

The Evolution of Street Children Phenomenon: Exploring Child Exploitation from Social, Cultural, and Economic Perspectives

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Abstract

Various government efforts to address the exploitation of street beggars have yet to be fully effective, especially in Medan City. This research aims to explore and understand how the practice of street begging exploitation and its social and economic impacts. The method used is qualitative research with a case study approach. The data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions involving the Medan City government, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders, especially street child beggars. The results showed that the exploitation of street children in Medan City continues to increase, which reflects the problems of poverty and poor child protection. The characteristics of street child beggars in Medan are diverse, with different modes of begging. On the other hand, the Medan City Government has enacted Regional Regulation No. 6 Year 2003 to address this issue, but its implementation could have been more optimal. As the responsible party, the Social Affairs Office of Medan City has made various efforts, such as coaching and rehabilitation, but the number of street children is increasing. This research concludes that a more integrated approach and cooperation with related parties is needed to address the problem of street beggars' exploitation effectively.

Keywords: Government, Policy, Street beggar, Children, Social, Cultural.

The government has implemented diverse measures to mitigate the issue of exploitation among street child beggars (Andi, 2022; Pratama, 2021). However, the current efforts have not entirely resolved the issue. Street child beggars can still be readily found in several

locations in Indonesia, including Medan City. They are particularly prevalent at intersections with red lights (traffic lights), and their population is steadily growing. Their existence frequently leads to societal issues such as criminal activity, lawlessness, the proliferation

of impoverished areas, and the degradation of urban green spaces (Djaafar et al., 2022; Setiawan, 2020). The phenomenon of exploiting street child beggars has eventually become widespread across Indonesia. The exploitation of street child beggars is widespread in Indonesia, particularly in major cities like Bandung, Jakarta, Denpasar, Ujung Pandang, Semarang, Surabaya, and Medan.

This phenomenon covers a wide range of activities undertaken by street children, such as shining shoes, selling newspapers, selling packaged food and drinks, and begging for others. Some street children also engage in busking. This reflects severe social and economic inequalities and the weak child protection system in Indonesia. The exploitation of street children is not a new phenomenon. It can be traced back to the prolonged economic and social crisis period. Many children were forced to live on the streets due to the poverty of their families. For example, the Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s worsened socio-economic conditions in Indonesia (Al Araafi et al., 2024), forcing many families to seek additional sources of income, including their children. In addition, uncontrolled rural-to-urban migration has exacerbated the problem. Rapid urbanization in Indonesia is not accompanied by adequate infrastructure and social services, leading to slums and beggars (Alfiani, 2016; Hidayati, 2021). These children are often exploited by irresponsible parties who take advantage of their vulnerability for personal gain, including sexual exploitation (Siregar & Muslim, 2022; Umam, 2022).

Street children in Indonesia often come from low-income families living in urban slums (Almaida et al., 2023; Subhan, 2018). Many have dropped out of school or never received formal education (Rempé et al., 2023). Life on the streets forces them to engage in high-risk activities in terms of health and safety. In addition to begging, they often engage in other informal activities such as washing cars, busking, selling newspapers, shining shoes,

selling packaged food and drinks, and, in some cases, even engaging in criminal activities. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, there are estimated to be thousands of street children spread across major cities in Indonesia. This number tends to increase along with Indonesia's increasing economic and social problems (Kemensos.go.id, 2022). Most of these children are between 7 and 17 years old, and most are male. However, it is undeniable that there are also a large number of girls involved in street activities, who are often vulnerable to a higher risk of sexual exploitation (Umam, 2022). Common locations for begging are shopping malls, traffic lights, and other crowded centers, and these activities are often carried out in crowded places such as train stations, bus terminals, and traditional markets (Bahfiarti et al., 2019; Ramadhani, 2021; Sri et al., 2023). On the one hand, this activity provides them with income to fulfill their daily needs. On the other hand, they often work in deplorable conditions and at high risk to their health, safety and even dignity (Muhibuddin et al., 2018).

It is unavoidable that this phenomenon also occurs in Medan City, one of Indonesia's prominent cities. The rising prevalence of begging conducted by street children is an inherent issue that necessitates resolution, mainly due to the exploitative nature of these actions, which inflict harm onto numerous parties, particularly kids. The growing population of street child beggars is also observed in Medan City. The data on street kid beggars in Medan City differs from those published by the Medan City Social Affairs Office and needs to be consistent with the annual data available. According to the Medan City Statistics Office, in 2014, 1526 individuals began begging on the streets, accounting for 50.26% of the total number of street child beggars in North Sumatra. Meanwhile, based on data provided by the Indonesian Heritage Foundation (YPI), the number of individuals amounted to 1500. The North Sumatra Kid Protection Association (PPAI) reports that there are 5000 street kid

beggars in North Sumatra, with 1800 explicitly located in Medan City. According to the Urban Social Working Group (KKSP), there are currently 1150 street child beggars in Medan City (Muda et al., 2023).

Therefore, a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed in dealing with the problem of street children. This is also supported by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide assistance and guidance to street children (Firman, 2018; Suryaningsih & Nur, 2020). Some NGOs also provide temporary shelter, health services, informal education, and skills training for street children. However, these efforts still need several challenges, including limited resources and ineffective coordination among various stakeholders. On the other hand, addressing the exploitation of street beggars is difficult for the Medan City Government to do independently and requires cooperation with buffer areas such as the Deli Serdang District Government, Binjai City Government, and Langkat District Government. This cooperation can be done with a collaboration system according to their respective roles. The Medan City government has also taken this step through Regional Regulation No. 6 of 2003 on the Prohibition of Vagrancy, Begging, and Immoral Practices in Medan City (Thamrin et al., 2023). However, begging exploitation experienced by street children is still widely spread throughout Medan City; this is marked by the formation of slum neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city, not to mention the lousy stigma of the community regarding the status of street children, becoming a *prahara* that must be resolved (Badar, 2018; Wijaya & Carina, 2024). This research aims to explore and understand more about the exploitation of street beggars in big cities in Indonesia, especially in Medan City, and its social and economic implications.

Theoretical Framework

a. Public Policy

Experts' perspectives on the concept of public policy vary widely. However, the essence remains the same: placing all government decisions on the challenge of meeting widespread and ever-evolving public demands due to better levels of education and technical progress (Widodo, 2021). According to Dye (1978), "public policy is a choice made by the government to do or not do something; this is as stated: "Public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do." Generally, public policy can be seen from two angles: policy analysis and evaluation and the policy process. Policy and evaluation analysis are included in the first perspective of policy analysis and evaluation (Wahab, 2021). It is intended that through policy analysis, adequate and appropriate alternatives will be found, which allow for solving problems and achieving the desired goals. Regarding adequacy, effectiveness, suitability, and efficiency, policy evaluation assesses the difficulties of a policy that has been made and implemented. In the context of this research, public policy can be used to identify the factors that cause the exploitation of street children and how the government's efforts to implement appropriate policies to protect children from exploitation practices and improve their welfare.

b. Policy Implementation Concept

Implementation is simply the implementation of carrying out specific tasks. The concept of implementation is undoubtedly related to the implementation of specific tasks determined by policymakers (Pramono, 2020). The formulates in short that "to implement" means to provide the means for carrying out (providing the means to do something), to give practical effect (causing an impact or resulting in something). In a broad sense, implementation can also be interpreted as operationalizing or carrying out activities determined by the law and has become a mutual agreement among various stakeholders, actors, organizations (public or private), procedures, and techniques.

c. Policy Evaluation

Public policy evaluation is an act to assess and monitor the work set before (Taufiqurakhman, 2014). Evaluation policy is any rule or principle that a group or organization uses to guide its decisions and actions when conducting an evaluation (Evaluation policy is what rules or principles a group or organization uses to guide its decisions and actions". The initial evaluation is one of the essential steps for subsequent evaluation because after the formulation of the policy draft is made or approved, it is still necessary to conduct socialization to obtain initial responses from the public (Dunn, 2015). This can be seen in the law-making process. In the context of this research, policy evaluation serves to assess how the Medan City government's efforts to eradicate the exploitation of beggars against street children in Medan City are appropriate or inappropriate.

d. Literature Review

To support this research study, previous studies are needed as a source of reference and consideration in writing this research. This literature review examines various studies on policies and the government's role in addressing homelessness and begging. Previous research conducted by Yang et al. (2023) examined how the living conditions of beggars can be improved through appropriate policy-making and significantly improve their welfare. Dyb (2020) examines how housing policy in Norway benefits beggars. On the other hand, it creates a new form of beggar population management. Killander (2019) examines the criminalization of begging and survival strategies through legislation in South Africa, noting that these measures often reflect colonial legacies and raise questions about their constitutionality.

Meanwhile, Dyb and Zeiner (2024) discussed related beggar handling policies, namely regarding housing for beggars in Norway, which turned out to have weaknesses, especially in the context of the legal framework. However, the policy could have been more effective. Then Afroz (2017) examined the state's response to begging in India and

concluded that the state's approach often focuses on control rather than social inclusion, thus worsening the conditions of beggars.

On the other hand, when compared to conditions in Indonesia, Urbaningrum, Syahri, and Tinus (2022) in their research examined the role of the Palu city government in addressing the problem of homelessness and begging and showed that the policies implemented have had a positive impact, although they still face some challenges. Furthermore, Asmara, Kariem, and Kencana (2023) evaluated the Palembang City Council policy and concluded that inter-agency coordination and consistent policy implementation were critical to the success of this approach. Al Anba and Santoso (2021) evaluated the homelessness policy in Semarang City based on Regional Regulation No. 5/2014. They concluded that clear rules and strict law enforcement contributed to the program's effectiveness. Similarly, Nasution and Thamrin (2016) examined the policy implementation of the social agency's follow-up program in Medan City. They concluded that skills training and economic empowerment are essential in reducing homelessness and begging.

Similarly, Yusrizal and Asmara (2020) examined the policy of overcoming homelessness and begging in North Aceh District. They concluded that government intervention in the form of welfare and social rehabilitation succeeded in reducing the number of homeless people and beggars. Finally, research by Suprpti and Wardaya (2024) drew attention to begging prevention policies in Bengkulu City and suggested that a community-based approach and ongoing support are essential for long-term success.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, precisely a case study approach. This research methodology uses rigorous case analysis to understand a particular phenomenon comprehensively. This approach aims to

comprehend the phenomena encountered by participants in a research study, including their behavior, perceptions, interests, motives, and actions, by articulating them as statements (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study involved gathering data through conducting comprehensive interviews with key stakeholders, including the Medan city government represented by the Medan city social service, non-governmental organizations specializing in street children, and individuals or groups exploiting street child beggars in Medan city.

In addition, direct observation involves closely monitoring all forms of community contacts regarding the activities of street child beggars. Primary data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholders using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and undertaking field observations to gather comprehensive data and information (Ridder, 2017). This approach was executed by sending invitations to the key stakeholders involved in the study, such as the Medan City Government, represented by the Social Service Office, the Civil Service Police Unit, and the Medan City Police as institutional participants. Non-governmental organizations and universities, as non-institutional entities, have the responsibility of monitoring and offering guidance on policies about the exploitation of street child beggars in Medan City. In addition, they promote and enable community conversations regarding the execution of policies.

This data-gathering strategy allows for the acquisition of perspectives from multiple knowledgeable people regarding street kid beggars in Medan City. The research was carried out in Medan City due to the ongoing issues in managing street kid beggars. The city faces many of these beggars, requiring specific measures to address the situation. This is evident from the conspicuous presence of street child beggars in several locations across Medan City. Data analysis approaches encompass the processes of

data reduction, presentation, and deriving conclusions (Miles et al., 2014).

Results

Condition and Characteristics of Beggars in Medan City

However, poverty is the inability or helplessness of a person to fulfill their needs properly (Maulana et al., 2022; Nabila et al., 2023). Poverty is one of the chronic problems that occur in Indonesia, including in Medan City. Poverty affects not only several other social problems, such as unemployment, malnutrition, and increased crime but also the future of the nation. Lack of education is one of the main reasons that contribute to the formation of poverty problems. People in rural areas, for example, need more access to higher education, especially universities. As a result, they need to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to do jobs. Empowering the poor to get out of their poverty is still tricky. It can be seen that the number of poor people from year to year does not change much and fluctuates; it is said that the facts that the community shows their numbers are increasing, both those who have activities as scavengers, beggars, vagrants, and other odd jobs. During the emergence of the coronavirus outbreak, it is said that the poor population increased quite sharply because many people could not carry out activities as before the coronavirus.

This is also further exacerbated by the fact that the issue of rehabilitation of street beggars in Medan City is still very complex and does not have the means to rehabilitate those caught in raids. The Social Service Office of Medan City only has a halfway house located in Pinang Baris, precisely behind the Medan City Social Service Office. Its capacity still needs to grow as a halfway house, namely ten people. As a halfway house, beggars caught in raids can only stay for 2 (two) days and a maximum of 4 (four) days. Apart from the shelter house, the Social Affairs Office of Medan City can leave those

caught in the raid at the Punge Orphanage in Binjai. This building belongs to the Social Affairs Office of North Sumatra Province. So, the Social Service Office of Medan City can only leave those caught in raids at the building and not for a long time. With the limited rehabilitation facilities, the Medan City Social Services Office collaborates with Orphanages. The Medan City Social Office needs authority to manage the Orphanage in this cooperation process. The management of the Orphanage is entirely under the authority of the Orphanage, whether it is managed independently or under the name of a particular foundation. Each Orphanage has its own rules, in which case it has the right to accept or reject children entrusted by the Medan Social Service to live in the Orphanage from arrests.

On the other hand, the practice of begging by children in Medan City still has not received maximum handling. From year to year, their presence is increasingly easy to find in various strategic places and locations for begging. The *modus operandi* is also very varied and dynamic according to the opportunities that have the chance to get the mercy of others who see them. Children in begging usually use several equipment such as aqua glasses or the like, small boxes, hats in simple shapes and other objects that can be put in money by people who feel sorry for their arrival. To attract the sympathy of those around them, the behavior displayed is very diverse, for example, wearing tattered clothes that deserve pity, painting their bodies with silver, wearing clown equipment, carrying small children, and not infrequently committing fraud by pretending to be a disabled person.

The development of street beggars in Medan City shows an increase; this can be seen from the ease of finding street beggars both during the day and at night. Some of them begdoor to door, in strategic places traveled by people from various directions. In 2016, their number was 61 people; in 2020, it increased to 127 people. Obtaining data on street beggars in Medan City is very difficult because they usually move from one place to another, making it difficult to track their

whereabouts. The characteristics of begging by street beggars in Medan City can usually be grouped into 2 (two) parts: begging in crowded places and begging from one place to another.

The characteristics of begging in crowded places are the way begging is carried out at red light intersections, traditional tax locations, and in the courtyards of places of worship such as mosques, churches, and other security centers. Meanwhile, begging, which involves traveling from one site to another, is accomplished by visiting individuals' residences, commercial establishments, or residential complexes. As they perform such deeds, they typically utter phrases that elicit sympathy from their listeners, such as "I haven't had a meal yet, please," or "assistance needed for school children and victims of disasters." Specific individuals in operations carry some of these children, while others walk alongside their caregivers or parents. Children who are coerced or instructed by specific individuals to engage in begging are undoubtedly highly susceptible since they find themselves in a setting surrounded by adults who exhibit a combination of violence and aggression. The table below displays the demographic breakdown of street beggars in Medan City during the past five years, including teenagers and adults.

Table 1. Youth and Adult Beggars in Medan City 2016-2020

Year	Number (people)
2016	201
2017	215
2018	234
2019	247
2020	372

Source: Social Service Office of Medan City in 2021, processed by the researcher, 2024.

The table above shows how, each year, the number of teenage and adult beggars has increased significantly. It should be noted that this data is reported in the Medan City Social Service; in reality, the number of beggars in Medan City at each location point is enormous.

The difficulty of getting accurate data is due to the mobility of beggars who never settle in one place, so this data only describes a small part of the reality in the field.

Behavioural Dynamics of Street Beggars in Medan City: Raids as a Curbing Measure

The Medan City Social Service Office, the Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP), and the Medan City Poltabes police typically perform operations against street beggars, and vagrants in Medan City. The operations are carried out by systematically surveying multiple thoroughfares in Medan City, explicitly focusing on the junctions with red traffic lights, urban parks, and specific locations frequented by homeless individuals and beggars congregating.

In every raid of vagrants and beggars, four-wheeled vehicles are usually brought along. The number of vehicles brought is sometimes 1 unit of a closed truck type owned by the Pamong Praja police unit that can carry around 50 people. However, in some instances, an additional vehicle, a Kijang pick-up, which can carry 15 people, is brought. The homeless people and beggars caught in the raid will be put into the truck, then taken and recorded at the shelter house of the Medan City Social Service. From this data collection, vagrants and beggars caught three times in the raid will be sent to social institutions in North Sumatra.

Meanwhile, social workers from the Medan City Social Service and the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) of Medan City will foster street children caught. Meanwhile, those who can call their parents, family, or guardians can pick them up at the shelter. The Social Service Office of Medan City carries out regular monthly raids on vagrants and beggars, with some raids occurring twice a month. The raids are initiated in response to the prevalent occurrence of vagrancy and begging, as documented through data collection and on-site evaluations by the Social Service Office of Medan City. The following table presents the frequency of raids carried out by the Medan City Social Service on individuals who are homeless

and begging for money over the previous five years.

Table 2. Frequency of raids on homeless people and beggars in Medan City 2016-2020.

Year	Frequency of Raids
2016	13 times
2017	14 times
2018	16 times
2019	16 times
2020	17 times

Source: Social Service Office of Medan City in 2021, processed by researchers, 2024

The data in the table reveals that Medan City carries out raids on homeless folks and beggars between 13 to 17 times each year. These raids are frequently heightened during specified timeframes, such as before the fasting month of Ramadan and preceding the New Year. During Ramadan, many homeless individuals and beggars typically appear, migrating from different areas for higher income. Muslims traditionally provide sadaqah (charitable donations) to the impoverished this month. This period offers a favorable circumstance for people experiencing homelessness and beggars to exploit. Nevertheless, after the conclusion of Ramadan and Eid, there is usually a decrease in the number of newly homeless individuals and beggars, resulting in a less conspicuous presence of these individuals in Medan City.

To uphold public order, raids are conducted 2 to 3 times every month throughout Ramadan. These operations are usually conducted without prior notice to prevent homeless individuals and beggars from avoiding apprehension. However, efforts to escape frequently lead to chases between the law enforcement authorities and the individuals begging for money. Following negotiations and, if necessary, the implementation of assertive actions, the beggars are transported using Satpol PP vehicles to shelters, where officers from the Medan City Social Service offer guidance and assistance. The raids target sites often frequented by beggars, particularly at red light crossroads

notorious for such acts. Therefore, only certain high-activity areas inside Medan City's 21 sub-districts and 151 urban villages are the main targets of these operations.

The conduct of vagrants and beggars in Medan City exhibits a consistent trend of increasing dynamism annually. Recently, there has been a noticeable rise in a new trend in begging, which involves the utilization of clown attire and individuals covered with silver to attract attention. These individuals utilize clown media to perform song and dance routines and then approach drivers who observe their performance to solicit rupiah. The act of soliciting by assuming the appearance of a clown is not limited to public spaces but also extends to door-to-door interactions. Meanwhile, the silver man, also known as "silver," engages in his begging activities by coating his entire body with silver paint. He then approaches motorists, robotically lifting his hands to solicit rupiah. The benefactors typically provide monetary assistance ranging from one thousand rupiah to one thousand rupiah to individuals facing homelessness and beggars. It is uncommon for them to provide over ten thousand rupiah (Muda et al., 2023).

In every raid of vagrants and beggars conducted by the Medan City Social Service, the media used in begging, such as clown outfits, clown hats, musical instruments, and the like, are also confiscated and brought to the shelter house of the Medan City Social Service. After receiving guidance, the equipment can be returned to its owner. Based on the data collection conducted by the Medan City Social Service, many clothes and clown hats used by gepeng are rented from certain people. In this case, the Medan City Social Service requires that the owner take the equipment, and if it is not taken within 6 (6) months, it will be destroyed. Apart from that, it was conveyed not to rent it out again and not to exploit children to beg through this media.

Exploitation Practices of Street Child Beggars in Medan City

It is undeniable that the practice of begging is one of the practices that are prone to exploitation; this, of course, involves many parties, especially minors, who are often the 'main capital' in begging activities. These acts of exploitation directly cause many losses; this phenomenon can be seen through the rise of criminal acts and causing unrest in the community. However, this problem cannot be blamed on beggars alone; the government should see this phenomenon as a public problem that must be resolved immediately. The Medan City government has enforced legislation to restrict the exploitation of street beggars by Regional Regulation No. 6/2003, which specifically targets the prohibition of vagrants, beggars, and immoral activities within the city. This regulation aims to provide a hygienic and well-organized Medan City, necessitating the enforcement of rules against vagrants and beggars, who are perceived as diminishing the city's visual attractiveness. The proliferation of street beggars in various locations, such as traffic crossroads, mosque courtyards, pedestrian bridges, and city parks, disrupts Medan City. This impedes the government's endeavors to transform the city into a cultural tourism hub and a center for government services.

According to Regional Regulation No. 6/2003, vagrants are defined as those who live in a manner that does not meet the local community's standards, do not have permanent homes or stable jobs, and occupy public areas. This is consistent with empirical evidence in the field, where several street children who beg are subjected to exploitation in order to collect money from drivers by various means, including selling tissues, performing street music, crying for mercy, dressing up as silver-painted statues or clowns, and engaging in direct begging. The methods of exploitation are widespread in frequently visited begging places across Medan City. The act of exploitation can be classified into various categories: organized group exploitation, exploitation by parental groupings, individual exploitation, and exploitation based

on leasing arrangements. Street beggars in Medan City engage in various sorts of exploitation.

Table 3. Exploitation of street beggars in Medan City

Type of Exploitation	Description
Structured group	Children are dropped off, picked up and supervised by the group in their begging activities; they usually stay with the group.
Parents	The child is dropped off, picked up, supervised and utilised by the parents; usually living with the parents.
Self-sufficient beggars	The child has no permanent residence, no relatives, and lives in a homeless situation.
Custody or Rental	The child is dropped off and picked up based on an agreed transaction, usually sharing the proceeds; and lives with the parents or guardians.

Source: Processed by researchers, 2024

Based on the table above, various kinds of exploitation are carried out on street children in Medan City. Firstly, through structured groups: These children are dropped off and picked up at the begging location by a group that organizes them. While there, the group always ensures they must continue begging and not run away. These children usually stay with the group in a predetermined area where they live with other children the same group exploits. Furthermore, the exploitation carried out by the parents of these street children is that they are dropped off and picked up at the begging location by their parents and go to the designated begging spots. Parents control their begging activities and often use them to earn money. Parents force these children to work as beggars, and they have to give all the proceeds to their parents. They live with their parents in a particular place and their daily activities are very dependent on the guidance and control of their parents because they are usually very young, ranging from 1 to 10 years old.

Then, independent beggars where these children do not have a permanent residence and live on the streets. Groups or parents do not supervise them. As a result, they develop violent characteristics such as violent tendencies and disrespectful behavior, as a form of defense and survival alone in the harsh street environment, without adult guidance or supervision. Lastly, through child care or rental transactions, these children are dropped off and picked up at the place where they beg, having previously agreed with their parents or guardians. The parent or guardian entrusts the child to a third party to beg, usually for a fee or profit share. As per the agreements, these children reside with their parents or guardians but are hired by third parties to engage in begging activities during the day. Street children in Medan City are subjected to many sorts of exploitation, which have a considerable detrimental impact on them. Extensive interviews with multiple beggars disclosed that their daily income varies from Rp. 40,000 to Rp. 120,000. The revenue is generated not solely through solicitation but also through the sale of pre-packaged sustenance, beverages, tobacco products, and cleansing wipes. Moreover, the involvement of young children in begging activities intensifies the exploitation of youngsters living on the streets.

In order to successfully eradicate or at least diminish the act of begging, there must be a shared consciousness and endeavor from both the authorities and the populace. Furthermore, the occurrence of exploitation transforms the evolving techniques of begging and the living conditions of homeless individuals in Medan City. In the last ten years, the strategies employed by beggars have evolved beyond straightforward requests for charity to the sale of items such as tissues, food, and beverages. Recently, there has been a growing trend where people dress up as "silver men" or clowns to ask for money. The remark above was issued by the director of the Social Rehabilitation Division under the Medan City Social Service. The diverse range of begging techniques and the

introduction of new approaches pose a considerable obstacle in eliminating the exploitation of street child beggars in Medan City.

Government Efforts to Eradicate the Exploitation of Street Child Beggars in Medan City

The prevalence of street begging in Medan City is undeniably a consequence of persistent poverty that remains unresolved. Thus, the Medan City government persists in eliminating these exploitative behaviors. This can be evidenced in Regional Regulation No. 6/2003, which explicitly prohibits vagrancy, begging, and engaging in immoral conduct within Medan City. The Medan City Government is tasked with addressing the issue of vagrants and beggars by ensuring their accountability to the Social Affairs Office of Medan City. Furthermore, this endeavor must be undertaken by the government with assistance. In the process, the involvement of several parties is required, including the Medan City Government represented by the Social Service, the Civil Service Police Unit, and the Medan City Police as institutional actors. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and universities, as non-institutional players, are responsible for monitoring, providing input, and engaging with the community.

Annually, the Social Service Office of Medan City receives a disbursement of monies from the Medan City Budget (APBD) specifically designated to address the issue of street child beggars. The financial distribution is allocated for implementing social welfare services and rehabilitation programs managed by the Social Affairs Office of Medan City. These programs encompass administrative services and supervision designed explicitly for street children. Conversely, the Mayor of Medan, in collaboration with the Medan City DPRD, has implemented Local Regulation No. 6/2003, which prohibits vagrancy, begging, and immoral activities. The Social Affairs Office of Medan City is responsible for enforcing this regulation.

Nevertheless, despite the passage of 18 years since the regulation was put in place, it has become evident that the execution of the administrative program needs to be functioning as intended. This is because many street beggars in Medan City still continue to engage in begging activities despite being the intended recipients of guidance to cease such actions. According to an interview with the head of the People's Welfare Division at the Regional Secretariat of Medan City, he explained:

"The problem of increasing the number of street child beggars in Medan City is actually also influenced by the widespread mobility of beggars where their domicile is not from Medan, but outside Medan City. In carrying out their begging activities, they are in the Medan City location, but after finishing with their begging activities, they return to their respective domiciles. This is what makes it difficult to track them, so we do not get a clear number (of beggars)."

About the interview, based on the author's field observations, the mobility of street beggars to Medan City occurs every day. Usually, they go to Medan City in the morning with a pick-up truck and are picked up in the evening. Meanwhile, some are escorted by their parents. Some of these street beggars are domiciled in other places such as Deli Serdang Regency, Binjai City, and Langkat Regency, which are pretty close at the same time in each Medan City boundary, making it difficult to track them without inter-regional cooperation. With different domiciles from the place of begging activities of these street children, it becomes one of the inhibiting factors to provide administrative services because after the data collection is done, they will usually be returned to their place of origin, or some are fostered in a halfway house for those who have domiciles in Medan City. The Medan City Government bears the cost of the coaching through the Medan City Social Service. However, inevitably, the implementation of the government's efforts to alleviate the practice of exploitation is still minimal, which is limited to

discourse without any maximum effort in realizing it. This can be seen 18 years after the enactment of Regional Regulation No. 6 of 2003 on the Prohibition of Vagrant, Begging, and Immoral Practices, which is not a short period. However, on the contrary, the problem of street beggars in Medan City is even more widespread, both in terms of the resulting impacts such as the proliferation of criminal acts, reducing public order and security, polluting the beauty of the city and, most notably addressing their welfare as part of the community that must receive special attention from the government.

Following the implementation of the regional rule, political players, particularly those in the executive and legislative branches, need to show more interest and commitment to its enforcement. This is evident from the necessity for increased efforts to assess the execution of the policy, as its implementation is now stagnant and falling behind in comparison to the prevalent exploitation of begging that involves street children in Medan City. The disregard shown towards the points of law outlined in Regional Regulation No. 6/2003 on the Prohibition of Vagrancy and Begging and Immoral Practices appears to render them insignificant, lacking any genuine commitment to enforce the provisions stated within. The Medan City Government's efforts to address the issue of street beggars have yet to be demonstrated despite the introduction of Regional Regulations that outline this duty as part of political policy. The outcomes of this policy should pertain to the tangible implementation of the policies enacted.

Discussion

This research explores the conditions and characteristics of beggars in Medan City, focusing on street child beggars and how the government's efforts to address the problem. The high level of poverty in Medan has forced many people, including children, to take to the streets to beg, and the lack of access to education and decent work has further exacerbated the situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened economic conditions while increasing

the number of poor people and beggars. The Medan city government has attempted to address this issue through the enactment of Regional Regulation No. 6/2003 on the Prohibition of Vagrant and Begging as well as the Immoral Practice of Raiding to protect and reduce the number of beggars as well as taking care and rehabilitation measures for beggars, especially street children. However, these efforts are hampered by the limited capacity of shelters, inadequate rehabilitation facilities, and the government's lack of seriousness in addressing this issue.

Beggars' exploitation of street children is the main issue of this study. Children are often forced to beg by various parties, including structured groups, parents, and independent individuals. They are dropped off and collected at begging stations and forced to work in degrading conditions. This exploitative practice not only harms children but also creates unrest in the social environment. Structured groups organize these children's activities, while some operate independently without adult supervision. In addition, employing children to beg is a detrimental form of exploitation for them.

The study on street child beggars in Medan City identifies poverty and lack of education as primary drivers of child begging. Many of these children come from low-income families in urban slums, limiting their access to education and forcing them into exploitative work environments. This finding aligns with previous research, such as Urbaningrum, Syahri, and Tinus (2022), who highlighted similar socioeconomic issues and noted the partial effectiveness of existing government policies. Thamrin et al. (2023) emphasized the need for skills training and economic empowerment, which echoes the current study's call for comprehensive interventions.

The study identifies forms of exploitation, including organized group exploitation, parental exploitation, and individual exploitation. This mirrors the findings by Killander (2019), who examined similar issues in South Africa and

highlighted the limitations of punitive measures. Afroz (2017) discussed the exacerbation of conditions through state control-focused approaches, which aligns with findings in Medan City, where more inclusive strategies are needed. Dyb and Zeiner (2024) also noted similar weaknesses in housing policies in Norway, underscoring the necessity for improved infrastructure and resources.

The research suggests that government and NGO interventions are crucial but face limited resources and inadequate rehabilitation facilities. This supports the findings of Asmara, Kariem, and Kencana (2023), who emphasized inter-agency coordination and community engagement as critical components for policy success. The current study also aligns with Yang et al. (2023) and Suprapti and Wardaya (2024) in emphasizing comprehensive policy reform and community-based approaches as essential for improving the welfare of street children.

In conclusion, addressing the exploitation of street child beggars in Medan City requires a holistic approach that includes government agencies, NGOs, and community involvement. The study underscores the need for integrated strategies that empower street children through education and economic opportunities, moving beyond punitive measures to focus on social inclusion and support. By comparing these findings with previous research, the study highlights the need for sustainable solutions that address the root causes of exploitation and provide meaningful opportunities for street children and their families.

Conclusion

This research shows that poverty, lack of access to education, and exploitation are the main

factors behind the increasing number of children begging on the streets in Medan City and coupled with the worsening economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated this situation, resulting in more children begging on the streets. The Medan city government's clean-up and rehabilitation efforts also face various obstacles, including limited budgets and inadequate capacity of shelters and rehabilitation facilities. The exploitation of street-bending children, whether by structured groups or individuals, is a severe problem that requires special attention. The practice not only harms children physically and psychologically but also causes social unrest and disrupts urban order and cleanliness.

This research also shows that a more comprehensive and sustainable approach is needed to address street begging in Medan. This includes policy decision-making processes and stricter law enforcement. In addition, an appropriate budget is needed to support better rehabilitation facilities and collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the community. However, it cannot be denied that this research is still limited and has so far not been able to capture the complexity of the problem of exploitation of child street beggars in Medan. Therefore, further research is needed to provide further solutions to this problem. This further research should consider the development of increasingly diverse begging modes in Medan City so that the strategies implemented can be more effective in protecting children from exploitation and helping them break the cycle of poverty.

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