

Chapter 1

introduction

Introduction

Global Overview of Begging

Begging—the act of asking for money or help in public spaces—is a complex and persistent social issue found all over the world. It is deeply intertwined with economic hardships, cultural beliefs, and the effectiveness of government support systems. While begging occurs in nearly every country, it is especially visible and widespread in developing and less economically stable nations. In these regions, persistent poverty, lack of social safety nets, and high unemployment rates create an environment where many people have no choice but to resort to begging¹. This phenomenon is not limited to any single continent or culture. Begging can be seen on the busy streets of major global cities such as New York and London, where it often reflects homelessness and social exclusion. Similarly, it is widespread in rural villages and sprawling urban centers across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, revealing the universal nature of poverty and social vulnerability. The World Bank² estimates that over a billion people live in conditions of extreme poverty worldwide. For many of these individuals and families, begging becomes the last, and sometimes only, option to survive when other means of income are unavailable. Experts from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasize that begging is a symptom of deeper structural inequalities. People who beg often come from marginalized backgrounds with limited access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities. These systemic barriers trap them in cycles of poverty and social exclusion, making it difficult to escape begging without comprehensive social support.

Begging manifests in two major forms: voluntary and forced. Voluntary begging usually occurs when individuals or families, despite their best efforts, find no other way to secure food, shelter, or basic necessities. Forced begging, on the other hand, is a tragic form of exploitation where vulnerable people—often children, the disabled, or women—are coerced or trafficked by criminal groups or even family members to beg on the streets (International Labour Organization,³). Forced begging is a severe human rights violation and is increasingly recognized as a form of modern slavery in many parts of the world. Public attitudes towards beggars differ widely depending on cultural, religious, and legal contexts. In some societies, begging is met with compassion and seen as an opportunity for charitable giving, rooted in religious or cultural traditions that encourage helping the needy. Conversely, other societies stigmatize or criminalize begging, sometimes imposing fines or detentions under public order

laws (Amnesty International,⁴ These contrasting approaches influence the visibility and treatment of beggars and affect their ability to access social services. One of the key drivers behind the rise of begging is rapid urbanization. As people move from rural areas to cities in search of better jobs and living conditions, many find themselves caught in overcrowded slums or living on the streets due to insufficient affordable housing and lack of urban infrastructure⁵ Cities, especially mega-cities, often lack the capacity to provide adequate social safety nets for these newcomers. As a result, visible begging becomes a common survival strategy for many who find themselves homeless and unemployed in unfamiliar urban environments.

Begging in Asia

Asia is home to over half of the world's population and carries a significant share of global poverty. Particularly in South Asia which includes countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka begging is a visible and persistent social challenge. The region's dense populations, combined with uneven economic development, social inequalities, and rapid urbanization, create conditions where begging is widespread and deeply embedded in daily life (Asian Development Bank,⁶ Poverty is the primary driver of begging throughout Asia. For millions of families, especially those living on the margins of society, stable employment or sustainable income is often out of reach. Many survive on irregular, informal work or no work at all, pushing them towards begging as a means of survival. In this context, begging is not a choice but a last resort to secure basic necessities like food, shelter, and clothing. The issue is particularly acute among women and children. Gender disparities across the region mean that women frequently face barriers to education, employment, and property ownership. This marginalization leaves many women with little economic power, forcing some into street begging to support their families (Chaudhry & Hussain,⁷. Children, especially those from impoverished or broken homes, are alarmingly vulnerable. Lacking access to schooling and protection, many children end up begging in busy marketplaces, train stations, or religious sites. Political unrest and conflict in parts of Asia exacerbate the problem. For example, regions experiencing displacement due to ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, or economic crises see surges in homeless and displaced populations who often resort to begging. This displacement disrupts traditional support networks and worsens the vulnerability of affected individuals and families. Adding a darker layer to the issue, numerous investigations have uncovered organized begging syndicates operating in South

Asia. These criminal networks exploit the desperation of vulnerable populations, including trafficked children, disabled persons, and the elderly, forcing them to beg while seizing a large portion of their earnings. Such syndicates operate with alarming sophistication, moving individuals between cities and exploiting their labor as a form of forced begging. This system traps victims in cycles of abuse and poverty, robbing them of their dignity and freedom. Culturally, many Asian societies have long-standing traditions of almsgiving deeply rooted in religious teachings. Major religions in the region Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam promote charity and helping the less fortunate as fundamental moral duties. This religious framework inspires generosity and compassion, encouraging many people to give to beggars as a form of spiritual merit⁸. However, this goodwill sometimes unintentionally perpetuates begging by providing a steady stream of donations. Religious festivals, pilgrimage sites, and sacred locations become hotspots for begging activities. During these times, the volume of charitable giving increases significantly, leading to a noticeable rise in begging as individuals seek to benefit from the influx of donations. While these charitable acts come from a place of kindness, they can also enable organized begging practices and diminish efforts to address the root causes of poverty.

Begging in Pakistan

Pakistan, a country with a rapidly growing population exceeding 240 million, grapples with a pressing social and economic issue: begging. This challenge is deeply intertwined with the country's ongoing economic difficulties, including rising inflation, persistent unemployment, and a high rate of population growth. These factors combine to create an environment where increasing numbers of individuals, unable to secure steady livelihoods, turn to begging as a means of survival.⁹ The scale of begging in Pakistan is staggering. Current estimates suggest that approximately 38 million people depend on begging to meet their daily needs, a figure that underscores the magnitude of this social crisis. Collectively, these beggars earn about 32 billion Pakistani Rupees every day, amounting to an astonishing annual total of nearly 11.7 trillion PKR equivalent to roughly 42 billion US dollars. To put this in perspective, this sum accounts for around 12% of Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product.¹⁰ These numbers highlight not only the profound human suffering but also the significant economic consequences, such as lost productivity, reduced workforce participation, and increased pressure on government social welfare and health systems. The demographics of Pakistan's beggars reflect the vulnerability of several groups. Children represent a particularly alarming segment, especially

in urban areas where poverty and crime are more concentrated. Many child beggars are victims of exploitation, forced into the streets by family members or criminal gangs that profit from their labor. This form of forced begging is a harsh reality that robs children of their childhood, education, and future opportunities. Women also constitute a large proportion of beggars. Due to social and cultural restrictions that limit their participation in formal employment, many women resort to begging as a means to support themselves and their families. Their vulnerability is further heightened by the risk of harassment and exploitation while begging in public spaces¹¹ Urban centers such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad host the highest concentrations of beggars in Pakistan. These megacities attract large numbers of migrants from rural areas, driven by the hope of securing better education, employment, and living conditions. However, the reality often falls short of expectations. The rapid influx strains urban infrastructure, resulting in overcrowded slums, inadequate housing, and limited access to essential services. Many migrants find themselves homeless or living in extreme poverty, with begging becoming a common survival strategy. This rural-to-urban migration, while fueled by aspirations for upward mobility, paradoxically exacerbates the visibility and prevalence of begging in city streets¹² Beyond urban centers, begging remains a critical issue in smaller towns and rural areas, where traditional safety nets are weakening due to economic pressures and social changes. The lack of effective government programs to support vulnerable populations, combined with limited access to education and healthcare, perpetuates the cycle of poverty and begging

Begging in Punjab

Punjab, Pakistan's most populous and economically significant province, faces a pronounced challenge with begging, especially in its large urban centers like Lahore, Faisalabad, and Multan. The province's rapid urbanization and demographic pressures have intensified this issue, as many impoverished families from rural areas migrate to cities in search of better opportunities. Unfortunately, the harsh realities of urban life often fall short of expectations. Many migrants end up living in overcrowded slums or informal settlements, struggling with limited access to clean water, healthcare, education, and other basic necessities¹³ This environment fosters vulnerability and increases dependence on begging as a means of survival The roots of begging in Punjab are closely tied to socio-economic challenges such as high unemployment, widespread illiteracy, and physical disabilities that limit individuals' capacity to secure formal employment. These factors create a vicious cycle of poverty,

leaving many with no viable alternatives but to seek alms in public spaces. Children are especially affected; child begging remains alarmingly common, with numerous reports revealing that some children are coerced or controlled by organized begging networks. These groups often operate with sophisticated structures, exploiting children by forcing them to beg under strict supervision and confiscating much of their earnings (Punjab Social Welfare Department,¹⁴ Such exploitation not only deprives children of their childhood but also denies them access to education and proper care, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and social exclusion. The economic impact of begging in Punjab is significant, albeit informal and often overlooked in official statistics. Some beggars in urban centers report daily earnings reaching up to 1,400 Pakistani Rupees, which can be a considerable amount for individuals living in extreme poverty. This informal economy underscores begging's role not just as a social problem but as an unregulated economic activity impacting urban livelihoods. Recognizing the gravity of the issue, both government agencies and non-governmental organizations have initiated programs aimed at rescuing and rehabilitating child beggars. These interventions often focus on providing shelter, education, vocational training, and psychological support to help reintegrate these children into society. However, these efforts face significant hurdles. Weak enforcement mechanisms, limited financial and human resources, and societal acceptance of begging as a cultural norm have all impeded progress¹⁵. In many communities, begging is viewed with a degree of tolerance or even compassion, which reduces the urgency to confront the underlying problems aggressively. Moreover, while urban areas see concentrated efforts, rural parts of Punjab continue to struggle with limited support structures, meaning that the root causes of begging—poverty, lack of education, and unemployment—remain largely unaddressed.

Begging in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a province known for its rich cultural heritage and strategic location along the border with Afghanistan, faces a persistent and growing challenge of begging, particularly in its urban centers such as Peshawar, Mardan, and Kohat. The region's complex history of conflict, political instability, and cross-border tensions has had a profound impact on its socio-economic fabric, contributing significantly to displacement, poverty, and social vulnerability.¹⁶ KP's proximity to Afghanistan has resulted in a steady influx of Afghan refugees over several decades. While these refugees have sought safety from war and persecution, their arrival has placed additional strain on the already limited economic

resources and social infrastructure of the province. The increased population pressures exacerbate unemployment and poverty, pushing many displaced families and local residents alike into precarious living conditions where begging often becomes a means of survival ¹⁷. The province's economic challenges are severe. KP has some of the highest unemployment rates in Pakistan, particularly among youth and women, largely due to limited industrial development and scarcity of formal employment opportunities. Coupled with this is the lack of a comprehensive social welfare system capable of supporting the most vulnerable populations. These gaps in social safety nets force many individuals, including widows, disabled persons, and the elderly, to rely on begging to meet their basic needs. Child begging is notably widespread in KP, especially in crowded marketplaces, bus terminals, and around religious shrines. Unfortunately, many of these children are not begging by choice but are coerced into it by family members or controlled by organized gangs. These exploitative groups profit from children's vulnerability, often subjecting them to harsh conditions while demanding a large portion of the money they collect. This not only robs children of their childhood and education but also traps them in a cycle of abuse and poverty from which escape is difficult. In response to these challenges, the KP government has initiated various social welfare programs aimed at alleviating poverty and supporting vulnerable populations. These programs include financial assistance schemes, vocational training, and efforts to improve access to education and healthcare. However, despite these initiatives, significant implementation gaps persist. Resource limitations, bureaucratic hurdles, and inadequate outreach mean that many who need help remain underserved. Furthermore, cultural attitudes in KP sometimes normalize begging as a part of social life, which complicates efforts to reduce its prevalence. The traditional emphasis on charity and religious giving particularly during the holy month of Ramadan or at shrines often inadvertently sustains begging practices rather than addressing the underlying causes. Addressing begging in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach. This includes strengthening economic opportunities through job creation, expanding social safety nets, improving education and child protection systems, and combating the exploitation of vulnerable populations. Collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and international partners will be essential to create sustainable solutions that empower individuals and reduce the reliance on begging for survival.

Begging in Balochistan

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province by landmass but also its least developed, faces profound socio-economic challenges that have contributed to the rise of begging across many of its districts. The province is characterized by widespread poverty, low literacy rates, and limited access to basic social services—factors that create a fertile ground for the persistence and growth of begging.¹⁸ Districts such as Kech, Quetta, and Gwadar have reported particularly high levels of child begging, which is often a direct consequence of extreme poverty compounded by socio-political instability and ongoing security concerns. The province has long struggled with issues related to insurgency and law enforcement gaps, which hinder effective governance and limit the reach of social welfare initiatives. One of the critical drivers of begging in Balochistan is the scarcity of employment opportunities. The province's economy remains heavily dependent on agriculture and natural resource extraction, but these sectors offer limited jobs, especially for the youth and women. This economic stagnation forces many families to seek alternative means of survival, including sending their children to beg on the streets to supplement the household income.¹⁹ In many cases, children begin begging at a young age, sometimes under the pressure or coercion of family members struggling with destitution. Balochistan's rugged and vast terrain, with remote mountainous areas and scattered settlements, complicates efforts to provide adequate education, healthcare, and social support services. The lack of government presence in these far-flung regions means that many vulnerable individuals remain invisible to social protection mechanisms, making begging one of the few visible signs of their hardship. Security concerns in the province also restrict the ability of NGOs and government bodies to operate freely, further limiting outreach and intervention efforts. Frequent unrest and a fragile law and order situation make it difficult to enforce child protection laws or implement rehabilitation programs effectively. Additionally, cultural and tribal dynamics in Balochistan influence begging practices. In some areas, traditional norms and values may shape how communities perceive poverty and begging, sometimes fostering resignation rather than proactive solutions. In conclusion, begging in Balochistan is a multifaceted issue deeply embedded in the province's socio-economic and political realities. Combating it requires a strategic approach focused on improving access to education, expanding economic opportunities, strengthening governance, and enhancing security. Only through sustained and coordinated efforts can the cycle of poverty and begging in Balochistan be meaningfully addressed.

Begging in Sindh

Sindh, one of Pakistan's four provinces, faces considerable challenges with begging, especially in its smaller cities and rural areas outside the metropolitan core. While the province has seen economic development in certain regions, large segments of the population continue to suffer from poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare factors that fuel the rise of begging²⁰. In rural Sindh, agricultural communities often struggle with seasonal unemployment, landlessness, and underdevelopment. Many families, unable to sustain themselves through farming or local labor, resort to sending children or disabled members out to seek alms in villages or urban centers. This phenomenon is deeply embedded in the social fabric of certain areas where begging is sometimes normalized as a survival mechanism. Ethnic minorities and marginalized communities, such as the Sheedi and certain Hindu castes, are disproportionately represented among beggars in Sindh. Social exclusion and discrimination exacerbate their vulnerability, limiting their access to social services and formal employment. The province's social welfare system is often criticized for its limited reach and lack of integration, leaving many vulnerable groups without effective support. Government-led initiatives and NGOs have attempted to intervene through awareness campaigns, educational programs, and rehabilitation centers, but progress has been slow. Cultural attitudes towards begging and charity sometimes hinder enforcement, as communities may view almsgiving as a religious or moral obligation, which indirectly perpetuates the begging cycle.

Begging in Karachi

Karachi, the economic heartbeat of Pakistan and the country's largest city, is at the epicenter of the begging crisis in Sindh. With a population exceeding 20 million, Karachi's sprawling urban landscape is marked by stark inequalities, widespread poverty, and continuous influxes of migrants from across Pakistan and beyond. These dynamics have made begging a highly visible and complex issue in the city.²² One of the most startling statistics comes from recent surveys estimating that approximately 30,000 children beg at more than 970 traffic signals throughout Karachi. Many of these children are under the control of well-organized begging mafias that operate systematically, exploiting vulnerable individuals including children, disabled persons, and women for profit. These criminal syndicates often use coercion and violence to maintain control over beggars, funneling a large share of their daily earnings to gang leaders while keeping the individuals in perpetual poverty. Karachi's beggars come from diverse backgrounds. The city hosts significant populations of internally displaced persons

(IDPs), Afghan refugees, and marginalized ethnic groups such as Pashtuns and Bengalis, many of whom live in informal settlements or slums. Displacement due to conflict, lack of affordable housing, and economic exclusion force many into the streets to beg for survival. The city's weak social welfare infrastructure and lack of coordinated urban planning exacerbate the problem by failing to provide adequate shelter, healthcare, or educational services to these vulnerable populations ²³ Despite numerous efforts by NGOs and government bodies to rescue and rehabilitate beggars, these initiatives face enormous obstacles. The sheer scale of the problem, combined with the entrenchment of criminal syndicates, political apathy, and corruption, undermines effective intervention. Moreover, societal attitudes sometimes hinder progress; for many Karachiites, giving alms to beggars is seen as a charitable duty, inadvertently supporting the begging economy. The socio-political volatility in Karachi, with frequent ethnic tensions, unemployment spikes, and governance challenges, further complicates efforts to reduce begging. For many individuals, begging becomes not just a survival strategy but a symptom of deeper systemic inequalities and marginalization within the city's fabric.

1.2 The Research Problem

Begging is a growing social and economic problem in many urban centers around the world, and Karachi, as the largest city in Pakistan, is no exception. Despite being the commercial and industrial hub of the country, Karachi presents a paradox where towering buildings and bustling markets coexist with visible and persistent poverty on the streets. The presence of beggars—young children, elderly individuals, women, and persons with disabilities—is an everyday sight at traffic signals, marketplaces, shrines, and public transport stops. This visible aspect of urban poverty reflects deeper systemic issues and highlights the need to explore and understand the root causes of begging in Karachi. Begging is not merely a symptom of poverty—it is often the result of a combination of socio-economic failures, governance gaps, and exploitative systems. While poverty is undoubtedly a significant factor, the situation in Karachi is far more complex. Organized begging mafias, weak law enforcement, unemployment, lack of education, inadequate access to healthcare, and rural-to-urban migration all converge to fuel the persistence and increase of begging. In some cases, begging is a deliberate profession; in others, it is the result of forced labor, human trafficking, or familial exploitation ²⁴. Despite the alarming visibility of begging in Karachi, there has been insufficient academic and policy attention on this issue. Official statistics on the exact

number of beggars in Karachi are inconsistent and often underreported. This lack of data and focused research contributes to ineffective policy responses. Moreover, while government initiatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have launched sporadic efforts to rehabilitate beggars, these programs often fall short due to limited resources, lack of political will, and the absence of a long-term strategy²⁵, Karachi's urban dynamics make the problem particularly difficult to address. The city is home to diverse populations including internal migrants, Afghan refugees, and marginalized ethnic groups. Many of these groups are not formally documented, making it difficult to offer them state support or integrate them into the formal economy. In many cases, entire families engage in begging due to intergenerational poverty and lack of economic mobility²⁶. The involvement of criminal networks has turned begging into a form of organized crime, with children and vulnerable adults trafficked and controlled by syndicates²⁷. Religious and cultural factors also play a dual role in this issue. On one hand, traditions of charity (such as zakat, sadaqah, and almsgiving during Ramadan) promote a culture of compassion and help for the poor. On the other hand, these well-intentioned practices can unintentionally support the begging economy, especially when exploited by criminal groups who station beggars near mosques and shrines during religious festivals²⁸. This creates a morally complex situation where acts of charity may perpetuate exploitation rather than alleviate poverty. The vulnerability of children engaged in begging raises critical ethical and legal concerns. Child protection laws in Pakistan prohibit child labor and exploitation, yet child begging is widespread and increasing. The state's inability to implement child welfare policies, along with the lack of education and family support, forces many children into a life of street begging. These children are deprived of education, healthcare, and a safe environment, which perpetuates cycles of poverty, illiteracy, and exploitation²⁹. One of the major barriers to resolving the problem of begging in Karachi is the absence of a coordinated response among government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities. Municipal authorities often focus on cosmetic clean-up operations during high-profile events rather than addressing the root causes. When beggars are removed from public spaces, they often reappear elsewhere due to the lack of sustainable rehabilitation plans³⁰. Moreover, law enforcement often lacks the training or resources to differentiate between voluntary beggars and those coerced into the practice. As a result, anti-begging drives can lead to the criminalization of poverty rather than the protection of victims. Police raids sometimes target individuals without addressing the mafias or networks behind them, allowing the exploitation to continue unchecked³¹. The lack of comprehensive policy at the national or provincial level further hampers progress. While some provinces, such as Punjab,

have initiated anti-begging legislation and rehabilitation schemes, Sindh has yet to implement a robust framework. Karachi, in particular, suffers from bureaucratic fragmentation, where responsibilities are divided among various municipal bodies with limited coordination³². Given this complex, multifaceted problem, it becomes essential to conduct a thorough research study that goes beyond surface-level observations. This study aims to identify and analyze the root causes of increasing begging in Karachi, examining the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that contribute to the problem. It also seeks to explore the impact of organized begging, the role of state and non-state actors, and the lived experiences of those engaged in begging. By understanding these dimensions, this research can provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, development organizations, and law enforcement agencies. It will also highlight gaps in the existing legal and social systems and propose strategies for holistic and sustainable solutions that prioritize the dignity, rights, and well-being of Karachi's most vulnerable populations³³.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

Objectives of the research refer to the specific, clearly defined goals that a study aims to achieve. They serve as the foundation for the entire research process, guiding the selection of methodology, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. These objectives break down the overall aim of the study into smaller, manageable components, ensuring that the research stays focused and systematic.

. The study wanted to achieve the following objectives:.

1. To identify the key socio-economic factors contributing to the rise in begging in Karachi.
2. To examine how poverty, unemployment, and inflation are linked to street begging.
3. To explore the impact of broken families and lack of social support on individuals turning to begging.
4. To investigate the role of organized begging mafias and their influence in urban areas.
5. To assess how rural-to-urban migration and displacement contribute to the begging population.

6. To evaluate the role of religious and cultural practices in sustaining the begging culture.
7. To analyze the effectiveness of government and NGO interventions in reducing begging.
8. To study the experiences and survival strategies of beggars in Karachi through field data.
9. To understand the gender- and age-related dimensions of begging, especially among women and children.
10. To suggest practical, evidence-based recommendations for reducing and rehabilitating the begging population.

1.4 The Scope of the Research

The scope of this research defines the boundaries and dimensions within which the study of increasing begging in Karachi will be conducted. This section outlines the thematic, geographical, temporal, and demographic focus of the research, highlighting what will be included and what will be excluded to ensure a clear, structured, and manageable approach to the study. This research will specifically investigate the phenomenon of street begging within the metropolitan limits of Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan and a major socio-economic hub. With a population exceeding 20 million, Karachi represents a microcosm of the nation's complex urban challenges, including poverty, migration, and informal economies³⁴. The study will focus on identifying the socio-economic, cultural, political, and institutional factors contributing to the prevalence of begging in this urban setting. By narrowing the geographical scope to Karachi, the research seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of local conditions rather than broad, generalized observations that may not fully reflect the city's unique context. Thematically, the research will explore a wide range of issues associated with begging. These include poverty, unemployment, inflation, internal displacement, lack of education, family disintegration, and absence of social support systems. It will also examine the influence of organized begging mafias, the role of religious and cultural practices, and the response of governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing the issue. Begging will be studied not just as an economic problem but as a multi-dimensional social phenomenon linked to inequality, exclusion, and governance failure³⁵. A significant portion

of the study will involve analyzing how rural-to-urban migration, particularly from less developed regions of Sindh, Balochistan, and southern Punjab, contributes to the begging population in Karachi. Migrants, often displaced due to poverty, conflict, or natural disasters, arrive in urban areas with minimal resources and limited social capital, leading many to resort to begging as a survival strategy³⁶. By focusing on this migratory pattern, the study seeks to establish a connection between structural rural deprivation and urban begging. The demographic scope of the research will include individuals of various ages and genders involved in begging activities. Particular attention will be paid to vulnerable groups such as children, women, the elderly, and disabled persons. These populations are often targeted by criminal networks or forced into begging by economic hardship or familial pressure. Child beggars, for instance, are frequently found at traffic signals and public places, often controlled by organized groups³⁷. Women beggars, on the other hand, often face dual vulnerabilities due to gender discrimination and economic exclusion, limiting their access to formal employment³⁸. Another crucial element within the scope is the examination of the role played by cultural and religious norms in sustaining begging practices. In Pakistan's predominantly Muslim society, charity is considered a religious obligation (zakat and sadaqah), which inadvertently sustains a continuous stream of alms towards beggars. While this fosters compassion and community solidarity, it also creates a system where professional begging can thrive unregulated³⁹. This study will critically examine how such norms intersect with economic realities, thereby contributing to the persistence of begging. The scope of this research also includes a detailed review of state responses and policy frameworks. This encompasses an evaluation of existing laws against begging, the performance of social welfare departments, and the effectiveness of rehabilitation initiatives by NGOs and philanthropic organizations. Past studies have indicated that while several efforts have been made to control begging in Pakistan, implementation has often been fragmented, under-resourced, and inconsistent^{40, 41}. This research will thus explore the gap between policy intent and practical outcomes in Karachi. Methodologically, the study will utilize both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It will include primary data collection through interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys involving beggars, law enforcement personnel, social workers, and policymakers. Secondary data will be drawn from government reports, NGO publications, journal articles, and news media to enrich the analysis. By adopting a mixed-method approach, the research aims to combine statistical trends with lived experiences, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the begging phenomenon⁴². The research will be limited to a two-year time frame, focusing on the most recent data and

developments up to 2025. Historical references will be included where necessary to provide context, but the core emphasis will remain on current trends and policies. The temporal limitation helps ensure the relevance of the findings and their applicability to contemporary policymaking and intervention strategies. It is also important to define what falls outside the scope of this study. The research will not focus on begging in other cities of Pakistan, nor will it explore international begging practices except in brief comparative references to contextualize Karachi's situation globally. Additionally, the study will not delve into purely psychological or medical aspects of individuals involved in begging, unless such issues intersect with broader socio-economic themes. By defining a clear scope, this research aims to produce focused, actionable, and context-sensitive insights into the causes and consequences of begging in Karachi. The findings are intended to inform social policy, enhance NGO intervention strategies, and contribute to academic discussions on urban poverty and social exclusion.

1.5 The Justification of the Research

The increasing phenomenon of street begging in Karachi has emerged as a serious socio-economic challenge that demands scholarly attention and policy-driven responses⁴³. The justification for this research lies in its urgency, relevance, and potential to offer empirical insights into one of the most visible yet under-researched issues facing urban Pakistan. The rationale for undertaking this study spans several dimensions social, economic, cultural, humanitarian, and policy-oriented each contributing to the importance of a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the problem.⁴⁴ Firstly, Karachi, being Pakistan's most populous city and a major economic hub, reflects broader national trends of urbanization, migration, poverty, and inequality. With a population exceeding 20 million, the city is home to thousands of street beggars, many of whom are children, women, and the elderly. The visibility and normalization of begging have made it a routine part of urban life, yet the experiences, struggles, and systemic causes behind this phenomenon remain largely undocumented. This research aims to fill that critical knowledge gap by providing grounded, real-world data that can help inform effective policies and interventions[,]⁴⁵ Secondly, while there is substantial literature on poverty, informal labor, and urban marginalization in Pakistan, few academic inquiries have directly addressed the dynamics of street begging as a standalone issue. Most existing studies treat begging as a byproduct of poverty without examining its unique characteristics, networks, and survival strategies. This study will

explore not only the causes but also the organizational structures (such as begging mafias), cultural reinforcements, and socio-political neglect that allow begging to persist and proliferate.⁴⁶ Thirdly, from a human rights perspective, the issue of street begging raises serious ethical and humanitarian concerns. Many beggars, particularly children and disabled individuals, are victims of exploitation, abuse, and neglect. The lack of state protection and institutional support further exacerbates their vulnerability. Through interviews, case studies, and statistical data, this research will highlight these lived realities, contributing to a broader human rights discourse in Pakistan and advocating for state accountability and social justice.⁴⁷ Another strong justification for this research is its policy relevance. Despite various governmental and non-governmental initiatives to reduce street begging, most interventions have been sporadic, poorly funded, and inadequately evaluated. This study will assess the effectiveness of existing rehabilitation programs and identify gaps in service delivery. It will also propose evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing the scope, reach, and sustainability of anti-begging efforts.⁴⁸ Moreover, the research holds significant importance in the context of socio-cultural studies. Begging in Pakistan is often intertwined with religious and cultural norms. Practices such as giving zakat and sadaqah are encouraged, especially during religious festivals, inadvertently reinforcing street begging as a culturally acceptable livelihood. By analyzing these practices critically, the study will contribute to an understanding of how culture and religion shape public attitudes and behaviors toward begging.⁴⁹ In addition, the research is justified on methodological grounds. It will adopt a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, to provide a holistic picture of the issue. This methodology ensures that the study is both statistically rigorous and deeply empathetic, allowing the voices of marginalized individuals to be heard alongside the hard numbers. Such a balanced approach is crucial in understanding the complex realities of street life and economic survival in Karachi.⁵⁰ From an academic standpoint, this study will contribute to urban sociology, development studies, public policy, and gender studies. The multi-disciplinary nature of the research ensures that it will have a wide appeal and utility across various academic fields. It will also serve as a valuable resource for students, researchers, and practitioners working on issues of poverty, urbanization, and social justice.⁵¹ Furthermore, the study is timely. With the economic situation in Pakistan worsening due to inflation, currency devaluation, and unemployment, the incidence of begging is likely to rise. This research will provide a current snapshot of the problem, capturing data from a period of acute socio-economic distress, thereby enhancing its relevance and urgency.⁵² The research also aims to shed light on the psychological and social

dimensions of begging. Many beggars experience social stigma, exclusion, and a loss of dignity. Understanding their mental health struggles, coping mechanisms, and aspirations is essential for designing humane and effective rehabilitation strategies. This aspect of the research aligns with global best practices in inclusive development and mental health advocacy⁵³ Lastly, the study is expected to generate public awareness and stimulate informed dialogue. By publishing findings, hosting seminars, and collaborating with media and civil society, the research aims to shift public perceptions and reduce the stigma associated with begging. It aspires to transform public apathy into collective action, making it not just an academic exercise but a step toward societal transformation⁵⁴

1.6 The Basic Research Paradigm

To understand the growing phenomenon of begging in Karachi, a well-defined research paradigm is crucial. A research paradigm offers a philosophical and methodological foundation that guides how the research is conceptualized, conducted, and interpreted. According to Creswell⁵⁵, a paradigm comprises beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and how that knowledge is acquired. This study employs a constructivist ontology, which assumes that the reality of begging is socially constructed, fluid, and influenced by diverse socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. In other words, the meaning of begging varies across individuals and is deeply embedded in the structural fabric of Karachi's society⁵⁶ Epistemologically, the study is interpretivist in nature, aiming to uncover the subjective meanings and lived experiences of individuals involved in begging. Rather than assuming an objective stance, the researcher adopts a participatory role in co-constructing knowledge with participants. Schwandt⁵⁶ emphasizes that interpretivist epistemology allows researchers to grasp complex social phenomena by engaging with the perspectives of those directly affected. This is particularly vital when studying vulnerable populations like beggars, who are often overlooked or misunderstood by formal institutions.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study integrates multiple sociological perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding. Structural functionalism is employed to examine how different institutions, such as family, education, and economy, either contribute to or fail to address the issue of begging⁵⁷. In contrast, conflict theory highlights the socio-economic disparities and power dynamics that perpetuate poverty and exploitation, especially by organized begging mafias^{58, 59}. Additionally, Amartya Sen's Human

Development Theory is utilized to analyze how deprivation in basic capabilities like health, education, and employment leads individuals to resort to begging. Symbolic interactionism, as described by Blumer⁶⁰, adds a micro-level perspective by exploring how beggars interpret their roles, negotiate their identities, and interact with society. In terms of methodological orientation, the research adopts a qualitative approach. This decision is grounded in the need to understand complex human experiences that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures. As Patton⁶⁰ notes, qualitative methods enable the researcher to delve deeply into social issues, uncovering the motivations, challenges, and coping strategies of individuals. Through narratives and personal accounts, the research aims to highlight the socio-emotional dimensions of begging that often go unnoticed in statistical data.⁶¹ The research strategy follows a case study design, with Karachi serving as the case to explore the larger issue of urban begging in developing megacities. Yin [15] posits that case studies are ideal for in-depth, contextually rich investigations. By focusing on Karachi, the study not only captures the unique socio-political dynamics of the city but also draws parallels with other urban centers facing similar issues. The case study allows for triangulation of data—interviews, observations, and document analysis—thus enhancing the credibility of the findings.⁶² Data collection is conducted through multiple qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews are held with beggars, NGO workers, government officials, and community members. These interviews provide diverse perspectives on the causes, consequences, and control of begging. Participant observation is conducted at strategic locations like traffic intersections, shrines, and marketplaces to capture real-time interactions and behaviors. Focus groups with local residents help gauge community attitudes, while document analysis of policy reports, NGO publications, and media articles offer secondary insights.⁶³ Sampling is carried out using purposive and snowball techniques. Purposive sampling targets individuals with relevant experiences and backgrounds—such as child beggars, disabled individuals, and ex-mafia members—ensuring a wide range of viewpoints. Snowball sampling is used to access hidden populations involved in organized begging, where trust is essential for participation.⁶⁴ This combination of sampling techniques allows for rich and varied data collection. Ethical considerations are of paramount importance in this research, given the vulnerability of the population being studied. Participants are informed of their rights and consent is obtained prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality are strictly maintained to protect the identities of respondents. Additionally, the research is designed to avoid any form of psychological or physical harm. Participants are assured that their involvement is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time without repercussions. Ethical approval is sought from

the university's ethics review committee before commencing fieldwork⁶⁵ Data analysis is performed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke⁶⁶ argue that thematic analysis provides a flexible yet systematic approach to interpret textual data. NVivo software is used to assist in coding and organizing the data. The researcher maintains reflexivity throughout the process, using field notes and analytic memos to ensure transparency and minimize bias., To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several techniques are employed. Triangulation is used to cross-verify data from multiple sources. Member checking involves presenting preliminary findings to participants for validation. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues provides critical feedback, and an audit trail is maintained to document all methodological decisions and changes⁶⁷ These strategies collectively enhance the rigor, dependability, and credibility of the study, However, the qualitative research paradigm also has its limitations. Findings from a case study in Karachi may not be generalizable to other regions. The subjective nature of interpretive research may introduce researcher bias, despite efforts at reflexivity. Moreover, gaining access to organized begging networks poses practical and ethical challenges. Acknowledging these limitations ensures transparency and contextual integrity of the research outcomes.⁶⁹

1.7 Hypothesis

In social science research, hypotheses serve as preliminary explanations or assumptions that guide the inquiry into complex social issues. For a study examining the causes of increasing begging in Karachi, formulating hypotheses allows the researcher to systematically investigate the interconnections between socio-economic conditions and the prevalence of street begging. Hypotheses provide a framework to explore how variables such as poverty, unemployment, inflation, family disintegration, migration, and organized crime contribute to the persistence of begging in urban environments, This research is grounded in both theoretical literature and empirical observations. According to Creswell⁶⁹, hypotheses are essential components in shaping the research design, guiding data collection, and aligning qualitative insights with potential causal patterns. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba⁷⁰ emphasize that in qualitative paradigms, hypotheses may not always be statistically tested but serve as guiding constructs that help explore relationships within the real-world context, In light of these perspectives, this study proposes the following hypotheses to investigate the multi-layered factors behind the growing phenomenon of begging in Karachi,

1. **H1:** Higher levels of poverty in urban Karachi are directly linked to the increase in street begging.
2. **H2:** Unemployment and underemployment among low-income individuals significantly influence begging behavior.
3. **H3:** Inflation and economic instability have pushed more families and individuals towards begging for survival.
4. **H4:** The breakdown of traditional family structures and lack of social support systems contribute to the involvement of children and women in begging.
5. **H5:** Internal migration, especially from rural to urban areas, leads to increased begging due to lack of shelter, employment, and services.

Variables

In the field of social research, **variables** are defined as observable and measurable characteristics or attributes that can vary among individuals, groups, or settings. They play a crucial role in framing research questions, guiding data collection, and helping researchers establish relationships between causes and effects. Variables provide the analytical foundation for identifying trends, testing theories, and formulating policies, especially when investigating complex social issues like begging in urban environments. Understanding variables is vital because they allow for the structured exploration of how various factors interact to influence specific social phenomena. In a city like Karachi, where begging is influenced by a web of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors, variables help isolate and study these influences in a systematic and scientific manner. There are several types of variables used in social science research. The two most central to empirical studies are **independent variables** and **dependent variables**.

1. Independent Variables

Independent variables are the presumed causes or predictors in a research study. These variables are manipulated, selected, or measured to determine their influence on the outcome, i.e., the dependent variable. They are not influenced by other variables in the study but are believed to have an impact on other aspects of the social phenomenon under investigation. In the context of this research on the increasing trend of begging in Karachi, the independent

variables include the various social, economic, and structural factors believed to contribute to this issue. Examples include:

- Poverty and low income
- Unemployment and job insecurity
- Inflation and rising living costs
- Family disintegration or abandonment
- Rural-to-urban migration

2. Dependent Variable

The **dependent variable** is the effect or outcome that researchers aim to explain or predict. It is termed “dependent” because its status or condition is thought to rely on or be influenced by the independent variables. In this study, the dependent variable is the **prevalence and patterns of begging in Karachi**.

This variable will be explored through indicators such as:

- The number and demographics of beggars in various urban localities.
- The locations and methods of begging (e.g., on roads, in shrines, markets).
- The frequency and duration of begging activities.
- The living conditions and survival strategies of individuals who beg.
- Public perceptions and institutional responses to begging.

The Key Concepts

Understanding the rising trend of begging in Karachi requires a thorough grasp of several key concepts that underpin the issue. These concepts serve as the foundation for analyzing the causes, effects, and possible solutions to begging. This section clarifies twelve essential concepts that will guide this research.

1. Begging:

Begging is the act of requesting money, food, or assistance in public spaces, often driven by dire economic necessity. It is a visible indicator of poverty and social marginalization but can

also reflect complex socio-cultural dynamics (Karn, 2010). In Karachi, begging ranges from spontaneous individual acts to organized syndicates controlling entire begging operations.

2. Poverty

Poverty, defined as the inability to meet basic living needs, is the primary driver of begging (World Bank, 2022). It is multidimensional, encompassing income deprivation, lack of access to education, health, and social services (Sen, 1999). In Karachi, deep-rooted poverty due to unemployment and inflation fuels the growing begging population.

3. Unemployment

Unemployment, or the lack of paid work for those willing and able to work, exacerbates poverty and leads to increased begging (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2023). It undermines individual dignity and contributes to social exclusion (ILO, 2021).

4. Urbanization

Rapid urbanization in Karachi, characterized by an influx of migrants from rural areas, often results in informal settlements with poor living conditions and limited opportunities (UN-Habitat, 2022). This unplanned urban growth pressures city resources and pushes many into begging.

5. Rural-to-Urban Migration

Migration from rural to urban areas is a key factor increasing the number of beggars, as migrants face social dislocation and lack employment (World Bank, 2021). Many migrants arrive with hopes of better livelihoods but end up marginalized.

6. Social Exclusion

Social exclusion refers to the systematic marginalization of certain groups from social, economic, and political participation (Silver, 1994). Beggars often experience stigma and discrimination, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2021).

7. Organized Begging Syndicates

These are networks that exploit vulnerable individuals, controlling begging in cities and siphoning off a portion of their earnings (ILO, 2020). Recognizing these syndicates shifts the perception of begging from purely individual survival to systemic exploitation.

8. Child Begging

Child begging involves minors forced or coerced to beg, often by family members or criminal groups. It represents a grave violation of children's rights and perpetuates intergenerational poverty (UNICEF, 2022).

9. Gender Dimensions of Begging

Women and girls face unique vulnerabilities in begging, often due to social restrictions on employment and heightened risks of exploitation and abuse (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2021). Understanding gendered experiences is crucial for effective interventions.

10. Social Welfare and Rehabilitation

Social welfare encompasses policies and programs aimed at alleviating poverty and supporting vulnerable populations, while rehabilitation seeks to reintegrate beggars into society through education and vocational training (Dawn News, 2023).

11. Inflation and Cost of Living

Rising inflation increases the cost of basic necessities, further squeezing poor households and pushing more people toward begging as a coping mechanism (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2023).

12. Cultural and Religious Factors

In some communities, religious and cultural norms encourage almsgiving (zakat and sadaqah), which can inadvertently sustain begging practices (Ahmed, 2018). Understanding these cultural dimensions is key to designing culturally sensitive interventions.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter serves as the foundation of the entire research by providing a comprehensive background to the issue of begging, particularly focusing on its alarming rise in Karachi. It begins with an overview of begging as a global and local social phenomenon, situating the problem within the broader context of urban poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. This chapter clearly articulates the research problem by outlining the various socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to begging in Karachi, such as inflation, broken family structures, and rural-to-urban migration. It defines the key concepts and terms to ensure clarity for the reader and sets the boundaries of the research by explaining its scope and limitations. Furthermore, the introduction emphasizes the significance of the study by discussing how understanding the causes of begging can aid in policy formulation and social intervention. The chapter concludes by presenting the research objectives and questions, thereby framing the direction for the subsequent inquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter delves deeply into the existing body of knowledge on begging, poverty, and urban social issues, drawing from a wide range of academic sources, reports, and case studies. It synthesizes global and regional perspectives, emphasizing how socio-economic disparities, cultural attitudes, and governance affect begging patterns. The literature review examines the socio-economic determinants such as unemployment, lack of education, and family disintegration that compel individuals to resort to begging. It also investigates the darker side of begging—organized begging mafias and human trafficking—that exploit vulnerable populations, particularly women and children. Cultural and religious factors that both support and perpetuate begging are explored, considering how charitable giving in various religious traditions may inadvertently sustain the practice. The chapter critically assesses previous interventions by governments and NGOs, highlighting successes, failures, and existing gaps. Theoretical frameworks such as structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism are introduced to underpin the analysis and provide a lens through which begging can be understood as a social phenomenon.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this chapter, the researcher lays out the systematic approach taken to study begging in Karachi, justifying the research design and choice of methods. The chapter begins by explaining the research paradigm—typically qualitative or mixed methods—to capture the complex, lived realities of beggars and those involved in anti-begging initiatives. It details the sampling strategy, explaining how purposive and snowball sampling are used to identify a diverse group of participants, including beggars, NGO workers, police officials, and community members. The data collection techniques are described thoroughly, encompassing semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation in high begging hotspots, and document analysis of relevant reports and policies. Ethical considerations are given particular emphasis due to the vulnerable nature of the population studied, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and the minimization of harm. Finally, the chapter discusses the techniques for data analysis, such as thematic analysis using software tools, and explains steps taken to ensure the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents a detailed account of the research findings, richly describing the socio-economic profiles and lived experiences of beggars in Karachi. It discusses how poverty, lack of employment opportunities, family breakdowns, and displacement due to rural-urban migration create a fertile ground for begging. The analysis reveals the role of organized begging mafias, showing how they control significant portions of begging activities in certain urban areas. Special attention is paid to vulnerable groups, especially children and women, highlighting their unique challenges and modes of survival. The chapter also explores the interplay between cultural-religious norms and begging, showing how charitable traditions both alleviate and complicate the issue. The effectiveness of various government and NGO initiatives is critically assessed through participants' testimonies and field observations, revealing both achievements and limitations. The use of quotes, case studies, and thematic maps enriches the narrative, providing an in-depth understanding of the problem's complexity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The concluding chapter synthesizes the study's core findings and reflects on their implications for policymakers, social workers, and scholars. It reiterates the multifaceted causes of begging in Karachi, emphasizing that no single solution exists but that a holistic, multi-sectoral approach is necessary. The chapter offers evidence-based, practical recommendations aimed at poverty alleviation, social welfare enhancement, strengthening of law enforcement against begging mafias, and improved access to education and healthcare. It underscores the importance of community involvement and culturally sensitive interventions that respect the dignity of beggars. The limitations of the study are candidly discussed, including challenges related to data collection and generalizability. Finally, the chapter suggests avenues for future research, such as longitudinal studies and comparative analyses with other megacities facing similar issues, to continue building knowledge and inform better strategies against begging.

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