

## Original Article

# Assessment of spatial distribution, characteristics, and socio-economic status of urban beggars in Karachi city, Pakistan

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## Abstract

Begging is a social problem of every urbanized city, most importantly in the developing countries. Due to the increasing population and lack of earning resources in the urban cities, begging is now extremely entrenched in the roots of society. The problem has never been resolved either by the government or civil society, particularly in the developing world. Beggars are usually found in highly dense urban and sub urban areas so that the advantage of the structural inequality of wealth and mobility between the beggars can be achieved. This study is conducted in Karachi, a mega city of Pakistan. Eighteen different towns of the city were surveyed during the study period and around 740 beggars were interviewed. The main aim of the study was to find out the characteristics, socioeconomic status, and the spatial distribution of the urban beggars. A stratified random sampling method is used to collect the data. The study confirms the influence of land use on the spread of beggars. The study also finds out that most of the beggars are migrated from different provinces and based on gender; percentage of male beggars is high as compared to the female beggars. The study further reveals that beggars typically move toward the highly urbanized areas of the city to earn a good earning. The study suggests that the municipalities and NGOs can work together to get rid of this social problem by implementing the policies and procedures already laid down to accommodate these beggars in the mainstream of society.

**Keywords :** Beggars, social problem, spatial distribution, urban area, land use area, Towns, Karachi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Begging is considered as one of the serious social problems on a substantial scale in every society. According to Lynch (2005) it is a social phenomenon of "solicitation of a voluntary unilateral gift, most often money, in a public place". Due to the increasing population and lack of earning resources in the urban cities, begging is getting extremely entrenched in the roots of the society. It is recognized that poverty is the most important promoter for this movement (Ristevska-Dimitrovska et al., 2021). It is a global problem originating. Similarly all over the world, especially in the developing countries and most specifically in public places including parks, bus stops, shops, on the roads or in the streets (Shahid et al., 2021). There are certain other factors as well that play important role in the spread of this problem such as: lack of education, unemployment, early marriages, homelessness, social segregation, lack of identification for family members that leads to disregarding of their communities, preconceptions, stereotypes, discrimination and exclusion from society (Arifi et al., 2013). Similarly, children are also involved in this system that is further linked with child prostitution, drug abuse, risk of trafficking and



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involvement of children in criminal acts. Certain Religious factors also influences the beggary system through zakat and madrassas (Azam, 2011).

It is revealed by the Thamrin and Ritonga (2018), that the issue of urban beggars has never been completely resolved by either the government or civil society. Therefore, most of the beggars are usually found in highly dense urban and sub urban areas so that the advantage of the structural inequality of wealth and mobility between the beggars and tourists can be achieved (Bernstein et al., 2019). These beggars often used to earn money by executing their arts and skills. However, they must ultimately rely on the mercy of society (Khan et al., 2013). In many countries the population of street beggars is increasing progressively. In a province of West Java in Indonesia the population of street beggars has increased by 8,352 people in 2020 (Shara et al., 2020). Similarly, in Pakistan the population of beggars is increasing gradually, and the peoples are migrating from rural to urban areas. Due to increasing inflation rate and lack of income resources, they are shifting towards the urban centers to get the benefit of the available basic facilities in cities.

In an Islamic country like Pakistan, the problem of beggary is intensified to a greater extent also because of religious norms. The country practices religious instructions, authorization of the constitution order of the panhandlers, preach charity, alms and call for public sympathy with the wellbeing of the masses. According to Human development Index Pakistan ranked 154th out of 170 countries, upper side of low human development (Conceição, 2020). In Pakistan, 81.352 million peoples, approximately 38.3 percent of the total population are multidimensional poor. While 27.419 million (12.9 percent) are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty according to the Human Development Report (2020).

In pakistan beggary is now becoming a social evil and an organised crime. Its magnitude has reached to an frightening stage and beggars have become an additional burden on the society (Shahid et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the magnitude and causes of beggary in the streets of Karachi city and to identify social issues in terms of homelessness, poverty, injustice, and unemployment. For the said purpose, the study aims to find out the type of beggar trafficking being happening in the streets of Karachi along with the exploration of the ideologies being exploited by the beggars within the city. This paper also helps to identify the hotspot areas of begging and the most deprived towns of the city so that government and NGOs should take proper actions by providing social support in terms of financial assistance, food, shelter and health etc.

## 2. MATERIALS & METHODS

### Study Area

The study was conducted in Karachi that is the financial hub of the country. This city was selected because this is not only highly populated but also highly urbanized. It is considered as the sixth largest urban accumulation worldwide, which spread over an area of 3780.00 km<sup>2</sup> (Brinkhoff, 2017). It lies in the southern parts of the Sindh province and surrounded by Dadu district in the north, Thatta to the northeast, and Lasbela district of Baluchistan province to the northwest direction (Qureshi, 2010). The city is administratively divided into six districts namely District East, West, Central, South, Malir and Korangi. These districts are further divided into 178 Union councils. The urbanization rate of the city is 2.81% (KMC, 2017). Currently around 27.51 million people are inhabited in the city which is 38.8% of the total population of Pakistan (Centralized agency, 2016).

The study is conducted in all eighteen different towns of Karachi city namely: North Nazimabad, Gulberg, Gulshan e Iqbal, New Karachi, Liaquatabad, Landhi, SITE area, Korangi, Baldia, Jamshed, Malir, Orangi, Shah Faisal, Kemari, Saddar, Bin Qasim, Gadap and Layari towns (Figure, 1). All these towns belong to different socioeconomic groups. However, a large segment of the population lives below the poverty line in Karachi. Approximately, 75% of its inhabitants belong to the poor to middle income group and almost 40% of these people lives in the slum areas of the city (Hasan et al., 2013). There are three major industrial zones in Karachi which spread in four different towns of Korangi, Landhi, SITE and New Karachi. Some of the agricultural practices are also observed in Malir and Gadap towns. In these towns the population usually belongs to the low to middle income group. North Nazimabad, Gulshane Iqbal and Gulberg are densely populated towns and have good socioeconomic status.

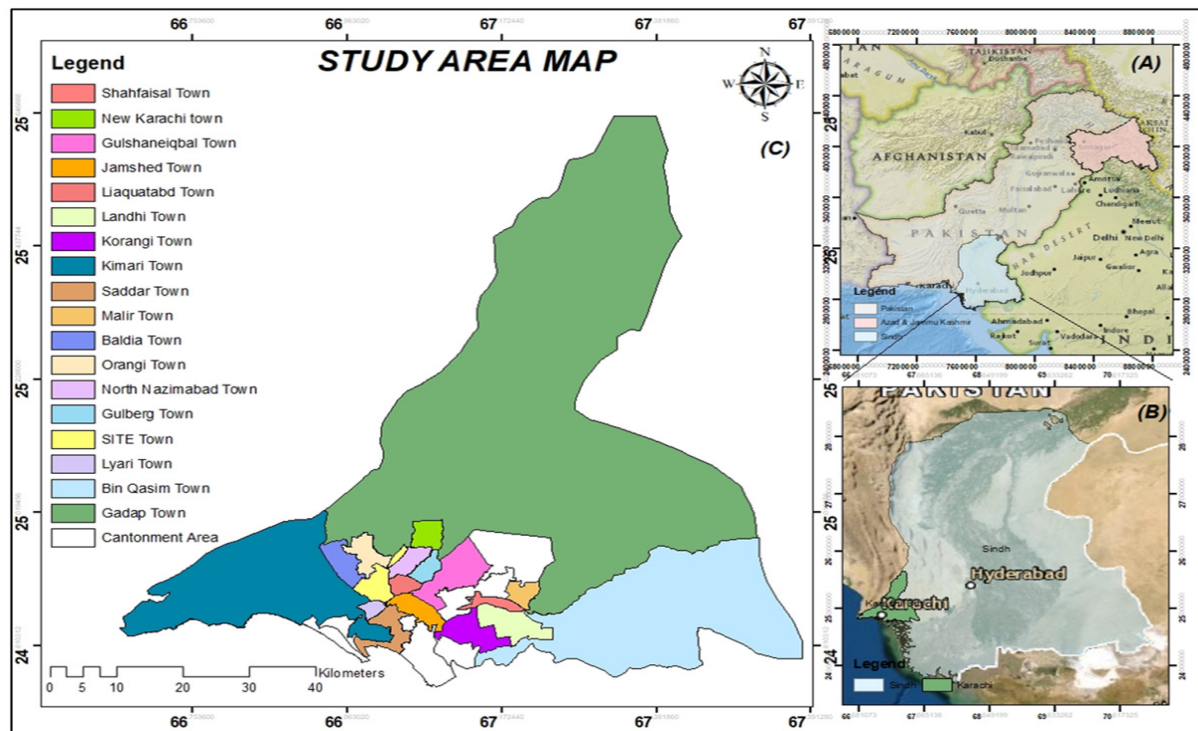


Figure 1: Showing the study area map, (a) Pakistan (b) Sindh (c) Distribution of towns in Karachi city

### Data collection & analysis

The study was designed and generally based on qualitative research. The overall methodology and data acquisition method of the study can be seen in Table 1. The data collection method was based on the personal communications with beggars and a survey questionnaire tool was used for this purpose. The target population was beggars roaming around in the streets of different towns of Karachi city. A stratified random sampling method was used to collect the data (Shahid et al., 2021). Beggars were asked questions regarding their reasons for begging, their age, ethnicity, and residence. The types and characteristics of the beggars were also determined as well as they were screened to perceive any kind of disability in them. Qualification and monthly income were another important parameter used to identify the illiteracy and socioeconomic status of beggars. The duration of the survey was 180 days (10 days for each town). The survey was conducted at different targeted locations including grocery markets, bus stop, traffic signals, public places, and commercial areas.

The data was analyzed using the SPSS (v.25) for descriptive statistics and to determine the relationships among different variables. Arc Map (v.10.7) was used to generate different maps for the spatial distribution of beggars, population density of the city and the hot spot areas of beggars.

**Table 1**

Data acquisition method

Variables	Data Type	Acquisition technique	Tool	Sources
Characteristic of beggars	Primary	Interview	Questionnaire	Informant

## 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Population density & land use type of the towns

Field survey was conducted in eighteen different towns of Karachi to determine the spatial distribution and characteristic of urban beggars. The data of population is taken from the official website of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2021). Population density in these towns can be seen in Figure 2.

The lowest population density is found in Kemari and Gadap towns because most of the areas in these towns are vacant while the residential area of Kemari town is only 5%. Population density between 1372 to 19145 per square kilometer lies in five different towns namely Gulshan e Iqbal, Bin Qasim, Shah Faisal, Landhi and S.I.T.E towns. Land of Bin Qasim town is principally used for industrial activities; however, the residential area is increasing with time due to increase in the population growth and the migration of



peoples from different provinces. Landhi town is also considered as an industrial area as the large land area is used for industrial and commercial purposes. Only 40% of the area of Landhi town is categorized as a residential area. Gulshan e Iqbal and Shah Faisal towns are basically residential areas, and their urbanization rate is increasing annually. Malir, Baldia, Korangi, Gulberg and Saddar towns have the third highest population density within the category of 19145 to 34971 per square kilo meters. In Baldia town most of the population lies in the katchi abadis (squatter settlements) and almost 50% of the land use area is occupied by the low socio-economic income group dwellers.

In Malir town most of the land use area is occupied by the urbanized population while within this town agriculture activity is also being observed that covers an area of almost 20% of the land use. Saddar town is mostly utilized for commercial activities in the city, whilst it is one of the oldest and most populous towns of Karachi. Peoples of different ethnic and religious groups are residing in Karachi and that is why different place of worships are available for different religions. These religious sites are often a good attraction to commercial beggars. Gulberg town is also occupied by the residential land use type while most of the area of the town is highly urbanized. While Korangi town is another industrial area where the land is used for industrial purposes but some of its areas are occupied by the peoples for their residences. A sizeable land of this town comprises of katchi abadis. New Karachi, North Nazimabad, Orangi and Jamshed towns have the second highest population densities from 34971 to 58300 per square kilometers.

Most of the land of these towns is used for residential purposes and these towns are highly urbanized. Some of the land of new Karachi town is used for industrial activity. Orangi town is considered as one of the largest slums of the world due to the deplorable socioeconomic status of the town. The town is scarce of the basic needs and facilities required by the citizens (Hasan and Vaidya, 1986). The highest population density is observed in the Liaquatabad and Lyari towns from 58300 to 84220 per square kilometers. Most of the land within both towns is occupied for residential purposes. In Liaquatabad town the population density is very high following the Lyari town. Due to the existence of large un-urbanized areas or katchi abadis the population density is found to be the highest in Lyari town.

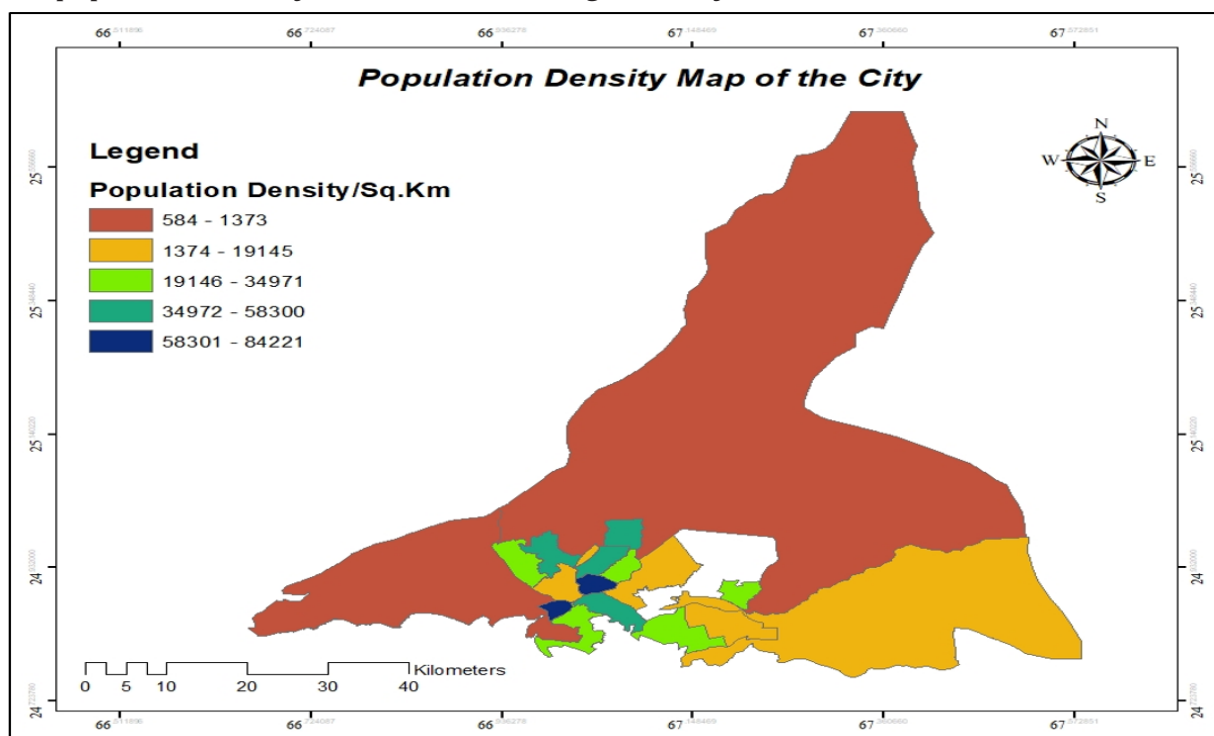


Figure 2: Showing the population density map of the study area (Census, 2017)

### General overview of the beggars

From the field survey a total of 740 beggars were interviewed during the period of the study. The general description of the beggars roaming in different streets of the towns of Karachi can be seen in Table 2. Based on the interviews 433 of 740 beggars were males and 307 were females that corresponds to the highest percentage of male beggars. Beggars of different age groups were also interviewed, and the age groups can be seen from Table 2. Out of the total number 21% belonged to the young age group from 20 to 30 years old. Following this 18% beggars belonged to the very young age group from 11 to 20 years.

Similar pattern of the age group distribution is observed by (Riaz & Abrar, 2018). Least percentage of only 10% of beggars belonged to the age group of late 50s. Beggars were also interviewed for their ethnicity and it is observed that most of them are migrated from different provinces. The larger percentage of 61.08% beggars migrated from rural areas to the urban center. While only 38.9% of local beggars were found in the study area. Most of the beggars (34.59%) were found illiterate and only 28.56% of beggars have studied up to the middle level. Only 6% beggars were those who have completed their graduation studies.

**Table 2**

General overview of the beggars in Karachi city

S. No.	Characteristics of beggar	Result and Inference
1	<b>Sex</b>	
	Male 433	58.51%
	Female 307	41.49%
2	<b>Age Group (Years)</b>	
	Less than 10	N = 87, % = 12
	11 – 20	N = 135, % = 18
	20 – 30	N = 154, % = 21
	31 – 40	N = 105, % = 14
	41 – 50	N = 89, % = 12
	51 – 60	N = 75, % = 10
	More than 60	N = 95, % = 13
3	<b>Ethnicity</b>	
	Migrated (Afghani, Pushto, Punjabi, and Sindhi speaking)	(61.08 % N=452)
	Residents	(38.92 % N=288)

**Table 3**

Showing Level of education of the beggars

S.#	Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
01	Illiterate	256	34.59
02	Primary - middle level	212	28.65
03	Matriculation	133	17.97
04	Intermediate	89	12.03
05	Graduate above	50	6.76
	Total	740	100.00

### Characteristics of beggars in the study area

General characteristics of the beggars observed in the study area can be seen in Table 3. A study reveals that only 2.96% of religious beggars were found in eighteen different towns of Karachi. Mostly these beggars were found in Saddar and North Nazimabad towns. Most of the beggars were idlers that are 34.16% distributed in all towns. Following this a great percentage of professional and habitual beggars were found that is 28.05%. These are those beggars who are deliberately involved in this business of beggary to avoid the hard work and patience to get paid on monthly basis. A great proportion of 19.68% of the beggars were disabled. They are involved in beggary by getting sympathy of the citizens through their injuries and their health conditions.

Some of the beggars have shown the fake injuries or disability just to get benefited by this opportunity (Thamrin & Utama Ritonga, 2018). Similarly, there are number of peoples who are taking the advantage of begging even in their good conditions by gaining the sympathies from the citizens. A total of 8% of modernized beggars were found in the study area. Hermaphrodite beggars were also observed in the study area and their percentage is of almost 4.5%. Khudori & Herliana, (2020) also found that transgender is usually involved in beggary to fulfill their basic needs. They are often stigmatized and away from the mainstream of society. The very least percentage of 2.61% of beggars is found in the transportation routes during the study period.

**Table 4**

Showing the types and characteristics of the beggars in the study area

S. #	Type	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
01	Religious beggars	Found at religious places	37	2.96
02	Disabled beggars	Lying on roadsides, sitting on wheelchair, paraplegia, hemiplegic or diplegic aimed to deserve pity.	145	19.68
03	Able-bodied beggars	Habitual of begging (Professional beggars)	189	28.05
04	Idlers beggars	Lazy and unwilling to earn money and operate through a leader. Use young women with newborn babies or young children or very elderly person.	207	34.16
05	Modernized beggars	Properly dressed up and gain sympathy through self-explanations	85	8.01
06	Travelling beggars	Found it at the bus stop or railway station. Getting sympathy by saying that they have lost accessories to reach home	39	2.61
07	Hermaphrodite beggars	Transgender	38	4.53
Total			740	100

### Income of the beggars

Daily income of the beggars is shown in Table 5. The study found that the beggars mostly earn Rs. 400/= daily in different towns on Karachi. Study reveals that majority of the beggars earns up to 500 PKR/- on daily basis that is almost Rs. 15000/= on monthly basis. Khan (2018) observed the similar trend of monthly income of the beggars in the city of Lahore. There are several beggars earning more than Rs. 500/= daily. The percentage of such beggars is approximately 10.83%. It can be seen that majority of the beggars are socioeconomically better than their representing state (Riaz & Abrar, 2018). A small percentage of only 7% beggars only earn less than Rs. 100/= on daily basis.

**Table 5**

Showing beggars average daily earning

S.#	Money (in Rs.)	Frequency	Percentage
01	Less than 100	51.85	7.006
02	101 – 200	84.84	11.465
03	201 – 300	131.97	17.834
04	301 – 400	221.53	29.936
05	401 – 500	169.68	22.930
06	More than 500	80.13	10.828
Total		740.00	100.000

### Style of begging

During the interviews begging style of disabled beggars were also observed and the study reveals that 52% of the beggars are involved in begging in groups of two or three peoples. They took the support of others for the purpose of begging. Following this 15.92% of beggars were observed with wheelchairs and braces. While some of the beggars were found lying or sitting on the roadsides as well as dancing to get the attention of the citizens. Their magnitudes were 13.38% and 10.83%, respectively.

**Table 6**

Showing style of begging adapted by disabled

S.#	Style	Frequency	Percentage
01	Begging with someone	386.50	52.23
02	Sitting on wheelchair/use braces	117.83	15.92
03	Lying or sitting on roads	98.98	13.38
04	Dancing on roads to get attention	80.13	10.83
05	Others	56.56	7.64
Total		740.00	100.00

### Reasons of begging

The beggars were asked for their reasons and their interest in begging. Response of the beggars can be seen from Table 7. Most of the beggars claim that they need money for survival and due to lack of

employment. The percentage of such beggars was 33.12%. While other beggars approximately (27.39%) claim that begging is necessary to be able to buy the medicines for them. Similarly, 22.93% of the beggars' claims to fulfill their basic need or to get the food for themselves and their families' while 16.56% of the total beggars gave no reason or response to the interviewer.

**Table 7**

Showing the reasons of begging

S. #	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
01	They are crippled/ill and need medicine	202.68	27.39
02	They have no job and need money for their survival	245.10	33.12
03	They need to purchase food item	169.68	22.93
04	Give no reason	122.55	16.56
	Total	740.00	100.00

### Spatial distribution of the beggars in different towns of Karachi

The spatial distribution of the beggars in different towns of Karachi can be seen from Fig. 3 while percentage distribution of beggars within different towns is given in Table 8. The study reveals that the areas having the lowest population density have the lesser number of beggars such as Kemari and Gadap town. The percentage of beggars within these towns was only 2.97% and 2.43% respectively. The number of beggars within the Orangi and Lyari town was also less that is 2.7% and 2.8%, respectively. This may be because the beggars belonging to these areas move to the highly urbanized towns or the city center to have the better earning on daily basis. S.I.T.E and Landhi towns have the second lowest range of beggars from 2.98% to 3.65% as these towns are primarily known for the industrial activities. Similarly, the number of beggars in Shah Faisal, Bin Qasim and Korangi town as well as in Saddar town is third lowest. The percentage of beggars in these towns was 4.59%, 4.73%, 4.86% and 5.27%, respectively.

The number of beggars in Shah Faisal town is less may be because of the low population density and socioeconomic status of the town. All other three towns are involved in the industrial and commercial activities but some of the areas are occupied by public places and residential purposes and hence the number of beggars is increasing. The range of percentage of beggars from 5.28% to 7.84% lies in five different towns namely: Liaquatabad (5.95%), Jamshed town (6.08%), Malir (6.62%), Baldia (6.89%) and New Karachi (7.84%). All these towns are greatly populous and have high population density (See figure 2). Along with that these towns are also urbanizing at a very high rate. The highest percentage distribution of beggars is found in Gulberg town (8.78%), Gulshane Iqbal town (9.73%) and North Nazimabad town (10.54%). These towns lie in the district central of Karachi city and are mainly residential areas.

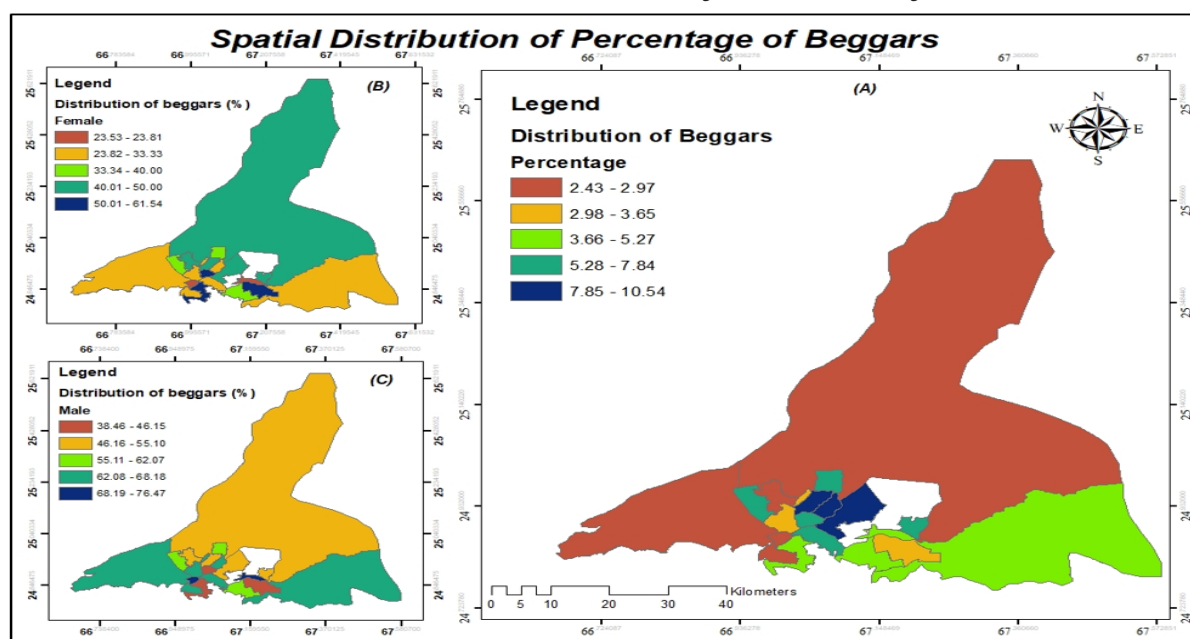


Figure 3: (A) Spatial distribution of percentage of beggars in different towns of Karachi, (B) Spatial distribution of male beggars in different towns, (C) Spatial distribution of female beggars in different towns.

These towns have large number of public places and belong to high socioeconomic groups, where beggars can easily find their target peoples. Distribution based on gender is also observed as most of the female beggars were found in Landhi (62%), Liaquatabad (55%) and Saddar town (54%) while the population of male beggars was highest in Shah Faisal and Lyari town.

This research confirms that the urban land use greatly influences the business of beggary because most of the beggars were found in the highly urbanized areas of the cities. This is inconsistent with the findings of Fawole et al.,(2011)who also confirms that the urban land use had the great impact on the spatial distribution of beggars in the Nigerian cities. Most of the beggars are usually located in the city centers having the most commercial and residential places (Ogunkan & Jelili, 2013).

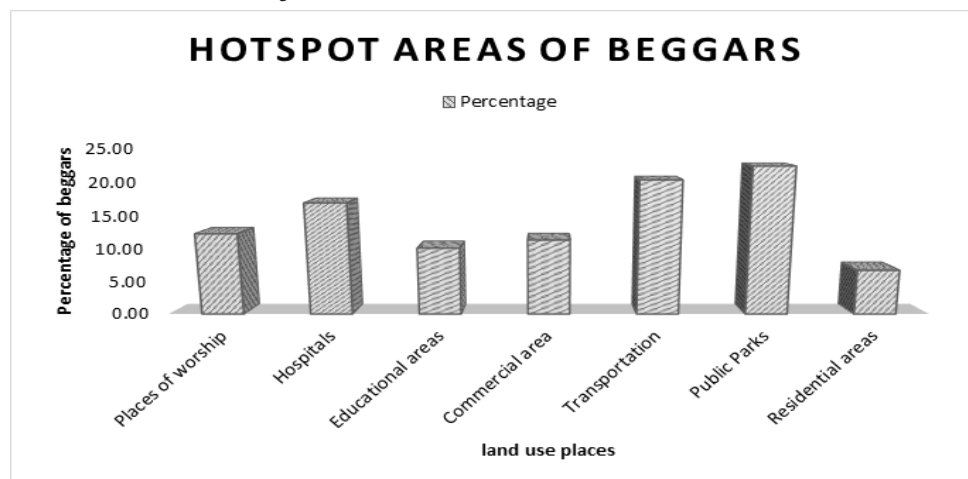
**Table 8**

Gender wise distribution of beggars

S. #	Towns	Frequency	Percentage	Male Frequency	%	Female Frequency	%
1	Kemari town	22	2.97	15	68.18	7	31.82
2	Korangi town	35	4.73	21	60.00	14	40.00
3	Shah Faisal town	34	4.59	26	76.47	8	23.53
4	Landhi town	26	3.51	10	38.46	16	61.54
5	North Nazimabad town	78	10.54	41	52.56	37	47.44
6	New Karachi Town	58	7.84	36	62.07	22	37.93
7	Gulberg town	65	8.78	44	67.69	21	32.31
8	Gulshane Iqbal town	72	9.73	36	50.00	36	50.00
9	Liaquatabad town	44	5.95	20	45.45	24	54.55
10	Orangi town	20	2.70	11	55.00	9	45.00
11	Saddar town	39	5.27	18	46.15	21	53.85
12	Jamshed town	45	6.08	30	66.67	15	33.33
13	Lyari town	21	2.84	16	76.19	5	23.81
14	Gadap town	18	2.43	9	50.00	9	50.00
15	SITE area town	27	3.65	18	66.67	9	33.33
16	Bin Qasim town	36	4.86	24	66.67	12	33.33
17	Malir town	49	6.62	27	55.10	22	44.90
18	Baldia town	51	6.89	31	60.78	20	39.22

### Hotspot areas of beggars

In the urban and sub urban localities the beggars were mostly observed in the public places where the peoples are found in the majority. Beggars from the poor socioeconomic areas move toward the urbanized areas where the number of peoples enjoying a good quality life. In this study it is observed that most of the beggars were found near the public parks/ places (22.30%), transportation (20.1%) and hospitals (16.89%). The hotspot areas for beggars can be further seen in Fig. 4. Similarly, places of worship, commercial areas and educational areas are also occupied by most of the beggars. These places provide the ideal target to such peoples. Riaz & Abrar, (2018) also observed that most of the beggars in Karachi lie in the most urbanized areas of the city.





**Table 9**

Showing the hotspot areas of beggar

S. #	Hotspot Areas of beggars	Frequency	Percentage
01	Places of worship	91	12.30
02	Hospitals	125	16.89
03	Educational areas	75	10.14
04	Commercial area	84	11.35
05	Transportation	150	20.27
06	Public Parks / places	165	22.30
07	Residential areas	50	6.76
	Total	740	100.00

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study has identified the variation in characteristics and socioeconomic status of beggars in Karachi city. Most beggars are professional and do this business to get rid of the extensive hard work and efforts by doing jobs etc. While some of the beggars migrated from the rural areas to earn their bread and butter. There are many factors that are involved in the rise of this social problem such as poverty, unemployment, high inflation, and lack of basic facilities, illness, and other social issues. The study confirms that the type of land use plays an important role in the spatial distribution of these beggars. They used to move toward the urbanized areas of the city where they have better earning opportunities. It may be observed that these beggars are also involved in street crimes. It should be considered as the national issue and necessary policies and procedure should be implemented to get rid of this social menace of the urban cities. It is recommended that both governmental and non-governmental organizations should take the initiative for the social empowerment of society by exploring/creating multiple jobs for the needy ones. Provision of education, basic facilities and counseling of such peoples can provide better results to the society and would be helpful to curb this social evil.

#### Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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