

An Analytical Study of the Social, Economic and Familial Causes of Child Begging in India

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Abstract

Child begging is one of the serious social and humanitarian challenges confronting Indian society. It adversely affects children's education, health, safety, dignity and overall development. The present study examines the major social, economic and familial factors that contribute to the prevalence of child begging in India. The study demonstrates that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, income inequality, rural-to-urban migration, social exclusion and organised begging networks are among the significant social and economic factors that push children towards begging. In addition, family disintegration, domestic violence, parental illiteracy, substance abuse, parental neglect, orphanhood and abandonment further increase children's vulnerability to begging. The study adopts a socio-legal perspective and examines the relevant constitutional safeguards, child protection laws and governmental policies designed to protect children from exploitation and deprivation. It argues that the existence of legal provisions alone cannot adequately address the problem unless such provisions are effectively implemented at the grassroots level. Quality education, social security, family empowerment, employment opportunities, public awareness and effective rehabilitation mechanisms are equally essential for addressing the structural causes of child begging. The study concludes that the elimination of child begging requires a multidimensional and coordinated strategy involving the government, judiciary, law-enforcement agencies, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations, families and local communities. The protection of children's rights must extend beyond rescue operations and include long-term rehabilitation, education, social integration and economic support for vulnerable families. The findings of the study may provide useful insights for policymakers, legal scholars, child-rights organisations and other stakeholders concerned with the protection of children and the promotion of human dignity and social justice.

Keywords: Child Begging, Social Causes, Economic Causes, Familial Causes, Child Rights, Poverty, Illiteracy, Social Exclusion, Child Protection, Rehabilitation.

1. Introduction

Child begging represents a serious social, economic and humanitarian concern in contemporary Indian society. It poses a significant challenge to the protection of children's rights, human

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Published: 17 August 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJMRS.2026.v2.i3.301165>

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dignity and opportunities for holistic development. Childhood is a crucial stage of human development during which every child should have access to education, healthcare, adequate nutrition, protection, emotional support and opportunities for the development of his or her personality. However, when children are compelled to beg for their livelihood or for the financial benefit of others, they are deprived of many of the essential conditions necessary for a safe and dignified childhood. Child begging is not merely an issue of individual poverty. It is a multidimensional phenomenon arising from the interaction of economic deprivation, social inequality, family instability, educational exclusion, unemployment, migration, exploitation and inadequate social protection. Poverty and unemployment may compel economically vulnerable families to depend upon the income generated by their children. In many cases, children discontinue their education and enter public spaces such as streets, markets, religious places and traffic intersections to seek money or other forms of assistance. Family-related circumstances also contribute significantly to the persistence of child begging. Family breakdown, domestic violence, parental substance abuse, parental neglect, abandonment and the absence of adequate care and supervision may expose children to unsafe living conditions. Children who are orphaned, abandoned or separated from their families may become particularly vulnerable to exploitation. In some cases, organised groups may exploit such vulnerabilities by compelling or manipulating children into begging for financial gain. The problem also has a significant socio-legal dimension. The Constitution of India provides important safeguards relating to equality, life and personal liberty, protection against exploitation and children's right to education. Various legislative measures, including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 and the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, provide a legal framework for the protection and development of children. Nevertheless, the continuing existence of child begging demonstrates that legislative protection alone cannot eliminate the problem. Effective implementation of laws, accessible education, social-security mechanisms, livelihood opportunities, family support, community participation and rehabilitation services are equally important. A child-centred approach must therefore remain at the core of all intervention strategies. The present study seeks to analyse the social, economic and familial causes of child begging and to examine the issue from a socio-legal perspective. It further attempts to identify the structural factors responsible for the persistence of the problem and proposes measures for prevention, protection, rehabilitation and social reintegration. The study is intended to contribute to the broader discourse on child rights, social justice and human dignity in India.

2. Concept of Child Begging

The concept of child begging refers to a situation in which a child below the age of eighteen seeks money, food, clothing or other forms of assistance from members of the public, either for his or her own subsistence or for the financial benefit of another person. Although begging may appear to be an individual economic activity, in the case of children it is frequently associated with broader structural conditions such as poverty, family disintegration, illiteracy, unemployment, social exclusion, exploitation and trafficking. Child begging deprives children of opportunities that are fundamental to their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. Children engaged in begging frequently remain outside the formal education

system and are exposed to hazardous environments, violence, abuse, exploitation, substance use and criminal activities. Their vulnerability may be further intensified when they are controlled or exploited by organised groups. From a socio-legal perspective, child begging should therefore not be understood merely as an act of seeking charity. It represents a condition in which children may be deprived of their basic rights and developmental opportunities. An effective response consequently requires more than temporary relief or charitable assistance. It requires legal protection, educational inclusion, social security, family empowerment, rehabilitation and sustained community participation.

3. Meaning of Child Begging

In its general sense, child begging may be understood as a situation in which a child seeks money, food, clothing or other forms of assistance from members of the public in order to meet basic needs or to generate financial benefits for another individual. Such activity may occur in public places including streets, markets, religious sites, transport terminals and traffic intersections. Although some children may appear to engage in begging voluntarily, their participation is frequently influenced by poverty, family pressures, abandonment, social exclusion or exploitation. In certain circumstances, children may also be compelled or manipulated by adults or organised groups to beg for their economic benefit. The consequences extend beyond the immediate act of begging. Children engaged in begging may lose access to formal education, healthcare, adequate nutrition and a secure family environment. They may also face physical and psychological abuse, trafficking, substance dependence and other forms of exploitation. Thus, child begging should be understood as a manifestation of social and economic vulnerability rather than merely as an isolated economic activity. In the Indian context, the phenomenon is closely connected with poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, social inequality and family instability. Consequently, addressing child begging requires coordinated intervention by the State, families, communities and civil society organisations.

4. Definition of Child Begging

There is no single universally accepted definition of child begging. From a socio-legal perspective, however, it may broadly be described as:

“A situation in which a person below eighteen years of age seeks money, food, clothing or other forms of assistance in public places, either independently or under the direction, control or influence of another person, for personal subsistence or for the economic benefit of another.”

This understanding makes it clear that child begging cannot be examined solely through the conduct of the child. The circumstances that compel or influence the child to engage in begging must also be considered. Where a child is forced, coerced, manipulated or controlled by parents, guardians, intermediaries or organised groups for the purpose of begging and financial gain, the situation assumes the character of exploitation and raises serious child-protection concerns. The principles embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasise the child's rights to survival, development, protection and participation. From this perspective, child begging may interfere with the effective enjoyment of several fundamental rights, particularly the rights relating to education, health, protection from exploitation and dignified development. Therefore, child begging should be treated as a social, economic and

legal issue requiring an integrated response. Its prevention cannot be achieved merely through punitive measures; rather, it requires addressing the underlying causes and ensuring the child's long-term protection, education and rehabilitation.

5. Social Causes of Child Begging

Social factors play a significant role in pushing children towards begging. Poverty, illiteracy, social inequality, unemployment, migration, inadequate social awareness and exclusion of vulnerable communities are among the major social conditions associated with the phenomenon. Children belonging to economically disadvantaged families may be deprived of educational opportunities and basic services. When families lack sufficient resources, children may be withdrawn from school and encouraged or compelled to contribute to household survival. Lack of awareness regarding children's rights and the long-term importance of education can further reinforce this cycle. Rural-to-urban migration is another relevant factor. Families migrating to urban areas in search of employment may experience difficulties in securing stable employment, housing, healthcare and education. Children in such families may consequently spend considerable time in public spaces and become vulnerable to begging and exploitation. Social exclusion and discrimination may also increase vulnerability. Marginalised families and communities may have limited access to education, employment and social-security programmes. In the absence of effective institutional support, children from such backgrounds may be exposed to begging as an alternative means of survival. Another serious concern is the involvement of organised networks. Vulnerable children may be exploited by individuals or groups who use them to obtain financial benefits. Such exploitation may involve coercion, deception, trafficking or other forms of abuse. Public attitudes towards begging may also unintentionally contribute to the continuation of the practice. Individuals who provide money directly to children, although motivated by compassion, may inadvertently create an economic incentive for continued child begging. Therefore, public awareness should encourage people to support legitimate child-protection and rehabilitation mechanisms rather than reinforcing exploitative practices.

6. Economic Causes of Child Begging

Economic deprivation is one of the most significant factors contributing to child begging. Poverty, unemployment, unstable income, inflation, indebtedness and unequal access to economic opportunities may place families under severe financial pressure. When families are unable to meet basic requirements such as food, housing, healthcare and education, children may be pushed into income-generating activities. In some cases, begging becomes one of the few immediately available means of obtaining money or food. Rural households may face additional economic vulnerabilities because of dependence on agriculture, seasonal employment and uncertain income. Crop failure, natural disasters, debt and seasonal unemployment can significantly reduce household income. Such circumstances may encourage migration to urban areas, where families may continue to face unstable employment and inadequate living conditions. Economic exploitation represents another important dimension. Children may be used by individuals or organised groups as instruments for generating income through begging. In such situations, the money collected by children may be appropriated by adults, leaving the children without meaningful control over the earnings generated through

their labour. Limited access to social-security benefits, lack of awareness regarding government welfare schemes and inadequate livelihood opportunities for vulnerable households may further aggravate the situation. Accordingly, addressing child begging requires policies directed not only towards children but also towards the economic conditions of their families. Poverty reduction, employment generation, effective implementation of social-security schemes, educational support and economic empowerment of vulnerable families are therefore essential components of a sustainable strategy for preventing child begging.

7. Familial Causes of Child Begging

Family is the primary institution responsible for the care, protection and socialisation of a child. When the family itself experiences economic, social or emotional instability, children may become particularly vulnerable to begging and other forms of exploitation. Extreme poverty and unemployment may compel parents to depend upon children's economic contributions. In some families, children may therefore be encouraged or forced to beg in order to supplement household income. Parental illiteracy may further reduce awareness regarding the importance of education and children's legal rights. Family disintegration is another important factor. Persistent parental conflict, separation, divorce, domestic violence and emotional instability can create an unsafe environment for children. Some children may leave home or become separated from their families and subsequently survive through begging. Parental substance abuse, gambling and irresponsible behaviour can also undermine family welfare. When household resources are diverted towards addictive or harmful activities, children's basic needs may remain unmet. In extreme circumstances, children may be neglected, abandoned or exposed to exploitative environments. Orphaned, abandoned and children living without adequate parental care may face particularly high levels of vulnerability. Without effective institutional support, they may come into contact with exploitative individuals or organised networks involved in begging and trafficking. Lack of parental awareness about child rights and education can further perpetuate the problem. In some households, children may be viewed primarily as additional sources of income rather than as individuals entitled to education, protection and development. Therefore, prevention strategies must include family counselling, parental awareness, social-security support, livelihood opportunities, educational assistance and effective child-protection mechanisms. Strengthening vulnerable families is essential for ensuring that children are not compelled to depend upon begging for survival.

8. Conclusion

Child begging is a complex social problem resulting from the interaction of social, economic and familial factors. It cannot be attributed exclusively to poverty. Illiteracy, unemployment, social inequality, migration, family disintegration, domestic violence, parental neglect, substance abuse and inadequate awareness of children's rights may collectively contribute to a child's involvement in begging. Children engaged in begging are often deprived of education, healthcare, nutrition, safety and opportunities for healthy development. Their exposure to public spaces also increases their vulnerability to physical and psychological abuse, trafficking, substance use and other forms of exploitation. Although the Indian constitutional and legislative framework provides significant protection to children, the continued prevalence of child begging demonstrates the need for stronger implementation and coordinated institutional

action. Legal provisions must be supported by effective educational programmes, social-security measures, family empowerment, employment opportunities and rehabilitation services. The elimination of child begging therefore requires a comprehensive child-centred strategy. Government agencies, courts, law-enforcement authorities, educational institutions, civil-society organisations, local communities and families must work together to identify vulnerable children, prevent exploitation, restore educational opportunities and provide long-term rehabilitation. Every child is entitled to grow in a safe and supportive environment with access to education, healthcare, nutrition, protection and dignity. Ensuring these conditions is not merely a matter of charity but a matter of rights, social justice and constitutional responsibility. A sustainable solution to child begging can therefore be achieved only when preventive, protective and rehabilitative measures operate together. The ultimate objective should be to create a society in which no child is compelled to beg for survival and every child has a genuine opportunity to develop his or her abilities and live a life of dignity.

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