

## **Aged Street Beggars in the City of Dhaka**

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**Abstract:** Begging alms in the streets of the big cities can be found almost in all developing countries including Bangladesh. Even in developed countries they are seen but not frequently. In Muslim countries they are more frequent. Providing alms to poor is a very common phenomenon in Bangladesh. There is a deep-rooted belief supported by religious sentiments and humanitarian sympathy that giving alms is a virtue. Poor people are taking this opportunity.

This study attempts to find out the socio-economic condition of the aged street beggars in Dhaka city.

Purposive Sampling, a type of Non probability sampling method was applied and information was collected by using a structured questionnaires to 50 street beggars at three different locations (Baitul Mokarrom Mosque, Komlapur Railway Station and Uttara sector 4 graveyards).

These spots were selected according to our own convenience. They wanted to avoid us. After giving each a tk.50 note, they agreed to give us the desired information. It was a face-to-face interview. We found that 40% aged beggars in Dhaka city are disabled.

Bangladesh is a country which is worst hit with the begging problems and beggars can be found everywhere in the country. This paper examines the socio-economic, health profile and reasons of begging and different problems facing by the beggars in the city of Dhaka. Some recommendations were made to eradicate begging from the city streets of Dhaka.

**Key words:** Begging, Poverty, Homelessness, street beggars, Dhaka city.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, "A Beggar is a person, typically a homeless one, who lives by asking for money or food" [Oxford Dictionary, 2001].

Beggars are the highly vulnerable, poverty-ridden individuals of Bangladesh society.

Begging alms in the streets of Dhaka as well as in other big cities in Bangladesh is rampant. Technically it is supposed to be banned. Even in some areas in Dhaka city one can see the sign boards written, "Beggars Free Area." But they are there and nobody is there to restrict them. Sometimes loud speakers are seen to use to discourage begging but to no avail. Providing alms to poor is a very common phenomenon in Bangladesh. There is a deep-rooted belief supported by religious sentiments and humanitarian sympathy that giving alms is a virtue. Poor people are taking this opportunity.

There is no official figure on the number of beggars in the country or in the city of Dhaka, but estimates from different sources suggest that there are around 700,000 beggars in Bangladesh out of which 40 thousand in the city of Dhaka. The overall rate of beggars in Bangladesh has been decreasing but beggars in Dhaka city are increasing. [M.A. Helal and K.S. Kabir, 2015]. Finance Minister AMA Muhith has estimated that the number of beggars is now 600,000 in Bangladesh. [bdnews24.com, 2018].

According to the Finance Minister of Bangladesh, "Begging will completely be rooted out once the present government comes back to power." [bdnews24.com, 2018]. He believes that the day is not far off when people will not die of hunger and not beg anymore. "We have defeated poverty in many respects but 30 million people are still below the poverty line. Of them, one million are extreme poor." Says Mr. AMA Muhit. [The Daily Star, 22 October, 2018].

Most of the beggars come from this one million and their number is, according to many sources, 7, 00,000.

Bangladesh got its independence in 1971. Being an agricultural country, majority of its people used to depend on agriculture. 21 percent of Bangladeshi people still live below poverty level. It is a huge population of a country of 161 million people.

The government is trying hard to change the situation and urbanization is getting priority together with the industrialization of the economy from a predominant agricultural based economy.

But the vulnerable group of people found it difficult to cope with it. For them even surviving is difficult. They are compelled to beg in the streets. Bangladeshi social and religious sentiments support begging. Metropolitan management, social security, social services are not up to the mark in this mega city. An influx of people from the village to Dhaka city cannot cope with the difficult situation and they find themselves in a very critical condition. Finding no other solution, they get themselves involved in begging.

People of all ages are involved in begging. Some of them took it as a profession. But some of them are bound to do this work. Most of them don't have eyes, hands, legs or have other disability which prevented them to get a job. It is very sad when we see the children and the aged people are begging. They were not supposed to do it. In our research we have only considered aged street beggars. It is heart rending to see the people at the end of their lives stretch their hands for alms.

Who are aged people? There are different definitions in developed and developing countries. In developing country like Bangladesh, people who are aged 60 years and over are considered to be aged or elderly. And in Developed countries who are aged 65 and above considered aged or elderly. They are respectfully called senior citizens of the country.

Why are they begging alms even at this stage of life? We have conducted a survey to know the reasons of their involving in this work.

## **II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

A section of people in Bangladesh are extremely poor. Beggars are mainly the victims of the vicious cycle of poverty. If they are beggars, they remain beggars generation after generation. It becomes a tradition for them to be beggars. So our main objective was to find out the causes of begging, whether the elderly beggars are genuine beggars and actually they have no other alternatives to survive.

Other than the main objective, some other specific objectives are

- (a) To know about their living conditions, their average incomes and expenditure
- (b) To find if there is any risk of begging in the streets of Dhaka.
- (c) To reveal why they are begging in such a miserable condition when the government of Bangladesh is trying hard to rehabilitate them

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Bangladesh Center for Human Rights and Development(BCHRD) conducted a survey on the 1000 Dhaka city beggars in 2013.It has been revealed from the survey that 33.5% of the street beggars were above the age group of 51, Children less than 12 years of age constituted 16.5%. According to the survey female beggars were more than the male beggars [BCHRD, 2013].

According to a study in 2005, Yusuf, A, estimated that there were 700,000 beggars in Bangladesh, Hundred taka per day (\$1.50) is their earning. In his study he said that a wide spread forced begging is involved. [Yusuf, 2012].

Abdullah Al Helal in a paper based on secondary data revealed that a notorious syndicate is involved in the cruelest activity of forced begging. He tried to identify in his investigation the masterminds who are engaged to this ruthless trade- beggar's mafia. [Helal, 2013]

M. Obaidul says in his paper, "The begging is more common when the people become invalid, disable or aged. These all are having association with the poverty itself." [Md. ObydulHoq, 2016].

Jelili says in his paper, "Although the problem of begging is a worldwide phenomenon, it is more pronounced in developing countries" [Jelili, 2013].

Baltazar in a study of the street beggars in Tanzania with Dodoma and Singida Municipalities as case studies found that aged people constitute the high proportion of beggars in these two municipalities [Baltazar, 2011].

Rao classified the street beggars in India into different categories: Juvenile beggars, Physically and mentally handicapped, Diseased, Religious mendicants, able bodied, Aged and infirm, Causal beggars and Professional/Hereditary beggars.[Rao, 2016].

However, there is a scarcity of literature specifically on the aged street beggars in the city of Dhaka.

## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For our primary data we have conducted a survey using Purposive Sampling method of Non-probability sampling. We have collected data using a questionnaire where all the questions used were in structured form. Our target population were aged persons who were above 60 years and most of them were unable to move freely. We have collected data from 50 persons out of which 26 were male and 24 were female. Face to face interviews were taken by us.

We have prepared a questionnaire for the study including the beggar related questions which would focus the beggar's socio-economic and demographic situation. We asked them whether they took it as their profession, Further we enquired whether they would quit this humiliating activities if offered a better shelter. We also asked if they enjoyed the begging and what were the barriers of begging in the city of Dhaka.

Focusing on the objectives, the questionnaire of the study include questions related to beggars' socio-economic and demographic condition, their living condition, whether considering this as profession, enjoying it or intending to quit if got better chance for survival, overall barriers in begging in Dhaka city.

For our secondary research, we have used some journals and news papers from internet. Pages like Wikipedia and Banglapedia have also provided us with information.

## V. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The scope or the extent we extracted from the findings & analysis of our research centers around certain intriguing questions. The data-oriented analysis aided us to extract the necessary information to conduct our research findings. These questions are as follows:

### 5.1 Place of Origin

There are nine (9) administrative divisions in Bangladesh. Some are economically better well off than others. As per the figure 1, about 45.7% beggars are from Mymensingh Division, 17.2% are from Barisal, however, only 8.6% hail from Dhaka division. Mymensingh is the neighboring division to Dhaka. There is a good transport system to travel to Dhaka city. That's may be the reason of the highest number of beggars in Dhaka city from Mymensingh. Next higher number from Barisal. Mostly they travel from Barisal by launch. The travelling cost is low. Even they escape from paying the fair. They beg in the launch as well.

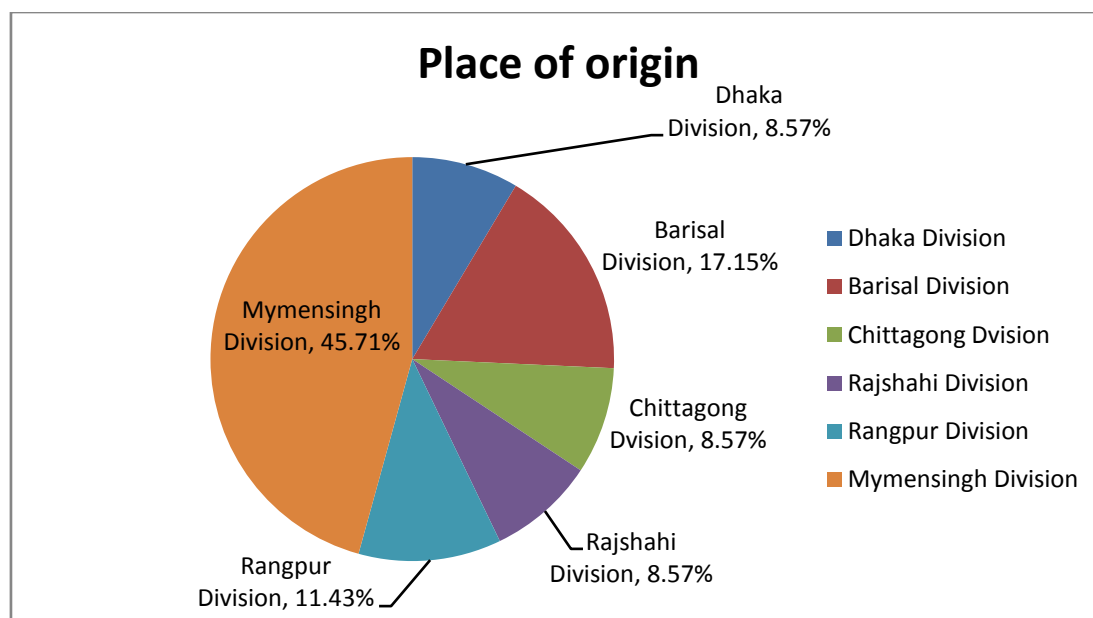


Figure 1: Place of Origin of the Beggars

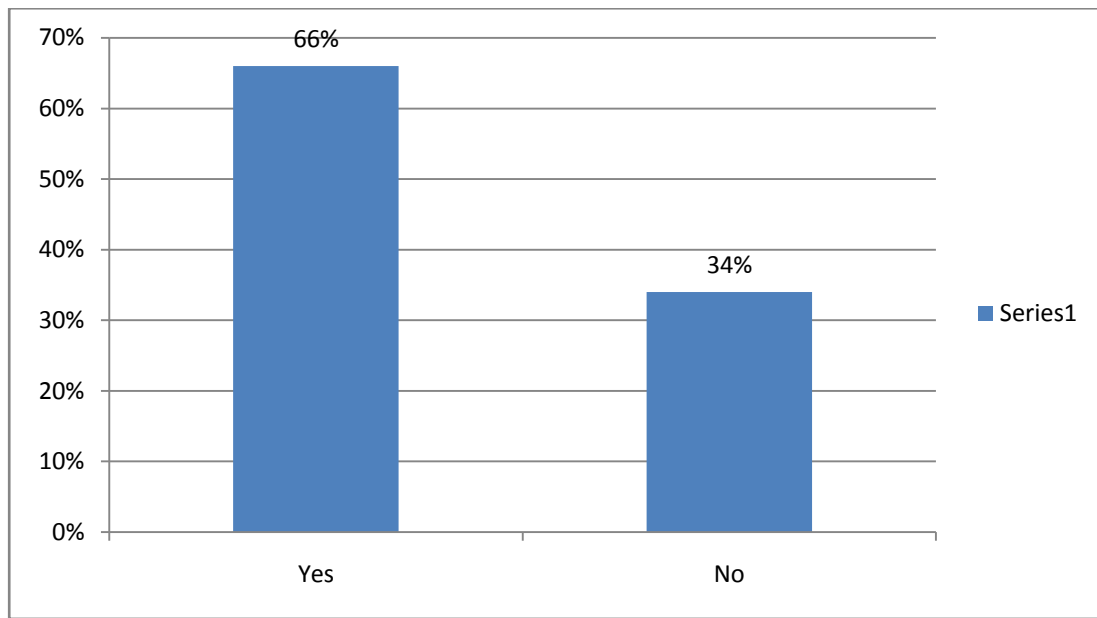
### 5.2 Daily Earning from Begging

We have come to know from the study that the daily earning varies from tk150 to tk750. The variation of earning is due to the location of begging, and due to the day of the week. They earn more during the Muslim month of Ramadan. Usually an old man/woman earns more than the other age groups. Next higher earnings group is the children aged less than 5. These two groups attract sympathy from the passersby. Their average earnings range in between tk.1500 to tk.3000 per day. Our study shows that aged people constitute the large proportion of street beggars in the city of Dhaka.

### 5.3 Govt. Allowance for the elderly people (BoishkoBhata)

The present government of Bangladesh introduced a BoishkoBhata (Monthly Allowance) Program for elderly people since April 1998. This allowance increased from tk. 100 in 1998 to tk. 500 in 2018. There is a huge demand for it from the elderly. A large number from the demanders cannot be provided with the bhata. According to the survey report and the figure 2, we found that among 50 individuals 33 did not get the government allowance and only 17 individuals got the allowance. So we asked them, why they didn't get the

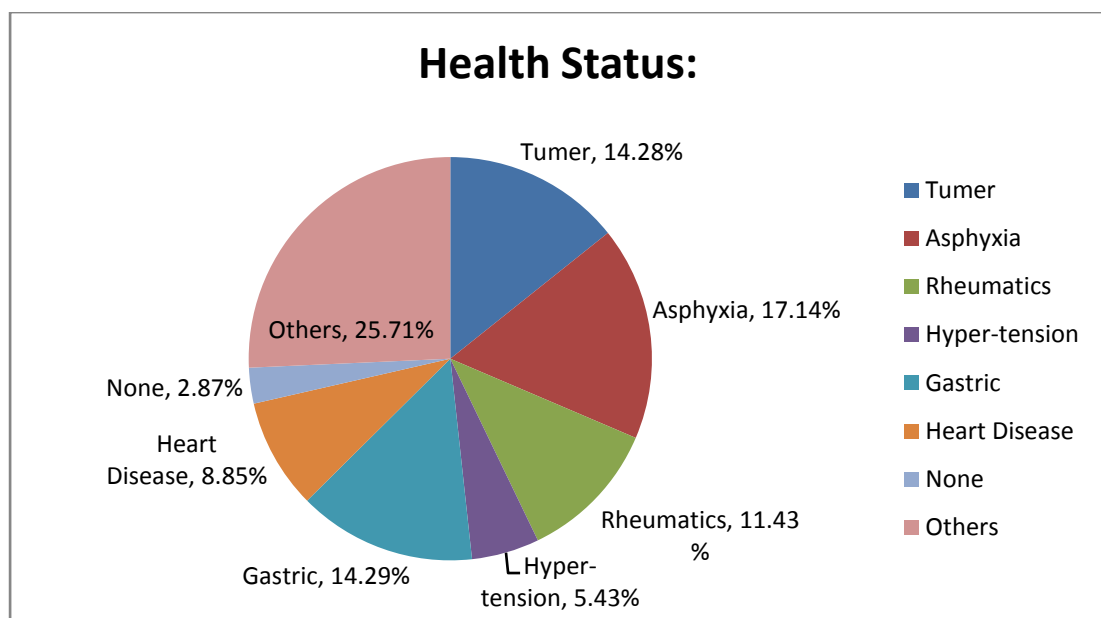
allowance. They replied, “According to the local administration, we do not fulfill the criteria of getting allowance”. Favoritism is the main criteria of distributing the allowance- according to the most of the beggars. It was beyond our scope to verify their claims. Actually the Basic Criteria for men the minimum age limit is 65 and 62 for women. There are some priorities Criteria to be fulfilled to get the allowance.”The potential beneficiary’s annual income should be below tk. 3000 (less than US\$ 37), he/she must be physically unable or fully incapacitated, Physically/mentally handicapped with partial or no ability to work, Possess no assets, land and/or home, Widowed/widower, divorced, separated, deserted by family, childless, etc. And spend all income on food.” [The Ministry of Social Affairs]. The elderly beggars who were begging in the streets might not fulfill these criteria.



**Figure 2:** Do you get boishko bhata (Elderly Allowance)?

**5.4 Health Status**

We can see in the (pie chart) figure 3, that they are suffering from several kinds of diseases like tumor, asphyxia, rheumatics, Hypertension etc.17.14% individuals are suffering from Asphyxia, 14.29% people are suffering from tumour and gastric and 11.43% people have hyper tension and rheumatics as well. Only 2.88% beggars have no disease.



**Figure 3:** Health Status of Beggars

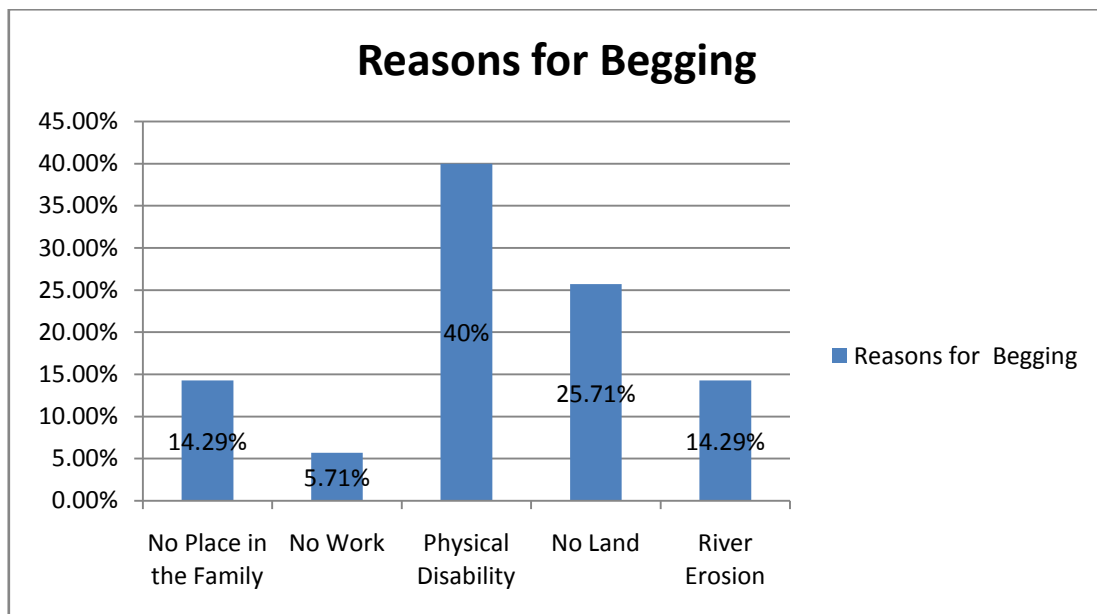
But there is a good thing that we have found in our survey, 80% of the beggars surveyed are taking treatment. In the portion of 20%, who were not receiving any treatment, some of them did not have any disease. But still the percentage of taking treatment is not up to the mark.

**Table 1:** Taking Treatment at Present or not.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	40	80
No	10	20
Total	50	100

**5.5 Reasons for Begging**

From the figure 4, we can see that 40% came to Dhaka due to physical disability and ultimately for begging alms. Almost one-third of the old-aged beggars migrated to Dhaka due to negligence in the family and river erosion. 25.71% beggars do not have land for living. 5.71% came to Dhaka for work.



**Figure 4:** Reasons for begging

**5.6 How do you spend your earnings?**

The figure 5 shows that most of their earnings (39.8%) are spent on food, 27.5% of their earnings they spend on maintaining their families. One-fifth of their earning they save for the future. Around 13% of their earning has been used as rent.

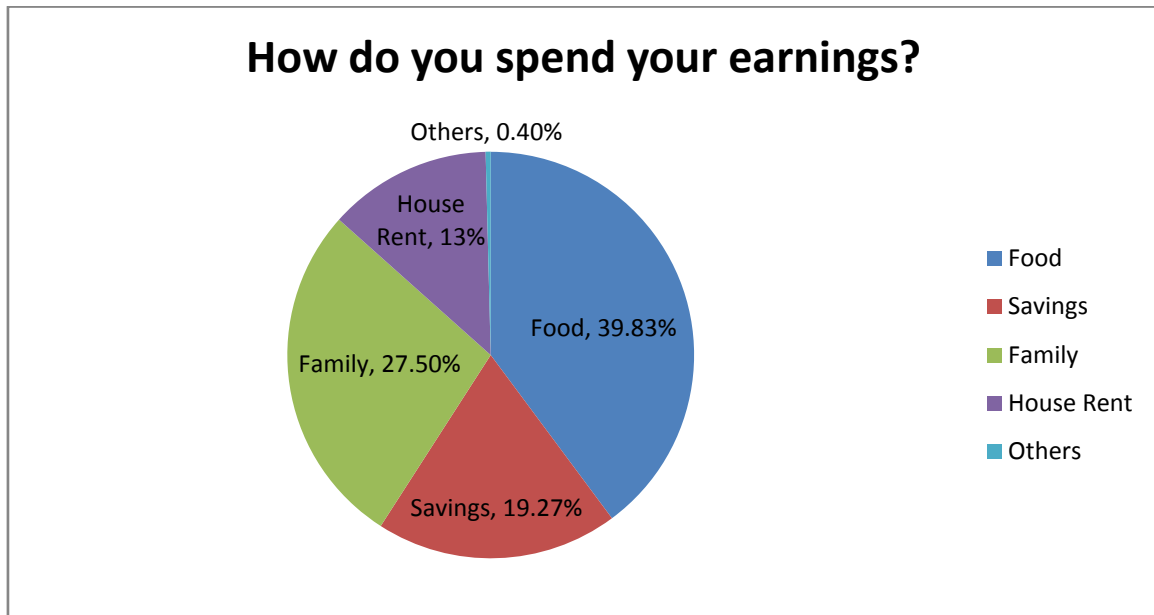


Figure 5: How do you spend your earnings?

**5.7 If you were given an opportunity to stay in Shelter home supported by the government, would you move there?**

From the figure 6 it reveals that an overwhelming majority (80%) of the beggars said they would not go to a shelter if offered. They are not interested because of the poor service of the shelter and also no earning is available for their families. Only a very small portion (11%) would shift to the government shelters, because of their very poor health condition.

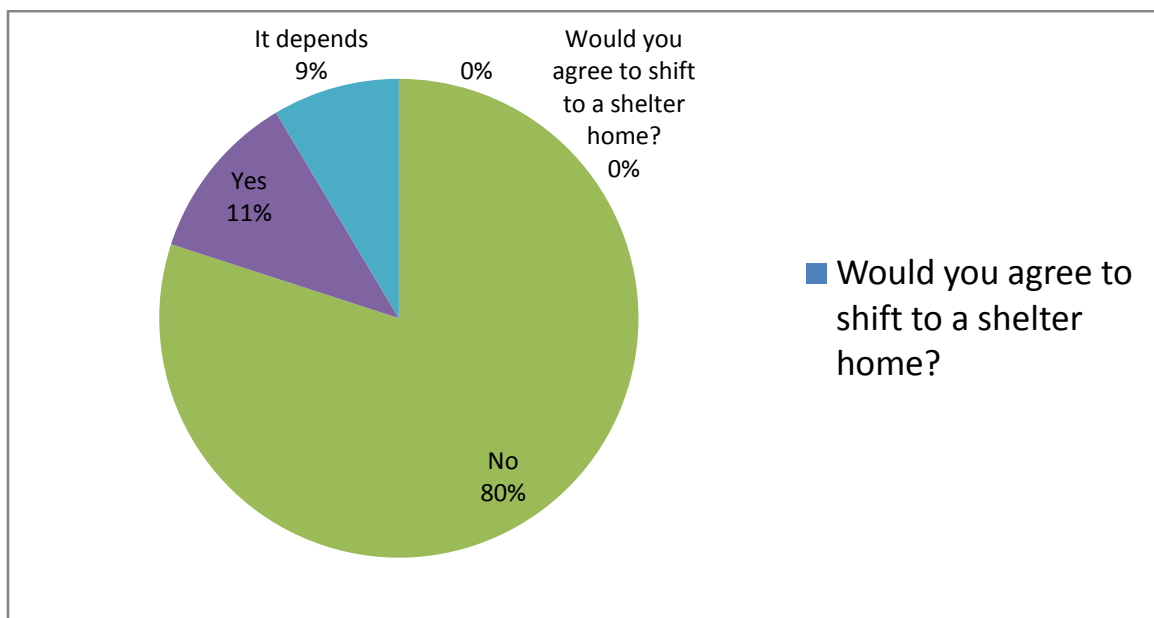
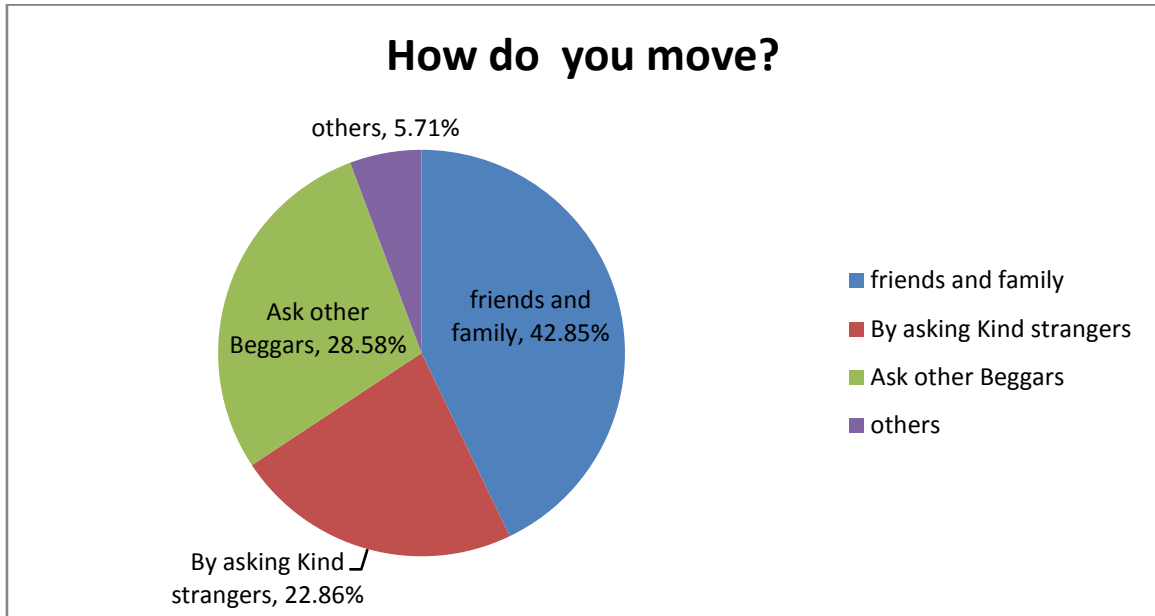


Figure 6: Would you agree to move to a shelter home?

**5.8 How do you move before and after Begging?**

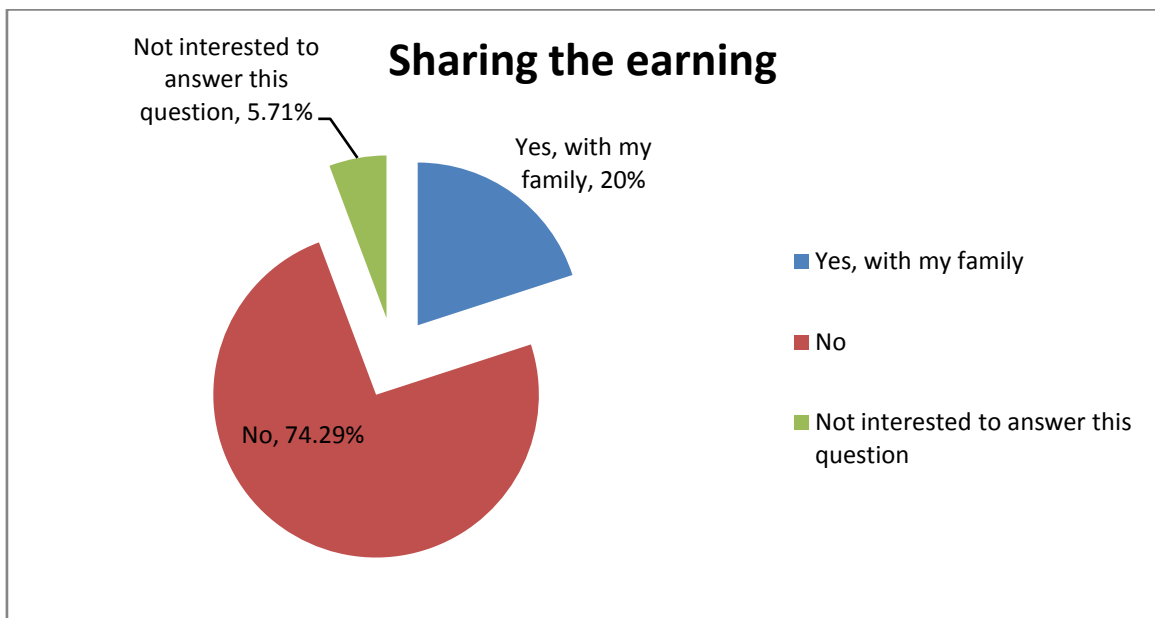
This was somewhat a disguised question. We wanted to reveal whether mafia is involved in forced begging. In answering the question how they spent their earnings, the figure 7 represents that only 0.40% percent said, they shared with “others” We suspected the “other” respondents, could be the mafias. When we asked in depth about these people, they were reluctant to answer this question. Almost half of the beggars (43%) moved to the begging place by taking help from their family members and friends. Around 29% of the beggars moved to the begging place depending on fellow beggars. Sometimes sympathetic people help them to move to their begging place. A large number of beggars (22.86%) move by asking help from the kind people.



**Figure 7:** How do you move?

**5.9 Are you forced to share your earning to anyone else?**

The figure 8 shows that two-thirds of the beggars responded that they didn't need to share their earnings with anybody else. But one beggar in five said they had to share their earning with their family members. This was a little direct question to find whether they were forced to beg by somebody else. So we found a little evidence (5.71%) of connection with the mafia.



**Figure 8:** Are you forced to share your earning to anyone else?

**5.10 Are you forced to Begging?**

As per the figure 9 it reveals that 94% of the beggars are not forced by anyone. They are beggars because of their disability, landlessness and helplessness. However, two respondents out of fifty answered in the affirmative. They are forced by a group of people about whom they completely refused to talk.

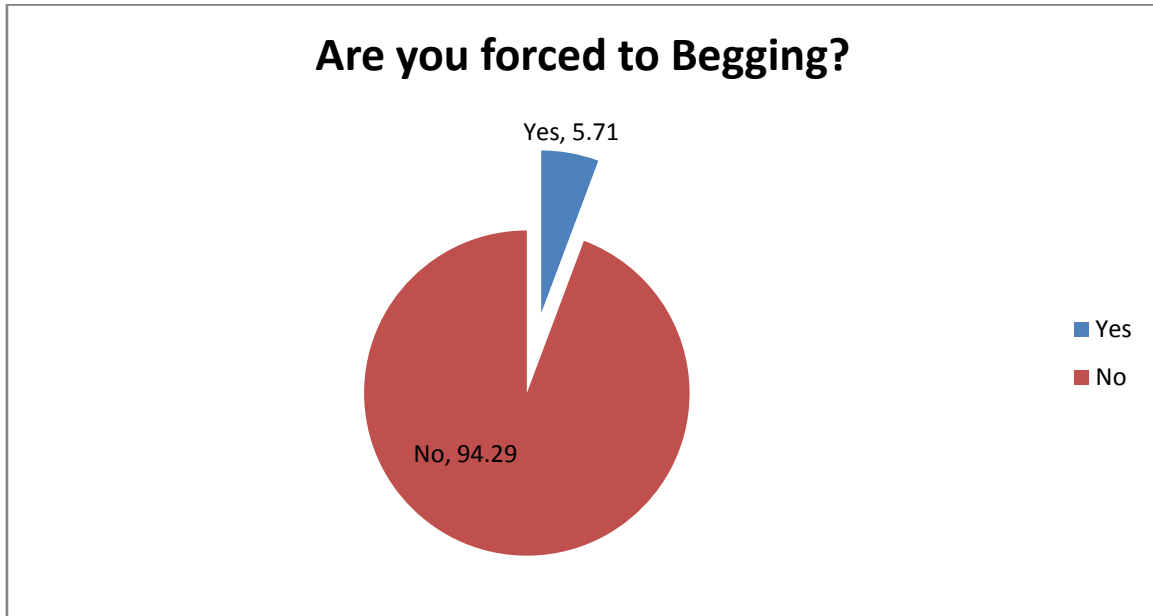


Figure 9: Are you forced to Begging?

**5.11 How do you choose the place of begging?**

By considering the people's weaknesses, religiosity, wealthiness of the residents beggars choose their location. The figure 10 represents 43% choose places around Mosque as their favorite destination for begging. Around 25.7% beg beside the graveyard and 20% beggars beg beside hospitals. Others like traffic intersection, railway station, launch station, different mazars (shrine) are popular places for beggars to beg.

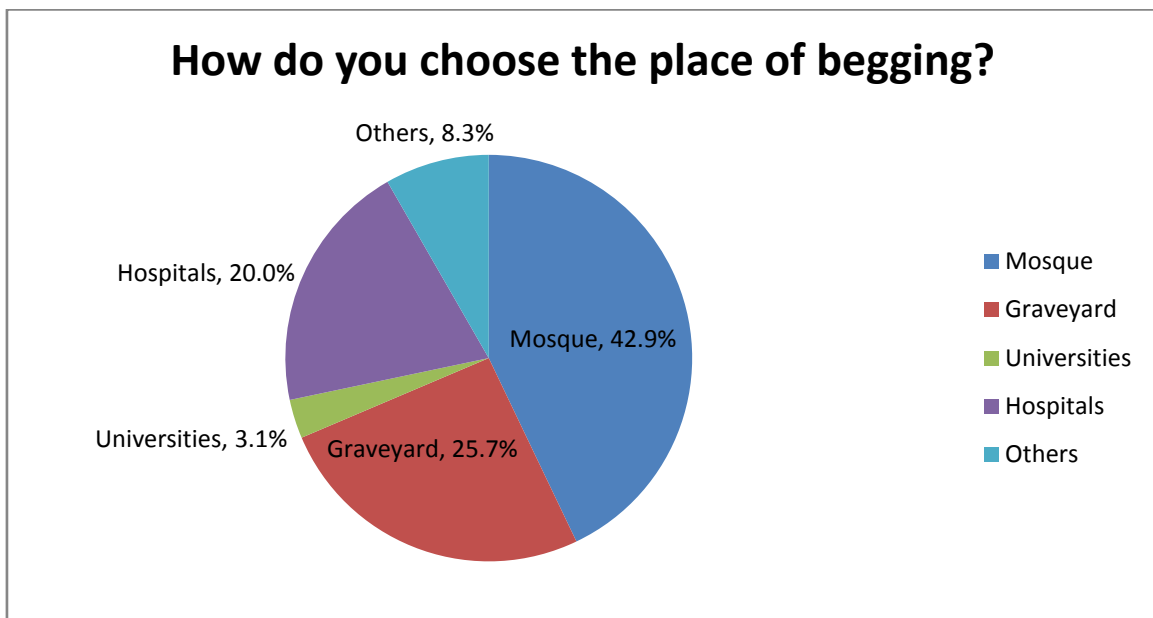
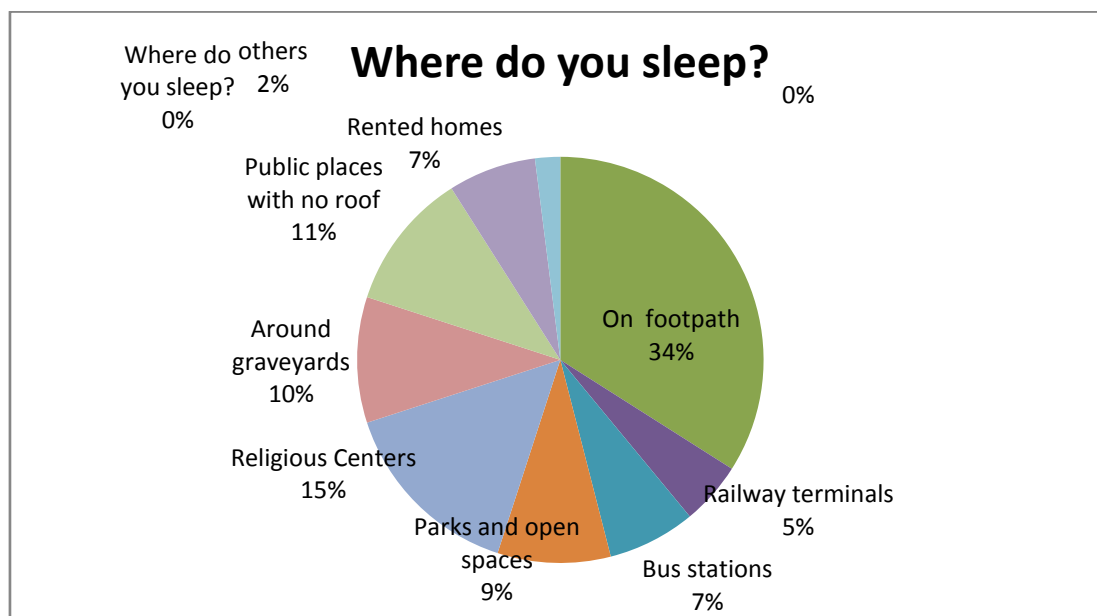


Figure 10: How do you choose the place of begging?

**5.12 Where do you sleep?**

The respondents were asked about their living conditions. None of them have their own homes. Mostly they sleep on the footpath, in the religious centers – Mosque, temples, in public places with no roof, around the graveyards refer to figure 11. Only a very small percentage of beggars reside in rented homes. More than two-thirds of the elderly beggars said that they collect drinking water from the government supply. Most of them use public toilets and open space for defecation.





**Figure 18:** Where Do You Sleep?

Findings from our study suggest that the elderly beggars lead an accumulated miserly life which is very humiliating where all basic amenities of life is absent All of them are afraid of eviction and harassment by the law-enforcing agencies and local goons.

#### VI. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

- The Study finds that 45.71% of beggars in Dhaka city came from nearby area like Mymensingh.
- Their daily earning varies from tk 150 per day to tk 750 per day. Variation of income is due to the location and day of begging.
- The study finds that Government Allowance does not reach 34.0 % of beggars.
- Health condition of most of the beggars in city of Dhaka are utterly poor, most of them face life threatening diseases.
- However, 80% of the beggars do not want to move into government facilitated shelters.
- The study also finds that 94.29% beggars are not forced to beg. However, 5.71% beggars are forced to beg by a unknown group of people.
- Majority of the elderly beggars live on the streets, in the religious centers, around the graveyards etc. Only 7% of them have their own rented house.

#### VII. LIMITATIONS

Many secondary sources about begging suggest that a beggar's mafia is involved. But the respondents categorically refused to give us any such evidence.

- We have used Purposive Sampling, since it is anon probability sampling, the findings cannot be generalized.
- Most of the Beggars didn't know their exact ages, because all of them were illiterate.
- They were very much reluctant to talk as they considered it as a wasting of time.
- Lack of accessibility and availability in finding aged beggars among their concentrated areas.

#### VIII. RECOMMENDATION

- The people of Bangladesh are traditionally religiously soft to the street beggars, especially about the old age people. This attitude is necessary to be changed to reduce the number of beggars.
- Old aged home can be established for their rehabilitation.
- Free of cost medical facilities are to be provided for aged beggars.
- Allowance for aged people is needed to be increased, both in size and amount.
- Better food and shelter can be provided in government shelter.
- Like the present drive against the drug, the government must give more attention against the beggar's mafia.

- “ Beggar – free ,Kishoreganj Upazila, district of Nilphamari” and “ Beggar – free Narail District” can be taken as models and can be extended to all other districts in the country to eradicate begging in the cities.
- Most importantly, a census of all the Dhaka city beggars of all ages to be conducted and a massive propaganda against the begging to create awareness and develop the sense of self –disgust among the beggars. They would think of quitting begging by themselves.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh. It is a mega city, the biggest and the most populous city of the country. The estimated population of the city area is 12 million more than the total population of many countries in the world. Its population is increasing very fast and the number of beggars is also increasing. Total number of beggars in the country is declining but their number is increasing in the city of Dhaka. The government of Bangladesh is trying hard to digitize the whole system and the overall economy is growing fast. The development creates a huge gap between the rich and the poor. There is a scarcity of jobs in the rural area, so an influx of migrants to the dreamland city of Dhaka. Joint families are breaking very fast. Young people travel to the cities for acquiring higher education and then working there. They do not return to the villages. There are no care taking persons available for the old parents and grandparents. They migrate to the cities and finding no other source of surviving; they get themselves involved in begging. Some other factors are also responsible for their engagement in begging such as poverty, religion, river erosion, becoming handicapped suddenly by an accident and physical disabilities caused by other reasons. Poverty is the main reason for begging. Poverty creates beggars. Religion does not support begging but it says to support the disadvantaged which is an indirect support for it.

The government of Bangladesh is doing commendable job to rehabilitate the beggars in capital city as well as in the whole country. This effort has to be enhanced if we want to see a beggar-free Bangladesh.

The study finds that the health condition of street beggars in Dhaka city is very poor. In asking the question of whether they want to move into a government rehabilitation center, the study explores that only 11% beggars in Dhaka city intends to quit begging and stay in a rehabilitation center.

It is really heart rending to see the terrible conditions old aged people begging in the streets of Dhaka.

Mafia in force begging are to be stopped by the government with the help of the law enforcing agency.

Dhaka city dwellers do not want to see any longer the humiliating situations of the beggars in the streets.

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