Demographic and socioeconomic determinants of women begging in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 2007

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Abstract: Background: Begging is a last resort of coping mechanisms of poverty, disability and various political, social and environmental crises. It is practiced to obtain from others. Objective: This study is attempted to investigate the demographic and socio-economic determinants of begging at Bahir Dar. Methods: case-control study design was used with a total population of 204 (102 cases[beggars] and 102 controls[non- beggars]). Semi-structured questionnaire were used and entered in to SPSS for Windows version 15.0 for analysis. Result: reasons for beggar's engagement in begging were, Poverty (98%) unemployment (78%) and physical handicap (54%) were identified. As to the background characteristics of respondents, the result of the binary logistic regression indicates that there was significant relation between begging and literacy status. The odds of begging decreases by 25% for literate respondents than their illiterate counterparts. In this study, beggaring was found increasing as age level increases. The logistic regression results also indicate that the odds of begging is 10.76 times higher for cases in the age group 25-34 years than younger cohorts (15-24 years). Annual household income also showed an association to be beggars between the groups. Conclusion and Recommendation: illiteracy, migration, old age and low annual household income were significantly associated with being beggar. Reducing rural urban migration and establishing an old age security system may solve the problem.

Keywords: Bagging, Women, Bahir Dar

1. Introduction

In its very essence, begging connotes the desire to get something from others. According to Ministry Of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) [1], the concept of begging can have various meanings based on the type of people engaged in the activity and the purpose of begging. Some beg as a ritual, others may have religious reasons, while the majorities drift to the activity because of economic and social reasons. A technical committee in MOLSA (1992:3) defined begging as "a method of earning one's living from the income obtained by others using age, health and economic condition as a means for gaining sympathy". Begging is an activity emanated from poverty and destitution. It is practiced to obtain from others what one is unable to get by oneself to bring oneself out of misery and poverty [1].

Begging did not exist in primitive societies, which were characterized by small groups of blood relatives living together and supporting each other[2]. The existence of the support systems for the economically dependent limited the spread of the practice. Begging began with the emergence of private property. The problem of beggary followed the disintegration of the early social structures and support systems. Starting from the Middle Ages, the spread of begging has been reinforced by the Christian doctrine of almsgiving[3]. In many countries, the almsgiver as well as the beggar were honored due to the religious value attached to the almsgiving [4]

According to MOLSA (1992) there is no written document that indicates the exact time and place of the emergence of begging in Ethiopia. However, oral reports have indicated that begging has existed for centuries especially around religions temples and rural areas. Azeb, cited in MOLSA (1992) stated that there were three types of begging in the earlier days: begging by the destitute related to religions almsgiving, supported by religious teachings and beliefs; begging by religious students and a

cast related to traditional belief practiced by religious students of the orthodox church and by a cast called "Haminas or Lalibelas" and begging as a ritual service for the church related to religion to build churches or to buy uniforms for clergymen [1].

Modern civilization as well as natural and man – made disasters disrupted the traditional social and economic structures and increased beggary in the country. The important social structure affected by civilization is the extended family system. The disabled, the elderly and orphans were taken care of within the family setting. However, these days, thousands of unaccompanied children, the elderly, lactating mothers and handicapped soldiers fled to cities and towns, where the family support system could not be maintained. Agriculture, which is the mainstay of the greater proportion of the population, is frequently affected by draught. This increased rural-urban migration and further deteriorated the economic situation. During the last couple of decades, internal conflicts, draught and famine have created many victims resulting in large numbers of displaced children, ex-soldiers and entire families. This led to an influx of destitute wanderers into urban areas, particularly into streets of the capitals [1].

Having no alternative means of survival, many of these people resort to begging on the streets in front of churches, at traffic lights, around commercial areas and rely on the traditional generosity rooted in the Ethiopian culture. Bahir Dar is one of the fast growing towns in Ethiopia where the practice of begging has been ever increasing. Locals claim that the number of beggars has never reached the current numbers, arguing it as a growing problem. A recent survey by the Amhara Region Labor and Social Affairs Bureau (2006) [5] also revealed that from the 3576 beggars found in selected towns in the region, 20.5 percent is found in Bahir Dar. Inspite of the increasing complexity in the depth and magnitude of the problem; however, there are few studies conducted in this area. The Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs of the Region under took few surreys, which aimed at knowing the overall situation of beggars, and did not try to identify the basic determinants of begging. This study, thus, is probably the first attempt to investigate the demographic and socio-economic determinants of begging, particularly at Bahir Dar.

Wubshet [3] discussed that the main reasons for beggars to depend on this practice are disability, destitution in old age, unemployment and underemployment. However, other reasons, which are sometimes genuine but usually false, such as begging for transportation, lack of money for medical treatment, taking fabricated medical documents, being robbed by thieves, etc are also used [6].

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to identify the correlates of begging, particularly of women beggars for they are the disadvantaged group in our society [7]. This study was expected to provide reasons of women begging at Bahir Dar so that both governmental and non-governmental organizations will design appropriate interventions to tackle the problem.

2. Brief Description of the Study Area

Bahir Dar town is the capital of the Amhara National Regional State. It is one of the rapidly growing towns of Ethiopia. Its population size was 54,766 in 1984 [8], 96,140 in 1994 [9], and estimated 152, 787 by 2003 [10], showing a rapidly increasing trend, owing to both natural increase, annexation of adjoining rural settlements and rural-urban migration. According to 1994 Population and Housing census of Ethiopia, about 54% of Bahir Dar population was migrant, of which 54.7% were women.

As is the case in other urban centers of Ethiopia, there is pressure on social services and economic opportunities, hence poverty, unemployment, destitution and streetism, which disproportionately affect females are common in Bahir Dar Amhara Regional State Labour and Social Affairs [5]. As of the Bureau, of the 3576 beggars found in the selected towns of the Region, 732 (20.5%) of which 43.3% were women are found in Bahir Dar town.

3. Method

3.1. Methodological Problem in the Study of Beggars

Unlike other areas, conducting research on beggars involves various complexities, thus special care has been taken particularly regarding the ethical and methodological issues while designing and collecting data. There are also sampling problems with reference to where the data are collected. Unless there is a definite reception center, which provides services for beggars, it seems very difficult to design reliable sampling technique. Beggars are also mobile, and many of them have no definite address, which make sampling frame impossible. These are the main methodological problems associated with the study of beggars. By combining different approaches, it may be possible to generate empirical information about beggars with reasonable assurance.

3.2. Design of the Study

In order to investigate the possible determinants of begging among women, the case-control study design was used. A case-control design is one of the commonly used analytical studies in which subjects are selected on the basis of whether they have particular outcome (cases) or not (controls). In this study women beggars who are exposed to the outcome (begging) represent the cases. On the other hand, non-beggars who are not exposed to the outcome variable (begging) represent controls. It was a population based case-control study where each case (beggar) was matched with a corresponding control (non-beggar).

3.3. Sampling Design

In order to enhance generalization and validity of the study, large sample size was used. From 317 women beggars found in Bahir Dar (Amhara Region Labout and

Social Affair Bureau, 2006), about one third of them were the subjects of the study. Hence a total sample size of 204 (i.e., 102 beggars and 102 non-beggars) was taken to be the participants of the study.

Women beggars (cases) were selected using two-stage cluster sampling technique. First, in consultation with professionals in Bahir Dar Special zone Labor and Social Affair Office, area clusters (beggar corners) were considered. From the eight major area clusters, four area clusters (50 percent of the clusters) were selected randomly. The data collection lasted for two weeks to get available number of beggars at the selected area clusters.

Before starting data collection from each of the selected area clusters, investigators listed all eligible beggars available in the area cluster considered and 50 percent of the listed beggars were selected for the interview using systematic random sampling technique. Similar procedures were followed for all the four selected area clusters. Both the process of listing the eligible respondents and decisions on sampling were made in the field within an hour prior to starting data collection. Since beggars are mobile, caution was made to avoid those beggars who were interviewed at the other selected area cluster.

The selection of non-beggars (controls) was straight forward. Two Kebeles were selected randomly from the town and divided into blocks and a block was selected randomly from each Kebele. Lists of households for the selected blocks were obtained from the respective kebele offices and half of the households were selected randomly. Lists of eligible women were prepared for the selected households and subjects were obtained using systematic random sampling technique from the list.

3.4. Data Analysis

The main purpose of the study was to examine the socio economic and demographic factors to be women beggars at Bahir Dar town. Percentages cross tabulations and bivariate techniques were used for analysis. Multivariate technique – logistic regression was used to analyze the relationship between set of predictor variables and begging controlling for any differences in the background characteristics of the respondents.

4. Result

4.1. Background Characteristics of Respondents

In this study, respondents who can read and write are considered as literate and those who cannot read and write are illiterate. The data indicate that 70.3% of the respondents are illiterate. Of all respondents, about 78% of the respondents are migrants, Fifty percent of the respondents are currently married, 26.7% divorced and 23.3% windowed. Majority of the respondents (32.7%) are aged 45 and above. 20.3%, about 30% and 17.3% of the respondents, respectively are in the age group 15-24, 25-34

and 35-44 years. The mean age of the study population was 38.3 years (Table 1).

As it is indicated in Table 2, 65% of the respondents have 2-4 family size and 16% are single family. About 19% have five and above family size. About half of the study population has average monthly household income less than 100 Birr, 20.3% have between 100-200 Birr and 30.2% have above 200 Birr.

Table1. *Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Background characteristics, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 2007.*

Background characteristics	Number	Percent
Educational status		
illiterate	142	70.3
literate	59	29.2
Migration Status		
non-migrant	45	22.3
migrant	145	77.7
Marital Status		
Married	90	50
Divorced	48	26.7
Widowed	42	23.3
Age group		
15-24	41	20.3
25-34	60	29.7
35-44	35	17.3
≥ 45	66	32.7
Family size		
Single family	33	16.3
2-4	131	64.9
≥ 5	28	18.8
monthly income		
less than 100 birr	100	49.5
100-200 birr	41	20.3
>200 birr	61	30.2

Beggars were asked the time since they began begging. 68.4%, 17.3% and 14.3% of beggars respectively are 1-5 years, 6-10 years and 11 years and above duration since they are begging (Table 2), indicating many of them engaged in the activity recently.

Table 2. *Percentage distribution of beggars by duration of begging, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 2007.*

Duration of begging	Number	Percent
1-5 years	67	68.4
6-10 years	17	17.3
11-15 years	7	7.1
≥ 16	7	7.1

Beggars' means of living before they engaged in the activity. About 38.4% of the beggars were housewives, 18.2% were retailers ('tella', 'injera', charcoal, etc), 31.3% were house servants and 9.1% were daily labourers. The data indicate that majority of the beggars were dependent in their husbands for their means of living.

It was explained that various reasons which are sometimes genuine but usually false are mentioned for

begging. Therefore, beggars in this study were asked reasons for their engagement in the activity. Poverty (98%) unemployment (78%) and physical handicap (54%) are identified as the three top factors of begging (Table 3).

Table 3. *Percentage Distribution of beggars by reasons of begging, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 2007.*

Reasons for begging	Number	Percent
Poverty	98	23.8
Religious obligation	3	0.7
Unemployment	78	19
Lose of property	14	3.4
Physical handicap	54	13.1
Lack of old age security	32	7.8
Divorce	35	11.2

5. Correlates of Begging

In this study, a case-control design was used to investigate the possible determinants of begging among women. As it is explained above, women's engagement in begging may be caused by factors, such as poverty, unemployment, lack of old age security etc. The impact of these factors can be discerned in conjunction with other correlates. One possible correlates of low economic status or poverty is low educational level which in turn limits opportunities, particularly in an urban setting where the value of labour depends on the skills on offer. The low educational status is a determinant of the type of jobs individuals engaged in. Therefore, selected background characteristics of respondents; age, family size, migration status, educational status, marital status and average monthly income were considered in this study.

The Chi-square test of independence was used to examine the association between begging and the explanatory variables considered, and were found there existed significant association. The logistic regression model was also used to identify and quantify the net effect of each independent variable considered to be beggar controlling the effects of other variables at their mean level. The goodness of the model used was assessed by Hosmer and Lemeshow's test. The test suggests that if the Hosmer and Lemeshow's goodness of the test statistic is greater than 0.05, the model estimate fits the data at an acceptable level [10], accordingly, the goodness of the fit of the model used was found 0.321.

Table 4 Presents background characteristics of respondents by cases (beggars) and controls (non- beggars). Differentials were observed among respondents against the background characteristics considered in this study. The data indicate that illiteracy is higher for beggars than non-beggars (61.3% VS. 38.7%). The Chi-square test of independence indicates significant relationship between illiteracy and begging (X^2= 25.7, P<0.000). The result of the binary logistic regression also indicates that there was

significant relation between begging and literacy status. The odds of begging decreases by 25% for literate respondents than their illiterate counterparts (Table 5).

About 61% of beggars and about 40% of non-beggars were migrants, and the relationship between migration and begging was found significant (X^2 = 34.1, P<0.000). The odds of migrants to be beggars were found 19.29 times higher than non-migrants (Table 5). The cross tab between begging and current marital status indicates that greater proportion of beggars, 72.9% and 66.7%, respectively are divorced and widowed, and only 16.7% are currently married. On the other hand 83.3%, 27.1%, and 33.3% of non- beggars are currently married, divorced and widowed respectively. The bivariate test indicates significant association between the two variables (X^2=52.5, P<0.000), but the net effect of marital status on begging failed to reach significant.

In this study, beggaring was found increasing as age level increases. The proportions of respondents that engaged in begging are 29.3%, 46.7%, 51.4% and 63.6% in the age groups 15-24, 25-34, 35-44 and 45years and above respectively. The relationship between age level and begging was also found significant (X^2=12.2, P<0.01) (Table 5). The logistic regression results also indicate that the odds of begging is 10.76 times higher for cases in the age group 25-34 years than younger cohorts (15-24 years), and the odds of beginning in the age groups 35-44 and 45 years and above were 7.36 and 7.68, respectively higher than in age group 15-24 years (Table 5).

As family size increases, engagement in begging was found decreasing, from 97% for single family to 18.4% for families with 5 household and above. Put it in other way, majority of the beggars are single household families. The Chi-square test also confirms that the relationship between family size and begging was significant (X^2=44.9, P< 0.001) (Table 4). Though the net effect of family size on begging failed to reach significant, the probability of begging declines as family size increases (Table 5). One possible reason for this result may be due to the fact that the proportion of single family household is higher for beggars or if there are other family members in the household, they may help each other in other activities to make their living instead of engaging in begging.

Majority of the beggars (84%) have average monthly household income below 100 Birr compared to non-beggars (16%). Around 39% of beggars have average monthly household income between 100 and 200, while it was 61% for non beggars. No beggar respondent was found with average monthly household income greater than 200 Birr (Table 4).

Over all, the data indicate that average monthly household income was found lower for beggars than non-beggars. The relationship between begging and income level was found significant (X^2=19.21, P<0.000). The odds of begging for those respondents with average household income between 100 and 200 was found decreased by 7%

than those respondents whose average monthly household income was less than 100 Birr. (Table 5).

Table 4. Chi-square test of independence of Background characteristics of Respondents and begging, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 2007.

Background Characteristics		Respondents status				Total		X²	P
		Non beggar		Beggar					
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
Educational status	illiterate	55	38.7	87	61.3	142	100		
	literate	46	78.0	13	22.0	59	100	25.7	0.000
	Total	101	50.2	100	49.8	201	100		
Migration status	Non migrant	40	88.9	5	11.1	45	100		
	Migrant	62	39.5	95	60.5	157	100	34.1	0.000
	Total	102	50.5	100	49.5	202	100		
Current Marital status	Married	75	83.3	15	16.7	90	100		
	Divorced	13	27.1	35	72.9	48	100	52.5	0.000
	Widowed	14	33.3	28	66.7	42	100		
	Total	102	56.7	78	43.3	180	100		
Age group	15-24 years	29	70.7	12	29.3	41	100		
	25-34 years	32	53.3	28	46.7	60	100		
	35-44 years	17	48.6	18	51.4	35	100	12.2	0.007
	45 years & above	24	36.4	42	63.6	66	100		
	Total	101	50.5	100	49.5	202	100		
Family size	Single family	1	3.0	32	97.0	33	100		
	2-4 family size	70	53.4	61	46.6	131	100		
	5 members & abo	31	81.6	7	18.4	38	100	44.9	0.000
	Total	102	50.5	100	49.5	202	100		
AV hh income	Below 100-200 birr	16	16.0	84	84.0	100	100		
	Above 200	25	61.0	16	39.0	41	100	19.21	0.000
		61	100.0			61	100		
	Total	102	50.5	100	49.5	202	100		

Table 5. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis of Beggar Women, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 2007.

Variables	B	S.E	Exp (B)	Sig.
Educational status				
illiterate (RC)	.000			
literate	-1.37	.76	.25	.05
Migration status				
Non-migrant (RC)	.000			
Migrant	2.96	.76	19.29	.000
Marital status				
Married (RC)	.000			
Divorced	.53	.80	1.7	.904
Widowed	.39	.83	0.67	.635
Age group				
15-24 (RC)	.000			
25-34	2.38	.93	10.76	.010
35-44	2.00	.96	7.36	.038
≥45	2.04	.86	7.68	.018
Family size				
Single household (RC)	.000			
2-4 household members	-2.09	1.26	.12	.09
≥5 household members	-2.07	1.48	.13	.161
Average monthly income				
Less than 100 Birr (RC)	.000			
100-200 Birr	-2.63	.6	.07	.000
>200 Birr	-12.53	30.31	.00	.679

6. Discussion

This study investigated the correlates of begging among women beggars in Bahir Dar town. The study also assessed duration in begging practice and reasons for begging among beggars. The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents which can have direct or indirect effect on an individual's livelihood are considered.

The results revealed the existence of significant relationship between begging and the variables considered in the study. Majority of the beggars were illiterate (61.3%), migrant (60.5%), divorced (72.9%) and widowed (66.7%) compared to non-beggars. The odds of begging decrease by 25% for literate respondents compared to illiterate respondents and the probability of migrants to be beggar was 19.29 times higher than non-migrants.

Beggars mentioned that the basic reasons for begging were poverty (98%) and unemployment (78%). For example, 84% of them reported that their monthly average household income was less than 100 Birr. One of the possible reasons of poverty may be their low educational status which limits their opportunity of getting employment in an urban setting where the demand for labor depends on the skills on offer. Therefore, effort to increase access to education and increasing their educational participation may help women develop skills which increase the value of their labor.

As the results revealed, greater proportion of beggars are migrants. 64.7% and 80.9% beggars respectively replied that they came to Bahir Dar to search job opportunity and poverty in previous residence. Marriage related variables, such as early marriage, arranged marriage and cultural barriers for remarriage and low access to resources may be important factors for their migration [12-13]. The marital status of beggars indicated that 72.9% and 66.7% of respondents respectively are divorced and widowed. Hence, measures which dissolve the impacts of those cultural

barriers possibly through information, education and communication and sustain them in their origin by increasing their access to resources, improving productivity and organizing and engaging in income generating activities may decrease the existing migration trend and begging consequently.

Lack of old age security is also the other reason mentioned for begging. The cross tab also indicates that the proportion of beggars increases with increasing in age. On the other hand, the cross tab between family size and begging indicates that the proportion of beggars decreases as family size increases, from 97% for single family to 18.4% for household with 5 members and above. Therefore, maintaining the existing family support system may minimize the magnitude of the problem for people may help each other instead engaging in begging. Moreover, establishing an old age security system through maintaining the traditional social ties may solve the problem.

Data on duration since begging indicate that 68.4% of beggars have 1-5 years begging experience. Therefore, it may be possible to change their life style by providing counseling support and designing income generating schemes which support their livelihood.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

Respondents identified different reasons for begging: poverty, unemployment and physical handicap, old age, migration and low household income. Reducing rural urban migration by designing income generating activities for the poor, and establishing an old age security system by maintaining the traditional social ties may decrease the occurrence of begging.

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