

# Street Begging in Kuala Lumpur

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**Abstract.** Street begging is a prevalent concern to any part of the country. In Malaysia, the street begging is raising phenomenon and the issue is cater under the Akta Orang Papa 1977 Act 183. Malaysia's Social Welfare Department had identified a total of 119 foreign beggars in Malaysia between January and June 2012 while on 2011, the Welfare Department rounded up 1408 beggars and from the total of that, 318 were foreigners. This paper aims to explore the factor beyond the existence of street beggars in Kuala Lumpur. This fundamental study is using cross-sectional survey involving 150 respondents which are the beggars under the care of Welfare Department and the data collected by using questionnaires. The statistical result ( $r = .336$ ,  $p < .01$ ) shows that poverty has a significant positive relationship toward the street begging. The findings of this study reflecting the theory of Vicious Cycle of Poverty.

**Keywords:** Vicious Cycle Poverty Theory, Street begs, Community, Welfare

## 1. Introduction

Street begging is a prevalent concern to any part of the country. It is reported that an average of ten people tends to beg every day (Lynch, 2005). Lynch (2005) stated that the street begging activities often regarded as anti-social behavior among the people. The street beggars were found everywhere in the public spaces such as gas stations, restaurants, supermarket, mosque and church. The street begging activities has received little attention by the authority and public (Lynch, 2005). According to the report by UNICEF (1990) the beggars were the victims of abuse, neglect and abandonment of society. Namwata (2012) stated that street begging is an urban problem and often obviously seen in every urban area. This is evident in the study by Jordan (1999) in which begging has also become highly visible in Britain cities. Namwata (2012) stated that this condition is a reflection of urban complexity worldwide and has become a common phenomenon for years and the population of the beggars on the streets is increasing. This was also agreed by (Shekighenda, 2006) that stated the problem of street beggars were severe in urban areas where the street beggars populated as compared to other areas. As the period of June 2013, The Department of Social Welfare (JKM) has nabbed 343 vagrants and beggars nationwide. Statistics show that Kuala Lumpur recorded the number of beggars and homeless persons (3 October, 2013, News Straits Times). According to Children Act 2001 Malaysia under section 3 (2), a child cannot be forced into begging either for street performances or hawk, sell lottery, gambling or other activities that will detrimental to their health and welfare and any party or any of the found in violation of this rule shall be liable to a fine of not more than RM5, 000 or imprisonment not exceeding two years or both. According to Public Relations Officer, Department of Social Welfare (JKM) although the Destitute Persons Act 1977 provides for the rescue and rehabilitation of vagrants and beggars in Rehabilitation Institution under the DSW, the essence of the Act is more rehabilitative in nature.

The number of beggars reported to be on the rise due in parts to the caring and generous public (12 July, 2012, The Borneo Post). There is also comments given by the Kuala Lumpur Welfare Department (JKM) Deputy Director, Rosman Khan ZainulAbidin Khan stated that the Malaysians matter of giving and easily sympathizing with peoples' grievances is causing activities in Malaysia hard to be stopped (12 July, 2012, The Borneo Post). Due to this kind of culture that practice by Malaysian which too generous and sympathy to the inconveniences of other people had led the beggars to take advantage on that and making begging as their profession. According to Kuala Lumpur Welfare Department (JKM) Deputy Director, Rosman Khan ZainulAbidin Khan, begging can be defined as any act which is considered to encourage the giving of alms, by pretending to sing, play, act and offering something for sale. Kennedy and Fitzpatrick (2001) defined

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begging as asking passersby for money in public place. The beggars may use various modus operandi in order to gain public sympathy so that they may collect some funds from them (12 July, 2012, The Borneo Post). This problem cannot just be ignored and neglected because it can have adverse effects on the environment, economy and social. The negative effect of beggars in terms of the environment is the existence of the beggars may portray a bad image to Malaysia (6 July, 2012, The News Strait Times). It has been reported the comments from The Auxiliary Police Officer, Constable MohdAris Muslim that he had received many complaints from the public about the presence of beggars and vagrants in the area which give the country a bad image especially to foreign tourists (3 October, 2012, The Star). As street begging is raising issue in Malaysia, thus this paper to measure the significant factors of street begging in Kuala Lumpur.

## **2. Vicious Circle of Poverty Theory**

The theory of "vicious circle of poverty" seeks to explain the determination of poverty in the society and shows that poverty as a subculture, passes from one generation to another and becomes institutionalized among the poor (Namwata, 2012). It is one of the features that provide the ground for the phenomenon of begging. This theory emphasizes on people's inability to manage risk rather than their attitude to risk as a way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Other attributes of poverty which make escape difficult are poor health, lack of skills, lack of self-confidence or support mechanism, remoteness from market, lack of physical asset or borrowing power, malnourishments or a combination of the above (Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009). As a result, the poor are trapped in the situation with little chance of escaping such that in a vicious process, poverty is maintained among the poor across the generations. Therefore, in order for the poor to meet their basic needs, they have to resort into begging. The vicious circle of poverty helps to explain the existence of begging across the generations (Jelili, 2006).

### **2.1. Poverty and Street Begging**

Poverty, in its nature, is defined as the state of being extremely poor (Jelili, 2006). In this study, poverty has a positive significant relationship with street begging. This work supported by Adedibu (1989) which stated that begging is considered as the instrument for the poor which see begging as their potential source of income and has always been a major outlet for them to come through. In addition, Kennedy and Fitzpatrick (2011) also agree with it as it indicates poverty as the absence of financial support has resorted to begging on street for survival means. Similar findings on poverty as the movement of street begging were reported by Amman (2006) and Tambawal (2010) as cited in Ogunkan and Fawole (2009). A study, previously conducted by Delap (2009), shows the same result, where poverty, which can be defined as a lack of essential items such as food, clothing and shelter that are needed for proper living forces the poor to begging on the street for generates some income for survival means.

Urban poverty is one of the causes that can lead to street begging as the poor to stay in inner-city face serious economic pressure. This is due to urbanization where rampant development of the city especially in Kuala Lumpur. The Economic Planning Unit (2013), Prime Minister's Department Malaysia figures that the abject poor households in the Malaysian nation at 53.5%. In the abject poor household category comprises Malaysia peninsular has 35.1%, Sabah 53.6%, and Sarawak 11.4% (EPU, 2013). The Poverty Line Income (PLI) for Peninsular Malaysia is RM 763 (EPU, 2013). This number seems to be not ideal as compared to the growth of economic level and the increase in the cost of living. Due to the socioeconomic pressure, there is a tendency for the poor to go to the street for begging as the final decision.

### **2.2. Method and Material**

Quantitative method was used in this research to drive the understanding of the relationship between the begging factors and street begging behavior. The data are collected through questionnaires. The population was among the street beggars placed by the Welfare Department in Anjung Singgah Dan Desa Bina Diri. In order to examine the data, Pearson Correlation Analysis was used to define the relationship between identified variable and street begging in Kuala Lumpur.

### **2.3. Findings**

### 2.3.1 Profile of respondents

In this profile of respondents, the researchers discussed about the respondents demographic such as gender, age, education and marital status. The result indicates the counts of gender, where 105 respondents are male while 45 respondents are female, which indicates 70 percent and 30 percent respectively. The age of respondents is set up from 15 to above 46 years old and this scope was used in order to identify the involvement of children age below than 18 years old in the street begging. The highest participation is from 67 respondents of beggars aged from 46 years old and above (44.7 %). Conversely, the lowest is from 17 respondents with the age range of between 15 to 25 years old (11.3 %). For the education level, there are three categories, namely Primary, Secondary and No Formal Education. From the survey, most of the respondents have no academic qualification which is 42 people, 28 percent of the total number of respondents. Respondents with Primary qualification are 32.7 percent and Secondary qualification is 39.3 percent. Furthermore, the total number of respondents who is unmarried is 75 people (50%) which is the highest and follow by married 44 people (29.3%) and divorced 31 people (20.7).

### 2.3.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Analysis

No	Construct Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Street begging	-				
2	Poverty	0.336**	-			
3	Disability	0.124	0.223**	-		
4	Human trafficking	0.057	0.43	0.161*	-	
5	Homelessness	0.075	0.246**	0.146	0.041	-

\*\*p<.001

In examining the relationship between poverty, disability, human trafficking and homeless with street begging, the statistic used is Pearson Correlation. This statistic is used because it can generate the relationship between the independent variables and a dependent variable of this research. The Pearson correlation analysis is the testing of the hypotheses of this research, which is to find whether the hypotheses are accepted or rejected. Hypothesis for the paper is there is a significant relationship between identified variables and street begging in Kuala Lumpur. Table 1 above shows the result of the Pearson correlation analysis. In this research, the accepted significant level is  $p < 0.001$  and  $p < 0.005$ . The result shows that only one variable that has a positive significant relationship with street begging which is Poverty with relationship accuracy of  $r: 0.336$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Thus, researchers do accept the Hypothesis that there is positive relationship between poverty and street begging in Kuala Lumpur.

## 3. Discussion

The result from this survey is also consistent with the research by Namwata (2012) that stated, in such a vicious cycle, poverty is maintained across generation. Therefore, to meet their basic needs, the poor resort to begging. It also endorsed the study by Nora Groce and Barbara Murray (2012) which stated that begging is an activity emanated from poverty and destitutions.

While talking about poverty in Kuala Lumpur, one need to hold in their mind that as Kuala Lumpur is the well developing city how could street begging happened. Thus, it proved that urban poverty lead to this matter. The rampant urbanization scenario leads to this social problem. In 2011, the research done by Mercer provides the statistic that urbanization rate in Kuala Lumpur is 76 percent (16 December, 2013, The Edge). Rapid urbanization makes more economic pressure as an increasing number of the population leads to higher demand in job opportunities, housing and access to economic activities such as food outlets. These are the basic demand of the population; however, the government cannot cater these issues due to the limited fund. While the cost of living in urban areas is an increasing trend but limited incomes faced by the people especially by the poor those live in city foster them to beg in the street as the easiest way in gaining income. Even some of them make street begging as their main job to find income (Department of Welfare, 2013). The poors need to accept the fact that challenging live in city depressed them especially those with a level of academic qualification at not at a satisfactory level. The vicious poverty cycle practically applied here, with

the poor in urban may not afford to send their children to get better education level therefore their children will inherit the poverty from their parents. Unfortunately, the authorities such as the welfare department and the religious council may not enough fund to help them as those people live in rural areas also need aid by from the government. Therefore, it is not surprising if the trend of street begging will be continued increasing from time to time as the one of the factors that can be considered as the root factor which is educational access is not properly handled.

In Malaysia, many strategies have been adopted to address poverty and to reduce its impact. Despite the numbers of poor people were reduced sharply, relative and urban poverty seems to be worsening, since the cost of living within the urban areas is much higher than that in rural areas (Samat et al., 2010). Along the line, the government of Malaysia has eliminated the incidence of poverty very sharp and even went beyond the MDG expected. Malaysia managed to reduce poverty from almost 50% in 1970 to 22.8% 1990 and to only 5.7% in 2009 and the ambition is to reduce it to zero in the Vision 2020 (Yassin Abdallah and Narimah, 2012). Despite this positive progress in eradicating poverty, incidences of poverty can still be found and it varies considerably by state and among the various ethnic groups (Yassin Abdallah and Narimah, 2012) . According to UNDP (2005) the highest incidences of poverty are in Sabah 16% and Kelantan 12% while ethnic differences remain marked with 7.3% among Malays, 1.5% for Chinese, and 1.9% for Indians. To address these disparities and achieve economic growth with equity, Malaysia has gone into a series of strategic plans and these plans include New Economic Policy (1971-1990), National Development Policy (1991-2000), National Vision Policy (2001-2005), Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) and Vision 2020 while the NEP (1971-1991) concentrated on building a country with an advanced economy, balancing social development and reducing income disparity among different ethnic groups (Yassin Abdallah and Narimah, 2012). Even though government introduced 5 year plan to curb this issue, unfortunately urban poverty remain as the major issue because while the government had implemented effective and efficient policies to help the poor in the city however the cost of living also increase parallel to the efforts that the government had done. Hence, there are many efforts need to be done not only by the government but also the private sectors and the community organizations. In the recent situation with the announcement of the 2013 budget, the government increases the sum of one-off cash handout amount from RM 500 to RM 650 of those people with income lower than RM 3000 and RM 500 to those incomes range RM 4000-RM 5000 (Economic Planning Unit, 2013). Other than that, the government also provides the Perumahan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (PR1MA) to help the poor in urban to have their own home. The involvement of private sector also is seen very important to cater the issue of urban poverty, notwithstanding the involvement of private sector seems not as much as expected by the government (Economic Planning Unit, 2013) thus it creates a situation whereby urban poverty remain as the major issue in the city, in this case Kuala Lumpur.

#### **4. Recommendation**

In order to resolve the issue of street begging, the root factor which is poverty need to be catered. Therefore, it is recommended to the government to review the economic policy to ensure it is more inclusive for those poor are stayed in urban areas. The roles of a New Economic Model and the Malaysian Plan need to re-address the issue of inner city poverty as it can lead to more serious societal problems in this case street begging. Without denying the continuous efforts done by the authority in solving the issue, however it is necessary for the authority to re-look on the equality of economic growth between the rural and urban areas to ensure balance development progress. While talking about the income, revisiting the Poverty Line Income may be necessary as the basic determinant for PLI such as food, utilities and housing cost is in increasing trend where these are the factors that can contribute to urban poverty in Kuala Lumpur.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The result demonstrates that only poverty is positively significant toward the street begging in Kuala Lumpur. The finding of this research is parallel to the studies conducted previously by Adibu (1989), Jelili (2006), Ogunkan and Fowale (2009), Kennedy and Fitzpatrick (2011) and a report by the Economic Planning Unit of Malaysia (2013). In order to resolve the issue, a comprehensive economic policy must be

implemented to ensure urban poverty can be cut down and stop when Malaysia achieve high income developed nation by the year 2020.

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