Roman A. Solovjev

National Research University Higher School of Economics

**The begging as a (quasi)occupation in modern Russia[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The given report is aimed to present key results of the research of begging in Moscow, conducted in 2012-13. The study is based on in-depth interviews of the individuals who ask alms at the church porches in Moscow. It is proven, that implementation of Neo-Weberian perspective provides a useful framework in exploration of beggars as a unique status group. Begging is discovered to be characterized by a number of attributes, which drive us to consider this activity a (quasi)occupation. As a specific status group beggars in Russia are revealed to use collective form of closure[[2]](#footnote-2)*,*to pass through four career steps[[3]](#footnote-3), to possess specific combination of assets[[4]](#footnote-4) and to cultivate a local culture*.* It is argued in the paper that there is downward occupation mobility from so-called adjacent occupational groups such as unskilled workers to beggars. All these make it possible to criticize the current policy of Russian government towards particular lumpen groups and suggest new ways of begging regulation in social welfare state.

**Explanation of the research topic**

Traditionally begging is explored as a socio-economic dysfunction of capitalism that stigmatizes individuals as unnecessary people, whose ‘non-productive’ activity has a negative impact on the economy of cities[[5]](#footnote-5). However, begging is not only a regular consequence of merchant capitalism and escaping the government off certain segments of labour markets[[6]](#footnote-6), but a widespread form of economic and occupational activity with a specific set of rules and behaviour patterns. Begging is defined in the course of informal labour market; and beggars – as its economic agents with special combination of assets, strategies of earning a rent and even occupational culture. Both domestic and foreign data[[7]](#footnote-7) enable us to confirm that begging is included in the system of labour market and represents an inferior segment of informal economy so it can be analyzed from the view of sociology of professions and labour economics.

Thereby, the research problem is that in Russia, as in the whole world, beggars have become a rather stable social group with own economic and occupational strategies, specific work status and code of behaviour. However, begging as a form of semiprofessional activity, firstly, has ‘parasitic’ nature[[8]](#footnote-8) and, secondly, may be the object of downward occupational mobility for members of other professional groups. All that have an adverse effect on labour potential of the economy. In this regard an empirical analysis of the problem allows us not only to study the phenomenon within the new perspective, connected with the concept of professional groups, but also to suggest some critics about regulation of this activity.

**Goals and objectives**

The research goal lies in analyzing the church begging in Russia within the concept of professional groups and labour economics. The research objectives are assigned as follows:

1) Describe socio-economic and professional features of church beggars

2) Consider begging in the course of professional groups

3) Characterize the nature of socio-professional mobility towards begging

4) Suggest the ways of regulation of begging within social policy

The research object embraces people who beg for private profit near churches in Moscow, while the subject is their socio-demographic and occupational characteristics and the process of socio-professional mobility towards a group of beggars.

**Novelty**

The issue of beggars in the course of occupational groups is underdeveloped as in most papers begging is regarded as a by-product of economy or an example of social policy failure[[9]](#footnote-9). In this research analysis of begging is based on Neo-Weberian perspective and labour market concept that makes possible to see the nature of the phenomenon in the light of socio-professional structure and establish links with a) other socio-professional groups b) previous professional experience c) social care and integration institutions. Thereby, developing the idea of both foreign and domestic researchers that “begging seems to be a special employment pattern”[[10]](#footnote-10) we have attempted to make a complex study of begging as socio-professional group.

It is shown that the view of begging in the course of occupations may become an important step of shaping somewhat holistic view of a particular segments of lumpen labour market and possible ways of the development of Russian labour potential.

**Data and Methods**

The research is based on the original data collected in the form of in-depth interviews with the use of method of involved observation. The data includes 10 interviews with people (7 men and 3 women whose ages range from 25 to 60) who beg for private profit near churches in Moscow and observation notes that compile the main qualitive analysis.

**Results**

The results of the research reflect socio-economic and ex-occupational patterns of begging in Russia.

First, most church beggars in Moscow have come either from CIS or from smaller Russian cities, generally from European part of Russia. Primarily, these are those who are poor qualified workers came to Moscow to raise money and were pushed to the edge of society due to job loss. Sociological reasons for the latter were rooted in socialization went through rough social environment – prison, orphanage, or army. Usually it correlated with conflicts with local community – people leave their hometowns because of tense relations with relatives or friends.

Second, most beggars have been living by alms no more than one year, i.e. for these people begging is a relatively new form of activity. Half of the informants sometimes combine begging with other kinds of activity in informal sector, for example, one-off job without any contracts. Earlier most respondents were occupied with manual jobs and unqualified work in farming. Only a few of them were occupied as semi-skilled workers either in manual or non-manual labour. Remarkably, before starting to ask alms they tried to find a job although there were periods in their lives when they even did not try to seek a position despite an ability to do this.

Third, the beggars potentially could or actually do possess not very poor allocation of resources. For instance, none of them does suffer from hunger or lack of clothing, what is taken by most of them from churches, social services, voluntary organizations, etc. Only half of informants have no shelter, while others share flats with other beggars or their relatives – not taking into account the rare cases when some of them even own a property in Moscow or their hometowns. Majority of this people usually have somewhat good health, as the place where they can treat their ailments. Moreover, about the quarter of respondents are social beneficiaries *de jure*. In fact, most of them do not see this assistance due to either the loss of some of the documents or failure to submit the necessary applications. Thus, the case of poor recourses acquired by these people may be an indicator of a certain culture considered a grouping attribute for them.

Forth, beggars use collective forms of social closure and characterized by the particular attitudes to work, deviant career[[11]](#footnote-11), and autonomy. It makes this kind of activity very close to occupation. On the other hand, one may hardly describe begging as regular occupation because this kind of activity does not imply rendering of services or exchange and a professionalization process. Additionally, there are the exogenous factors that interfere such “professionalization” – church porch is the social institute that stimulates individual deviation within local community of people asking alms by involving people in productive forms of economic activities.

Fifth, both collective forms of closure and possibilities of making deviant career within begging allow us to consider this activity as a particular“occupational surrogate”. It means that begging belongs to a more general societal system and functionally connects to its elements. For example, there are adjacent occupations that coexist with begging and functionally become asocial source of newcomers for it – casual workers.

Finally, begging pulls in workers from adjacent jobs like loaders, street sellers, cleaners, etc. that totally embrace about 15% of working population accounting one of the numerous occupation in Russia. It turns to be an important issue as the national Government in fact does not regulate the given segment. Moreover, it tends to prohibit this activity. In fact, social policy in begging should be structural and protective in favour of domestic labour occupied with low-skilled jobs as they pop up in edge of society partially due to push-effects of labour market oversaturated by unskilled migrants invaded Moscow during last years.

1. The study was conducted within the “Ideologies of Professionalism in a Welfare State” project carried out as part

of the National Research University Higher School of Economics Academic Fund programme in 2012-2013, grant no 12-05-0007. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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3. *Becker, S.H.* (1963). Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. NY: The Free Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Bourdieu, P.* (1983). ÖkonomischesKapital, kulturellesKapital, sozialesKaputal // SozialeUngleichheiten (Soziale Welt, Sonderheft 2) / ed. by ReinhardKreckel. Güttingen: OttoSchwartz&Co., 183-198.

*Radaev, V.* (2002). Ponyatie kapitala, formi kapitalov i ih konvertatsiya. [Definition of capital, its forms and conversion] Ekonomicheskaya sotsiologiya [Ecocomic Sociology], 3(4), 20-32.

*Tihonova, N*. (2006). Resursny podhod kak novaya teoreticheskaya paradigma v stratifikatsionnih issledovaniyah [Resource approach as new teoretical paradigm in stratification research], 9, 28-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Fawole, O.A., Ogunkan, D.V., Omoruan, A.* (2011).The Menace of Begging in Nigerian cities: A Sociological Analysis. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 3(1), 9-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. David Shichor& Ruth Ellis, 2010; Eric Henry,2009; Tatek Abebe,2009; B. Creemers, J. Billen& B. Gobin,

2010; Alexander KwesiKassah, 2007; Hartley Dean, 1999; Alison Murdoch, 1994; Bernard Fortin, Guy Lacroix

&Dominique Pinard, 2010; StefAdriaenssens and JefHendrickx , 2010; Jordan, 1999 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Hartley, D*. (1999). Begging questions: street level economic activity and social policy failure. – Bristol: PolicyPress..

*Butovskaya, M., D’yakonov, I., Smirnov, A., Sal’ter, F.* (2001). Gorodskye nishchie v Rossii: itogi polevih issledovaniy. In Hristophorova, O., Dybo, A. (Eds.), Yasyk, kultura, obshchestvo [Language, culture, society] (pp. 73-98). Moscow, M: RSUH.

*Butovskaya, M. (2007).* Poproshainichestvo kak universal’nyi fenomen chelovecheskoy kultury [Begging as a universal phenomenon of human culture]. Etnographicheskoe obozrenie [Etnographic review], 3, 3-11.

*Ilyasov, F., Plotnikova O.* (1994). Nishchie v Moskve letom 1993 goda [Beggars in Moscow, summer of 1993], Sotsiologicheskiy zhurnal [Journal of Sociology], 1, 150-156. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Here the word “parasitic” is used as not connected with rendering services and mutually-beneficial exchange. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. see:

*Hartley, D*. (1999). Begging questions: street level economic activity and social policy failure. – Bristol: PolicyPress. *Kennedy, Catherine and Fitzpatrick, Suzanne* (2001). Begging, rough sleeping and social exclusion: Implications for social policy. Urban Studies, 38 (11), 2001-2016. *Fawole,* O*. A., Ogunkan, D. V. and Omoruan, A*. (2011). The Menace of Begging in Nigerian cities: A Sociological Analysis// International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 3(1), 9-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *see:*

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11. *Becker, S.H.*(1963). Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. NY: The Free Press [↑](#footnote-ref-11)