RETHINKING URBAN POVERTY: THE EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF BEGGING

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ABSTRACT

Urban beggary in Indonesian cities such as Pekanbaru persists as a complex social issue driven by intertwined economic, cultural, and structural factors. Rapid urbanization and economic growth have failed to alleviate deep-rooted social inequalities, resulting in a visible increase in street beggars despite government interventions. This study aims to explore the underlying factors contributing to the persistence of urban begging in Pekanbaru, understand beggars' lived experiences, evaluate policy effectiveness, and identify barriers to sustainable solutions. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through purposive and snowball sampling, in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation in major begging hotspots across Pekanbaru. The findings reveal a heterogeneous population of beggars, including children, adults, and the elderly, often trapped in cycles of poverty, low education, and intergenerational transmission. While economic deprivation is a significant driver, agency, adaptation, and "innovative" strategies—such as performative begging—were also observed. The study highlights the limited success of punitive or charitable policies, underscoring the need for holistic, participatory interventions that address both structural constraints and socio-cultural stigmas. In conclusion, urban beggary in Pekanbaru is shaped by a complex interplay of poverty, social exclusion, and adaptive survival strategies. The research is beneficial for policymakers and social practitioners seeking context-sensitive, multi-dimensional solutions. Future studies should examine the dynamics of organized begging syndicates and evaluate long-term impacts of inclusive social programs.

Keywords: Adaptation, Beggars, Phenomenology, Poverty, Urbanization

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of urban beggary has become a persistent and complex social issue in major Indonesian cities, including Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau Province. This phenomenon emerges as a consequence of interlinked social, economic, and cultural factors that drive certain individuals to the margins of society (Tobing, 2014; Ikhsan et al., 2024). As an expanding urban center, Pekanbaru is experiencing rapid economic growth, urbanization, and infrastructural development, yet these advancements have not translated into evenly distributed social welfare (Ikhsan et al., 2024; Sasmita et al., 2023). The resulting social inequality is evident in the increasing number of beggars, a trend that persists despite governmental interventions and policy efforts. According to official statistics, the incidence of poverty in Pekanbaru has shown a consistent upward trend, with the number of impoverished residents increasing from 30,400 in 2020 to nearly 36,000 in 2022 (BPS Indonesia, 2024). While the city does not have the highest poverty rate in Riau Province, the persistent growth in the number of beggars and homeless people illustrates the challenges of poverty alleviation and urban social management (Rahman et al., 2023). The presence of beggars in urban spaces disrupts both the city's aesthetic and its social harmony, and is frequently likened to a "contagion" threatening urban comfort and security (Suparlan, 1993; Osa Karina, 2022). This issue is not unique to Indonesia; studies in India, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Brazil also show a correlation between urbanization, poverty, and the proliferation of street begging (Akinyemi et al., 2021; Tade & Salami, 2019; Ojong & George, 2020; Garcia et al., 2017). Globally, the rise in urban beggars is often linked with a lack of educational opportunities, insufficient job markets, migration from rural to urban areas, and inadequate social safety nets (World Bank, 2022; ILO, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this trend by disrupting livelihoods, increasing unemployment, and forcing more vulnerable groups into informal survival strategies such as begging (Sumner et al., 2020; Jalil, 2021; Asian Development Bank, 2020). Social distancing policies, business closures, and the collapse of service

industries compounded poverty in urban areas, especially for those without stable employment or social protection (UNDP, 2021).

Despite a range of governmental and non-governmental programs intended to address poverty and urban begging, the problem remains persistent and multi-dimensional (Muslim, 2013; Fahriadi & Adianto, 2023). Main research problems include: What are the driving factors behind the proliferation of beggars in Pekanbaru? How do beggars navigate urban life in terms of social and economic well-being? What barriers hinder the resolution of this issue? Why has begging become an entrenched profession in urban contexts? The general solution proposed by policymakers has been a combination of social welfare programs, punitive measures (such as anti-begging laws), and sporadic skills training for the urban poor (Waleleng & Pratiknjo, 2023). However, the efficacy of these interventions is debatable, as most fail to address underlying structural inequalities or to provide sustainable pathways out of poverty (Lewis, 1966; Bradshaw, 2007).

Scientific literature points toward the necessity of multi-faceted interventions that address not only the economic but also the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of poverty and begging (Lewis, 1966; Bradshaw, 2007; Palikhah, 2017). The "culture of poverty" thesis, first proposed by Oscar Lewis (1966), suggests that chronic poverty engenders specific attitudes and behaviors—including passivity, fatalism, and a reliance on immediate rewards—that may perpetuate the cycle of deprivation. Other scholars emphasize the importance of structural and institutional factors, such as limited access to education, exclusion from labor markets, and weak social safety nets (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2021; Tschudin, 2007; Siahaan, 2004). Studies in Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America consistently show that effective anti-begging strategies must incorporate both "welfare" and "empowerment" approaches—combining material assistance with social reintegration, capacity building, and community involvement (Delista Togatorop, 2017; Rohmah, 2017; Garcia et al., 2017; Ojong & George, 2020). Preventive, rehabilitative, and participatory models, as recommended by Rohmah (2017) and Pratama (2022), are found to be more effective than merely punitive or charitable measures.

A review of national and international literature reveals several key findings and persistent gaps. Studies have documented various causes of begging, such as lack of employment (Itang, 2015), inadequate skills, family breakdown, mental health problems, and manipulative behaviors by certain professional beggars (Vera Risma, 2024; Grace J. Waleleng, 2023; Pratama, 2022). Yet, there is a lack of localized, in-depth, phenomenological analyses that capture the lived experiences of beggars in Indonesian cities like Pekanbaru—particularly in the post-pandemic context. Most existing studies rely on quantitative or policy-oriented frameworks, while few employ qualitative, phenomenological approaches to understand how beggars themselves perceive their circumstances, agency, and survival strategies (Mardhika et al., 2024; Spiegelberg, 1978; Crotty, 1996). Internationally, similar gaps exist, as shown by recent reviews in journals such as Urban Studies and Social Indicators Research, which highlight the need for micro-level, ethnographic, and phenomenological investigations into urban poverty and marginality (Akinyemi et al., 2021; Tade & Salami, 2019; Garcia et al., 2017). Furthermore, interventions in other countries have demonstrated limited success when they do not address the socio-cultural stigmatization and lack of genuine social reintegration for beggars (World Bank, 2022; ILO, 2021). Local research, such as by Muslim (2013) and Jalil (2021), often stops at policy recommendation and lacks insight into the "voice" of the beggars and their complex motivations—including cases of voluntary vs. involuntary begging, or the rise of organized begging syndicates (Risma, 2024; Ningtyas & Erianjoni, 2022).

This research aims to explore, in-depth, the phenomenon of urban begging in Pekanbaru by identifying the driving factors, examining the socio-economic conditions of beggars, evaluating existing policies, and assessing the barriers to their effective resolution. Specifically, the study seeks to answer: What are the underlying factors driving the proliferation of beggars in Pekanbaru? How do beggars perceive and experience their social and economic lives? What are the main obstacles in eradicating begging in the city? Why is begging maintained as a profession among certain groups? Unlike previous research, this study employs a phenomenological approach (Husserl, 2005; Crotty, 1996; Asih, 2005), allowing the voices and subjective experiences of beggars in Pekanbaru to be foregrounded. The novelty lies in integrating micro-level, qualitative insights with macro-level policy analysis to understand not only the "what" and "how" of urban begging but also the "why" from the beggars' own perspectives. The research hypothesizes that the

persistence of urban begging in Pekanbaru is not solely the result of economic deprivation or policy inadequacy, but is also shaped by entrenched cultural values, adaptive survival strategies, and the perceived (often rational) advantages of begging compared to other forms of informal work. The study will also explore the effects of post-pandemic economic disruptions and the limitations of existing interventions. The scope covers adult and child beggars in various locations in Pekanbaru, focusing on their socio-economic backgrounds, motivations, daily experiences, and interactions with both the public and authorities. The study contextualizes findings within national trends and global literature, drawing lessons for both local and broader policy interventions.

METHOD

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative phenomenological approach aimed at exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of urban beggars in Pekanbaru City. Phenomenology, as articulated by Husserl (2005) and further developed by Crotty (1996), emphasizes understanding phenomena through the perceptions and consciousness of individuals, rather than relying on preconceived categories. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating complex social realities that cannot be reduced to quantitative measurements (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher serves as the main research instrument, engaging directly with participants in the field, thus enabling a rich, descriptive, and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Moleong, 2007; van Manen, 2017). The principal aim is to uncover the essence and meaning of the beggars' experiences, guided by Seligman's (2011) theory of authentic happiness in developing observation and interview frameworks.

Research Location

The research was conducted in Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau Province, Indonesia, a city spanning 632.26 square kilometers and consisting of 15 districts. As of 2024, Pekanbaru's population totals approximately 1,138,530, with a density of about 1,800 people per square kilometer (BPS Pekanbaru, 2024). Data collection sites were carefully selected based on their status as frequent gathering points for beggars and high population traffic, such as Pasar Arengka, the Plaza Ramayana shopping district, Simpang Lampu Merah Pasar Pagi, Simpang Tabek Gadang, Simpang Empat Flyover Mall SKA, and Simpang Lampu Merah Jalan Garuda Sakti. These locations represent the diversity of economic activity in Pekanbaru, where residents pursue livelihoods as civil servants, traders, entrepreneurs, scavengers, farmers, drivers, industrial laborers, and more.

Table 1. Research Sites and Key Characteristics

No	Location	Description	Reason for Selection
1	Pasar Arengka	Central market, high pedestrian flow	Major beggar congregation point
2	Plaza Ramayana area	Shopping/commercial district	High transaction/foot traffic
3	Simpang Lampu Merah Pasar Pagi	Main intersection, busy road	Visibility and accessibility
4	Simpang Tabek Gadang	Transportation node	Flow of people from various backgrounds
5	Simpang Empat Flyover Mall SKA	Mall/transportation node	Frequent congregation of beggars
6	Simpang Lampu Merah Garuda Sakti	Key urban crossroad	Representative of city's peripheral economy

Entry Procedures

Prior to entering the field, the researcher prepared all necessary official research permits and introductory letters from relevant governmental authorities. Preliminary observations were conducted to familiarize the researcher with the local context and to identify potential informants. The main phase of

data collection was scheduled from October to December 2024. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, including obtaining informed consent from participants, guaranteeing anonymity, and ensuring the respectful and dignified treatment of all informants throughout the research process (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Informant Selection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method that involves choosing individuals who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The criteria for informant selection included individuals who reside in Pekanbaru and earn their primary income through begging. Following Spradley's (1979) guidelines, informants needed to have extensive experience with begging activities, be actively involved in the city's begging community, and be available to provide comprehensive information (Faisal, 1990). To expand the sample and reach a broader representation, the researcher employed snowball sampling, whereby initial informants referred the researcher to other beggars in their network. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, in which interviews were conducted until no new information or themes emerged (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure richness and triangulation of findings (Miles & Huberman, 2014). The first method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their personal narratives, motivations, coping strategies, and perceptions of urban life. The interviews, which were audio-recorded (with consent) and later transcribed verbatim, began with open-ended questions such as, "Can you describe your daily routine as a beggar in Pekanbaru?" and "What factors led you to begin begging?" This approach enabled the researcher to explore not just the circumstances but also the meanings ascribed by the beggars to their lived experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was conducted. The researcher observed beggars' daily activities, interactions, and routines in public spaces without participating in the activities themselves, taking detailed field notes and, where possible, photographs to capture contextual data (Spradley, 1980; Kawulich, 2005). This observational approach provided additional insights into patterns of behavior, locations, and the social dynamics at play. The third data collection method was documentation, which included collecting relevant official documents, statistics from BPS Pekanbaru, and photographic records of the research process and context. Documentation also extended to audio and visual records of interviews, always ensuring participants' consent.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model articulated by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three interrelated steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, the researcher systematically selected, coded, and condensed raw data from field notes, interview transcripts, and documents. This step involved organizing data into manageable units while preserving core meanings. In the data display phase, the reduced data were organized into thematic matrices, charts, and narrative summaries to facilitate pattern recognition and comparison. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, involved interpreting the data to derive meaningful findings, developing emergent themes, and cross-checking conclusions for consistency and alignment with the research questions (Miles et al., 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was performed manually, and qualitative software such as NVivo was considered for managing large data sets (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Table 2. Phases of Qualitative Data Analysis

Step	Description	Output
Data Reduction	Selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting data from field notes, etc.	Coded segments, theme labels
Data Display	Organizing and compressing information for conclusion-drawing	Thematic matrices, charts

Step	Description	Output
Conclusion Drawing	Interpreting patterns, inferring meaning, validating findings	Synthesized narrative, theory

Data Trustworthiness and Credibility

The rigor and trustworthiness of the research were ensured through several strategies based on the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and further detailed by Sugiyono (2014): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was addressed through the triangulation of data sources, methods, and theories, as well as through member checking, whereby preliminary findings were reviewed by key informants for accuracy. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the context and participant experiences, enabling others to judge the relevance of findings for other settings. Dependability was ensured by maintaining detailed records and audit trails of all research activities, while confirmability was reinforced by researcher reflexivity, peer debriefing, and a transparent analytic process. The specific triangulation approaches applied in this research are summarized as follows:

Table 3. Triangulation Strategies Used in the Study

Triangulation Type	Purpose	Application in Study
Source	Different informants/sites	Beggars, officials, residents
Method	Multiple data collection techniques	Interview, observation, documentation
Theory	Diverse theoretical perspectives	Phenomenology, poverty theories
Investigator	Cross-validation by research team	Peer review, audit process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Orientation

This study explores the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of begging in Pekanbaru City, Riau Province, Indonesia. The research population consists of both native and migrant individuals with varying backgrounds, including men, women, children, and the elderly, each with unique motivations and circumstances that have led them to a life of begging. Field observations and interviews conducted in May 2025 identified beggars operating in high-traffic areas such as traffic lights, market corners, and mall entrances. The findings reveal both "genuine" beggars—those who beg out of necessity—and "pseudo" beggars, including those renting children or performing other acts for greater sympathy.

Research Implementation

The research was conducted from early May to late May 2025, with the researcher employing a pre-planned approach for identifying informants and negotiating access. Information about active begging spots was obtained from online sources and personal networks.

Table 4. Research Activities and Timeline

Name	Date	Activity Description
AM	19 April 2025	Observation and informant selection
	12 May 2025	Initial approach and street interview
SG	21 April 2025	Observation and informant selection
	14 May 2025	Initial approach and interviews (street and at home)
ST	23 April 2025	Observation and initial approach
	15 May 2025	Interview (street)
Kak R	23 April 2025	Observation and initial approach
	16 May 2025	Interview (street and at home)
Pak AP	25 April 2025	Observation and initial approach
	17 May 2025	Interview (street and at home)
IW	27 April 2025	Observation and initial approach
	19 May 2025	Interview (street and at home)

Profiles of Beggars in Pekanbaru City

Table 5. Demographic Profiles of Beggar Informants

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Duration Begging	Location	Daily Income
AM	Male	70	Primary	3 years	Sidomulyo	Rp30–60k
SG	Male	13	Junior HS	2 years	Palas	Rp50–100k
ST	Female	35	Unstated	3.5 years	Arifin Ahmad, Marpoyan	Rp50–100k
Kak R	Female	30	Primary	5 years	Panam	Rp50–100k
Pak AP	Male	58	Unstated	2 years	Jl. Arifin Ahmad	Rp30–150k
IW	Male	27	Primary	7 years	Arengka, markets	Rp200–250k

AM, aged 70, formerly worked as a public transportation driver. He shifted from selling newspapers and tissues to begging due to old age, physical decline, and lack of employment opportunities. His children also beg, highlighting intergenerational poverty. SG, a 13-year-old junior high student, began begging at age 11. He supports his mother and three younger siblings; his mother is also a beggar. SG's family receives no social aid, relying entirely on street earnings. ST, a 35-year-old mother, turned to begging with her husband after her husband lost his job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both parents beg to support their children, also selling balloons for extra income. Kak R, aged 30, is a mother of three. Her husband is a low-wage janitor. She chooses begging as the only viable means to supplement her family income due to lack of skills, education, and childcare. Pak AP, 58, formerly a driver, became disabled following an accident. He moved to Pekanbaru and now begs, sometimes dressed as a clown to attract more sympathy. He prefers not to burden his children or relatives. IW, 27, is physically healthy but became a beggar after failing to secure regular employment. Initially tricked into begging by acquaintances, he now manages a group of beggars and earns a significant income. These findings reflect a heterogeneous population of beggars, including individuals of all ages, genders, and backgrounds, forced into street begging by a mixture of structural constraints (poverty, joblessness, disability, single parenthood), intergenerational transmission, and, in some cases, learned helplessness or opportunistic adaptation. These findings corroborate global research showing similar demographic diversity among urban beggars (Abdelmonem, 2021; Tipple & Speak, 2009).

Patterns of Beggar Behavior in Pekanbaru

A major finding is the role of poverty and low education in perpetuating street begging. Most informants had little or no schooling, and almost none possessed marketable skills, mirroring global patterns in low- and middle-income countries (Bose & Hwang, 2016; Marpsat, 2014). For example, AM and Kak R, both with only primary education, described a lifelong lack of job stability, forcing them to rely on informal sector survival strategies. SG, despite being of school age, prefers to beg rather than attend school, attracted by immediate cash and the perceived futility of education—a finding echoed by Devereux (2017) and Galla et al. (2021), who identify educational deprivation as a driver and consequence of child begging. Some informants cited personal preference, resignation, or emotional adaptation as factors. Pak AP and AM, both elderly or disabled, described acceptance of their circumstances, seeing begging as the only accessible survival strategy. These findings reflect the "capability deprivation" framework by Sen (1999), emphasizing not just poverty but constrained choices and agency loss. In alignment with studies in Nigeria (Adeyemi et al., 2017) and India (Patel et al., 2021), many elderly beggars feel abandoned by family and social safety nets. A recurrent pattern is the "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1959), where generational transfer of values, beliefs, and behaviors leads to normalized dependence, passivity, and low aspirations. IW's group illustrates how young, able-bodied individuals may persist in begging due to learned behaviors, peer influence, and comfort with easy earnings, echoing the findings of Lewis (1998), Rahman & Siddiqui (2019), and Makoae et al. (2021). Many beggars choose the freedom and unpredictability of street life over formal employment, resisting routines, rules, and supervision. IW and Kak R openly stated a preference for the autonomy of begging, despite the inherent risks. Such attitudes have been documented among marginalized populations in India, Bangladesh, and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Rahman et al., 2019; Rani

et al., 2022). Interviews revealed strong environmental and familial influences. SG's family exemplifies how children internalize the behaviors and values of their parents, creating a feedback loop that reinforces poverty and street dependency (Stoecklin, 2021; Woldemicael, 2020). Peer pressure and localized networks, as seen in IW's group, further perpetuate the cycle.

Cultural and Structural Dimensions of Urban Poverty

Fieldwork observed a shift from conventional (passive) begging (outstretched hands, tattered clothing) to more performative or "innovative" strategies—such as clown costumes, selling trinkets, or using props—to maximize sympathy and income. This transition aligns with research in Latin America and Africa showing that urban beggars often adapt their tactics in response to changing public attitudes and local regulations (Ravenhill, 2016; Beazley, 2015). Oscar Lewis's theory of the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1998) finds support in these data. The normalization of begging, resignation to hardship, and generational persistence of poverty-related values—such as devaluing education, fatalism, and social withdrawal—are evident among informants. As observed elsewhere (Makoae et al., 2021; Ezeh et al., 2017), such subcultural transmission limits aspirations and reduces social mobility. Repeatedly, informants described a lack of meaningful government assistance and ineffective social interventions. Few had accessed social welfare programs, and most expressed skepticism about the responsiveness of official channels—a finding consistent with international literature (Bose & Hwang, 2016; Tipple & Speak, 2009; Woldemicael, 2020). This underlines the critical need for inclusive policy reforms, improved outreach, and integrated social protection systems (World Bank, 2022; ILO, 2019).

Table 6. Summary of Key Patterns and Their Global Parallels

Theme	Pekanbaru Findings	International Evidence
Low Education	Common among all ages, cause and effect of begging	Also found in India, Africa, Latin America (Devereux, 2017; Rani et al., 2022)
Family Transmission	Multiple generations involved in begging	Documented globally (Stoecklin, 2021)
Disguised/Innovative Begging	Costumes, props, "rented children"	Seen in SE Asia, Africa, S. America (Beazley, 2015)
Institutional Avoidance	Skepticism toward government/social services	Similar patterns in Nigeria, Bangladesh (Adeyemi et al., 2017; Woldemicael, 2020)
Peer Group Influence	Young beggars join "cliques" managed by older members	Noted in slum and street studies globally (Tipple & Speak, 2009)

Importance and Implications of Findings

These findings reinforce and refine the application of the "culture of poverty" thesis in the context of contemporary Indonesian cities, particularly highlighting the intersection of structural, cultural, and individual factors. The evidence supports Lewis (1959, 1998), but also suggests that agency, adaptation, and innovation play key roles in shaping modern begging practices (Makoae et al., 2021; Beazley, 2015). The intergenerational nature of begging calls for holistic intervention strategies—addressing not only immediate economic needs but also educational, psychosocial, and community-level determinants. Programs focused solely on income support or law enforcement are likely to be ineffective or counterproductive (ILO, 2019; World Bank, 2022). Successful international interventions combine early childhood education, skill-building, targeted social protection, and community engagement (Stoecklin, 2021; Rani et al., 2022).

The findings of this study resonate with a broad body of international literature in several significant ways. First, the multi-causal roots of begging identified in this research—such as economic hardship, limited educational attainment, lack of employable skills, and behavioral or cultural adaptation—mirror patterns observed in various global contexts, including South Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Beazley,

2015; Marpsat, 2014; Rahman & Siddiqui, 2019). These structural constraints have consistently been found to push vulnerable individuals toward street-based survival strategies. Second, the transmission of begging behavior through familial and peer networks reflects similar intergenerational cycles of street dependency and cultural normalization among both children and adults in countries such as Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2019), India (Patel et al., 2021), and Ethiopia (Woldemicael, 2020). This socialization into street life underscores the powerful role of environment and learned behaviors in perpetuating poverty-related practices. Third, this study corroborates global evidence of resistance to formal intervention programs, with many beggars displaying mistrust or avoiding the use of available social services. This resistance—found in diverse contexts—underscores the need for participatory, community-rooted, and culturally sensitive approaches to social reintegration (Ezeh et al., 2017; Ravenhill, 2016).

Beyond affirming existing knowledge, this research also makes several novel contributions to the field. Notably, it highlights the emergence of performative and disguised begging strategies—a phenomenon that remains relatively under-explored in Southeast Asian academic discourse. These strategies suggest an evolving adaptation among street populations in response to legal restrictions and shifting societal norms. Additionally, the study foregrounds the element of agency in the decision to engage in begging. Rather than portraying beggars as mere victims of circumstance, the findings reveal a complex interplay between structural compulsion and individual choice. This dual perspective invites a rethinking of policy frameworks, emphasizing the importance of solutions that simultaneously address systemic poverty and respect individual autonomy and dignity (Sen, 1999; Makoae et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to explore the underlying drivers, lived experiences, and socio-cultural dynamics of urban begging in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, through a qualitative phenomenological lens that foregrounds the voices of the beggars themselves. The research revealed key findings, including the multi-causal roots of begging—such as poverty, low education, lack of employable skills, and intergenerational transmission—along with emergent strategies like performative and disguised begging, and a pervasive mistrust toward formal social interventions. These findings highlight a complex interplay between structural constraints and individual agency, as many beggars demonstrated adaptive strategies, preferences for autonomy, and rational calculations in choosing to beg. The study makes significant contributions to both national and international scholarship by filling a critical gap in localized, micro-level analysis of urban begging in Southeast Asia, offering nuanced insights that challenge reductionist views of beggars as passive victims. By integrating the "culture of poverty" framework with contemporary perspectives on agency and adaptation, the research calls for more inclusive, participatory, and dignity-affirming policies that move beyond punitive or charitable models and toward holistic social reintegration and empowerment.

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