



Research Article


A Socio-Demographic Study of Beggars at The Magh Mela in Prayagraj: Awareness, Perceptions, and Challenges

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>This study investigates the socio-demographic profile, awareness levels, perception of beggars, and challenges faced by beggars at the Magh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. This study is based on 100 respondents, collected through an interview schedule. The study reveals that most of the beggars come from poor and marginalized communities like Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. Most participants have no formal education and engage in begging regularly due to poverty, joblessness, and lack of health. Some are aware of government welfare programs such as Ayushman Bharat and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, but many are uninformed and unable to access these schemes. The study also explains the harsh conditions of beggars. This study also focuses on the perception of the beggars. A large number of children and young individuals were also involved in begging. The study suggests that the government should provide mobile education, better welfare services, and rehabilitation programs to improve the living conditions of this vulnerable group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 28-03-2025 ▪ Accepted: 14-04-2025 ▪ Published: 28-04-2025 ▪ IJCRM: 4(2); 2025: 343-347 ▪ ©2025, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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KEYWORDS: Socio-Demographic, Beggars, Magh Mela, Challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Begging is a widespread issue in India with considerable social and economic consequences. The phenomenon of begging is often viewed through the lens of poverty. Begging and beggars are two different concepts. Begging is the act of asking someone for money, goods, food, and other things. Those who are

involved in this act are known as beggars. They are asking someone for a favour to fulfil their basic needs such as food, clothes, water, and other things. Beggars are that part of the poorer society where they are unable to fulfil their basic needs. However, in recent, if someone is begging, it does not mean that they have no medium to fulfil their basic need. But it is very

interesting in recent times that begging has also become a profession for most of the beggars. Begging is one of the most visible forms of poverty and social exclusion in India. According to 2011 census, there are 413670 beggars and vagrants are live in India. Uttar Pradesh state has the first position in the beggar population, where 65835 beggars live. This study focuses on the socio-demographic profile of beggars at the Magh Mela in Prayagraj to understand the key variables such as age, gender, marital status, education, disability, migration patterns, and family structure. Many beggars came from neighbouring states like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh. The religious and cultural, festivals and spiritual gatherings are often recognised as hotspots for beggars. One such religious congregation is the Magh Mela held annually in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh.

The beggars at the Magh Mela face numerous challenges, including poor sanitation, extreme cold, lack of medical aid, exploitation by organized groups, and the absence of any rehabilitation. An important part of this study is to assess awareness levels among beggars regarding government welfare schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, Old Age Pension, and Antyodaya Anna Yojana.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early studies by Henderson (1904) and Ottaway (1975) found in their study that in early societies, people did not beg because families and groups took care of each other. Begging started when property had become private and religious charity encouraged giving alms to the poor people.

Mukharjee (1945) ^[11] in his study viewed that beggary as an indicator of social instability. He analyse that most of the people beg because they are poor, unemployed, disabled, or have no family support. Kumarappa (1945) ^[11] also found that begging is a big issue and its proper solution can be possible through only government action.

Contemporary studies such as Carter (2007) ^[4-5] and CRISIS (2003) ^[6] focused on urban begging. They found that most of the beggars are homeless or addicted to drugs and alcohol. They suggest that the problem of begging cannot be solved only by making laws against begging.

Khan *et al.* (2013) ^[9] conducted an in-depth case study on the socio-economic status of beggars in Aligarh district, Uttar Pradesh. The study revealed that poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, lack of access to basic amenities like water, electricity, sanitation, and unavailability of ration cards were the predominant causes of beggary in the study area. This study emphasized the urgent need for targeted welfare schemes and vocational training to uplift the socio-economic status of beggars. Malarvizhi and Geetha (2016) ^[10] conducted a comprehensive study on the socio-economic issues of beggars in Coimbatore City. The study revealed that beggary is not only a result of poverty, but also due to illiteracy, unemployment, family disintegration, illness, and lack of care. The study identified that beggars faced many challenges such as harassment from municipal authorities, fellow beggars, and exposure to health hazards. This study also found that most beggars were unaware of their rights and unable to access government welfare schemes. Beggars have only voter IDs and ration cards. They recommended providing shelter, employment opportunities,

healthcare, and awareness programs to improve the livelihoods of beggars.

3. METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA

This research is based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Due to a lack of accurate statistical information on the beggar population, samples of 100 respondents were selected. This data is collected through an interview schedule using a simple random sampling method. The area of the study is Magh Mela in Prayagraj, which is organised every year in the Prayagraj district at Triveni-Sangam. Triveni-Sangam is the place where three rivers named Ganga, Yamuna, and invisible Saraswati meet each other. This confluence of these rivers is known as the holy Triveni Sangam. The data was collected in Magh Mela 2023, which was organised from 15 January to 4 March 2023.

4. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the demographic profile of beggars in the study area.
2. To assess the civil awareness of beggars and perceptions of beggars in the study area.
3. To identify the challenges faced by beggars in the study area.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Beggars

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Religion	Hindu	100	100
	Others	0	0
Gender	Male	52	52
	Female	48	48
	Total	100	100
Marital Status	Married	43	43
	Unmarried	44	44
	Widows/Widowers	13	13
	Total	100	100
Age Group	May-15	33	33
	16-40	38	38
	41-60	21	21
	61-80	8	8
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Religion and Gender: The survey data reveals that the entire sample population are identified as Hindu religion. This homogeneity reflects the religious Mela which is associated with Hindu Religion. Thus, it indicates a lack of religious diversity among the beggars in the study area. Gender distribution is nearly equal with 52% male and 48% female respondents. This explains that begging is not gender biased in this study area.

Marital Status and Age Distribution: The marital status of beggars also shows nearly equal distribution. Where married respondents are 43% and unmarried respondents are 44%, and the remaining 13% respondent belongs to widows or widowers. The table shows that most of the beggars are belong to the younger age group (16-40) which 38% of total begging. Child begging also prevails with a high percentage of 33% which is a very critical economic condition for the economy, while the

government is already offering free primary education and providing free food to children to ensure their right to education. The data shows that senior citizens are performing begging but with a fever percentage of 8%.

Table 1.2: Educational and Social Profile

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Education Y N	Yes	24	24
	No	76	76
	Total	100	100
If yes then Qualification	2 nd class	10	41.6
	3 rd class	7	29.1
	4 th class	1	4.1
	5 th class	2	8.3
	8 th class	1	4.1
	9 th class	3	12.5
	Total	24	100
Community	General	10	10
	OBC	17	17
	SC	18	18
	ST	55	55
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Educational Background: Education levels among the beggars are alarmingly low, where 76% of beggars having no formal education. Among those who are educated, in only 12.5% having completed 9th class and it is the highest education recorded in the study area. This lack of education is a very critical factor that leads to individuals to forcing them into begging due to secure stable employment.

Community and Social Background: The community-wise distribution of beggars shows that the ST category has the highest representation of 55% in surveyed population. This indicates significant socio-economic vulnerability among tribal populations. SC and OBC category constitute 18% and 17% respectively. The General category respondents are accounts for only 10%. It is clear that marginalized communities, STs and SCs, are disproportionately engaged in begging due to poverty, lack of education, and limited economic opportunities.

Table 1.3: Begging Characteristics and Daily Life

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Nature of Begging	Regular Basis	74	74
	On Special Occasion	26	26
	Total	100	100
Average Per Day Income	0-100	50	50
	101-200	39	39
	201 and more than	11	11
	Total	100	100
Facing Problem	yes	50	50
	No	50	50
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Nature of Begging and Income Levels and Problem Faced by Beggars: Here, the nature of begging shows beggars are begging on a regular basis or occasion basis. 74% of beggars are engaged in begging regularly, while 26% of beggars are begging on occasion. The average daily income of beggars was found to be

very low. 50% of beggars' per day income is between 0-100rs. And 39% of beggars' per day income earnings are between 101-200rs. Only 11% of beggars earn more than 200 Rs per day. There are 50% beggars face problems in begging in Magh Mela.

Table 1.4: Cross-tabulation of Gender and Types of Problems Faced by Beggars during Magh Mela

Gender	Problem Faced by Beggars			Total
	When VIP Come	Looted by Sadhu	Both of them	
Male	16	5	3	24
Female	13	5	8	26
Total	29	10	11	50
Statistical Test	$\chi^2 = 2.507$, df = 2, p = .285			

Source: Field Survey

Table 1.4 illustrates the problems faced by male and female beggars during certain situations such as the arrival of VIPs, exploitation by Sadhu, and instances where both problems occur. Among males, 16 beggars faced issues when VIPs arrived, 5 were looted by a Sadhu, and 3 experienced both issues. While, 13 females faced problems during VIP visits, 5 were looted by Sadhu, and 8 beggars faced both issues. The chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 2.507$, df = 2, p = 0.285) shows that the association between gender and problems faced by beggars is not statistically significant. This implies that male and female beggars face these challenges at comparable rates without significant gender-based differences.

Table 1.5: Marital status and perception of life satisfaction among beggars

Marital Status	Beggars Perception		Total
	Happy	Unhappy	
Married	14	29	43
Unmarried	27	17	44
Widows / Widowers	2	11	13
Total	43	57	100
Statistical Test	$\chi^2 = 12.011$, df= 2, p=.002		

Source: Field Survey

Table 1.5 presents the relationship between marital status and perception of beggars. Out of 43 married beggars, only 14 beggars feel happy, while 29 beggars feel unhappy. Among the 44 unmarried beggars, a higher number of beggars (27) felt happy, and 17 felt unhappy. The chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 12.011$, df = 2, p = 0.002) indicates a statistically significant association between marital status and the perception of life satisfaction of beggars. This illustrates that marital status plays an important role in the perception of beggars. Unmarried beggars are more satisfied with their lives than those who are married or widowed.

Table 1.6: Relationship between Marital Status and Level of Civil Awareness among Beggars

Marital Status	Civil Awareness		Total
	yes	No	
Married	30	13	43
Unmarried	33	11	44
Widows / Widowers	12	1	13
Total	75	25	100
Statistical Test	$\chi^2 = 2.705$, df= 2, p=.259		

Source: Field Survey

Table 1.6 explains the relationship between marital status and the level of civil awareness of beggars. Among married beggars, 30 reported being aware of civil matters, while 13 beggars are not aware. Unmarried beggars are showing that 33 are aware and 11 beggars are unaware. Widows and widowers displayed the highest proportion of awareness, with 12 out of 13 reporting awareness and only 1 indicating unawareness. The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 2.705$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.259$) reveals that the association is not statistically significant. This implies that marital status does not have a meaningful impact on the civil awareness of beggars.

6. FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Findings of the Study

- All surveyed beggars are identified as Hindus, which reflects that the organised event is religious, particularly to Hindus.
- The gender distribution is nearly equal, with 52% male and 48% female, indicating that begging is not significantly gender-biased in this study area.
- This study reveals that begging does not affect only the elderly or disabled but also the younger. And in this study, begging has a significant effect on the younger people.
- Most of the surveyed beggars are uneducated.
- The data shows that most of the beggars belong to Marginalized Communities.
- Data shows that beggars are primarily begging regularly in the study area.
- The earnings of beggars are quite small. This shows that beggars face severe financial crises.
- There is limited social knowledge of beggars regarding their rights.
- According to beggars, begging is not so easy. They have to face many difficulties during begging. They have reported difficulties when VIP visit, and also being looted by fake sadhus.
- There is 43% of beggars expressed satisfaction with their begging lifestyle, while a majority of beggars (57%) reported that they are unhappy

Suggestions

- The government should implement mobile or temporary learning centres at religious gatherings such as Magh Mela to provide basic education to beggars.
- The government should create employment opportunities for beggars, particularly for marginalized communities who are engaged in begging.
- The government should expand social welfare programs such as pensions, food security, and healthcare benefits for beggars.
- Increase awareness of government welfare schemes to beggars through outreach programs.
- It is necessary to aware beggars of their rights and government schemes.
- The government should promote social workers and volunteers to assist beggars during the Magh Mela to prevent exploitation.

- Establish temporary shelters with basic amenities for beggars to ensure their safety during mass gatherings.
- Set up rehabilitation centres to help beggars. It is a need for targeted welfare programs, skill development initiatives, and social reforms to uplift these communities to reduce dependency on begging.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex socio-economic realities of beggars at the Magh Mela in Prayagraj. Begging here stems not just from poverty but from long-standing marginalization, illiteracy, and limited access to welfare schemes. The presence of children and youth in begging signals deeper systemic failure. Despite temporary arrangements during the Mela, beggars continue to face exploitation. Addressing this issue, there is requires sustaining government efforts through targeted education, employment opportunities, social security programs, and rehabilitation initiatives to ensure long-term inclusion for this vulnerable section of society.

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