

Afghan Migration And Internal Displacement As Major Political Causes Behind Child Beggary: A Sociological Study In District Peshawar, Pakistan

Ahmad Khan¹, Prof. Dr. Niaz Muhammad²

¹ PhD Research Scholar at Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar.

Email: ahmadsociologist1@gmail.com

² Professor of Sociology at Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar. Email: niaz@uop.edu.pk

Abstract

The present study focuses on Afghan migration and internal displacement as major political causes in the promotion of the issue of child begging in district Peshawar, the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. It is a qualitative study conducted with the help of a sample size of 60 begging children having equal representation of both genders from the urban and rural areas of sampled district through purposive sampling technique. Besides, 18 male and female representatives from various governmental organizations such as Child Protection Unit, Child Beggar Home, Social Welfare Department, Police Station Head Officers (SHOs) and Lawyers were also interviewed. The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The study concludes that most of the children started begging as a result of Afghan migration and conflict-driven internal displacement from the newly merged tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into the vicinity of Peshawar district. The study foresees an impressive and solid role on the part of the line departments of the government and NGOs to facilitate the begging children in imparting education and establishing multi-skill development centers to make the begging children workable towards living an honorable life.

Key Words: Child Beggary, Afghan Migration and Internal Displacement, District Peshawar

Background of the Study

Begging by children has become a ubiquitous phenomenon across the world, encompassing all kinds of countries. It has resulted in adverse impacts on the socio economic conditions of the countries where it exists, particularly the Asian countries-India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. As per statistics given by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) based in Pakistan, Pakistan is a home accommodating about twenty-five million beggars, and among them 1.2 million are children who wander on the streets of the major cities and

busy centers of Pakistan. The pace at which the number of child beggars is on constant increase in Pakistan reflects an alarming situation. It has switched to adopt the form of a well-organized profession in major parts of our country especially in public places like in front of educational institutions, hospitals, parks, busy markets and even public transport etc. Child beggars are found in almost all provinces of Pakistan and majority of such children are up to 10 years old by age (Khan, 2011). According to a survey conducted by Anwar (2022), there were about 8,000 child beggars in Karachi in 2003 and that number then rose to

12,000 by 2005. Lahore is the home having about 10,000 child beggars while Rawalpindi hosts roughly 3,000 child beggars. So far Quetta and Peshawar are concerned, Quetta has approximately 2,500 child beggars while Peshawar is having up to 5,000 child beggars. Various governmental and non-governmental organizations are mandated with the primary objective to eradicate child beggary and rehabilitate the children involved in the begging at federal and provincial level in Pakistan. The Government institutions like Social Welfare Department, Home Department, Child Protection Welfare Bureau, Dar-ul-Kafala and Child Welfare Commission are working to control child beggary in Pakistan (Jabeen, & Akhunzada, 2017).

Based upon the estimation from International Labor Organization (ILO), about 168 million children in the globe are the victims of the menace of child labour in 2012 which represents 11% of the global population of children (ILO, 2015). Whereas, Milne (2015); Nwazuke and Igwe (2016) argued that child labour has become a global issue and there is no country in the world where nuances of the problem cannot be found.

Sociologically speaking, begging or panhandling is a form of social deviance and social problem whereby an individual represents himself as poor and needy to a stranger expecting donations for multiple reasons. Child begging is a form of forced child labour (ILO, 2015). Begging is an evil exercised for the purpose pushed by the greed to request others to grant them something, mostly in the form of money without any reciprocation (Kennedy & Fitzpatrick, 2000). A beggar is a distinguished individual who normally begs at public places like public offices, banks, shops, mosques, markets and busy streets (Adugna, 2006). These beggars might be children, adults, disable persons or other members of a family. In the curse of child begging, boys and girls both are involved having

the age below 18 years based upon the reasons of physical and psychological oppression (Ansari, 2006; Hammarberg, 1990; and Noguchi, 2000). The irresponsible and no-interest attitude of government is a source to surge the number of beggar mafias throughout the country. The government has failed to provide employment/job opportunities to the beggars and tackle the issue of child beggary in an effective way. Begging might result from the major socio-economic problems, lack of financial support and weak government policies. As per some reports, beggar mafias have surfaced and begging has now adopted the shape of a growing industry in Pakistan. Significant political factors are contributing to increase the beggarization. According to the US State Department's 2011 Trafficking of Persons Report on Pakistan, the mafias are engaged in buying, selling and kidnapping the children for the purpose of begging. According to the International Labor Organization's survey in Pakistan, 198 beggars were put to begging forcibly. In Pakistan, 34 percent beggars, as reported, were indulged in begging under the control of organized mafias. The beggar mafia bought 73 percent of them and over 50 percent from amongst such children had the age up to 10 years. A survey report of the International Labour organization (ILO) clearly indicates that the situation of forced begging in Pakistan is more alarming and severe as compared to other parts of the world. From 2001 and onward, the situation of tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faced a different shift as compared as to other parts of the country after Pakistan joined the war on terror after the 9/11 incident in the USA which led to attack on Afghanistan resulting in migration of Afghanis in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Millions of families from the tribal areas and afghan refugees migrated to Peshawar city, nearby rural areas and other suburbs of the province. In addition to it, earthquake and flood also remained the causes of migration and displacement of families to

Peshawar (Khosro & Yew, 2015). Furthermore, the massive migration in 1979 also compelled the migrated families to send their children for begging. According to the recent reports of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, most of the begging children are either Afghan refugees or from other provinces of the country mainly Punjab and Sindh. It is further reported that most of the children of Punjab and Sindh provinces have been kidnapped from there. The second largest number of the migrant children are from newly merged districts of Ex-FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Area). Most of them live in tented and muddy houses near Ring Road Peshawar. After transferring them to more economic and higher income spots, they became victims of the traffickers who put them into begging. Some of them were forcibly resorted to drugs and they became addicted, and later on stood dependent on the beggar mafia. Such situation made begging a compulsory activity for them to fulfill their needs of intoxicated drugs. Delap (2009) stated that the kidnapped children work for long hours, alongside suffering from sexual, mental, physical and verbal abuse by the people they beg to, and mafia they are affiliated with. A huge number of Afghan children are now being found in the busy markets of Islamabad as well. Certain questions are arising here that who are their handlers and who brought them for this illegal act. The majority quarters are of the opinion that these children have been brought by the cartels that are indulged in the illegal business of begging. It needs fastidious oversight to identify the real culprit indulged in it (Daily Times, 2022). The reports said that the beggar contractors and handlers who exploited these children are basically from Afghanistan, Sindh and Punjab (Tribune, July 17, 2022). There are teenagers and infants who are regularly ask for money in the city and also the peripheral rural areas of Peshawar. They come to the markets early in the morning and remain there till late evening.

Statement of the Problem

Child begging is a social fact as it has adopted the shape of a rooted social problem in district Peshawar impacting the socio economic conditions of the district. Behind this social evil, there are so many factors but the political factors are of immense importance. Afghan migration and internal displacement are some of the major political reasons that contribute a lot to the increasing number of child beggars in Peshawar district. The frequent occurrence of Afghan families' migration from Afghanistan prevails for the last decades due to repeated political crisis there. It is important to mention that in view of a long border with Afghanistan, Peshawar has been a home to accommodate about millions of Afghan refugees. Furthermore, war on terror in Afghanistan affected the adjacent tribal areas of Pakistan which also compelled the people from Ex-FATA to move in or were displaced as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) to Peshawar. There are so many other political factors which pushed the children of such families to adopt the profession of begging, but the present study was focused on exploring the Afghan migration and internal displacement as political causes behind the expansion of child beggary in district Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Methods and Procedures

This study was conducted under the qualitative approach in order to explore the phenomenon from political angle. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the help of interview guide as an instrument of data collection from 60 interviewees (begging children) of both genders with equal number. In addition to it, 18 male and female representatives in total from various governmental organizations such as Child Protection Unit, Child Beggar Home, Social Welfare Department, Police Station Head Officers (SHOs) and relevant Lawyers were also interviewed. The collected

data was processed through various stages of analysis under the thematic analysis strategy as specified for qualitative study.

Results and discussion

Afghan Migration

The political instability, shrink economy and other political crises at different ages in Afghanistan are the big reasons behind migration of Afghan families into Pakistan. The efflux of Afghans has multiplied social problems including child beggary, poverty and population etc. particularly in sampled district. The resources have got scarce here to afford their huge burden. Pakistan is already suffering from so many financial and social problems but the influx of Afghans has further aggravated it. Such situation has become a source of bumping up the issue of child beggary which is attention-deserving. The present study narrates some of the important interviews of the begging children.

Shan Gul, a begging child migrated from Afghanistan, told that:

“I belong to Jalalabad, a district of Afghanistan. My country is war-affected and that is why my family migrated into Peshawar due to lack of peace and job opportunity in Afghanistan. Being afghan refugees, we don't have our own house in Pakistan and it is the only option to move for begging here in Peshawar. I go daily for begging at 7 AM and busy in begging till the evening.

Another Afghan girl, Sana Bibi who was 12 years old and hailing from Afghanistan, narrated that:

“Afghan refugees shifted to Pakistan from different parts of Afghanistan in view of uncertain situations there. There is no other source of income except begging here in Peshawar and I earn from Rs. 300 to Rs.400 per day which

I give to my mother on daily basis. She buys the basic commodities of life with this amount for the family members”.

A government official from the Social Welfare Department at Peshawar confirmed the presence of afghan child beggars and viewed that:

“As per a rough statistical estimation, the number of local child beggars is lesser than the afghan children migrated with their families from different parts of Afghanistan and are begging in Peshawar district of Pakistan”.

Confirming the statement of the Social Welfare Department's representative, an official of the Child Protection Unit added that:

“We rescue the children who are basically from the other provinces of Pakistan such as Sindh and Punjab other than the children of Afghanistan and tribal districts of Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. He added that there is a lesser number of local children involved in begging”.

A senior lawyer viewed in an interview that:

“Majority of the Afghan child beggars cross the border illegally and inter into Peshawar. Afghan refugees are settled in Peshawar for decades and now it stands difficult to distinguish whether they are afghan children or local children the time they are begging”.

The same comments are supported by an official of the Child Beggar Homes who stated that:

“We protect the child beggars migrated from the neighboring country of Afghanistan or from the tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and it is pertinent to mention that a less number of local child beggars are included among them”.

It is summed up that Peshawar district of Pakistan is close to the border of neighboring country of Afghanistan and people from cross the border easily migrate into Pakistan for many pushing factors. Based on the interviews conducted with the begging children and relevant departments, a large number of child beggars have entered into Peshawar and other parts of Pakistan and started begging here. It is noteworthy that the culture of Pakhtuns from both sides is almost common and it is the main reason that they migrate here and face no communication and cultural problems. But on the other hand, it has bumped up the issue of child beggary in Peshawar city and outskirts. The same is also supported by an extract of a news item published in an English newspaper wherein it is portrayed that a huge increase in child beggary has occurred. Apart from it, Afghan boys were also observed while collecting recyclable trash for the sake of food and money in Peshawar (Daily Times, 2022).

Internal Displacement

Due to war on terror and poverty in Ex-FATA and rural areas of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), many people were forced to shift to Peshawar for shelter or job opportunities. There are certain push and pull factors that motivated the people to move to Peshawar. The era of militancy in the tribal areas (Now the newly merged districts of KP) made the inhabitants to become internally displaced persons normally known as IDPs. Most of these internally displaced persons moved towards Peshawar which was already overburdened by the people

who migrated from rural areas in search of employment in the city. It was difficult to provide all the ruralites with employment and in frustration they adopted begging as a source of livelihood. The 2010's Flood further aggravated the problem.

Mr. Lal khan, a minor boy aged 11 years and begging in the Saddar area of Peshawar, told that:

“I belong to Kuram district of the erstwhile FATA and have now been begging for the last four years in Peshawar Saddar. We have been displaced in 2008 during the period of war on terror. Here we live on rent now and paying Rs.5000 as house rent to the owner. It is a huge amount for IDPs like us. We have brought with us nothing as we left everything there while coming as IDPs”.

A girl of 13 years from the same tribal district, begging at Kohat Bus Terminal in Peshawar told that:

“First, we were displaced and accommodated at Muhammad Khwaja Camp in Hangu, but later we were shifted to Peshawar due to the worst living conditions at the Hangu camp. We were facilitated with food and cash money through Ration Card by the government but now the cards have been blocked and got expired. So, begging has become the only option to fulfill the basic needs”.

Apart from it, transportation of children from other provinces of Pakistan such as Punjab and Sindh is also a political issue in view of the failure of the concerned provincial governments due to their poor governance to play an effective role in controlling their transportation/trafficking. Children from the mentioned provinces are also

found at begging in Peshawar and they are doing it as an organized business or affiliated with mafias. Begging children from the IDPs families have more or less the same situation. A representative of the child Protection Unit viewed that:

“We rescue majority of those children who are migrated for begging from Sindh, Punjab and the merged tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa”.

A police official stated that:

“According to our reports, we have majority of the begging children belonging to Sindh, Punjab and newly merged tribal districts as compared to local begging children who are lesser in number”.

It is summarized that the local children involved in begging were lesser in number than the children displaced due to various reasons like internal displacement from the tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during war on terror, and also children from the Sindh and Punjab provinces. The provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab failed to take stern actions to control the transportation of children, and resultantly the mafias and other networks exploited them.

The armed conflict remained the central factor behind the displacement in Pakistan in 2013 because it compelled a huge number of people to become IDPs by leaving their respective native villages. The year 2009 also observed a big number of internally displaced persons who were compelled to leave their homes. Kälin (2008) quoted a report that those persons who were forced to flee their homes or areas of permanent residence in order to avoid the adverse impacts of armed conflict, violence, human rights violation and natural or human-made disasters.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The above discussion concludes that migration by the afghan families at different times starting from 1979 and onward in view of political turmoil in Afghanistan, secondly the internal displacement within Pakistan due to militancy particularly in the ex-FATA, and thirdly the child transportation/trafficking from the provinces of Sindh and Punjab fueled the issue of child beggary in Peshawar. It is worth-mentioning that Peshawar district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistanis near to the border of neighboring country of Afghanistan where from Afghans are frequently entering into Peshawar. Before merger of tribal belt (FATA) into the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, internal displacement occurred and majority of the IDPS moved into Peshawar which laid an economic pressure on it. The migration of poor individuals or their families from the rural and backward areas of Sindh and Punjab resulting from poverty or floods due to weak political policies of the concerned provinces is also one of the political reasons, which contributed to augmenting child beggary in Peshawar. Kidnapping from these areas can also be termed as the political one because of the expected affiliation of mafia with the influential figures.

The study recommends that the federal and provincial governments should legislate in this respect along with strict implementation after enactment of concerned law to ensure the eradication of child beggary from Peshawar and other parts of the country. The government also needs to move ahead by establishing rehabilitation centers to facilitate the target group of children in the sphere of education and multiple skills. The NGOs should also cooperate with the governments in this regard.

References

1. Anwar, M. (Sep 7, 2022). Beggary: ‘A Societal Curse’. Retrieved from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/993885/beggary-a-societal-curse/> on Jan, 10, 2023.

2. Adugna, G. (2006). Livelihoods and survival strategies among migrant children i Addis Ababa (Master's thesis, Geografisk institute).
3. Ansari, M. R. (2006). Protecting Human Rights. Maxford Books.
4. Daily Times. (2022). Begging, a Lucrative Business in Ramazan. Retrieved from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/914860/begging-a-lucrative-business-in-ramazan/> on July 24, 2022
5. Daily Times, 2022. April 6. Begging a Lucrative Business in Ramazan. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/914860/begging-a-lucrative-business-in-ramazan/>
6. Delap, E. (2009). Begging for Change: Research findings and recommendations on forced child begging in Albania/Greece, India and Senegal.
7. Hammarberg, T. (1990). The UN convention on the rights of the child-- and how to make it work. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 12(1), 97-105.
8. International Labour Organization. (2015). *World report on child labour 2015: Paving the way to decent work for young people*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organization.
9. Jabeen, T., & Akhunzada, Z. U. (2017). An Assessment of the Staff's Capacity to Implement the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection & Welfare Act 2010. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, 9(2), 15-28.
10. Kaime-Atterhög, W., & Ahlberg, B. M. (2008). Are street children beyond rehabilitation? Understanding the life situation of street boys through ethnographic methods in Nakuru, Kenya. Retrieved from <https://swepub.kb.se/showrecord?q=onr%3A%22swepub%3Aoi%3ADiVA.org%3Auu-86661%22&n=1&d=swepub&language=en&noredirect=true&tab2=abstract> on July 23, 2022.
11. Khan, A. (2011). Child Beggars. Retrieved from [https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/02/25/child-beggars/?Page%20Speed=no script](https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/02/25/child-beggars/?Page%20Speed=no%20script). on Jan, 27, 2021.
12. Kennedy, C., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2000). *Getting by: begging, rough sleeping and the Big Issue in Glasgow and Edinburgh*. Policy Press.
13. Khoso, A., & Yew, V. W. (2015). Recognizing invisible structural violence on juveniles: A case of Pakistan. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(4), 141-141.
14. Milne, B. (2015). Signed, ratified but not implemented. In *Rights of the Child* (pp. 31-47). Springer, Cham.
15. Noguchi, Y. (2002). ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 10, 355-369.
16. Nwazuke, A. N., & Igwe, C. A. (2016). Worst forms of child labour in Nigeria: An appraisal of international and local legal Regimes. *Beijing L. Rev.*, 7, 69.
17. The Express Tribune. 2022. 17 July. Publisher Naeem Sadiq. Need for Child Protection Reforms. The police professional and citizens of Pakistan have no obligation report. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2364828/need-for-child-protection-reforms>