

**BEST PRACTICE OF HANDLING BEGGARS IN MEDAN
CITY: MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY
PERCEPTION, AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
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***Email:** pungkut@usu.ac.id**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to identify best practices in handling beggars in Medan City using a collaborative approach involving the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. The main focus of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the rehabilitation and economic empowerment programs implemented, as well as to understand community perceptions of beggars that could potentially affect the success of the program. The research method used was qualitative, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with the Social Affairs Office of Medan City, NGO representatives, and local residents. The results show that the rehabilitation program involving skills training, access to social services, and business capital assistance has a positive impact in helping beggars achieve economic independence, although it is still faced with limited resources and professionals. On the other hand, negative community perceptions of beggars, which are often associated with laziness or child exploitation, pose a major challenge to social reintegration efforts. Based on these findings, the study recommends increased collaboration across sectors, as well as the implementation of public education campaigns to change community perceptions. It also suggests the development of long-term policies that focus on poverty alleviation and empowerment of vulnerable groups. This research provides a foundation for a more inclusive and sustainable best practice in addressing the problem of begging in urban areas.

Keywords: **Beggars, Best Practice, Economic Empowerment Handling, Multisector Collaboration, Public Perception.****INTRODUCTION**

The problem of begging in Medan has become a serious concern in the context of social and economic development. As one of the largest cities in North Sumatra, Medan has experienced a significant increase in the number of beggars in recent years. According to data from the Medan City Social Office, the number of registered beggars reached more than 1,500 people in 2023, with most of them coming from difficult and marginalized social backgrounds (Dinas Sosial Kota Medan, 2023). The presence of beggars in public spaces

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not only poses a challenge to social policy, but also creates a psychological impact on the general public, who are often trapped in a negative stigma towards this group (Stones, 2013; Hermer, 2019). In many cases, beggars are often seen as a social problem to be eliminated rather than individuals who have needs and rights to support. This stigma can lead to deeper marginalization, worsening their conditions and slowing down the process of social reintegration (Thamrin et al., 2023). Previous research suggests that a more humanist and inclusive approach is needed to address this issue (Muda et al., 2023; Andriotis, 2016). Thus, it is important to understand the social conditions of beggars and the challenges they face, as well as how government policies and existing programs can contribute to solving this problem. Many other Indonesian cities have successfully developed effective programs that tackle begging, with an approach that prioritizes rehabilitation and empowerment. These programs often involve collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities (Imsiyah et al., 2020; Sakerani et al., 2024; Helson et al., 2024; Setiawan & Wismayanti, 2024). For example, in Jakarta, a beggar rehabilitation program involving skills training and provision of shelter has successfully helped many beggars to return to a better life (Thamrin et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore best practices in handling beggars in Medan by assessing the success of existing programs as well as the challenges faced in their implementation. By focusing on these aspects, this study has several objectives. First, to identify existing begging handling programs in Medan and analyse their effectiveness. Second, to understand the public perception of beggars and how stigma can influence public policy. Third, to provide recommendations for stakeholders in creating a more effective and sustainable solution to the problem of begging in Medan. Through a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the condition of beggars in Medan, as well as best practices that can be adopted to improve their quality of life. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of policies that are more responsive to the needs of beggars and support the government's efforts in creating a more inclusive and sustainable Medan.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of best practices in handling beggars in Medan City. The qualitative method was chosen as it allows researchers to explore the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders and identify complex dynamics in the process of handling begging. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with 15 key informants, consisting of rehabilitation program managers at the Social Affairs Office of Medan City, members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on empowering marginalized communities, beggars who have received assistance, as well as local community representatives. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to give informants the flexibility to express their views freely, while allowing researchers to dig deeper into certain relevant aspects (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In addition to interviews, this study also used participatory observation techniques, where researchers directly observed the situation in the field at several strategic locations in Medan City where beggars are often active, such as Merdeka Square, shopping mall areas, and dense residential neighborhoods. This observation aimed to complement the interview data and provide a

visual context of the beggars' condition, their interaction with the community, and the approach taken by related parties in handling them. The data collected from interviews and observations were then analyzed using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns, themes and categories that emerge from the data. This analysis process involved several stages, starting from the initial reading of all data obtained, coding recurring and relevant words or phrases, to determining the main themes that would be used as the basis for compiling research results. Data validity was maintained through triangulation, by comparing the results of interviews with direct observation and related literature references. The researcher also applied a member checking strategy, where the results of the initial analysis were shared with several informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in line with their intentions. With this approach, it is expected that the research can generate in-depth and comprehensive insights into best practices in handling beggars in Medan. The qualitative approach and data collection methods used enabled a fuller understanding of the social context and challenges faced in alleviating the problem of begging, and provided a strong foundation for the recommendations that emerged from this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Beggar Handling Programs in Medan

Handling the problem of begging in Medan City has become a priority for the local government, particularly through the active role of the Social Affairs Office of Medan City. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with several stakeholders, including officials of the Social Affairs Office and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), it was identified that there are several programs to deal with beggars that are implemented with a multi-dimensional approach. These programs include social rehabilitation, skills training, providing access to social assistance, and collaboration with other sectors to increase the effectiveness of beggar empowerment. One of the main programs organized by the Social Affairs Office of Medan City is the social rehabilitation program. This program is designed to provide physical and mental support for beggars who have been recorded and are willing to participate in the rehabilitation process. In the initial stage, beggars who join this program will get temporary shelter in a facility provided by the government. There, they can access basic facilities, such as food, clean water, and health services. In addition, psychosocial counseling services are also provided for beggars who experience mental problems or trauma due to the hard life on the street. This counseling aims to help them deal with stigma and psychological pressure, as well as rebuild their confidence to be ready for more positive life changes. Furthermore, most of the beggars participating in this rehabilitation program are also given skills training. This training covers basic skills to more specific skills, such as handicrafts, sewing, cooking, as well as other technical skills that have potential economic value. With this training, beggars are expected to have skills that can be used to earn a living, so that they can move from informal work on the street to more stable and economically independent work. The training is also tailored to the interests and talents of each individual, so that they feel more interested and motivated to learn these skills. Not only the Social Affairs Office, several NGOs in Medan also play an active role in empowering marginalized communities, including beggars. These NGOs provide small business capital assistance for

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those who already have basic skills or who have completed training at the Social Affairs Office. This capital assistance allows them to start independent businesses, such as small craft or food businesses, so that they can have a sustainable source of income. In addition to capital assistance, NGOs also provide access to additional training for skills that are relevant and in line with market needs. NGOs such as Yayasan Pendidikan Marjinal and Bina Mandiri, for example, have worked with local businesses to provide access to work-based training, which can be a bridge for beggars to formal employment.

However, although various programs have been launched, major challenges remain in their implementation. One of the main challenges is limited resources, both in terms of funds and trained professionals. Currently, funding for rehabilitation programs and skills training for beggars still relies on limited budgets from local governments and donations from NGOs. In addition, the number of professionals, such as social counselors and skills trainers, is still insufficient to serve the needs of the recorded beggars. This results in a limited number of beggars that can be accepted into rehabilitation and skills training programs each year. Another challenge is the lack of coordination between the various parties involved, including the government, NGOs and the general public. This weak coordination has led to a gap between the efforts made and the expected impact. For example, some NGOs stated that the programs they run often lack synchronization with government policies, making empowerment efforts less effective and sustainable (Sibuea & Ritonga, 2024). Therefore, more integrated and sustainable measures are needed, including in terms of resource management and capacity building of professionals, so that beggar handling programs in Medan can have a more significant and lasting impact on their lives. With the identification of existing programs and an understanding of the challenges faced, this research suggests a more inclusive and collaborative approach in addressing begging issues. In addition to increasing resource capacity and optimizing the role of NGOs, closer collaboration with the private sector is also an important solution, for example through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs that can provide business capital assistance or employment opportunities for beggars who have gone through the rehabilitation process. This collaboration-based approach is expected to address the existing challenges and bring more positive and sustainable changes in handling beggars in Medan City.

Community Perceptions of Beggars

This study found that people's perceptions of beggars in Medan City vary greatly and are influenced by a number of factors, including the socio-economic background of the beggars, their level of knowledge about the reality of their lives, and their direct experiences with beggars. Some communities show deep concern and sympathy for the conditions of beggars, especially for those who appear to come from very poor backgrounds or who appear to be struggling with physical or mental disabilities. This sympathy generally arises from the view that beggars are victims of structural poverty, which pushes them into difficult economic situations without adequate support from family or social institutions. However, there are still many people who view beggars negatively. People with negative perceptions tend to see beggars as lazy, unproductive individuals, or even as people who deliberately utilize the sympathy of others for personal gain. Often, this perception is reinforced by beggars who are involved in child exploitation practices, where children are forced to beg

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under the supervision of adults to gain public sympathy. This phenomenon is not only a nuisance to society, but also draws criticism regarding moral and ethical values, as it violates children's rights and exploits children's weaknesses for personal gain. This situation often exacerbates people's negative perceptions of beggars and increases their distrust. In interviews conducted with several residents, it was revealed that community perceptions are heavily influenced by a lack of understanding of the social and economic background of beggars. Many people are unaware of the complexity of factors that lead to a person being trapped in a begging situation, including economic pressure, limited access to education, and lack of adequate social support. Instead, people tend to judge beggars at face value, based on their behavior on the streets or negative experiences they have had. In addition, the lack of information about rehabilitation or empowerment programs pursued by the government and NGOs also contributes to the community's skepticism. They generally assume that beggars make no effort to improve their lives and receive no guidance from the authorities, even though there are programs that have actually been implemented albeit with significant challenges. Negative perceptions of beggars often hamper their social reintegration efforts and reinforce the stigma attached to this vulnerable group. Existing social stigma can worsen the mental and emotional state of beggars, making them feel alienated and making it more difficult to reintegrate into society. As a result, many beggars feel that the only way of life left for them is to stay on the streets. This perception reinforces the cycle of poverty and powerlessness, as they lose the motivation and support needed to find a way out of begging. In addition, negative community views also often impact on support for government policies. The survey revealed that people with negative perceptions of beggars tend to support repressive policing policies, such as arresting or removing beggars from the streets, without considering rehabilitation or empowerment aspects. Such policies often do not solve the main problem, as beggars are only temporarily relocated and return to the streets after the crackdown is over. In contrast, people who have a positive perception or sympathy towards beggars are more supportive of empowerment and social assistance programs that focus on improving the living conditions of beggars in the long term. The importance of improving people's understanding of the root causes of poverty that underlie the lives of beggars is clear from the findings of this study. More effective educational campaigns from the government and NGOs are needed to change people's negative perceptions and increase their support for rehabilitation programs. These campaigns can involve mass media, digital platforms, as well as outreach activities at the community level (Lubis & Nasution, 2024). By understanding that many beggars are victims of unwanted situations, it is hoped that the public will be more open and supportive of their reintegration efforts. In addition, proper education can reduce stigma towards beggars and increase empathy, potentially encouraging community participation in empowerment programs run by the government or NGOs. Overall, the community's perception of beggars in Medan is a major challenge to the success of ongoing rehabilitation and empowerment programs. Changing this perception requires time and a comprehensive strategy, given the complexity of beggars' backgrounds and the influence of people's personal experiences in shaping their opinions.

Recommendations for More Effective Program Development

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic recommendations are proposed to develop a more effective and sustainable begging handling program in Medan City. This involves inter-party synergy, public education, and long-term policies that focus on poverty alleviation and empowerment of vulnerable groups. **Firstly**, it is important to enhance collaboration between the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector in beggar rehabilitation and empowerment programs. While existing rehabilitation programs have had a positive impact, their scope and quality are still limited. By involving the private sector, for example through corporate social responsibility (CSR), additional funding can be allocated to support these programs. In addition, the private sector can provide specialized skills training according to the needs of the labor market, which can increase the opportunity for beggars to change professions and become economically independent. Collaboration with NGOs can also enrich the approach to beggar empowerment, by providing counseling services, skills training, and sustainable small business development. This multilateral support is important to build a self-reliance-oriented program, where beggars are given tangible opportunities to develop relevant life skills. **Secondly**, public education campaigns need to be conducted on an ongoing basis to change negative perceptions of beggars. Research findings show that communities tend to have mixed views of beggars, which are largely influenced by a lack of understanding of their socio-economic background. Thus, educational efforts are needed to inform the public about the complex factors that drive people to become beggars, such as structural poverty, limited access to education, and unsupportive family conditions. This educational campaign can be carried out through various media, such as social media, public service advertisements, and counseling activities in the community. A more educated public about the living conditions of beggars is expected to have more empathy and support for rehabilitation programs. In addition, public education can help reduce the social stigma attached to beggar groups and open up opportunities for them to interact with society more equally (Christopher et al., 2024). **Third**, the government is advised to develop long-term policies that focus on poverty alleviation and empowerment of vulnerable communities, including beggars, through inclusive work policies and wider access to social services. Inclusive employment policies, for example, can provide employment opportunities for marginalized groups, including beggars, by providing necessary skills training and creating a supportive work environment. With better access to employment, beggars will have a more stable source of income and can reduce dependence on informal work or begging. In addition, access to social services, such as mental health services, housing assistance, and family counseling services, can help address the issues that often underlie begging, such as trauma, social alienation, and family instability. **Fourth**, a community-based approach that involves beggars in the decision-making process is also recommended. Beggars are often considered as objects of policy, with no direct involvement in formulating programs aimed at them. By involving beggars in the decision-making process, the programs designed will be better able to address their specific needs and can facilitate better social reintegration. For example, beggars can be invited to provide input on the type of skills training that best suits their needs or discuss the challenges they face while attending rehabilitation programs. This active participation can also help increase their sense of ownership and responsibility towards the program, which is

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expected to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the program in the long run. **Fifth**, it is also important to prioritize capacity building of the workforce in charge of the beggar rehabilitation program. Based on the research findings, one of the challenges faced is the lack of resources and a trained workforce, especially in terms of counseling skills and economic empowerment. By improving the quality of training for social workers, field officers and volunteers, the government and NGOs can provide more holistic and targeted services to beggars. This capacity building could include specialized training in counseling, trauma management, or relevant entrepreneurial skills. In addition, by involving professionals who understand the socio-economic dynamics of vulnerable communities, the program can provide a more humane and adaptive approach in addressing the problem of begging in Medan City. **Sixth**, regular evaluations and the development of clear performance indicators are needed to assess the effectiveness of begging handling programs. This evaluation could include the success rate of program participants in obtaining employment, the rate of reduction of beggars on the streets, as well as changes in people's perceptions of beggars. Through these evaluations, the government and relevant organizations can understand the challenges in program implementation and identify areas that require improvement or adaptation. A structured and continuous evaluation can also serve as a basis for designing more targeted and appropriate policies for handling beggars in the future. Overall, the development of a begging handling program in Medan requires an integrative and comprehensive approach. Programs that not only provide short-term assistance, but also facilitate empowerment, perception change, and inclusive policies that empower, are expected to create a sustainable solution to the problem of begging.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has explored various aspects of handling beggars in Medan City, ranging from programs run by the government and NGOs, community perceptions, to recommendations to improve the effectiveness of existing programs. From the findings, it is concluded that although the rehabilitation and economic empowerment programs for beggars have been running with clear objectives, their effectiveness is still limited by various factors. Collaboration between the government, NGOs and the private sector has not been optimal and still needs improvement. In addition, the strong negative perception of beggars among the community has the potential to hinder social reintegration and the continued stigmatization of this vulnerable group. To achieve more significant success in addressing the problem of begging, this study emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach involving cross-sector collaboration and improved public education. Multilateral collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the private sector is considered to expand the reach of the program and strengthen the financial aspect, as well as offer skills training that is relevant to market needs. On the other hand, systematic public education campaigns aim to improve public understanding of the factors that drive people to become beggars, thereby reducing the negative stigma that is often attached. These measures will facilitate the reintegration of beggars into society and create wider public support for rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, the government is expected to develop more inclusive long-term policies to address poverty and empower vulnerable communities. Inclusive employment policies and broad access to social services can not only help reduce the number of beggars

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on the streets, but also support the creation of equitable and sustainable economic opportunities. A community-based approach that involves beggars in decision-making would have the added benefit of allowing them to express their specific needs and challenges, making programs more effective. Future research can complement these findings with several recommendations. First, longitudinal studies are needed that monitor the long-term impact of beggar rehabilitation and empowerment programs, including the factors that determine the success or failure of their efforts in achieving economic independence. Second, comparative research across cities in Indonesia could provide insights into effective models of handling beggars in other regions, which could serve as inspiration for Medan City. Third, further studies on community perceptions using quantitative methods can provide a more accurate picture of the factors that influence community perceptions of beggars, including how demographic variables such as age, education, and economic status play a role in shaping their views. In addition, research on the impact of public education programs on changing perceptions would also provide important information for more effective campaign efforts. Overall, an approach that focuses more on aspects of economic independence and changing social perceptions is believed to provide a more sustainable solution to the problem of begging in Medan City and other areas in Indonesia.

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