

An Analysis of the Social Vulnerability of Beggars at the Mt. Haryono Traffic Light Intersection

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ABSTRACT

The existence of a food court on campus not only functions as a supporting facility for academic activities, but also plays a strategic role as a local economic space for micro-entrepreneurs. This study aims to analyze the role of the Food Court of UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri (UIN SAIZU) Purwokerto in supporting economic activities and empowering campus vendors. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Informants were selected purposively, namely vendors directly involved in food court activities. Data were analyzed descriptively and interpretively by linking field findings to the perspectives of locality development and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). The findings show that the UIN SAIZU food court functions as a local economic space that provides business opportunities, additional income, and relatively stable market access for campus vendors, although most of them still regard it as a side business. Beyond its economic function, the food court also serves as a social space that strengthens relationships among vendors and generates social capital in the form of trust, informal cooperation, and solidarity. However, its empowerment role still faces several challenges, including limited facilities, weak maintenance, instability in the number of buyers during semester breaks, and minimal business and management training. From the perspectives of locality development and ABCD, the food court has significant potential to be developed into a more participatory, inclusive, and sustainable local economic space. Therefore, improvements in facility management, broader vendor participation in governance, and stronger capacity building are needed to optimize the food court's contribution to the campus local economy.

Keywords: social vulnerability, beggars, public space, social welfare, social rehabilitation

ABSTRAK

Keberadaan food court di lingkungan kampus tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai fasilitas pendukung aktivitas akademik, tetapi juga memiliki peran strategis sebagai ruang ekonomi lokal bagi pelaku usaha mikro. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran Food Court UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri (UIN SAIZU) Purwokerto dalam mendukung aktivitas ekonomi dan pemberdayaan pedagang kampus. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi. Informan dipilih secara purposif, yaitu pedagang yang terlibat langsung dalam aktivitas food court. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif-interpretatif dengan mengaitkan temuan lapangan pada perspektif locality development dan Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Food Court UIN SAIZU berfungsi sebagai ruang ekonomi lokal yang menyediakan peluang usaha, tambahan penghasilan, dan akses pasar yang relatif stabil bagi pedagang kampus, meskipun sebagian besar pedagang masih menjadikannya sebagai usaha sampingan. Selain fungsi ekonomi, food court juga membentuk ruang sosial yang memperkuat hubungan antar pedagang dan menghasilkan modal sosial berupa rasa saling percaya, kerja sama informal, dan solidaritas. Namun, peran pemberdayaan masih menghadapi sejumlah kendala, seperti keterbatasan fasilitas, lemahnya pemeliharaan sarana, ketidakstabilan jumlah pembeli pada masa libur kuliah, serta minimnya pelatihan usaha dan manajemen. Dalam perspektif locality development dan ABCD, food court memiliki potensi besar untuk dikembangkan sebagai ruang ekonomi lokal yang lebih partisipatif, inklusif, dan berkelanjutan. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan penguatan tata kelola fasilitas, perluasan partisipasi pedagang, dan peningkatan kapasitas usaha agar kontribusi food court terhadap ekonomi lokal kampus dapat lebih optimal.

Kata kunci: kerentanan sosial, pengemis, ruang publik, kesejahteraan sosial, rehabilitasi sosial

Introduction

The phenomenon of begging remains a visible social issue in many urban areas of Indonesia. Beggars are commonly encountered at road intersections, markets, bus terminals, and especially at traffic light junctions characterised by high traffic intensity. Such spaces provide opportunities for beggars to obtain income from the sympathy of road users through brief, repetitive interactions that depend heavily on the density of traffic flow. In this context, begging does not merely signal poverty; it also reveals the existence of social groups living in conditions of vulnerability, with minimal protection and continuous exposure to social risk.

Normatively, the problem of homeless persons and beggars has long been positioned as a social issue that must be addressed by the state. PP No. 31 Tahun 1980 explicitly defines a beggar as a person who earns an income by begging in public through various means and pretexts in the expectation of eliciting pity from others. The regulation further states that the handling of homeless persons and beggars must be undertaken through preventive, repressive, and rehabilitative efforts, with the aim of preventing begging, reducing its social consequences, and reintegrating beggars into society so that they may live decently in accordance with human dignity (PP No. 31 Tahun 1980).

At the same time, the more recent social welfare regime provides a broader foundation. UU No. 11 Tahun 2009 tentang Kesejahteraan Sosial positions social rehabilitation, social security, social empowerment, and social protection as the principal instruments of social welfare provision. This framework is reinforced by PP No. 39 Tahun 2012, which affirms that the implementation of social welfare is a targeted, integrated, and sustainable effort carried out by central government, local government, and society. In technical regulations, Permensos No. 8 Tahun 2012 continues to include beggars

within the nomenclature of data collection on persons with social welfare problems (*Penyandang Masalah Kesejahteraan Sosial*), while Permensos No. 16 Tahun 2019 explicitly identifies homeless persons and beggars as targets of basic social rehabilitation. Thus, from a regulatory perspective, beggars are not positioned solely as objects of public-order enforcement, but also as subjects of protection and social rehabilitation.

Even so, at the local level, beggars are still more commonly interpreted through the lens of public order. In Kabupaten Banyumas, for example, Perda No. 16 Tahun 2015 tentang Penanggulangan Penyakit Masyarakat places beggars within the category of social pathology. This illustrates a tension between the social welfare approach and the public-order approach. On the one hand, social policy presupposes protection and rehabilitation; on the other hand, public-order policy positions beggars as objects to be removed from public space. It is precisely this tension that makes the issue of beggars important to examine from the perspective of social vulnerability.

Theoretically, social vulnerability is not identical to poverty alone. Chambers (1989) argues that vulnerability contains two key elements: exposure to risk and the inability to cope with or recover from shocks. Adger (2006) further explains that vulnerability is shaped by the degree of exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity of an individual or group in relation to social and economic pressures. Within this framework, beggars at traffic lights can be understood as a group highly exposed to traffic hazards, pollution, stigma, and economic uncertainty, yet possessing extremely limited adaptive capacity (Chambers, 1989; Adger, 2006).

Previous studies on beggars in Indonesia have largely focused on the factors that lead individuals to become beggars, the effectiveness of government programmes, or issues of public-order enforcement alone. The study by Sri

Kuntari and Eni Hikmawati shows that the roots of the problem of homeless persons and beggars are not singular, but are connected to poverty, geographical conditions, socio-psychological factors, and family culture (Kuntari & Hikmawati, 2017). Meanwhile, Maryatun, Santoso Tri Raharjo, and Budi Muhammad Taftazani demonstrate that the handling of beggars continues to face serious challenges when not accompanied by adequate rehabilitation and empowerment programmes (Maryatun, Raharjo, & Taftazani, 2022). These findings are important, yet they do not sufficiently explain how social vulnerability is experienced on a daily basis within a very specific public space such as a traffic light intersection.

Against this gap, the present study is directed towards analysing the social vulnerability of beggars operating at the traffic light intersection on Jalan MT. Haryono. The focus of the research includes: (1) the forms of social vulnerability they experience; (2) the factors shaping such vulnerability; and (3) their access to social welfare services. In doing so, the study seeks to position beggars not merely as objects of public-order regulation, but as subjects living within a cycle of social vulnerability that requires a more comprehensive reading.

Theoretical Framework

Social Vulnerability

Social vulnerability refers to a condition in which individuals or groups face a high risk of welfare disruption because of limited access to resources, protection, and the capacity to respond to shocks. Chambers (1989) explains that vulnerability cannot be understood solely in terms of income poverty, but must also be seen in terms of insecurity, powerlessness, and exposure to pressures that are difficult to control. Adger (2006), meanwhile, emphasises that vulnerability consists of three principal components: exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. In the context of beggars, social

vulnerability can be observed in their high exposure to economic, health, safety, and stigma-related risks, combined with weak access to social protection.

Vulnerability as a Structural Process

Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis (2004) argue that vulnerability does not arise naturally; rather, it is produced through social, economic, and political processes that keep certain groups in conditions of insecurity. In other words, vulnerability must be understood as the outcome of structures that constrain people's life choices. In this study, this perspective is useful in showing that begging is not merely an individual choice, but a form of adaptation to limited employment opportunities, restricted education, weak social support, and inadequate access to welfare services.

Social Stigma

To explain the social dimension of vulnerability, Goffman's concept of stigma (1963) is particularly relevant. Goffman explains that stigma attaches to an identity perceived by society as "spoiled" or "deviant," with the result that those who bear it are treated as less worthy of social acceptance. Beggars often experience not only economic deprivation, but also social devaluation, blame, and treatment as a public nuisance. Such stigma may reinforce their social isolation and hinder their access to both social support and formal services.

Social Welfare and Social Rehabilitation

Within the framework of social welfare, beggars may be understood as a group in need of protection, rehabilitation, and empowerment. UU No. 11 Tahun 2009 and PP No. 39 Tahun 2012 position social welfare as an integrated effort aimed at ensuring the fulfilment of citizens' basic needs. Meanwhile, Permensos No. 16 Tahun 2019 explicitly affirms that homeless persons and beggars are targets of basic social rehabilitation. Accordingly, the handling of beggars should not stop at raids or public-order enforcement, but should instead be directed towards restoring

social functioning, strengthening capacities, and promoting social reintegration.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research seeks to understand in depth the condition of social vulnerability experienced by beggars in urban public space. Social vulnerability is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, and therefore needs to be understood through the lived experiences, perceptions, and social interactions of informants rather than through aggregate figures alone.

The research site was the traffic light intersection on Jalan MT. Haryono, which, based on preliminary observation, constitutes one of the public spaces with high traffic intensity and a recurring location for begging activities. The principal informants were beggars who routinely operated at this location. Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their direct involvement in begging at the research site. To enrich contextual understanding, the study also involved supporting informants drawn from surrounding residents or others familiar with the phenomenon.

Data were collected through field observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine directly the activity patterns of beggars, the physical condition of the public space, their interactions with road users, and the risks they faced. In-depth interviews were used to explore the life experiences of beggars, the forms of vulnerability they encountered, and their views on assistance or social services they had received. Documentation was used to complement the data, both in the form of field notes and relevant regulatory and policy documents.

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, namely through data reduction, data display, and conclusion

drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation.

Findings and Discussion

General Overview of Begging Activities at the Jalan MT. Haryono Traffic Light Intersection

The observations reveal that the traffic light intersection on Jalan MT. Haryono constitutes a highly strategic public space for begging activities. Traffic congestion in the morning and late afternoon creates moments when vehicles stop at red lights, and these moments are precisely what beggars exploit to approach motorists. Their activities take various forms: walking between traffic lanes, extending a hand, carrying a small container, or using particular bodily appearances to evoke sympathy.

The field findings also show that some beggars work according to a fairly regular rhythm. They arrive at particular hours, adjust themselves to traffic density, take brief rests, and then resume activity. This indicates that the traffic light intersection has been transformed into an informal workspace with its own temporal patterns, strategies, and risks. In other words, begging at traffic lights is not merely a sporadic act, but part of a daily survival strategy.

Economic Vulnerability: Living on Uncertain Income

Economic vulnerability is the most prominent form of vulnerability identified in this study. Beggars depend on daily income that is highly fluctuating. Their earnings are not determined by any formal work standard, but by traffic density, the generosity of road users, and their own physical condition on a given day. This situation creates extreme economic uncertainty.

One informant, Bapak Warid, explained that the money he obtained was “sometimes just enough for food for the day, sometimes quite decent, but often very little.” This statement demonstrates that income from begging is profoundly fragile and devoid of continuity. Within the framework

proposed by Chambers (1989), such a condition reflects a combination of high exposure to risk and limited capacity to cope with shocks. Beggars live in uncertainty, while the scope of their economic adaptation remains extremely narrow.

This economic vulnerability is further intensified by the lack of alternative employment opportunities. Low educational attainment, limited work skills, age-related constraints, and weak access to formal employment networks mean that begging is chosen not because it is desirable, but because it is available and yields immediate cash income. At this point, economic vulnerability cannot be reduced to unwillingness to work, but must instead be understood as the product of severely constrained life choices.

Health and Safety Vulnerability: Public Space as a Hazardous Workplace

Health and safety vulnerability constitutes the second highly significant dimension. Begging takes place in traffic spaces that are dense, noisy, and fraught with accident risks. Beggars must move quickly between vehicles, calculate the timing of traffic lights, and avoid vehicles that begin moving when the light changes to green. One informant, Bapak Warid, recounted having once been struck by a motorcycle when traffic began to move.

From the perspective of vulnerability, this situation indicates a very high degree of exposure to physical danger. There is no labour protection, no safety standard, and no health guarantee directly protecting them while they work on the road. Beyond accident risks, beggars are also exposed to air pollution, heat, rain, exhaustion, and dehydration. Over time, these conditions heighten their health vulnerability, especially when compounded by poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare.

Within Adger's framework (2006), beggars at traffic lights experience high exposure and low adaptive capacity. They do develop practical strategies—for instance, selecting certain hours

or avoiding larger vehicles—but these strategies are insufficient to remove the fundamental risks inherent in the workspace they occupy. Thus, urban public space here functions as a deeply unsafe informal workplace.

Social Vulnerability: Stigma, Expulsion, and Social Isolation

The social vulnerability of beggars extends beyond economic and physical dimensions. Interviews show that beggars also face rejection, demeaning looks, harsh words, and even expulsion. One informant stated that “some people give, but others tell us to go away.” Such experiences demonstrate that beggars live not only in poverty, but also in a socially degraded position.

Goffman's concept of stigma (1963) helps explain this situation. In the eyes of many, beggars are positioned as symbols of laziness, disorder, or personal failure. As a result, they lose not only access to economic resources, but also equal social recognition. This stigma has a significant impact on their daily lives because it can inhibit interaction, diminish self-worth, and intensify social alienation.

This finding is consistent with the study by Kuntari and Hikmawati (2017), which shows that the problem of homeless persons and beggars is not solely related to economic factors, but also to socio-psychological and cultural factors that reinforce the reproduction of such conditions. In the field context, stigma makes it difficult for beggars to be accepted as subjects in need of protection; they are more often perceived as objects to be removed from public space.

Structural Vulnerability: Limited Access to Social Welfare Services

The study also finds that beggars experience structural vulnerability, particularly in relation to access to social welfare services. Some informants stated that they had at times received assistance, but that such support was irregular and unsustainable. One informant, Bapak Sunarto,

explained that assistance had once existed, “but it was not regular, so in the end I came back here.” This statement indicates that the interventions received have not been able to generate long-term change.

Yet from a regulatory point of view, beggars are clearly targets of social welfare intervention. PP No. 31 Tahun 1980 emphasises the need for prevention, rehabilitation, placement, and follow-up so that homeless persons and beggars do not return to their former circumstances. Permensos No. 16 Tahun 2019 even explicitly positions homeless persons and beggars as targets of basic social rehabilitation. However, at the level of implementation, access to services appears to remain weak, especially in relation to data collection, accompaniment, and post-rehabilitation follow-up.

This finding is relevant to Habibullah’s (2020) analysis of the role of *Puskesmas*. Habibullah shows that integrated social services at the local level tend to be stronger in handling administrative issues affecting the poor and the vulnerable poor, but remain less effective in reaching diverse vulnerable groups in need of social rehabilitation and empowerment. In the context of beggars, this suggests that the mere existence of social services does not automatically guarantee effective access when data inclusion is weak, mobility is high, and field approaches remain incidental rather than continuous.

Reading Beggars Between Public Order and Social Welfare

One of the key conceptual findings of this study is the tension between reading beggars as a problem of public order and reading them as a problem of social welfare. In local practice, the public-order approach appears more dominant because beggars occupy public space and are perceived as disrupting traffic, comfort, or the image of the city. This is consistent with local regulations such as Perda Banyumas No. 16 Tahun 2015, which still places beggars within the

regime of controlling social disorder.

However, when viewed through the lens of social welfare, beggars are a vulnerable group living under multidimensional pressure: economically poor, exposed to health and safety risks, socially stigmatised, and institutionally unprotected. For that reason, approaches that focus solely on raids and enforcement fail to address the roots of vulnerability. This finding is reinforced by the study of Maryatun, Raharjo, and Taftazani (2022), which shows that the handling of homeless persons and beggars cannot be effective if it stops at administrative control without support in the form of rehabilitation, skills strengthening, and social empowerment.

Thus, begging in public space should not be read merely as a violation of public order, but as a manifestation of social vulnerability requiring layered intervention: protection, rehabilitation, active outreach, and empowerment. This perspective also resonates with Andari’s (2019) study of the *Desaku Menanti* programme, which demonstrates that self-worth, community support, and business development are essential elements in breaking the cycle of begging.

Conclusion

This study shows that beggars operating at the traffic light intersection on Jalan MT. Haryono live in conditions of multidimensional social vulnerability. That vulnerability encompasses economic, health and safety, social, and structural dimensions.

Economic vulnerability is visible in unstable income and the absence of a secure livelihood. Health and safety vulnerability arises because begging is carried out in dense traffic spaces characterised by pollution and minimal protection. Social vulnerability is reflected in stigma, expulsion, and low levels of social acceptance. Structural vulnerability, meanwhile, is evident in weak access to sustained social welfare services.

These findings confirm that begging in public space cannot be understood merely as a matter of public order. Rather, it reflects a social welfare problem that has not been adequately addressed. Beggars therefore need to be positioned as subjects of social policy who require protection, rehabilitation, and empowerment, rather than merely regulation and removal.

Recommendations

First, local government needs to balance the public-order approach with a social welfare approach. Raids and enforcement are insufficient unless accompanied by data collection, social assessment, rehabilitation, and follow-up.

Second, the social affairs office and related institutions need to strengthen outreach strategies and direct accompaniment in public spaces, so that beggars can be linked more consistently with healthcare services, social assistance, social rehabilitation, and skills-strengthening programmes.

Third, local social service systems such as *Puskesmas* and *SLRT* need to broaden their reach so that they do not focus solely on the administrative handling of poor households, but are also responsive to vulnerable groups in public space, including beggars.

Fourth, future research may be directed towards policy analysis, programme evaluation of rehabilitation efforts, or longitudinal studies to assess whether existing interventions are genuinely capable of breaking the cycle of social vulnerability experienced by beggars.

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