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Abstract

Begging though time immemorial is an extreme form of poverty. In a developing country like India where there are about 400 thousand beggars it becomes important to analyse why such a large population divert towards this disrespectable means of survival. In response we study the demographic, social and economic profile of beggars in Guwahati city, Assam. In case of beggars, we find that demographic profile does not solely have a meaning. But it narrates important causation when studied along social and economic profile. Again we view that social profile of beggar is a much more important determinant in their life rather than economic profile. Elements like identification and starting age of begging are important when it comes to eradication of beggary.

Keywords: Beggar, social-economic-demographic profile, identification, starting age of begging.

1. Introduction

Providing the basic amenities of life to any citizen is one of the top most priorities of a responsiblegovernment (Das, 2007). When a section of population is deprived of their minimum capabilities then they are identified as poor (Sen, 1993). Poverty along with unemployment has the potential to turn out a section of the population into beggary (Begum, Rahman& Hassan, 2020). It is in country‟s growth and development along with equitable distribution of resources that defines the nature of socio economic scenario of the population (Demewozu, 2005;Begum, Rahman& Hassan,

2020). Incidence and prevalence of poverty on a country's population therefore introduces a huge question mark in its sustenance and progress. At present day beggary can be considered as the widest form of income inequality that ever exists in the world.When scientists are planning to reach Mars and build homes, a section of the people dies of hunger on earth every year. In India one out of four people starve every night and almost 78 million are homeless (Khan, Hossain,Hasina,Uddin&Ferdousi, 2016). There are 4,13,620 people who are identified as beggars by the 2011 census as revealed by T. Gehlot, the then Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment (GOI, 2018). When poverty and unemployment is considered as the prime factor of being a beggar, along with that the other socio economic as well as religious factors are also equally responsible for this situation (Khan &Shamshad, 2013).In most countries poverty is viewed using an arbitrarily determined measure called poverty line. But the important fact is that some population do not necessarily lie in a close proximity below this line. In fact a certain population also lie in the sediments of the poverty estimates. This sedimentary population along with no employment and infused in vulnerability of their life are left with no choice other than depending on alms. In the end, if they finally deemed to this dependency for their survival then they are considered as„beggars‟ (Malarvizhi & Geetha, 2016).

There is no worldwide consensus definition of beggars or begging. It is because the terms beggar and begging may differ depending upon the culture, location and also from the legal viewpoint. But over time different researchers have defined begging mostly as asking for charity or alms (Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009) without any obligation in return.[1] (Malarvizhi &Geetha, 2016; Begum, Rahman&Hasan, 2020)

According to Begum et al. (2020) "asking for alms or charity or giving out of sympathy to the poor is called begging". There is absence of. It is basically obtaining means of survival from others due to inability to get by itself (Khan &Menka, 2013).Although more or less beggary exists in almost all the countries but it is more severe in least developed and developing countries (Khan et al., 2016).

Beggars are the poorest of the poor and the most disadvantageous section of the society(Malarvizhi&Geetha, 2016). Therefore, an individual description of socio economic conditions that solely projects the existence of problems is never sufficient. To have a deeper understanding we must try to analyse the causes behind those problems. Article 46 of the Constitution of India provides direction to the state to promote the economic interest of the weaker section of population and protect them from social injustice (GOI, 1951). The concerned public authority only focuses on that group of people who has the identity of being a citizen of the country and completely ignores the people who fail to meet this criterion. It is found that beggars are not only poor on socio economic ground but majority of them are also poor in generating a valid identity proof of their citizenship. Due to un-fulfilment of this criterion, they remain uncounted in the government surveys which make their total number underestimated.

One major reason of lack of understanding of this group is due to lack of awareness and also the lack of intent to know about their situation and hardship. This aperture can be filled if more research is done in this area. Therefore, this study aims to understand the social, economic and demographic conditions of beggars and how these dimensions are interrelated to each other. This paper is further organised into three sections dealing with materials and methods of analysis, discussion of the results

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[1]Absence of any quid pro quo relation.

and conclusion respectively. The analysis and discussion section is further subdivided into four sections, namely, demographic, social, economic and additional aspects about beggars" life.

2. Materials and Methods

Both developed and developing countriesface the problem of begging in different forms or severity. But one thing is common across all countries, that begging is more noticeable in the urban areas. It is due to the abundance of wealthy individuals; and societal and religious infrastructure that increases the probability of getting alms (Namwata, Mgabo, & Dimoso, 2012; Khan, Hossain,Hasina,Uddin & Ferdousi, 2016).

Among the 27 districts of Assam the poverty rate of Kamrup Metro is so much lower that even the second lowest district has as much as three times higher poverty ratio than the former in the year 2013-14 (Government of Assam, 2016). It has been seen that the people tend to migrate to those places where better employment opportunity is available and standard of living is high. In this respect, a prominent work is done by M.P. Todaro where he stated that rural-urban migration is mostly taken place due to perceived or expected income differential between rural and urban places. As Guwahati city is considered as one of the largest commercial hub of the north eastern states of India therefore the employment opportunities are considered to be higher in Guwahati. This has been clearly reflected in the poverty data mentioned above. It depicts that the beggars tend to migrate and accumulate more to the Guwahati city in comparison to the other districts. This is also found in our sample where nearly half of the beggars are migrants.

This paper is a product of formative research approach. A prior participant observation isdone to identify the problems and thus the researchable areas. Based on the information from participant observation and pilot interviews,a survey schedule has been prepared. The participant observation and pilot interviews were carried out during the month of September and October, 2019 and the final in-depth interviews were executed during the month of January and February, 2020. For simplification of data collection we have divided the urban areas of the city into six zones as per Guwahati Municipal Corporation that isCentral, Dispur, West, East, Lokhra and South zones. In each zone we have considered the areas where it is assumed to have the maximum agglomeration of beggars. In most zones we could identify only one such area. But specifically in West and South zones more than one area is identified. We have collected 10 samples from each area. This sample collection is done on the basis of first come first procedure (Grab sampling). That is we have collected samples from the first 10 beggars that we have encountered. This is done because the total population of beggars is not available. Moreover unlike in snowball sampling we cannot assume that a beggar has any kind of connection or knowledge about other beggars. In case of West and South zone we have also clustered two areas as one if both the areas are in close proximity with one another.

In order to analyse the inter-linkage and interdependence of various factors related to the background of the beggars" life the variables are divided broadly under three categories- social, economic and demographic. These broad categories as well as their sub categories are explained usingbasic statistical measures and graphs.

Table 1: Zonal Distribution of the Sample Area		
Zone	**Area/Places**	**Sample size**
Central	Bhangaghar	10
Dispur	Basistha Temple	10
West	Jalukbari, KhamkhyaMandir, Kamkhya Railway station &Maligaon, Machkhowa& Fancy Bazaar	40
East	Ganeshguri	10
Lokhra	ISBT	10
South	Guwahati Railway Station&Cotton University, ShukreswarMandir&Panbazar	20
Guwahati City		Total Sample size = 100

3. Analysis and Discussion

Demographic Profile

Demographic profile provides information about the different characteristics of any population. Characteristics like age and sex distribution help us to identify the section of population which are more vulnerable than the others. Again, information about the migratory movements and its behaviour help us to know about the changes in population growth caused by the factors other than any natural increase. These factors have similar importance for a population of beggars as well. Along with these demographic factors, some beggar specific information provides insight about the problems of begging like its severity and the root causes.

Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Beggars (in Percentage)
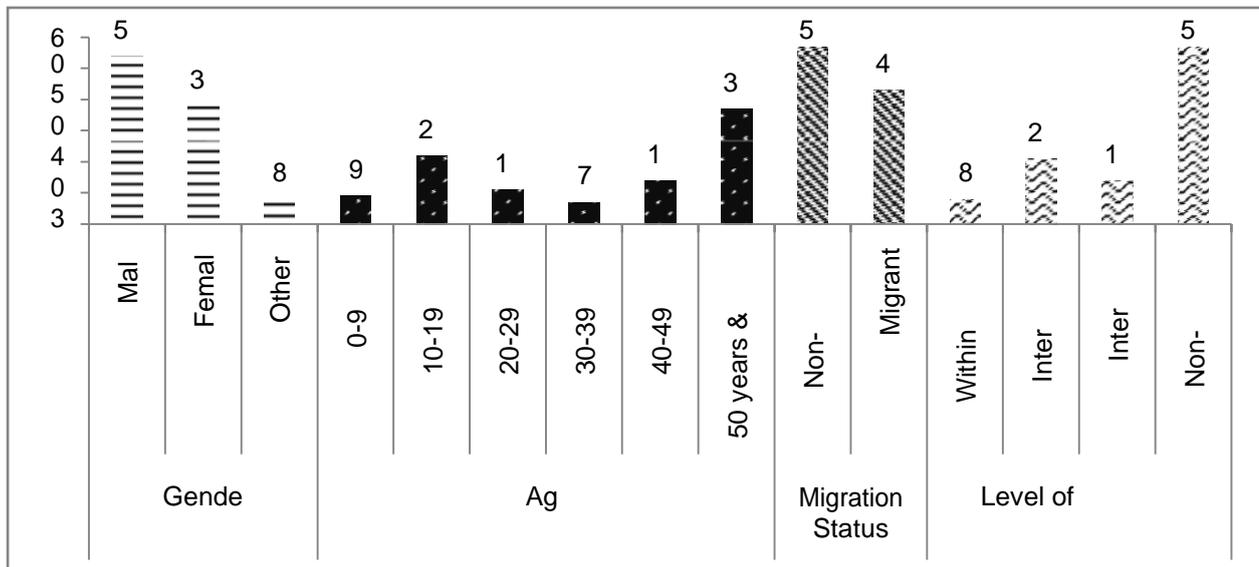
Source: Author's own calculation based on a sample survey

From figure 1, we can observed that most beggars are male (54%), followed by female (38%) while there are also some beggars which belong to the other gender category (8%). We define other gender as a person who does not fall under either male or female sex category. The statistics of gender of

beggars does not really imply a certain meaning to a study, rather is a compulsion. But gender becomes an important factor when it is associated with various other factors regarding risks and opportunities.

With reference to age of the beggars, most beggars belong to the age group of 50 years and above while least percentage of beggars belongs to the age group of 30-39 years. This result is similar to Ogunkan&Fawole, 2009; Begum, Rahman&Hasan, 2020. It implies that as age increases the productive capacity of an individual decreases. With no means of survival at this age people often tend to beg rather than work.

Among the migrant beggars, only 28 percent of them have a residential facility. However, this figure stands at 37 percent for the non-migrant beggars. This shows that non-migrant beggars are relatively in a better off position than the migrant beggars when it comes to having residential facilities. It means an individual finds more difficulty in finding a shelter in a new place than those already living there.Deka(2018) have also found similar results regarding slum dwellers of Guwahati city, where it have been stated that the people migrating from other part of the country are the most deprived followed by those migrating from other parts of the state of Assam and the non-migrants are comparatively at a better state than the other two categorised household.

Social Condition

Understanding social conditions helps in defining a person‟s opportunities and constraints regarding his place in the society. In this case regarding beggars we try to understand their basic social dimension, which includes their level of education, housing status, facilities of drinking water and sanitation and most importantly their possession of any proof of their identity issued by the government.

Figure 2: Social Profile of the Beggars(in Percentage)
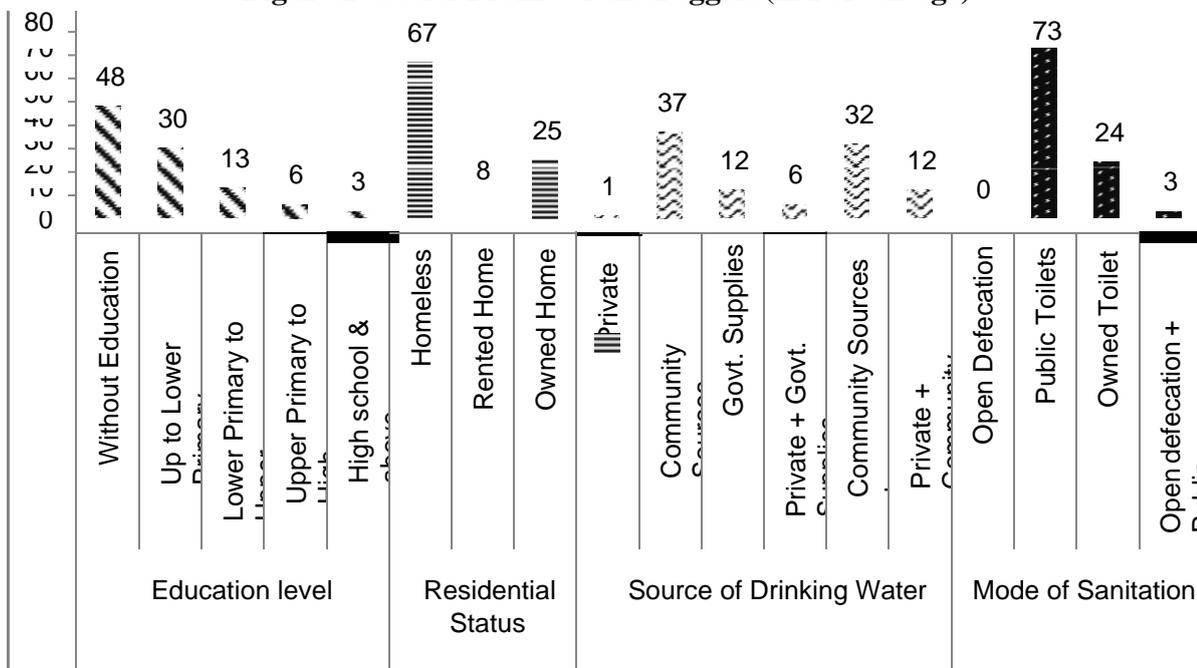
Source: Author‟s own calculation based on a sample survey

Education, knowledge and skill of a particular person establish their requirement in the society, as it indicates their productivity. In this paper, we consider only formal education as a substitute to all sorts of education and skill. The data from figure 2 shows that almost half (48%) of the beggars are uneducated and 30 percent of the beggars have only the basic education- this is more or less a common assumption (Malarvizhi&Geetha, 2016; Begum, Rahman&Hasan, 2020). But it is shocking to see that 9 percent of the beggars have education level above Upper primary standards. It is true this standard does not match the norms of many societies. But still it is melancholic to just imagine the plight of a person who has attained some amount of education enduring all the possible hardship and still consider begging as a profession.

The figure 2, also shows the residential status of the beggars, where it is found that 67% of the beggars are homeless. An interesting fact however is that 25% of the beggars mentioned that they have their own houses.Among the beggars who own a house, the majority of them are female (60%). But when we look into the matter from the age perspective of these females, we come to know that nearly half of them belong to the age group of below 14 years. This implies that they are either staying with their parents or with someone else they know who are basically adults (above 18 years). On further investigation we found that their houses were not fully pucca[2] houses. And they did not have any ownership of that land. We assume this because most of these houses are situated in slum areas.Again, all those who are staying in a rented home are found to belong from the others gender[3] category. One interesting observation is that all those who belong to third gender category, lives in a rented house and are from the middle age group. This is perhaps because they indulge into begging after attaining a certain age.

Drinking water and sanitation are some of the basic health requirements of life. With regards to drinking water it can be seen that 50% beggars quench their needs from a single source. Water is supplied either from a private source (1 person has a tube well) or community source (we consider all the sources as community source if it is not privately owned or provided by public authorities) or is supplied by public authorities (government source). In half of the samples it can be seen that people resort to two or more water sources. There are two reasons as stated by some respondents: 1) *"One source does not meet our requirement"* and *2) "We are getting water from different sources therefore we are using it. If we use only one source and discard the other and in future if our primary source fails to satisfy our needs we may not be able to access the secondary or tertiary source."* These two statements clearly show their insecurity towards a particular source. Situation of sanitation is such that some people have their own toilets but 73% beggars use public toilets. One important point to note here is that some respondents (3%) reported that they use public toilets but sometimes they also go for open defecation. These entire 3% sample is quite young in age. The highest age of a person that sometime goes for open defecation is 12 years. When we asked the people who mentioned to use public toilets about what they do if they cannot access any public toilets, majority of them did not give any reply. Therefore, the study is not very clear if they only use public toilets.

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[2]Pucca house refers to dwelling built of materials such as stone, brick, cement, concrete etc.

[3] Other gender here is meant to indicate the third gender concept who is neither man nor women.

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Economic Conditions

Inadequate economic status drives a person away from fulfilling their demand. Constant degradation of economic status leads to immolation of a person‟s even the basic needs. Basic understanding narrates that a person‟s economic condition is influenced by their income and wealth and also the income, wealth and support of their family and friends. In almost all types of economic studies it has been revealed that capturing a person‟s income and wealth directly is not always feasible. Therefore proxies for such economic variables are often used. In case of this paper we suffer from the same problem of discretion of income. Also we expect that a veracious beggar would not possess a significant amount of wealth. Therefore to identify the economic condition of a beggar we try to understand their source of income apart from begging and the problems as well as prospects associated with it.

Economic factors such as change in price of any kind of commodities have a great impact on the consumers. This impact is felt more when the income of the consumer is less. But though beggars fall below the group of income earning people, any distortion in commodity prices does not directly impacts their livelihood. Again unlike other people where income is determined by their capability to work and employment opportunities, income of beggar may depend on various uncontrollable factors like sympathy, climate, number of people encountered in a day and wealth of those of people. Moreover factors like wealth nearly do not exist in case of a real beggar forced by condition of survival. Again, economic factor like employment is superficial in nature as existence of proper employment disregards the existence of beggars.

Figure 3: Economic Profile of Beggars (in Percentage)

Source: Author‟s own calculation based on a sample survey

From figure 3, it can be seen that only 18% of the beggars have a certain employment opportunity, which is part time employment. The data shows that some of them were employed most of the days in the last week. But this data does not reveal the true reality.In almost all these cases their employability is only for a few hours. A question may arise that in what sense we regard them as employed. Therefore it is worth mentioning that the questions about their employment status, type of employment and employed days in the past week are not based on some hardcore economic definition or theory. Rather we consider their perceive level about the questions.

Moreover,we fail to incorporate the data of number of hours of employment as the respondents themselves could not specify their employable hours. One possible reason for this is the degree of variability among the hours each day. When asked about why there is so much variability of their employed hours one respondent replied, *"My employer himself is working hard everyday to feed his family, how can he assure to employ me on a regularbasis?"*This implies that in most cases these beggars are employed by people who themselves are not very well to do.It was also found that the earnings from these works are not even sufficient to ensure a full day"s hunger satisfied meal.

The employers mostly appoint them to some pseudo and menial tasks like cleaning the facade of their shops and stores. In return they received a small sum of money (sometimes as low as Rs 10) or a small amount of food. On being asked how they got their work and what they receive in return one such respondent narrated, *"I used to clean his spot for his portable food stall once in a while. After few days he started to pay me for that. Now every evening I clean his spot and he gives me Rs 20 for that. Sometimes by the end of the day he even gives me some left out food."*

The situation analysis about economic conditions shows that most beggars do not have an income apart from begging. For those that do perceive to have another income source does not necessarily have the security and sufficiency of sustenance from such income source.

Additional Aspects
Lack of Identity Proof

Another concerning result seen in the survey is that about 60% of the beggars do not have any kind of identification proof issued by the government. The reason of this being a concern is because any kind of government issued benefits will not reach this population, unless they are recognized.

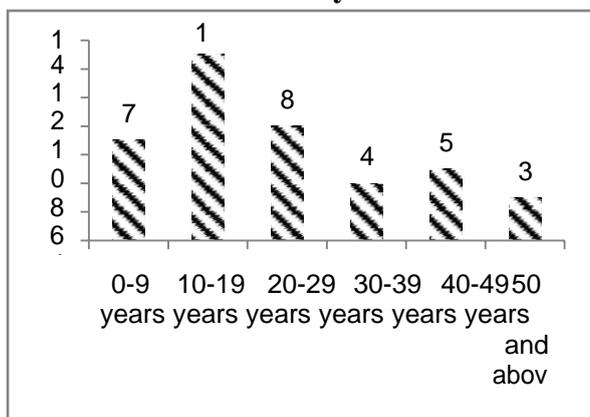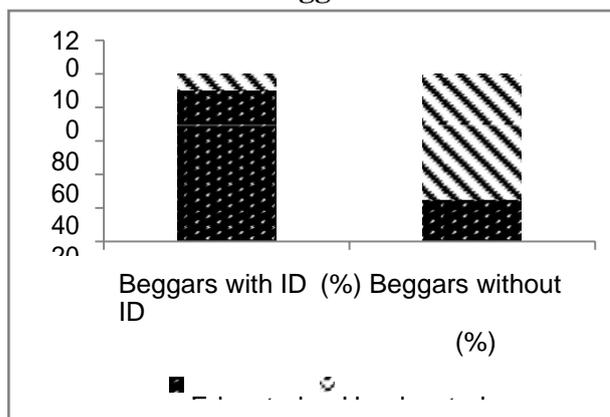**Figure 4a: Age Distribution of Beggars with Identity Proof**

Figure 4b: Educational Background of Beggars

Source: Authors own calculation based on

From figure 4a, it is seen that mostly the younger beggars are having identity proof as 20 out of 40 beggars with identity proof belong to the age group of 0-19 years. As we move further towards the elderly beggars, it is observed that the number become smaller and smaller. One main reason can be that many parents though beggars or come from a minimalistic background at least try that their child would get some sort of identification. Moreover, figure 4b shows that 90 per cent of beggars, who have identity proof, have minimum level of education. While on the otherhand a large section of

beggars who do not enrol themselves into formal education also do not have any identity proof. This implies that enrolment in formal education is a means to get identified themselves as a citizen.

It is important on governments" part to formulate and implement benefit policies for the poor. But it is even more important that the last person in the line is considered for such policies. Therefore, these peripheral population should find themselves in some kind of government record so that they can be uplifted and can be best utilised by transforming them into a human resource.

Starting Age of Begging

From the sample we found that the starting age of begging is very diverse. There are people who have started begging at as early as 4-5 years, at the same time there are certain people who have started begging at their 50s. Therefore, there is no anonymity about the age at which a person started begging. Putting differently, it can be said that age cannot be considered as a major determinant of begging. However, we have found that majority of people started begging at very early ages as the mode age is found to be 5 years.

Figure 5: Gender Distribution of Starting Age of Begging
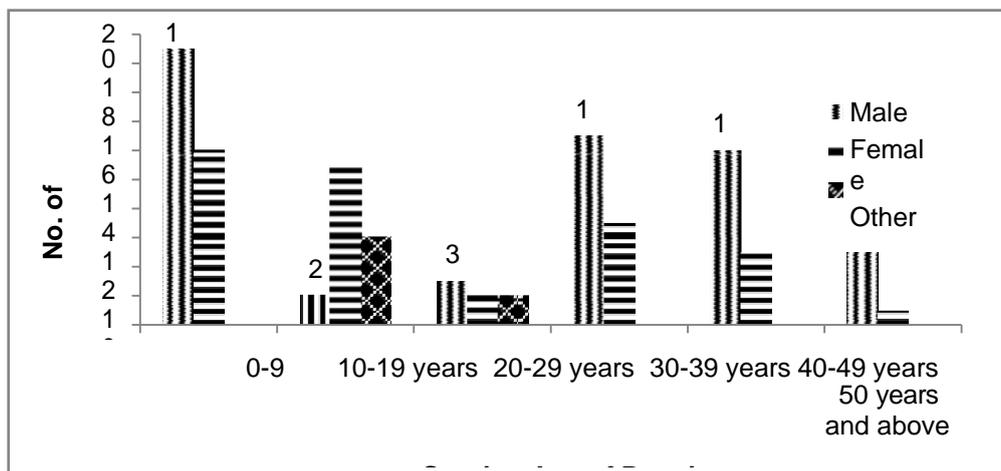
Source: Author"s own calculation based on a sample survey

The figure 5 shows that probability of starting to beg at an early age is the highest for both males and females. But during the age of 10-29 most males and females do not start to beg. Again after the age of 30 the probability to engage in begging increases. This is an interesting fact because it implies that people during their most productive years do not prefer begging. Therefore at this age if they are given sufficient attention to develop their capacities and also ensure a respectable life they might not tend to beg. This also means that if a person is diverted from begging at an early age than there is high probability that he/she can contribute to the society and vice-versa.The story of beggars for other gender is quite different. Their starting age of begging falls under the age group of 10 to 29 years.This result is quite opposite if we compare other genders with males and females. One major reason for this is that during this productive period the other gender people even if they wish to learn or indulge in some respectable economicactivities there are certain societal constraints. With lack of learning and earning opportunities and expecting no such possible pore in the future, they are left with no other option than begging. One such respondent gloomily states, "*I want to work but who*

will employ me?" We even find 100% willingness to work by these other gender persons. But the irony is that none of them have any kind of employment.

4.Conclusion

Based on the analysis, we find that the influence of demographic variables does not mean much independently whereas the implications of these variables can be best understood when associated with other socio economic factors.Apart from mentioning statistics,it is important to understand the implications of those values and relate them to the ground experiences.We observed that the social factors are relatively more importantthan the economic factors in defining the problems and opportunities of beggar. It is because, unlike most studies regarding any kind of population, the economic factors are nearly non- existent in case of beggars. Even if these factors exist, their implications are not that strong. And even if their implication is strong capturing these factors becomes almost impossible.

In fact identification of beggars and starting age of begging can devise better measures to eradicate beggary. It is important on governments" part to formulate and implement benefit policies for the poor. But it is even more important that the last person in the line is considered for such policies. Therefore, this peripheral population should be able find themselves in some kind of government record so that they can be uplifted and can be best utilised by transforming them into a human resource.It has been further observed that there operates a „U" shaped relationship between the starting age of begging and probability of different age group to indulge into begging. More elaborately, probability of indulging into begging is found to be higher at the early phase of life (below 10 years age) followed by a decrease in this probability in the middle age group (10-29 years age). However, probability of indulging into begging further rises at the latter phase of life when this population gets older. Therefore if they are given sufficient attention to develop their capabilities at their early phase of life and also ensures a respectable life then they might not involveinto begging. This also means that if a person is diverted from begging at an early age than there is high probability that he/she can contribute to the society and vice-versa. This result is quite opposite if we compare other genders with males and females. One major reason for this is that during this productive period the other gender people even if they wishes to learn or indulge in some respectable economic activities they often faces certain societal constraints. Therefore, awareness should be spread so that the society gives them the respect and the employment opportunities that they deserve. They should be aware of their rights to live. There should also need to change in the behaviour of rest of the society towards these other gender people to create an environment of social harmony where they able to engage in the different activities according their respective skills like other. This can as a whole contributes towards the national output of the country by converting this unutilised means into human resources.

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