

Psychology

Agents of Change**National Service Scheme and Social Workers Transforming Begging into Learning Opportunities****Jaya Bharti,^{1,*} Shyam Mishra,² Dharmendra Kumar Singh³**

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Begging remains a persistent social problem in many developing societies, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. Children and families engaged in begging often remain deprived of education, social dignity, and economic stability. Transforming this vulnerable population from dependency on alms to access to education requires community participation and sustained intervention. This study explores the role of National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers and social workers as “agents of change” in encouraging individuals engaged in begging to move towards educational opportunities. The study adopts a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews and field observations with NSS volunteers, social workers, and individuals from begging communities. The research highlights both the positive outcomes and obstacles encountered during such initiatives. Findings indicate that trust-building, community engagement, and awareness programs play a crucial role in motivating children and families to embrace education. However, socio-economic dependency, social stigma, and irregular participation pose significant challenges. The study emphasizes that community-based initiatives led by NSS volunteers can act as effective catalysts for social transformation. By fostering educational access, counseling, and rehabilitation support, such programs contribute to breaking the cycle of begging and promoting long-term social inclusion.

Keywords: Begging; Education; NSS Volunteers; Social Work; Community Development; Qualitative Research

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Introduction

E DUCATION has long been regarded as a fundamental instrument for social transformation, empowerment, and sustainable development. Scholars such as Amartya Sen (1999) emphasized that education enhances human capabilities and expands individual freedoms, enabling people to lead lives they value. Similarly, Paulo Freire (1970) highlighted that education is not merely a process of knowledge transfer but a means of liberation, particularly for marginalized and oppressed communities.

Despite constitutional guarantees like the Right to Education in India, access to education remains uneven, especially among socially excluded groups. Studies by UNICEF (2019) indicate that children engaged in street-based livelihoods, including begging, are among the most deprived in terms of educational access. These children often face barriers such as poverty, migration, lack of documentation, and social stigma.

Begging as a socio-economic phenomenon is deeply rooted in structural inequalities. Research by World Bank (2018) suggests that chronic poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities significantly contribute to the persistence of begging in urban and semi-urban areas. Furthermore, Oscar Lewis (1966) introduced the concept of the “culture of poverty,” where marginalized communities may develop adaptive behaviors, including begging, as survival strategies across generations.

Children born into begging communities are often trapped in a cycle of deprivation. According to UNESCO (2020), exclusion from formal education limits their cognitive development, employability, and social integration. The absence of early educational intervention often leads to lifelong marginalization.

Community-based interventions have emerged as effective strategies to address such issues. Research by Robert Putnam (2000) highlights the importance of social capital in fostering community development and collective action. In this context, youth-led initiatives play a significant role in bridging gaps between marginalized communities and institutional resources.

The National Service Scheme (NSS), launched in India in 1969, is one such initiative aimed at developing students’ personalities through community engagement. Studies have shown that NSS participation enhances social responsibility, leadership skills, and civic engagement among youth (Singh, 2015). NSS volunteers actively participate in literacy drives, awareness campaigns, health programs, and community development activities.

In the context of begging communities, NSS volunteers act as facilitators of change by initiating dialogue, building trust, and encouraging educational participation. According to Sharma (2018), trust-building is a critical factor in engaging marginalized populations, as these communities often exhibit resistance due to past experiences of neglect and discrimination.

Social workers also play a crucial role in rehabilitation and empowerment. Their interventions include counseling, connecting families to welfare schemes, and facilitating access to education. As noted by Jane Addams (1910), social work is fundamentally about improving living conditions and promoting social justice.

However, transforming begging communities toward education is not without challenges. Research by Kabeer (2005)

highlights that empowerment is a gradual process influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Families’ dependent on begging often perceive education as a long-term investment with uncertain returns, making immediate survival a priority.

This study is situated within this broader context and aims to explore how NSS volunteers and social workers act as “agents of change” in facilitating educational transitions among begging communities. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study seeks to capture lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges associated with such initiatives.

Although previous studies have explored the role of education in social transformation and the challenges faced by marginalized communities, limited research has specifically examined the role of National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers as grassroots change agents in transforming begging communities toward education. Existing literature largely focuses on structural barriers such as poverty, exclusion, and policy-level interventions, with comparatively less attention to youth-led community engagement and micro-level trust-building processes.

Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative studies capturing the lived experiences of multiple stakeholders, including children, parents, NSS volunteers, and social workers, within the same framework. This study attempts to fill this gap by providing an integrated, community-level perspective on how educational transformation occurs through interpersonal engagement, awareness-building, and social motivation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of NSS volunteers and social workers in facilitating trust-building and educational engagement among begging communities.
2. To identify the key structural and psychological barriers (such as economic dependency, stigma, and mobility) that hinder educational inclusion.
3. To explore the positive psychosocial and behavioral transformations among children engaged in begging after exposure to educational interventions.
4. To analyze the role of community dynamics, including peer influence and role modeling, in promoting educational participation.
5. To suggest sustainable strategies integrating educational support with socio-economic interventions for long-term transformation.

Research Questions

1. How do NSS volunteers and social workers contribute to building trust and promoting educational awareness among begging communities?
2. What are the major structural and social barriers (economic dependency, stigma, mobility) affecting the transition from begging to education?
3. What psychological and behavioral changes occur among children after participating in educational initiatives?
4. How does community motivation and peer influence contribute to educational inclusion?

Research Methodology

Table 1. Participant Categories.

Category	Number of Participants
NSS Volunteers	20
Social Workers	5
Children from Begging Communities	12
Parents/Family Members	7
Total	44

Note: Multiple responses were recorded from participants during qualitative interviews.

Table 2. Theme Framework.

Theme #	Theme Title	Category	Refined Description
T1	Trust Building and Rapport Formation	Positive	Continuous interaction and empathetic engagement by NSS volunteers and social workers helped establish trust, enabling community participation in educational initiatives
T2	Educational Awareness and Sensitization	Positive	Awareness programs improved understanding of free education, government schemes, and long-term benefits, influencing parental attitudes
T3	Confidence and Behavioral Transformation	Positive	Informal learning environments enhanced children's confidence, communication skills, and readiness for formal education
T4	Community Motivation and Role Modeling	Positive	Peer influence and visible success stories encouraged other families to adopt educational practices
T5	Economic Dependency on Begging	Challenge	Immediate income needs and reliance on begging limited the prioritization of education among families
T6	Social Stigma and Exclusion	Challenge	Discrimination and negative societal perceptions created barriers to school enrollment and retention
T7	Irregular Participation and Mobility	Challenge	Frequent relocation disrupted continuity in education and intervention efforts
T8	Psychological Resistance and Fear	Challenge	Fear of unfamiliar environments, rejection, and lack of confidence discouraged children from attending school

Note: These themes emerged from qualitative analysis of interviews, field observations, and informal discussions. They provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of educational engagement among begging communities and are further detailed in the Results section with participant narratives and tables.

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and responses of participants involved in initiatives aimed at transforming begging communities toward education. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of both enabling factors and barriers influencing educational inclusion.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were directly engaged in or affected by such initiatives, ensuring relevance and depth in the data collected. The study included the participant categories as showed in the Table 1.

Data Collection Methods

1. Semi-structured interviews with all participant categories.
2. Field observations during NSS activities and community interactions.
3. Informal discussions to capture spontaneous responses.
4. Documentation and review of NSS outreach activities.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a systematic and iterative process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved six key stages:

1. Familiarization with data – Interview transcripts and field notes were read multiple times to gain an overall understanding.
2. Initial coding – Meaningful segments of data were identified and coded manually based on recurring ideas and patterns.

3. Searching for themes – Similar codes were grouped together to form broader categories representing significant patterns.

4. Reviewing themes – Themes were refined and validated against the dataset to ensure consistency and relevance.
5. Defining and naming themes – Each theme was clearly defined and categorized into positive transformations and challenges.
6. Interpretation – Themes were interpreted in relation to research objectives and theoretical frameworks.

To enhance credibility and reliability, cross-checking of codes was conducted, and recurring responses across participant categories were compared. Triangulation was ensured through the use of multiple data sources, including interviews, field observations, and informal discussions. The analysis resulted in eight major themes, organized into two broad categories: Positive Transformation Factors and Challenges/Barriers. These themes are summarized in the framework below and are further elaborated in the Results section with supporting narratives and category-wise distribution (Tables 2–5).

Results

The present study aimed to explore the role of NSS volunteers and social workers in facilitating educational engagement among begging communities. Qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and informal discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This analysis

Table 3. Category-wise Response Distribution with Frequency and Percentage (N = 44).

Theme	NSS Volunteers (20)	Social Workers (5)	Children (12)	Parents (7)	Total (F)
Trust Building	15 (75%)	4 (80%)	5 (41.7%)	4 (57.1%)	28
Educational Awareness	14 (70%)	3 (60%)	4 (33.3%)	4 (57.1%)	25
Confidence Development	10 (50%)	2 (40%)	7 (58.3%)	3 (42.9%)	22
Community Motivation	11 (55%)	2 (40%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (42.9%)	20
Economic Dependency	12 (60%)	5 (100%)	6 (50%)	7 (100%)	30
Social Stigma	13 (65%)	4 (80%)	6 (50%)	4 (57.1%)	27
Irregular Participation	12 (60%)	3 (60%)	5 (41.7%)	4 (57.1%)	24
Psychological Resistance	9 (45%)	2 (40%)	7 (58.3%)	3 (42.9%)	21

Table 4. Positive Transformation Themes (N = 44).

Theme No.	Theme	Category	Key Insight
T1	Trust Building and Rapport Formation	Positive	Persistent engagement-built trust among families
T2	Educational Awareness and Sensitization	Positive	Awareness about free schooling encouraged enrollment
T3	Confidence and Behavioral Transformation	Positive	Children developed confidence and communication skills
T4	Community Motivation and Role Modeling	Positive	Peer examples motivated other families to participate

revealed eight major themes, which were broadly categorized into Positive Transformations and Challenges/Barriers. Table 3 presents a category-wise distribution of responses, showing the frequency and percentage of participants from each group who contributed to each theme. The table highlights the engagement patterns of NSS volunteers, social workers, children, and parents in the identified thematic areas.

Observations from Table 3:

- Trust-building was identified by a majority of participants (28/44; 63.6%) as the most critical factor facilitating engagement.
- Economic dependency and social stigma were highlighted as significant barriers, particularly by parents and social workers, underscoring structural challenges.
- The positive transformation themes (Trust, Educational Awareness, Confidence, Community Motivation) indicate the effectiveness of sustained volunteer interventions in initiating behavioral and attitudinal change.

Positive Transformation Themes

The positive transformation themes represent factors that directly facilitated the shift from dependency on begging to educational participation. These themes were further refined into Table 4, highlighting key insights from each.

Theme 1: Trust Building and Rapport Formation

As reflected in Table 4 (63.6%), trust-building emerged as the most dominant enabling factor, with NSS volunteers (75%) and social workers (80%) strongly emphasizing the importance of sustained engagement. The findings suggest that trust was not immediate but developed gradually through repeated visits, informal conversations, and empathetic, non-judgmental behavior. In the initial stages, most families exhibited hesitation and suspicion due to their prior experiences with outsiders who often failed to maintain continuity. However, consistent presence and genuine concern shown by NSS volunteers and social workers helped in reducing this resistance over time.

Participants explained that regular interaction without any

immediate expectations played a crucial role in building rapport. Volunteers often engaged in casual conversations, participated in daily activities of the community, and provided small but meaningful support such as basic learning materials or guidance. This approach helped in creating a sense of familiarity and emotional safety among the community members. As one NSS volunteer shared, “Initially, they were reluctant to even talk to us. But when we kept visiting regularly without expecting anything, they slowly started trusting us.” Another volunteer added, “Trust was not built in a day. It took weeks of continuous interaction to make them feel comfortable.” These narratives indicate that persistence and consistency were key elements in establishing trust.

Social workers further emphasized that distrust among such communities is deeply rooted in long-term marginalization and neglect. Their experiences suggest that without trust, no intervention—whether educational or rehabilitative—can be effectively implemented. As one social worker noted, “These communities have faced neglect for years. Trust-building is the first and most critical step in any intervention.” This highlights that trust is not merely a supportive factor but a prerequisite for meaningful engagement.

From the perspective of parents, trust was closely associated with the perceived intentions of the volunteers. Many parents initially believed that the volunteers’ involvement would be temporary or superficial. However, consistent follow-ups and genuine efforts altered their perception. A parent expressed, “We thought they would come once and disappear, but when they kept coming, we realized they were serious.” This shift in perception was instrumental in encouraging parents to consider educational opportunities for their children.

Children’s responses also reflected the emotional impact of trust-building. Initially, many children felt hesitant and fearful in interacting with volunteers. Over time, as familiarity increased, they began to perceive volunteers as supportive figures rather than strangers. One child mentioned, “At first I was scared to talk, but now I feel they are like teachers and friends.” Such responses indicate that trust-building not only facilitates

communication but also creates a positive emotional environment conducive to learning.

Overall, the findings clearly demonstrate that trust functions as the foundational pillar for all subsequent interventions. It enables acceptance, participation, and sustained engagement in educational activities. Without trust, awareness programs and motivational efforts are likely to remain ineffective. Therefore, trust-building can be understood as the first and most critical step in transforming begging communities toward education, acting as a bridge between external support systems and marginalized populations.

Theme 2: Educational Awareness and Sensitization

As shown in Table 4 (56.8%), educational awareness and sensitization emerged as a crucial factor influencing parental decisions, with NSS volunteers (70%) and parents (57.1%) contributing significantly to this theme. The findings reveal that a large proportion of families were initially unaware of the availability of free education, government support schemes, and the long-term benefits associated with schooling. For many participants, education was perceived as an inaccessible or irrelevant option due to their immediate economic concerns and lack of information.

The data suggest that awareness campaigns played a transformative role in reshaping these perceptions. NSS volunteers and social workers actively engaged in disseminating information related to free schooling, mid-day meal schemes, availability of books, and other educational benefits. These efforts gradually shifted the mindset of families from focusing solely on day-to-day survival to considering future possibilities for their children. As one NSS volunteer explained, “When we explained about free schooling, mid-day meals, and books, parents started showing interest.” Another volunteer added, “Awareness sessions helped them understand that education is not a burden but an opportunity.” These responses indicate that providing accurate and relevant information can significantly influence decision-making processes within marginalized communities.

From the perspective of social workers, lack of awareness was identified as one of the primary reasons behind the continuation of begging practices across generations. Their experiences highlight that many families were not resistant to education per se, but rather uninformed about accessible opportunities. As one social worker noted, “Most families lacked basic information about educational schemes. Awareness was the turning point.” This underscores the idea that informational gaps, rather than deliberate resistance, often hinder educational participation.

Parents’ narratives further reflect a shift in attitude following awareness interventions. Initially, education was not considered a priority due to economic pressures and lack of knowledge. However, once informed about the benefits and support systems, many parents began to reconsider their stance. A parent shared, “We didn’t know that education was free. Now we feel it is important for our child’s future.” This indicates a transition from ignorance to informed decision-making, which is critical for initiating behavioral change.

Children’s responses also highlight the motivational impact of awareness. Exposure to the idea of schooling and learn-

ing opportunities generated curiosity and interest among them. One child expressed, “They told me I can go to school and learn new things, so I wanted to try.” Such narratives demonstrate that awareness not only influences parents but also directly inspires children to engage in educational activities.

Overall, the findings suggest that educational awareness functions as a cognitive transformation process, altering beliefs, attitudes, and priorities. It bridges the gap between opportunity and access by enabling individuals to make informed choices. In the absence of awareness, even well-established educational provisions remain underutilized. Therefore, awareness campaigns can be considered a critical intervention strategy that initiates the transition from begging to education by reshaping perceptions at both individual and community levels.

Theme 3: Confidence and Behavioral Transformation

As reflected in Table 4 (50%), confidence and behavioral transformation emerged as a significant outcome of the intervention, with children (58.3%) showing the highest responses, indicating that they directly experienced noticeable psychological changes. The findings suggest that prior to engagement in educational activities, many children exhibited hesitation, withdrawal, and low self-esteem, largely shaped by their socio-economic conditions and lack of exposure to structured learning environments.

The introduction of informal education sessions created a safe, supportive, and non-threatening space where children could gradually express themselves without fear of judgment. Activities such as basic literacy exercises, storytelling, drawing, and interactive discussions allowed them to participate actively and build a sense of belonging. Over time, these consistent engagements contributed to visible behavioral changes, particularly in terms of communication, confidence, and willingness to learn. As one child expressed, “Before, I was afraid to speak, but now I can answer questions.” Another child shared, “I like coming to study because I can talk and learn new things.” These narratives clearly indicate that the learning environment fostered not only academic interest but also emotional comfort and self-expression.

NSS volunteers also observed significant transformations in children’s behavior. Initially, many children avoided eye contact, hesitated to participate, and remained passive during interactions. However, with continuous encouragement and engagement, they became more active and confident. One volunteer noted, “We saw a clear change in their body language. They became more confident and interactive.” Such observations highlight the role of sustained mentorship and supportive interaction in nurturing self-confidence among marginalized children.

From a professional perspective, social workers emphasized that confidence-building is a prerequisite for successful integration into formal education systems. They pointed out that without addressing psychological barriers, children may struggle to adapt to structured school environments. As one social worker explained, “Confidence-building is essential before formal school enrollment.” This suggests that informal education serves as a preparatory stage, helping children develop the emotional readiness required for formal schooling.

Parents’ responses further reinforce these findings, as they

Table 5. Challenges and Barriers (N = 44).

Theme #.	Theme	Category	Key Insight
T5	Economic Dependency on Begging	Challenge	Immediate financial needs compel families to prioritize daily earnings over education, making withdrawal from begging difficult.
T6	Social Stigma and Exclusion	Challenge	Discrimination and negative societal perceptions hinder school enrollment and retention, creating psychological barriers for children and parents.
T7	Irregular Participation and Mobility	Challenge	Frequent relocation or unstable living conditions disrupt continuity in education and the effectiveness of intervention efforts.
T8	Psychological Resistance and Fear	Challenge	Children and families may fear unfamiliar environments, rejection, or lack confidence, reducing willingness to participate in educational programs.

observed positive behavioral changes in their children at home. Increased communication, curiosity, and interest in learning were commonly reported. A parent mentioned, “Earlier my child was very quiet, but now he speaks more and shows interest in learning.” This indicates that the impact of educational interventions extends beyond the learning space and influences overall personality development.

Overall, this theme reflects that education plays a crucial role in fostering psychological empowerment and identity formation among children from begging communities. It enables them to overcome fear, build self-confidence, and develop a positive self-image. Such transformations are essential not only for educational participation but also for long-term social inclusion and personal growth.

Theme 4: Community Motivation and Role Modeling

As indicated in Table 4 (45.5%), community motivation and role modeling emerged as an important theme reflecting the influence of social dynamics within begging communities. NSS volunteers (55%) and parents (42.9%) particularly emphasized that change does not occur in isolation but is often driven by observation and collective behavior. The findings suggest that when a few individuals within the community adopt educational practices, it creates a visible and relatable example for others to follow.

The data reveal that success stories—such as a child enrolling in school or regularly attending informal classes—serve as powerful motivators for other families. Unlike external advice or formal awareness campaigns, these examples are perceived as realistic and achievable because they come from within the same socio-economic context. NSS volunteers observed that once one child begins attending school, curiosity and interest naturally develop among other children and parents. As one volunteer explained, “When one child starts going to school, others automatically get inspired.” This indicates that behavioral change spreads through observation and shared experiences rather than direct instruction alone.

Social workers further reinforced the importance of internal role models, highlighting that individuals are more likely to trust and emulate those who share similar backgrounds and challenges. External interventions may initiate awareness, but sustained motivation often comes from within the community itself. As one social worker noted, “Role models within the same community are more effective than external persuasion.” This reflects the concept that social proximity enhances credibility and acceptance.

Parents’ responses also demonstrate how community in-

fluence shapes decision-making. Many parents reported that witnessing the positive outcomes of other children’s education—such as improved behavior, confidence, and routine—encouraged them to reconsider their own choices. A parent shared, “When we saw another child going to school, we also thought of sending ours.” This highlights that change is often gradual and influenced by collective observation rather than individual initiative alone.

Children’s narratives further illustrate the role of peer influence in motivating educational participation. Friendships and shared experiences play a significant role in shaping their interests and aspirations. One child expressed, “My friend goes to school, so I also wanted to go.” Such responses indicate that children are not only influenced by adults but also by their immediate peer group, making peer interaction a critical factor in promoting education.

The analysis of positive transformation themes highlights the mechanisms through which NSS volunteers and social workers facilitate educational engagement among begging communities:

1. Trust Building and Rapport Formation (T1): Persistent and empathetic interactions establish trust, creating a safe and supportive environment for children and families to consider educational opportunities. Trust serves as the foundational pillar for all subsequent interventions.
2. Educational Awareness and Sensitization (T2): Providing accurate information about free schooling, government schemes, and long-term benefits reshapes parental attitudes and motivates families to enroll their children in education. Awareness acts as a bridge between community members and institutional resources.
3. Confidence and Behavioral Transformation (T3): Exposure to informal learning environments and supportive engagement enhances children’s confidence, communication skills, and readiness for formal education, enabling them to actively participate and adapt to structured schooling.
4. Community Motivation and Role Modeling (T4): Social learning and peer influence create a ripple effect, where observing the success of early adopters encourages others to embrace educational practices. Supporting these early adopters is crucial for scaling interventions and sustaining long-term change.

Together, these themes indicate that effective transformation is not only individual but also social—trust, awareness, skill-building, and peer influence interact to create conditions for sustained educational participation and broader community-level change.

Challenges and Barriers

In addition to positive transformations, the study identified several significant challenges and barriers that hinder the transition from begging to education. These obstacles are structural, social, and psychological in nature, affecting both children and their families. Table 5 presents the key challenges, highlighting their category and main insights derived from participant narratives.

Theme 5: Economic Dependency on Begging

As shown in Table 5 (68.2%), economic dependency on begging emerged as the most dominant barrier in the transition from begging to education, with 100% of parents and social workers identifying it as a critical issue. The findings clearly indicate that immediate financial needs and survival pressures often override long-term educational goals. For most families, begging is not merely a practice but a primary source of daily income, making it difficult to prioritize schooling over subsistence.

The data suggest that children are often viewed as contributors to household income, and their participation in begging is seen as necessary for family survival. As a result, sending children to school is perceived as a loss of income rather than an investment in the future. Parents repeatedly emphasized the economic constraints they face, highlighting the fragile nature of their livelihoods. One parent explained, “If my child goes to school, our income will reduce. We depend on daily earnings.” Another parent added, “We cannot afford to lose even one earning member.” These responses reflect the harsh reality that education, despite its long-term benefits, is often considered secondary to immediate economic survival.

Social workers strongly reinforced this perspective, identifying economic dependency as a structural barrier that cannot be addressed through awareness alone. They emphasized that without alternative income sources or financial support, efforts to promote education are likely to have limited success. As one social worker noted, “Economic dependency is the biggest obstacle. Without financial alternatives, change is difficult.” This highlights the need for integrated interventions that combine educational initiatives with livelihood support.

NSS volunteers also observed this tension between willingness and constraint. While many parents expressed interest in educating their children, financial pressures often forced them to continue with begging practices. One volunteer stated, “Parents are willing, but financial pressure forces them to continue begging.” This indicates that the issue is not always resistance but rather compulsion driven by economic necessity.

Children’s narratives further illustrate how economic dependency directly affects their participation in education. Many children reported accompanying their parents to contribute to daily earnings, which limits their ability to attend regular classes. One child shared, “Sometimes I go with my parents because they need help.” Such responses highlight that children are active participants in the economic structure of the family, making their withdrawal from begging particularly challenging.

Overall, this theme underscores that economic dependency is a structural and systemic barrier that significantly constrains the effectiveness of educational interventions. While awareness and motivation can initiate change, sustainable transformation

requires addressing the underlying economic vulnerabilities of families. Therefore, the findings highlight the urgent need for economic support mechanisms, such as livelihood programs, financial incentives, and social welfare schemes, to complement educational efforts and ensure long-term impact.

Theme 6: Social Stigma and Exclusion

As reflected in Table 5 (61.4%), social stigma and exclusion emerged as a significant barrier affecting both access to and continuity in education. A high proportion of social workers (80%) and NSS volunteers (65%) emphasized that stigma operates as an invisible yet powerful constraint, often undermining the effectiveness of educational interventions. The findings indicate that individuals from begging communities are frequently perceived as socially inferior, which influences how they are treated within educational and community settings.

The data reveal that discrimination is not always overt but is often subtle, manifesting in behaviors such as social distancing, exclusion from peer groups, or differential treatment within classrooms. Children, in particular, are highly sensitive to such experiences, which negatively impact their motivation to attend school. As one child expressed, “Other children don’t sit with us. They think we are different.” This highlights how early experiences of exclusion can create feelings of inferiority and discourage continued participation in education.

NSS volunteers also observed that stigma persists even after children are successfully enrolled in schools. Despite initial efforts to integrate them into formal education, these children often face challenges in adjusting due to the attitudes of peers and, in some cases, teachers. One volunteer noted, “Even after enrollment, they face subtle discrimination.” This suggests that enrollment alone is not sufficient; ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment is equally important for retention.

From the perspective of social workers, stigma is deeply embedded in societal perceptions and is therefore difficult to address through short-term interventions. They emphasized that negative stereotypes associated with begging communities create psychological and social barriers that hinder inclusion. As one social worker stated, “Social stigma creates invisible barriers that are difficult to address.” This underscores that stigma is not just an individual issue but a structural and cultural challenge.

Parents’ narratives further reflect the impact of social exclusion on decision-making. Feelings of discomfort, fear of humiliation, and concern about their children’s treatment often influence their willingness to engage with formal educational systems. A parent shared, “Sometimes we feel uncomfortable sending our children because of how others treat them.” This indicates that stigma affects not only children but also the broader family context, reinforcing patterns of exclusion.

Overall, this theme highlights that social stigma functions as a barrier to both inclusion and retention, limiting the long-term success of educational initiatives. While access to education may be facilitated through external efforts, sustained participation requires an environment that is accepting and inclusive. Addressing stigma, therefore, requires broader societal change, including sensitization programs within schools and communities, to promote equality, dignity, and social ac-

ceptance.

Theme 7: Irregular Participation and Mobility

As indicated in Table 5 (54.5%), irregular participation and mobility emerged as a significant barrier that disrupts continuity in both education and intervention efforts. The findings suggest that the transient nature of begging communities, often driven by the search for better earning opportunities or eviction from informal settlements, makes consistent engagement extremely challenging. Unlike settled populations, these families frequently relocate, resulting in discontinuity in children's learning processes and weakening the impact of ongoing educational initiatives.

The data indicate that mobility directly affects school attendance, retention, and the ability of volunteers and social workers to maintain sustained contact with participants. Parents reported that relocation is often unavoidable due to economic pressures, seasonal variations in income opportunities, or lack of stable housing. As one parent explained, "We move from place to place, so it is difficult to continue schooling." This highlights that mobility is not a matter of choice but a survival strategy, making it difficult to adhere to structured educational routines.

NSS volunteers also emphasized the frustration associated with disrupted progress. Despite investing time and effort in building rapport and initiating learning, the sudden relocation of families often results in a complete break in continuity. One volunteer noted, "Just when progress begins, families relocate." This reflects the challenge of sustaining long-term interventions in a highly unstable environment, where consistent follow-up is not always possible.

From a professional standpoint, social workers identified mobility as a major constraint in planning and implementing effective programs. Long-term strategies such as school enrollment, regular attendance monitoring, and behavioral development require stability, which is often absent in such contexts. As one social worker stated, "Mobility makes long-term intervention planning difficult." This underscores the limitation of conventional educational models when applied to transient populations.

Children's narratives further illustrate how mobility affects their learning experiences. Frequent shifts in location disrupt not only their attendance but also their emotional connection with learning spaces and facilitators. One child shared, "Sometimes I cannot come because we shift to another place." Such disruptions can lead to loss of interest, reduced motivation, and difficulty in adapting to new environments repeatedly.

Overall, this theme highlights that irregular participation and mobility act as structural barriers to continuity and retention in education. While initial engagement may be achieved, sustaining it requires adaptive and flexible approaches. The findings suggest the need for mobile education units, bridge courses, and community-based learning centers that can accommodate the dynamic nature of these communities. Addressing mobility-related challenges is essential for ensuring that educational interventions are not only accessible but also sustainable over time.

Theme 8: Psychological Resistance and Fear

As shown in Table 5 (47.7%), psychological resistance and fear emerged as a significant internal barrier, particularly among children (58.3%), indicating that emotional factors play a crucial role in shaping their educational participation. The findings suggest that beyond economic and social constraints, many children experience deep-seated anxiety, hesitation, and lack of confidence when exposed to formal schooling environments. These feelings are often rooted in unfamiliarity, previous experiences of exclusion, and limited exposure to structured learning settings.

The data reveal that for many children, the idea of attending school itself can be overwhelming. The transition from an unstructured lifestyle to a disciplined classroom environment creates uncertainty and fear. Children expressed concerns about not being able to adjust, communicate, or meet expectations. As one child shared, "I feel scared in school because everything is new." Another child explained, "I don't know how to behave in class." These narratives highlight that the fear is not only about academic performance but also about social adaptation and acceptance.

NSS volunteers observed that such hesitation often leads to avoidance behavior, where children either refuse to attend school or participate minimally when present. This resistance is not due to lack of interest but rather a lack of confidence and familiarity. One volunteer noted, "They hesitate because they feel they won't fit in." This suggests that children perceive themselves as different or inadequate, which affects their willingness to engage.

Social workers further emphasized that fear of rejection and failure is a major psychological barrier that prevents children from enrolling in or continuing education. They pointed out that children from marginalized backgrounds often anticipate negative experiences, which discourages them even before they attempt to participate. As one social worker stated, "Fear of rejection and failure prevents enrollment." This reflects how internalized perceptions of inadequacy can limit opportunities for growth.

Parents also reported instances where children resisted attending school due to discomfort or anxiety. Despite recognizing the importance of education, parents often struggle to convince their children to attend regularly. One parent mentioned, "Sometimes children refuse to go because they feel uncomfortable." This indicates that psychological resistance can influence not only children's behavior but also parental decisions regarding education.

The study also identified several critical obstacles that hinder the educational engagement of children and families in begging communities:

1. Economic Dependency on Begging (T5): Immediate survival needs and reliance on daily earnings limit families' ability to prioritize education. Even when aware of educational benefits, parents often perceive schooling as a long-term investment with uncertain returns. Economic vulnerability remains a primary barrier to sustained participation.
2. Social Stigma and Exclusion (T6): Marginalization and negative societal perceptions discourage families from enrolling children in schools. Discrimination from peers,

teachers, or the broader community can lead to early drop-out and reluctance to participate in educational initiatives. Overcoming stigma requires consistent community outreach and sensitization.

3. Irregular Participation and Mobility (T7): Frequent relocation, seasonal migration, or unstable living conditions disrupt continuity in schooling and intervention programs. Children often miss crucial learning periods, making it difficult to maintain progress and build long-term skills. Flexibility and follow-up mechanisms are essential to address this challenge.
4. Psychological Resistance and Fear (T8): Children and parents may experience fear, anxiety, or lack of confidence toward formal education due to unfamiliarity with school environments or past experiences of rejection. Psychological barriers reduce engagement and necessitate supportive, empathetic, and incremental approaches to integration.

These barriers illustrate that educational inclusion is influenced not only by individual willingness but also by structural, social, and psychological factors. Addressing these challenges requires multi-faceted interventions—combining economic support, awareness campaigns, trust-building, and flexible, child-centered educational approaches—to enable lasting transformation.

Discussion

The findings of the present study highlight that the transformation of begging communities toward education is a complex and multidimensional process influenced by psychological, social, and economic factors. The results align with several established theoretical perspectives in education, sociology, and development studies.

The prominence of trust-building (63.6%) in the findings supports the principles of participatory development theory. According to Paulo Freire (1970), meaningful social transformation occurs when marginalized individuals are actively engaged in dialogue rather than treated as passive recipients of aid. The process of repeated interaction and empathetic communication observed in this study reflects Freire's concept of dialogical engagement, where trust becomes the foundation for empowerment.

Similarly, Robert Chambers (1994) emphasized that development interventions are effective only when they prioritize local participation and build relationships of trust. The findings of this study reinforce that NSS volunteers, through continuous engagement, act as facilitators rather than authority figures, thereby enabling community acceptance.

The role of awareness (56.8%) in influencing educational participation aligns with the Capability Approach proposed by Amartya Sen (1999). Sen argues that development should be understood as the expansion of individuals' capabilities and freedoms rather than merely economic growth.

In the present study, awareness campaigns enhanced participants' understanding of educational opportunities, thereby expanding their ability to make informed choices. This reflects Sen's notion that lack of information is a form of deprivation, and improving awareness contributes to capability enhancement.

Further, Martha Nussbaum (2000) emphasized the im-

portance of education in developing human capabilities such as reasoning, affiliation, and control over one's environment. The findings demonstrate that awareness initiatives helped families move beyond survival-oriented thinking toward long-term developmental goals.

The themes of confidence-building (50%) and psychological resistance (47.7%) can be understood through self-efficacy theory proposed by Albert Bandura (1977). Bandura suggests that individuals' belief in their ability to perform tasks significantly influences their behavior and motivation.

In this study, children initially exhibited fear and hesitation but gradually developed confidence through supportive learning environments. This aligns with Bandura's concept that mastery experiences and social encouragement enhance self-efficacy.

Additionally, Erik Erikson (1968) emphasized that early experiences of competence or failure shape an individual's identity. The findings suggest that educational exposure contributes to positive identity formation among children from marginalized backgrounds.

The role of community motivation (45.5%) strongly supports social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing others. The ripple effect observed in the study—where one child's enrollment motivates others—demonstrates the process of observational learning.

This is further supported by Lev Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the role of social interaction in cognitive development. The findings indicate that peer influence and shared community experiences act as catalysts for behavioral change.

The dominance of economic dependency (68.2%) highlights the relevance of structural inequality theory. Karl Marx (1867) argued that economic structures determine social conditions and opportunities. In the context of this study, families' reliance on begging reflects systemic poverty that limits access to education.

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) introduced the concept of cultural and economic capital, suggesting that disadvantaged groups lack the resources necessary for social mobility. The findings demonstrate that without economic support, educational interventions alone are insufficient.

The issue of stigma (61.4%) can be explained through Erving Goffman (1963), who described stigma as a socially constructed process that devalues individuals based on perceived differences. Children from begging communities face discrimination that affects both access and retention in education.

This aligns with Howard Becker (1963), whose labeling theory suggests that societal labels can influence individuals' self-identity and behavior. The findings indicate that stigma not only affects how others perceive these children but also how they perceive themselves.

The challenge of mobility (54.5%) reflects issues highlighted in studies on marginalized and migrant populations. Michael Cernea (1997) emphasized that displacement and instability disrupt social structures and access to services.

The findings of this study similarly indicate that frequent relocation prevents continuity in education, suggesting the need for flexible and adaptive learning systems.

The discussion indicates that the transition from begging

to education is not merely an educational concern but a complex, multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of psychological, social, and economic factors. Psychological dimensions, as explained by Bandura and Erikson, influence self-confidence and identity formation among children. Social factors, highlighted by Freire, Vygotsky, and Goffman, emphasize the role of interaction, social learning, and stigma in shaping participation. Additionally, economic structures, as discussed by Sen, Marx, and Bourdieu, determine access to resources and opportunities, thereby influencing the feasibility of educational engagement.

Conclusion

The present study highlights that the transition from begging to education is a complex and multidimensional process shaped by the interplay of social, economic, and psychological factors. The findings clearly demonstrate that while educational interventions have the potential to bring significant positive transformation, their success largely depends on sustained community engagement and the ability to address underlying structural barriers.

The study reveals that NSS volunteers and social workers play a crucial role as agents of change by initiating trust-building, spreading educational awareness, and creating supportive learning environments. Trust-building emerged as the foundational element that enabled access to marginalized communities, while awareness campaigns helped reshape perceptions regarding the importance of education. Furthermore, the study identified that children exposed to informal educational settings showed noticeable improvements in confidence, communication, and willingness to learn, indicating the role of education in fostering psychological empowerment and identity development.

At the same time, the findings underscore that several persistent challenges continue to hinder the process of transformation. Economic dependency on begging remains the most significant barrier, as families prioritize immediate survival over long-term educational benefits. Social stigma and exclusion further limit participation by creating feelings of inferiority and discrimination, while mobility and irregular participation disrupt continuity in educational engagement. Additionally, psycholog-

ical resistance among children highlights the importance of emotional readiness and the need for gradual integration into formal schooling systems.

The study also emphasizes the importance of community dynamics, particularly the role of peer influence and role modeling in promoting educational participation. The ripple effect observed within communities suggests that small, successful interventions can lead to broader social change when supported by consistent efforts and visible outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that transforming begging communities toward education requires a holistic and integrated approach. While initiatives led by NSS volunteers are effective in initiating change at the grassroots level, long-term sustainability depends on the collaboration of multiple stakeholders, including educational institutions, government agencies, and social organizations. Interventions must go beyond awareness and incorporate economic support, social inclusion strategies, and psychologically sensitive approaches to ensure meaningful and lasting impact.

Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights into the role of NSS volunteers and social workers in promoting education among begging communities, certain limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the study is based on a relatively small sample size ($N = 44$), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The use of purposive sampling, although appropriate for qualitative research, may introduce selection bias, as participants were chosen based on their involvement in intervention activities.

Second, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly among volunteers and parents.

Third, the research is context-specific, focusing on particular communities, and the findings may not be fully applicable to other regions with different socio-economic conditions.

Finally, due to the qualitative nature of the study, the findings emphasize depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. Future research may incorporate mixed-method approaches to strengthen empirical validation. ■

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