inclination to help beggars is about 2 times the effect of the social class and 2.5 times the effect of education. These results, based on Table 11, at each level are 99 percent significant.

Table 11. The final explanatory equation. of attitude toward beggars in terms of the coefficients b and β .

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Religious tendencie	0.31	0.33
Social class	1.72	10.64
Education level	0.162	0.14
Constant	7.45	-
R=.49 $R^2= .241$	d.f=3.522 sig =.000	F=55.11

Multiple regression analysis of participants attitude toward begging.

The literacy level of the respondents is the first variable entering the equation of respondents attitude toward the phenomenon of begging and accounts for 13.5 % of the variation in this variable ($R^2=.135$) . Based on the coefficient B of the regression equation, for one year increase in

the education level of the participant, 0.137 is added to the score of the participant, 0.137 is added to the score of their negative attitude toward the phenomenon of begging and their attitude toward begging becomes more negative (Table 12)

Table 12. The regression equation of respondents’ attitudes towards begging at first level in terms of the coefficients B and β .

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Literally level	0.137	0.369
Constant	6.75	-
$R^2=.135$ $R=.368$	d.f=2.535 sig = 000	F=83.58

The degree of being religious is the second variable entering the equation. The entrance at this variable to the equation increases the explanatory pwer of the equation by 2.3($R^2=0.158$).

Based on the coefficients B of the equation, for one unit increase in the participatnts education level 0.164 is added to their attitude score towards

begging, and their attitude becomes more negative. Also, each score increase in the participants’ degree of being religious adds. 0.05 to the score of their attitude towards begging. Based on the coefficients B of the equation, the effect of the education level in accounting for the dependent variable is about 2.5 times the effect of participants being religious (Table 13)

Table 13. r Regression equation of the respondents attitude toward begging at the second level in terms of coefficients B and β .

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Literally level	0.164	0.441
Degree of being religious	0.05	169
Constant	4.96	-
$R^2=0.158$ $R=0.368$	d.f=2.534 sig=0.000	F=5.2

The participants social class is the third variable entering the equation. It increases the exploratory power of the equation to 18.2% ($R^2=0.182$) . Based on the coefficient B of the equation at this level for one year increase in participations education level, 0.136 is added to the score of their attitude towards the issues of begging in the

negative direction. Also one unit increase in the degree of participants being religious , add .05 to their score and finally increase in social class from low to average or from average to high caused the score of their attitude toward the issue of begging to by 0.576. decrease Table 14 indicates this issue:

Table 14: The regression equation of respondents attitude towards begging at the third level in terms of the coefficient B and β

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Literacy	0.136	367
Degree of being religious	0.05	17
Social class	0.576	0.17
Constant	4.64	-
$R^2=0.82$ $R=0.436$	d.f=3.533 0.000	sig = F=39.93

As illustrated by table 14 , the coefficient B of literacy is about 2 times the coefficient of being religious and social class. This means that the effect of literacy is 2 times the variables of being religious and social class. The birthplace of the participant is the fourth variable entering into the regression equation. It increases the explanatory power of the equation by 0.8 ($R^2=19$) . Based on the coefficient B of the equation for one year increase in the participants' education level , 0.12.8 is added to their score of the scale attitude

towards begging. Also one unit increase in the degree of being religious adds 0.57 to the participants score of the attitudes scale for towards begging the increase in the social class from low to average and from average to high caused their score on attitudes begging, and to decrease by 0.55. Also , the score of those in the city is more than that of those born in the village by 0.433. Based on the coefficients B of the equations , the effect of the education level is more than other variables (table 15).

Table 15: The regression equation of respondent's attitudes towards begging at the fourth level in terms of coefficients B and β .

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Education level	0.138	0.344
Degree of being religious	0.054	0.184
Social class	0.552	164
Birthplace	0.433	0.1
Constant	6.09	-
$R^2=0.9$ $R=0.436$	d.f=4.532 0.000	sig = F=31.19

The last variable entering the equation at the final level is the respondents sex. The entrance of this variable to the equation increases, the exploratory power of the equation by 1%. Based on the coefficients B of the equation one year increase in the participants education level adds 122 to their score of attitude towards begging and makes their attitude toward this issue more negative. One score increase to the participants degree of being religious added 0.053 to their score in the scale of attitude towards begging. Increases in the social class level from low to average and from average

to high caused the reduction of their score of the attitude towards begging by 0.59. The score of the attitude of those born in the city is more than those born in the village by 0.477. and the score of males' is more than score of females by 0.374. Based on the coefficients B of the equation, the effect of the respondents education level in accounting for the dependent variable is more than other variables and the effect of sex is lower than other variables. These results, considering the size of the Fobtained is 99% significant (Table 16).

Table 16: The regression equation of respondents, attitudes towards begging at the fifth level in terms of coefficients band β

Variable name	Coefficient B	Coefficient β
Education	0.122	0.329
Being religious	0.53	0.181
Social class	0.59	174
Residence	0.477	0.111
Sex	0.374	0.101
Constant	6.04	-
$R^2=0.2$ $R=0.447$	d.f=5.531 0.000	sig = F=29.53

Discussion and conclusion

Begging is one of the phenomena of the metropolitan areas of Iran and is of kind of social problem which unlike other problems is seen in the public despite the fact that economic poverty is an important factor in the development of this phenomenon. The findings of this study confirmed the theoretical foundations of the study in which in addition to the economic poverty, the culture of poverty also contributes effectively to the development and spread of begging. This is because the residence of more than half of the beggars is in suburban periphery areas whose residents, according to the theory of culture of poverty, experience the culture of poverty more than other areas. The study done in Shiraz on suburbanization and the culture of poverty also confirm the relationship between these two phenomena (Zareh, 2001, Ahmadi & Iman, 2003).

The findings of this study indicate that beggars engage in begging as fortune-tellers, medicating, street children, abandoned by the family and also have different individual characteristics such as being ill and physically disabled, mentally ill, addicted, and superannuated. The existence of these pretences and characteristics indicate that the phenomenon of begging is a complicated social problem, planning for which is difficult for example, 88.5% of the beggars were child laborers, a considerable percentage of whom were Afghan subjects whose organization is very difficult considering the fact that their real identity and social-economic status of their families are not known. The examination of peoples' attitudes toward begging and beggars indicated that in people's opinion helping beggars can have a

positive effects on human's life therefore for some social groups such as people of rural social origin and people with low education and married people and those of low social classes, the beggars, and their community have a positive function for the society and they have favorable feeling towards them. About 60% of the respondents consider begging something natural and an act of providence and some consider beggars as deserving to receive help. Therefore, such views about begging indicate that for some people especially those with more religious tendencies, begging is not something indecent and despicable. These findings lead us to conclude that considering the positive attitudes of some strata of the society and some social groups towards begging and helping beggars and the positive functions of this phenomenon for people, introducing beggars to the society in terms of their physical status and their potentials and the extent of their need for help as well as organizing and directing peoples' donations towards institutions and organizations which are responsible to cover those by injured society will be effective.

Suggestions

1. Considering the fact that different beggars are in different physical status, therefore they should be categorized into different groups of able-bodies, physically and mentally disabled and addicts. This identification and categorization prepares the ground for a different planning in order to organize the beggars and solve their problem.
2. The results of this study indicated that about 51% of the beggars fall in the group aged below 20, these people ordinarily have the

necessary potential for education and training, therefore , this group of beggars should be especially considered and prepared for appropriate occupations with the help of educational systems and organizations teaching responsible for technical skills.

3. About 17% of beggars are elderly and above 60 years of age who should be identified and For each of them a file containing their individual characteristics , status of livelihood and their families and their physical and mental health should be kept and they should be introduced to charities such as Imam Khomeini charity in order to be organized in this way.

4. Considering the fact that some parts of the city such as bus terminals, shrines, parks, graveyard and recreation centers are crisis-producing areas of the city in terms of begging, to identify the communication networks of beggars in these areas and to instal advertising placards on different occasions with the intention of making people aware and providing guidance with the intention to offer work to beggars who are able to work it is.

5. It seems that to solve the problems of beggars , the help and participation of different organizations such as the city council and municipality, governorship, and social welfare organization is necessary. Police and charities are needed and expert division of labor is also necessary to consider the potentials of each of these organization and to supervise their performance.

6. Proper treatment by the police of beggars seems necessary considering the physical status and age of them in order to avoiding the kind of aggressive behavior that is sometimes the case.

7. Organizing nongovernmental associations of the retired and elderly people , forming teams to identify the poor by the members of these associations and directing people's donations towards the real poor can be effective in reducing the phenomenon of begging.

8. Using the mass media , especially radio and television to give people confidence in organizations which offer social services such as Imam Khomeini charity with the intention of directing people's donations towards these organizations can help to solve the problem of begging.

9. Since the consideration of begging as crime is not legally justified , it is suggested that in dealing with this abnormal social behavior, any criminal aggressive action be avoided and the spread of this phenomenon be prevented by preventive and supportive measures.

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