

What Will Make Beggars Quit Begging in Chattogram, Bangladesh?

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Abstract

This research is an effort to help policymakers in alleviating poverty from Bangladesh. It mainly looks into if offering job or granting allowance can be effective tools for inducing beggars to quit this practice. It also sheds some light on the possible determinants of reservation allowance and reservation wage. Statistical tools and OLS regressions are used to analyze the data collected from a sample of 300 beggars. Findings suggest that both of offering job and granting allowance can be effectively used to reduce the incidence of begging. However, policy of granting allowance is found to be more powerful than offering job. As far as the determinants of reservation allowance and reservation wage are concerned, while a beggar's reservation allowance is significantly determined by whether the beggar is disabled and whether the beggar has willingness to do work instead of begging, a beggar's reservation wage is mainly determined by monthly income and the beggar's gender.

Key words: Begging, reservation allowance, reservation wage, Bangladesh

JEL codes: I32, I38, O15

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It has recently been recognized as a lower-middle-income country. However, 11.3% of her population is still living under lower poverty line ("Poverty Rate Comes Down", 2019). According to IFAD (2019), rural poverty in Bangladesh is more prevalent (36%) compared to urban poverty (28%). Many are suffering from extreme poverty.⁴ A large number of these poor people are living on begging. But there is no

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⁴ Extreme poor are those who cannot manage three times adequate foods in a day.

official record of total number of beggars in both Dhaka and Chattogram city which is a problem in dealing with this issue. However, referring to Khan (2011), Helal and Kabir (2013) stated that total number of beggars in the country is around 7,00,000. And former Finance Minister A. M. A. Muhith also agreed that total number of beggars in the country has decreased and it is around 6,00,000 (bdnews24.com, 2018). If we consider any of these figure with the total population of the country (162.7 million according to BBS (2011)) and multiply that ratio with the total number of population in Dhaka (2,17,41,000) and Chittagong (51,33,000, Chittagong City Corporation Budget, 2020) cities than the corresponding number of beggars in the Dhaka and Chattogram city comes to no less than 90,000 and 18,000⁵. It can be argued that these numbers are even higher because for various practical reasons the density of beggars in the mega cities is much higher than that of the rest of the country. Substantial prevalence of begging throughout the country all year round is clearly a symbol of poverty. Though there is no scope to argue that begging and poverty has one-to-one relation, they are strongly interconnected, otherwise as a rational being people are not supposed to be engaged in begging.

On the other side, begging is not a good practice in the sense that beggars (recipient) do not provide any goods or services to the provider in return. It is not materialistically or logically reciprocal. Though some people consider that providing alms is a gracious work from the point of religion, begging cannot be permanently granted based on this poor line of logic. It is a black spot on human dignity. Recipient needs to be bow down to the provider. Many religions (such as Islam) have strong reservation about it (See <https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/87527/begging-in-islam>). The government of Bangladesh also strongly discourage begging through several efforts of the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Department of Social Welfare. Still it is continuing. The government has some anti-poverty programs including old-age allowance, but it does not have any effort or program to directly address begging. Many by-born or otherwise disabled individuals also belong to this population. Besides, some beggars are found to cheat pretending that they are disabled (Rabbany, 2007). Several crime reports discovered that a group of syndicated criminals are involved in controlling a major section of the beggar

⁵ Population data are taken from MicroTrends (n.d.)

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population. According to a newspaper report⁶, aged and sick people are collected from different parts of the country and forced to beg in different busy areas of Dhaka City in exchange for poor accommodation and meals. Income of these beggars is substantially appropriated by their owners. However, perhaps because of the lower opportunity cost of begging these beggars prefer begging to other activities that generate economic values.

The scenario of Chattogram city is almost the same. Many people of different ages and with physical disability or without disability are found to beg in different places around this city. Hence, begging like poverty is a serious concern for the policymakers towards achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal-1 (poverty reduction and becoming a middle-income nation).

1.2 Significance of the Study

The importance of the study lies in the implications of the situation portrayed above for this country. On the one hand, begging is a social stigma and one of the vital impediments to the attainment of good image. On the other hand, it is an indication of labor market failure. A nation cannot reach its goal of attaining bliss point as long as such a failure exists. With such stigma and economic drawback, Bangladesh will have much difficulty achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because we have already argued that begging is a special dimension of poverty. Beggar population included people of different ages and with physical disability or without disability. Many of them are engaged through parents, some are the byproduct of circumstances, and some of them are forced to join. Hence, the magnitude of begging is even more corrosive than extreme form of poverty. Since we cannot achieve the SDGs or at least SDG-1 without reducing poverty, we cannot ignore the problem of beggary as it is one of the major dimensions of poverty. A sustainable development framework should be inclusive of policy actions aimed at reducing the number of beggars. Otherwise, we will not be able to reduce poverty successfully. Besides, since Bangladesh is now pursuing the goal of becoming a middle-income nation, alleviating poverty, particularly reducing the prevalence of beggars in the urban areas, is also positively related to fulfilling other development goals, such as food security, better nutrition, and health for lower-income earners

⁶ আলহাদী, উ. ফা. (২০১৭)

(Alam & Hossain, 2018; Islam et al., 2021). Therefore, institutional channels to reduce the prevalence of begging would be a significant step in achieving SDGs.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study is pursued in order to achieve the objective of answering the following two crucial questions:

- Is granting allowance or offering job an effective tool for reducing the incidence of begging? If yes, what would be the reservation allowance or reservation wage⁷?
- Which factors are the determinants of reservation allowance or reservation wage?

2. Literature Review

There is a large body of literature that deals with different aspects of begging. However, number of studies focusing the opportunity cost of begging and/or the link between begging and labor market is disproportionately low. Some selected studies are discussed below.

Uddin et al. (2014) examines the conditions of beggars in Dhaka city area. They find that among those who lost an income source prior to becoming a beggar 75% tried to get alternative income source but failed and started begging. They also observe that 30% of the beggars have a plan to quit begging as soon as they get a job. However, 55% of them have no motive to get rid of begging. They recommend for rehabilitation programs as well as awareness creating program.

Bangladesh Center for Human Rights and Development (2013) studies the earnings of beggars in Dhaka city. Their findings show that on average a beggar's daily earning is BDT 100 which he/she spends for buying food, medicine and paying house rents. This study also points out that most of the beggars are not happy with their present status (more than 97%) and want to be rehabilitated with the help of government supports.

The earning of the beggars in Dhaka city was also studied by My Bangladesh (2016). It observes that the daily earning of a beggar ranges

⁷ Here, the term "reservation wage" refers to the minimum wage at which a beggar would be willing to accept a job offer quitting begging profession. The term "reservation allowance" means the minimum allowance that will have to be provided to make a beggar quit begging profession.

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from BDT 600 to BDT 1000 which is much higher than that of a rickshaw puller (BDT 300), a brick breaker (BDT 250) and a CNG auto rickshaw driver (BDT 850). As a result, begging became more preferable than many low income occupations.

Sarker et al. (2016) aimed to find socio economic status of child beggars and reasons behind child begging. The targeted area of this research was Sylhet city in Bangladesh. 90 child beggars were taken in the sample and random sampling method were used for this study. One common reason behind begging with previous studies is poverty. The result revealed that 90% of the child beggars are in this position due to poverty. While 56.7% of these children work according to their own motivation, the other 38.9% of children work against their will in this bad practice. The study also shown that about 48.9% respondents earn daily above BDT 121 and 35.6% earn in between BDT 71-120 and only 15.6% have their daily earnings in between BDT 30-70. Through OLS regression method, it was found that the more a child can stay in the streets, the higher they earn. Keeping income as a dependent variable and staying at the streets independent variable, the coefficient of independent variable was 0.522. It shows the positive relation between these two variables. Children being more energetic, parents take them along for begging to have more income. The authors of this study recommended the government to initiate policies on schooling of these child beggars. As they believe, educating means prospering a nation and that is how the beggars' socio economic condition will change too.

Khan et al., (2016) also targeted Sylhet city in Bangladesh as it's one of the biggest remittance earning city in Bangladesh. Using primary data, the research aimed to look at the people's attitudes towards the beggars, the diseases beggar get while begging and finally the reason behind migration of beggars from rural area to city. 70 beggars from 5 areas were selected as respondents and to analyze the data univariate and bivariate methods were used. The result found that 60.5% of beggars migrated to city and begging as they don't have any earnable person in their families to fulfil the basic needs of a family. One more interesting observation was that 9% of the beggars are hand to mouth and 9% of beggars can save a little bit. On the other hand, around 18% of the respondents are living under debt. While investigating about the lifestyle of beggars, the data represented 79% of beggars are incapable of having three times meals which creates malnutrition among them. As a result

diseases are their daily companions. In Bangladesh under socio economic status, beggars are taken as the most marginalized people. As a consequence, social harassment is faced by them every other day by the other people in the same society. Result of this study has shown that 74% of beggars face different types of social harassment such as negligence and denial by own society. In the Sylhet city, more than 57% beggars migrated from other districts including Sunamganj, Hobigonj and Mymensingh as the standard livelihood and wealthy economic structure attracted them. In every research poverty stays the most prominent reason behind begging. Thus recommendations in this research are also no different from the above literatures.

Billah and Alam (2017) using secondary data examined the development policies for beggar in Bangladesh and also the existing policies. Begging has strong connection with mental health problems and low self-esteem by psychologists. While associations between begging, poverty and social exclusion mainly homeless and lower classes of the society have been found by social scientists. Beggars have been categorized into four broad group; beggars on the street (who have permanent home, maintain close family ties and return home after begging), beggars of the street (live on streets or public places and have weak family connection), beggars in the streets (separated from their family) and beggars of street families (children of beggars who live on streets and continue their parents work). Strategies adopted by them include pretending to be sick or disabled; holding doctor's prescription or any other official letter as a proof of their financial crisis near official and religious institutes. Reasons for begging are multidimensional, poverty being the primary reason. Other reasons include disability; handicapped people face many challenges and barriers, as well as competition for jobs; having no other option but being dependent on others. Apart from this unemployment, family disintegration, becoming orphans are some common reasons. Study also found that passersby are generally generous and sympathetic to beggars, although some people were harsh to beggars.

Thamrin and Ritonga (2018) investigated the reasons for begging and how this could be eliminated in Medan. They collected data in the form of individual in-depth interviews, questionnaires, group interview technique Participatory Action Research (PAR), as well as observation and documentation. Both external and internal factors are the causes of begging. Internal factors include poor levels of education and having low

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level of skills, not feeling ashamed of becoming beggars and getting used to and living a comfortable life being beggars. External factors include lack of job opportunities due to urbanization, beggars' influencing other, extreme situations such as bankruptcy and families not concerned regarding someone becoming beggar.

Sultana and Alam (2018) studied the socio-economic status of the beggars in Amroha city and the reasons that led them to such a life. Their examination was based on primary data collected by interviewing 100 native people using a structured questionnaire. Most of the beggars belong from the age group of above 40 both male and female. Main reasons for choosing this bad practice included family disintegration, children throwing parents out of their house, loss of husband, and divorce. The study found none of the beggars were educated up to graduate level. Most of the migrants came from places such as West Bengal followed by Bihar, Moradabad (U.P), and Bijnor (U.P); areas where there is lack of employment and resources. However, since they couldn't find any job after migration, they started begging. Their housings were in very poor and unhygienic conditions. As a result, they suffered from various illnesses like asthma and other respiratory problem, headaches, and skin diseases. Majority of the beggars begged for money but some, especially young ones, begged to purchase cigarette, gutka and tobacco substance. While some elderly ones beg to send their children to school for their bright future. Apart from poverty, beggars face some indirect problems; their children face discrimination in school, play spots, other workplace and harsh behaviors from donors.

The above survey suggests that the existing literature mainly focus on socioeconomic status of the beggars and causes and consequences of begging. The aspects of opportunity cost of begging and the link between labor market and begging remain widely ignored in the existing literature. This study aims to contribute in filling this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

For conducting this study, this research uses primary data. Using convenience sampling method, a sample of 300 beggars is selected from Agrabad commercial area, AK Khan Circle, GEC circle, Sholoshahar 2 No. Gate, Muradpur and Bahaddarhat of Chattogram city area. The data

is collected through a face to face interview with the selected beggars using a semi-structured questionnaire.

3.2 Variables

Considering the objectives of the study, questions are asked to elicit demographic and socio-economic information such as gender, age, income, number of dependents, and whether a respondent is disabled. Additionally, a respondent is asked about whether he/she will be willing to quit begging if an allowance or a job is offered. If the answer is affirmative there is a further question about the reservation allowance/wage. Table 1 provides descriptions of variables under consideration.

Table 1: Descriptions of variables

Variables	Nature	Definition
Gender dummy	Discrete (Binary)	It takes the value of 1 if the respondent is male and 0 otherwise
Age	Continuous	Number of years since the respondent was born
Disability dummy	Discrete (Binary)	It takes the value of 1 if the respondent is disabled and 0 otherwise.
Number of dependents	Discrete	Number of individuals economically dependent on the respondent
Monthly income	Continuous	Income earned per month by the respondent
Years of begging	Continuous	Number of years since the respondent started begging
Dummy for having willingness to do work instead of begging	Discrete (Binary)	It takes the value of 1 if the respondent has willingness to do work instead of begging once suitable job is provided and 0 otherwise.
Dummy for having willingness to quit begging once allowances is provided	Discrete (Binary)	It takes the value of 1 if the respondent has willingness to quit begging once suitable allowance is provided and 0 otherwise.

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Reservation allowance	Continuous	The minimum allowance that will have to be provided to make a beggar quit begging practice
Reservation wage	Continuous	The minimum wage at which a beggar would be willing to accept a job offer quitting begging practice

3.3 Empirical Strategies

Firstly, in order to unfold a typical respondent's characteristics we draw upon descriptive statistics presented in tabular form. Main conclusions of this study come from these descriptive statistics.

Secondly, we perform an OLS regression to identify the determinants of a typical respondent's reservation allowance/wage. Two regression equations are estimated. One is for explaining reservation allowance and the other for reservation wage⁸. Exploring the determinants of reservation allowance/wage is important because knowledge of the determinants will help policymakers in designing programs to get beggars out of begging practice.

Our two regression equations are of the following forms

Reservation allowance

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \textit{Gender dummy} + \alpha_2 \textit{Age} \\
 &+ \alpha_3 \textit{Disability dummy} + \alpha_4 \textit{No. of dependents} \\
 &+ \alpha_5 \textit{Income} + \alpha_6 \textit{Years of begging} \\
 &+ \alpha_7 \textit{Dummy for having willingness to do work} + \varepsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

Reservation wage

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \textit{Gender dummy} + \alpha_2 \textit{Age} \\
 &+ \alpha_3 \textit{Disability dummy} + \alpha_4 \textit{No. of dependents} \\
 &+ \alpha_5 \textit{Income} + \alpha_6 \textit{Years of begging} + u
 \end{aligned}$$

It is standard practice to use gender, age, number of dependents, and income as explanatory variables in the equation of reservation wage (see for example Hogan, 1999). Disability dummy is used based on the assumption that a disabled beggar may ask for disability premium. It seems also reasonable to include the variable "Years of begging" due to

⁸ Here, the term "reservation wage" refers to the minimum wage at which a beggar would be willing to accept a job offer quitting begging practice. The term "reservation allowance" means the minimum allowance that will have to be provided to make a beggar quit begging practice.

the possibility that spending more years in begging may create higher degree of rest inertia. The explanatory variables included in the equation of reservation allowance can be justified in the same way.

Gender dummy is expected to have positive sign because in a male-dominated society like ours demand for male labor is higher than demand for female labor. Individuals of older age may ask higher wage/allowance due to the fact that they have less enthusiasm in quitting begging practice than individuals of younger age. Therefore, the sign the coefficient of *Age* is expected to be positive. For similar reason, *Disability dummy* is expected to have positive sign. Income required for maintaining family expenses is positively related with the number of dependent. Thus it can be speculated that the coefficient of *No. of dependents* is positive. Because of rest inertia a beggar with more begging years is likely to ask for higher wage/allowance. This is why we can expect positive coefficient of the variable *Years of begging*. In order to induce a beggar with higher income to quit begging stronger incentive will be required. So, the coefficient of *Income* is expected to be positive. Finally, a beggar who has willingness to do work if opportunity is given is probably more enthusiastic and active-minded. It is likely that he/she will ask for more allowance than one who does not want to do work. The coefficient of the variable *Dummy for having willingness to do work*, thus, is expected to have positive sign.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Summary Statistics

Table 2 provides summary statistics for the sample used in this study. Only most relevant variables are considered. According to this table, the respondents' ages range from 12 years to 90 years. On average, they are nearly 50 years old. Around 57% of them are male. Not surprisingly the prevalence of disability problem among sampled beggars appears to be significant. More than 25% of them are disabled. On average, a beggar bears the burden of three dependents. The sample mean of monthly income is found to be BDT 3,647. The length of being in the begging practice ranges from several days to 50 years. The mean length is nearly seven years.

While 97% respondents express their willingness to quit begging if an allowance is provided, only 45% respondents say that if a satisfactory job is offered they will quit begging. Answer to the question "What will

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make beggars quit begging” underlies this finding. It implies that both of offering job and granting allowance have desired effects on the incidence of begging in the society. However, policy of providing allowance will be far more effective than the policy of offering job. The finding also implies that while for some beggars either policy would work, for others offering job will not work.

For the variables ‘Reservation allowance’ and ‘Reservation wage’, range rather than mean is important because if allowance or wage is offered based on mean, beggars whose individual reservation allowances or wages are above mean will remain uncovered. Summary statistics for these two variables suggest that reservation allowances range from BDT 3,000 to BDT 6,000 per month while reservation wages range from BDT 2,000 to BDT 20,000 per month.

Table 2: Summary statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Gender dummy	300	0.573	0.495	0	1
Age	292	49.58	16.69	12	90
Disability dummy	300	0.253	0.436	0	1
Number of dependents	293	2.997	1.687	0	9
Monthly income	299	8,739	3,647	3,000	24,000
Years of begging	299	7.517	6.876	0.008	50
Dummy for having willingness to do work instead of begging	289	0.450	0.498	0	1
Dummy for having willingness to quit begging once allowances is provided	293	0.969	0.173	0	1
Reservation allowance	275	4,960	986.3	3,000	6,000
Reservation wage	125	8,604	2,555	2,000	20,000

4.2 Estimation of the Regression Equations

Results of two OLS regressions are presented in Table 3. In the regression for reservation allowance, two variables “Disability dummy” and “Dummy for having willingness to do work instead of begging” turn out to be significant determinants of reservation allowance. In particular, on average, a beggar with disability asks BDT 374 higher allowance than a beggar with normal health. This may be due to the fact that begging practice is more remunerable for disabled beggars than their peers. In

fact, the sample data suggest that in a month a disabled beggar earn on an average BDT 2,043 more than an ordinary beggar.

Those beggars who are ready to quit begging in exchange for getting a job are found to claim BDT 430 higher allowance than those not willing to get a job. The reason why this is the case may be that since the former are physically and mentally more enthusiastic and more capable (as is evident from their willingness to do work) opportunity cost of getting out of begging is higher.

In the regression for reservation wage, a different set of variables is found to be significant. The coefficient of “Gender dummy” implies that a female beggar demands, on average, BDT 709 higher wage than a male beggar. This may be explained by the sacrifice that the female beggar will have to make in terms of work schedule if a job offer is accepted instead of begging. It is easily understandable that because of the responsibility that a mother has to take in our society to raise her children, working with a flexible schedule is important for her.

The coefficient of “Monthly income” suggests that a beggar having BDT 100 higher monthly income demands BDT 34 higher wage. This is obviously because of the higher opportunity cost of quitting begging.

Table 3: Results of OLS regressions

Variables	Regression for reservation allowance	Regression for reservation wage
Age	-4.096 (-0.875)	28.24 (1.394)
Gender dummy	25.53 (0.182)	-708.9* (-1.696)
Disability dummy	373.5** (2.151)	543.5 (0.632)
Number of dependents	-18.57 (-0.537)	13.80 (0.0846)
Monthly income	0.0335 (1.582)	0.341*** (3.598)
Years of begging	-10.34 (-0.888)	-11.62 (-0.188)
Dummy for having willingness to do work instead of begging	430.0*** (3.356)	
Constant	4,663*** (14.47)	4,764*** (5.323)
Observations	252	124
R ²	0.088	0.2299

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; Robust t-statistics in parentheses

5. Summary and Conclusions

Considering the significance of making the society free from begging, this study attempts to explore some important aspects of begging problem in Bangladesh. Particularly, it seeks to identify reservation allowances and reservation wages for the beggars begging in Chattogram city area. In addition, it sheds some light on the determinants of reservation allowance and reservation wage.

Data are collected from a sample of 300 beggars selected from different important locations of Chattogram city area using convenience sampling method. A semi-structured questionnaire is used to conduct face-to-face interview with the respondents. Two core variables considered are “Reservation allowance” and “Reservation wage”.

We use statistical and econometric tools to analyze the data. Two regressions are estimated. One is to explain reservation allowance, and the other is to explain reservation wage. Summary statistics suggest that policy of providing allowance will be far more effective than the policy of offering job in inducing beggars to quit begging. For some beggars either policy would work, for others offering job will not be effective. Moreover, reservation allowances range from BDT 3,000 to BDT 6,000 while reservation wages range from BDT 2,000 to BDT 20,000.

According to the estimated regression for “Reservation allowance”, on average, a disabled beggar demands BDT 374 higher allowance than a beggar with normal health. Those having willingness to quit begging in exchange for getting a job are found to claim BDT 430 higher allowance than other beggars. The estimated regression for “Reservation wage” suggests that gender and monthly income from begging are important determinants of reservation wage. The minimum wage that will have to be offered to induce a beggar to work is on average BDT 709 higher for female beggars compared male beggars. Besides, if a beggar’s monthly income is higher by BDT 100 than another beggar, the former is expected to demand BDT 34 higher wage than the later.

The findings of this study have important policy implications. Government can consider offering job and granting allowance as important tools for inducing beggars to quit such undignified practice. If government decides to pursue a policy of providing allowance to reduce the prevalence of begging in Chattogram city, the allowance has to be made range from BDT 3,000 to BDT 6,000. How much in Chattogram an individual beggar deserves should

be determined by whether the beggar is disabled and whether the beggar is a job seeker. However, since this proposed allowance is much higher than the existing old-age allowance, implementing the proposed allowance may tempt the non-beggar old-age allowance recipients to rush into beggary. Given such possibility, we recommend that the proposed allowance be meant only for disabled beggars.

In case government initiates a program for providing job to beggars, the offered wages should range from BDT 2,000 to BDT 20,000. The wage has to be varied depending upon gender status and monthly income from begging. Overall, in developing a program to reduce incidence of begging in Chattogram city, beggars' disability status, gender status, willingness to do work, and monthly income will deserve special attention.

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Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge that this study has been carried out under the financial assistance of the Research and Publication Cell, University of Chittagong.