

VAGRANTS, ENTREPRENEURS OR DESPERATE PEOPLE? LEGAL AND MEDIA DISCOURSE ON BLIND TISSUE SELLERS

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Abstract

Society tends to ascribe negative connotations toward blind people who receive their income primarily from selling tissue to the public in the streets, restaurants, and public markets. The perception of blind tissue sellers as beggars is conveyed through media and legal categorization of destitute people, which produce and reinforce the disabling cycle of marginalization onto these individuals in society. This article analyses selected Malaysian online newspapers concerning disabled tissue sellers and legal documents concerning destitution. The authors discuss the phenomenon within the framework human dignity, poverty, bio-politics philosophy, and decent work. The public and the government easily misunderstand the issues surrounding blind tissue sellers. The authors emphasize this social phenomenon as a symptom and outcome of continuous disablement in society caused by compromising the integrity of the desperate self, the pressure of neo-liberalized socio-cultural functioning and, the systemic and structural failures of society. The phenomenon perfectly exemplifies the neo-biopsychosocial interpretation of disability. There is an urgent need for the Malaysian government to take structural measures to increase blind people's opportunity to have gainful employment, decent work, and a social safety net.

Keywords: Blind tissue sellers, decent work, disablement, legal document, media discourse.

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Introduction

Back in March 11th of 2019, *Sinar Harian* published a series of articles that claimed to be an investigation on blind tissue sellers (Wartawan Sinar Siasat, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). In response to this publication, *Persatuan Kebajikan OKU Penglihatan Bekerja Sendiri* Kuala Lumpur (PKB), an association of self-employed blind persons in Kuala Lumpur, organized a discussion on March 16th to counter against those articles which they deemed damaging and mischaracterizing blind tissue sellers. For some blind persons, selling tissue papers is the only job they know and do best because they cannot find other more gainful jobs (Tan, 2012). There are some occasions where non-disabled individuals ask about blind tissue sellers. Some of them view such occupation as beggary. Some feel pity, and some feel annoyed.

Amongst the disabled community, it seems the topic has become more or less a taboo subject. Even though many of us, if not most, despise such occupation and those who do it, we never hear this topic is being discussed critically and thoroughly at the national level. Undoubtedly, this issue is very challenging for us, both ontological and practical. It is ontologically challenging because we cannot just categorize tissue sellers as beggars. We need to study its factors, contexts, and motivations. The authors believe that marking a group of individuals with a specific label never solves the issue. On the other hand, it is practically challenging because it overlaps between personal, communal, systemic, and political dimensions. Without a clear understanding and conceptualization of the phenomenon, we may not propose meaningful solutions for it or make it worse.

The authors opt to conduct a study on local media and legal discourse surrounding blind tissue sellers through qualitative content analysis of selected Malaysian online newspapers and legal documents. The authors frame the discussion within the bio-politics philosophy framework, human dignity, poverty, and decent work. The paper begins with a review of related literature and proceeds to the explanation of the research methodology. The next section presents the findings from the analysis of local media and legal materials. The authors then discuss their findings and try to expound our theoretical model that critically situates the phenomenon in personal, communal, and structural dimensions.

Literature Review

Poverty amongst persons with impairment and/or chronic illness occurs due to the difficulty of accessing and acquire basic needs, economic resources, and opportunities, to meet their functioning and capabilities (Palmer, 2011, pp. 214-215). Barnes (2011) postulates that both poverty and disability are two related and socially constructed phenomenon exacerbated by globalization. Furthermore, lack of awareness and negative attitudes towards disabled persons can have a real economic impact on this group (Matsui, 2011). The economic impact can come through different forms, such as government investment in accessibility, regulations to increase job opportunities, and employers' acceptance toward hiring and retaining disabled employees.

Difficult life situation compounded with factors such as societal and systemic failures besides self-stigmatization produce and reproduce conditions for disabled people and disabled children to work as beggars (Groce, Loeb, & Murray 2014; Groce, Murray, & Kealy, 2014; Rugoho & Siziba, 2014), which in turn make them hooked to such jobs because of its quick and lucrative earnings (Rugoho & Siziba, 2014) and encourage other to capitalizing on people's sympathy via syndicated crime (Azam, 2011; Groce et al., 2014). Disabled beggars have to rely on multiple begging strategies (Groce et al., 2014), including using a donation contract (Devlieger, 2018).

In the local sphere, we have to rely on sources from the NCBM Outreach, a quarterly publication of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), to gather materials relating to this topic. Abdullah and Ooi (2012) discuss some of the major factors that encourage tissue selling activity in Malaysia, especially among young blind individuals. The factors include the involvement of Indonesian migrants as guides, difficulty getting job placement, lack of services and opportunities for blind people in other states in Malaysia, and ultimately the lucrative earning from such jobs. In their article, Abdullah and Ooi (2012) also put forward some recommendations to overcome this phenomenon. However, the solutions revolve around the roles of the Malaysian Association for the Blind and not necessarily the government, except the collaboration between the Department of Social Welfare and the Immigration Office to detain migrants who work as guides for the blind tissue sellers.

Working as beggars have negative psychological, emotional, social, and political implications for disabled persons. Either one is being forced or consciously like to participate in beggary; it strikes directly on human rights principles, which is human dignity. Every human, including those with a neurological difference, has a personal dignity which is inherently part of them because they have a natural capacity for conceptual thought and rational choices (Lee & George, 2008). Dignity cannot be robbed just because others are violating one's dignity.

Persons with impairment and/or chronic illness also enjoy their rights as human beings. Thus, their dignity must be respected. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities supplies a useful starting framework for enabling governments' policies to promote and protect disabled persons' dignity (Bell, 2017). Although dignity is an abstract and integral concept deeply rooted and embodied in a person, it still exposes to external pressures. Social, cultural, geographical, and economic circumstances combined with political apparatus (such as laws) can still shape, distort, and control one's ownership of their dignity.

Imagine a situation where a person has to choose either to beg to stay alive or to keep finding 'good jobs' with the uncertain success of whether he or she can secure one. Most people, logically and rationally, will choose the former. It does not mean the person is not appreciating his or her dignity or losing dignity when he or she takes up beggary. Instead, the person has to compromise his or her dignity even though it causes adverse psychosocial effects in the person's life. Any interventions to eradicate beggary must not merely blame the beggars but scrutinize the broader social, cultural, economic, and political ecosystem that produces beggary in the first place.

A sociological analysis of the impacts of beggary highlights the negative fallout from the inadequate standard of living and poverty, which then spill into disruption in society (Hailu, 2017) in addition to shame and social isolation shackling these beggars (Groce et al., 2014). Lack of coordination between government agencies in resolving this issue also worsens (Hailu, 2017). International bodies like the International Labour Organization has called for promoting and furthering the decent work agenda globally. The International Labour Office (2013) proposed ten indicators for decent work which include job opportunities, adequate salary, decent working time,

the balance between work, family, and personal life, job security, equal opportunity and treatment, safe work environment, social protection, and engagements between employers and worker groups.

The International Labour Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, World Bank Group, and International Monetary Fund (2016), in a joint report for the G20 Employment Working Group, suggest four broad themes of measures in promoting decent work. Those themes are rational income growth mechanisms, collective bargaining, social protection system, and working conditions. The same joint report also addresses working conditions concerning workers with physical impairment and mental health problems. Some of the proposed strategies include hiring and retaining more disabled employees, providing reasonable adjustments according to the employees' needs, a clear guideline for managers and employers, employee engagement and worker groups, and psychosocial risks assessment.

Looking at the international scale, governments take various measures to increase the employment opportunity of disabled people. With various degrees of success, they include employment services, vocational training, quota systems, financial supports, disability management, persuasion measures, anti-discrimination law, consultation, and monitoring (O'Reilly, 2003). Recently, International Labour Office (2015a) calls for actions toward the inclusive labor market via adopting anti-discrimination law, national strategies, data on employment of disabled persons, international cooperation, promotion of entrepreneurship, and using the United Nations instruments.

In localizing the decent work agenda, the emphasis is put on a network of cooperation (International Labour Office, 2015b). Though cooperation is an excellent proposition to realize decent work-related initiative, few salient factors must be taken into account for it to be a success, such as political will, identification and distribution of responsibilities, and human rights consciousness among the public. This is where institutional and systemic factor analysis is required. The framing and solutions for ending beggary must not only individualize the symptoms and effects.

The critical discussion about disabled beggars also questions the bio-politics or bio-power in a society that produces and reinforces the phenomenon. The bio-power of disablement is cultivated and demonstrated via a range of apparatus to differentiate between groups of people and control their interactions with each other (Tremain, 2005, p. 11). They are such as using laws, policies, and cultural goods, which then becomes the philosophical and praxis discourse (Tremain, 2017) in managing the problem. How the law defines and remedies beggary, how policy constructs measures to rehabilitate or re-assimilate the beggars into the society, and how media portrays the phenomenon and different parties involved are some of the apparatus used to condition the society, particularly the beggars to view beggary and their worth. Campbell (2005) emphasizes the need to interrogate negative ontologies behind these apparatuses.

Methodology

The study collects its data from two primary sources; online news articles and legal documents. The researchers selected three local newspapers as media content source; *Berita Harian*, *Sinar Harian*, and *The Star*. They systematically tracked and collected online articles on these news websites using the following keywords: blind tissue seller, disabled beggar, and disabled vagrant. They specified the collection of news articles published between 2016 until 2018. They selected these three newspapers because they are among the prominent and established mainstream outlets in the local media industry and public.

Besides that, the researchers selected the period between 2016 until 2018 because issues surrounding disabled and blind tissue sellers exploded within this time frame, not only in the media but also among the public and the disabled community spheres. After copying the news articles into a separate word document file, the researchers read through and begin their analysis by jotting down the language used, factors, reactions, and solutions contained in these news articles. The coding, grouping, and analyzing processes were done manually without using any qualitative analytical software. They did the read-through twice for each news article to avoid overlooking any relevant points or misunderstanding the sentences.

The second source of data is Malaysian law relating to destitution, namely the Destitute Persons Act 1977 (Act 183). The researchers obtained the act from the internet. They analyzed the law regarding its purposes, interpretation of main terminologies, mechanisms and structures of power, penalties or remedies, and other relevant matters imposed on the subject of this act (i.e., the beggars or vagrants). Combining the two data sources allows the researchers to understand better the local discourse surrounding the research topic. From there, they hope to advance a useful theoretical explanation and practical solutions for it.

Findings

The Destitute Persons Act 1977

The researchers analyzed the Destitute Persons Act 1977 (Act 183) because the law is cited when the government detains those deemed as ‘destitute people’ and ‘vagrants’ in Malaysia. People who engage in tissue-selling are considered as beggars and vagrants. The law contains provisions such as the power to require a destitute person to reside in a welfare home, voluntary admission into a welfare home, penalty, arrest of an escaped destitute person, and aftercare supervision. The act replaces the Vagrants Act of 1965. As stated at the beginning of the law, the purpose of the Destitute Persons Act 1977 is “... to provide for the care and rehabilitation of destitute persons and the control of vagrancy”.

The three keywords mentioned in the purpose section of the law (care, rehabilitation, and control) produces a complicated combination. Though these words carry a positive notion, which is to bring good benefits to the beggars and vagrants, it simultaneously symbolizes society's opposing sides. The law is designed to label and remove individuals away from society (care) to be fixed and reintroduced to society (rehabilitation). The word 'rehabilitation' also signals that the beggary is defined as individual problems instead of affirming the complex social, cultural, political, and economic factors that produce beggary.

Since its approval in the Parliament until now, the law still frames beggary using the lens of charity and neoliberal interpretation of personal failings. Furthermore, the last part of the purpose section uses the phrase ‘the control of vagrancy’ and not ‘abolishment of vagrancy.’ It means Malaysian legislators consciously decide to maintain the status quo, but for a manageable level. It is acceptable to control a significantly sophisticated conflict in society initially, but the focus must be continuous, from control, reduction, and eventually abolishment. Since its inception in 1977, the goal should not remain the same for more than forty years.

There are a few key terms relevant to the study according to the interpretation of the law. First, it defines a destitute person to have one of the following attributes: (1) a person is found begging in a public place that causes or may cause disturbance to other people at that particular public place (i.e., the users, owners, or renters); or, (2) a lazy person found in a public place, whether the person is begging or not, without apparent capacities to keep one’s fare or having no home or unable to give a satisfactory self-description. The law also interprets beggary as a conscious action in leading someone to give a handout, whether the beggar is pretending to do something in return or otherwise, such as singing, playing, performing, or selling.

Through these interpretations, the law actively imposes specific characteristics onto its subject. Those characteristics are lazy, unproductive, pretentious, poor, irritating, and cognitively untrustworthy. These characteristics are deemed as a crime since the law provides penalties via Section 3 and Section 11. As such, the public then is conditioned to act accordingly toward these characteristics. The notion of criminal affiliation always lingers in the community psyche even though they pity these subjects. The authors can observe how neoliberal thinking utilizes a legal tool to punish actions or characteristics and encourage others to avoid such actions and characteristics.

The Destitute Persons Act 1977 points to a few institution/people of power in carrying out the provisions of the act such as the Department of Social Welfare, the Director-General of the Department of Social Welfare, social welfare officers, the minister charged with welfare services, local governments, Magistrate, Board of Visitors, the Superintendent who manages or control welfare home, and the

establishment of welfare homes for destitute persons itself. Though different actors have different degrees of power and functions, the authors believe complex mechanisms and power structures are imposed on those labelled as beggars and vagrants.

For instance, according to Section 4, a person can voluntarily admit him- or herself to a welfare home, and such persons are required to abide by the rules and conditions imposed by the act. However, once he or she is in, only the Superintendent has the power to discharge a person residing in the welfare home under his or her management. The discharge is made on one of these reasons: (i) the resident has found suitable employment to sustain the resident's livelihood; or, (ii) the Superintendent can find other people who are willing and can provide appropriate support to the resident.

According to the legislation, a welfare home can be a specific institution or as part of an existing institution to receive, care for, and rehabilitate destitute persons. Section 5 provides the power to the minister to establish welfare homes and appoint the Superintendent to manage a welfare home. As emphasized in subsection (5) of Section 3, Superintendent is legally required to 'keep' any destitute persons admitted to the welfare home, either temporarily placed or otherwise. Besides using the law, institutions such as welfare homes can categorize, segregate, and fix the supposed victims.

Though the welfare home residents' right to healthcare is safeguarded through Section 10, there are still risks of exploitation of the residents at these welfare homes. Section 9 imposes the welfare home residents to take part in suitable activities, either to prepare themselves for employment after discharge from the welfare home or to maintain the welfare home's operation. The last part of Section 9 can potentially lead the welfare homes' management to compel free labour out of their residents without any compensation.

Local governments, the Director-General of the Department of Social Welfare, and any social welfare officers can produce a written authorization to an officer to detain any destitute persons and bring such persons to a Magistrate within 24 hours as outlined by Section 3 of the act. If the destitute person offers any resistance to the

officer, the officer can request any police officer assistance. If the Magistrate has sufficient reasons to believe that any person brought to be a destitute person, the Magistrate can order such a person to be admitted temporarily to a welfare home while waiting for a report by a social welfare officer. The report must be provided by the social welfare officer within one month from the date of such person's admission into a welfare home.

When the Magistrate is satisfied with the report that a person is a destitute person, the Magistrate has the power to order that person to reside in a welfare home, not more than three years. However, the Magistrate can extend the period of residence with the maximum period of another three years. On the other hand, Section 13 gives legal autonomy to the minister to shorten the period of residence and discharge any person from a welfare home due to exceptional circumstances involving such a person's welfare. However, Section 3 of this act is not applied to anyone under 18 years old.

Following that, Section 6 provides the power to the minister to appoint a Board of Visitors for every welfare home to conduct responsibilities and functions according to the rules prescribed by the minister. The same section also provides additional functionality to the Board of Visitors to advise and make recommendations to the Director-General of the Department of Social Welfare on relevant matters as the Director-General can refer to it. Though the existence of the Board of Visitors is a good measure for oversight, the significance of Section 6 is undercut when the law uses the word "may" instead of "shall". It means the appointment of the Board of Visitors is optional. Even the Director-General is not legally required to consider and implement the recommendations put forward by the Board of Visitors.

Subsequently, Section 7 gives the authority to the minister to make rules:

1. To regulate the admission and management of welfare homes, including the care, control, discipline, and rehabilitation of the welfare home residents
2. To prescribe the constitution and functions of the Board of Visitors
3. Other relevant matters for the effective enforcement of the act

Rules and regulations are imperative to elaborate on general provisions in any law. Nevertheless, it seems the rules and regulations are mostly imposed and not participatory. The intervention measures to end destitution in society must embrace humanness, communal interdependence, and needs-oriented approach and not social deterrence. Lack of transparency and consultation can hamper such a transformation.

Refusal or any resistance, including escaping the arrest, is considered an offense by this law. The destitute person can be sent to a welfare home or imprisonment for not more than three months. The same penalty is imposed on any welfare home resident who leaves the welfare home without the Superintendent's permission or fails to return to the welfare home within a specified time without reasonable justification. Consequently, Section 12 emphasizes a police officer's power to arrest any person who has infringed section 11 without a warrant.

Interestingly, the Destitute Persons Act 1977 also provides for aftercare supervision through Section 16. When a person is discharged from a welfare home, the person must be supervised by a social welfare officer for a period not exceeding one year. The monitoring of the ex-residents is important to ensure they are not dragged back to destitution. Nevertheless, their success hinges on other factors such as employment, an adequate standard of living, and vocational skills. It requires a connected intersectional policy and close cooperation between different stakeholders aside for the positive development of the ex-resident's self-concept.

It is counter-productive to criminalize and individualize destitution. It is also unnecessary for the government to use force to contain and segregate destitute persons using institutions and police officers. Destitution, which results in beggary or vagrancy, is a delicate and complicated social matter. We assert the federal and local governments should ensure well-trained social workers are on the field to engage destitute persons rather than cracking down on these people like a crime raid. Thus, the law must be amended or replaced to ensure the human rights of the destitute persons are safeguarded, either in their care, support, and reintegration measures.

Besides repealing Section 3, 11, and 12, other provisions in the law must be reviewed. For instance, the minister must be legally required by the law to appoint the Board of Visitors. Besides that, the Director-General is also legally required to consider and implement the recommendations by the Board of Visitors. The minister must also be required to consult with the community and grassroots activists to develop and review rules or regulations relating to this act. New provisions to ensure transparency, accountability, complaint mechanisms, and oversight should be introduced in the law.

Finally, to embrace human rights transformation, the welfare homes should be changed to community housings. Instead of being a place for containment and rehabilitation, community housings become the avenue of the residents to empower and reshape their lives. In these community housings, the residents are not seen as welfare recipients or victims or even prisoners; instead, they are seen as active community members. The community housings will be the place where the residents live, receive training, work, build their family, and strengthen interpersonal connections. Here is where the residents are trained and work according to their interests to maintain their community housings, such as cleaners, cooks, babysitters, shopkeepers, and community housing administrators.

Local media discourse

Those who sell tissue papers are considered as beggars in the public eye. Several news articles cite discomfort among the public as well as netizen outcry over this issue, such as the news article titled *"Keluarga Wanita OKU Jual Tisu Kembali Jalani Rutin Hidup"* and *"Saya OKU, Saya Tak Tipu"* published by Berita Harian, as well as news articles by The Star titled *"Begging on The Road Despite the Dangers"* and *"Time to Stop the Beggars."* One particular accusation is that the tissue sellers pretend to have an impairment, reaffirming one of the ascribed characteristics of a destitute person in the Destitute Persons Act 1977. From the interviewees' responses cited in the news articles, the researchers observed mixed feelings of pity, worry, disgust, and anger toward disabled tissue sellers and beggars in general.

Media coverage on this particular phenomenon also provides conflicting narratives. On one side, though rarely, some articles like the article titled “*16 Tahun Kumpul Duit Jual Tisu*” by Sinar Harian portray some beggars as heroic victims. They can fulfil certain cultural or religious responsibilities, even though they have to collect the fund needed through beggary. On another side, some articles, for example, articles titled “*OKU Kaya Hasil Minta Sedekah*” by Sinar Harian and “*Hasil Lumayan Punca Pengemis Meningkat di Shah Alam*” by Berita Harian, frame beggars as rich people who prey on public sympathy and greedy. This kind of article provokes anger toward disabled tissue sellers and beggars in general.

Besides viewing such activities as a public nuisance, some interviewees also cite the impact of beggary on their city’s or district’s image, as reported in the article titled “*Begging on the Road Despite The Dangers*” by The Star. Other interviewees claim some beggars engage in other criminal activities such as pickpocketing, as cited in the article titled “*Hasil Lumayan Punca Pengemis Meningkat di Shah Alam*” by Berita Harian. There are also reports linking beggary to crime syndicates in some places, especially among non-citizen beggars, as reported in the article titled “*Organised Crime Gang Behind Foreign Cripples Forced to Beg at Hotspots in Malaysia*” and “*52 Held in Begging Ring Raids*” by The Star. In a few articles, the suspicion of such organized criminal activities is evident even though the interviewees only provide circumstantial evidence, as quoted in the article titled “*Hasil Lumayan Punca Pengemis Meningkat di Shah Alam*” by Berita Harian.

Many articles describe some of the factors attributing to beggary. For example, public generosity, financial problem, alcohol, drug addiction, and lucrative earning. Those articles include “*Masjid Zahir Tumpuan Peminta Sedekah*” by Sinar Harian and “*RM10,000 Sebulan Hasil Mengemis*” published by Berita Harian. However, reporters and the media supply superficial exploration of the issue. Moreover, we postulate that the solutions put forward in these articles are ineffective and may cause more problems. Some of the actions are stern warning, banning beggars from entering certain public places, transference to welfare homes, and discourage the public from giving alms. Some also propose harsher measures such as punishing the beggars’ relatives for not caring for them and retraction of welfare aid, as quoted in articles

titled “*Time To Stop The Beggars*” by The Star and “*Masjid Zahir Tumpuan Peminta Sedekah*” by Sinar Harian.

Article by Sinar Harian titled “*Jual Tisu Mata Pencarian Saya*” highlights the effects of shaming particular blind tissue sellers, albeit just a gloss over. These effects include a physical attack on the blind tissue sellers and stress among their children. It highlights the risks of physical and mental abuse and its effects on the individuals, but the media make no comprehensive coverage. Furthermore, the language used in the media may reinforce and amplify the vulnerability of these supposed victims by using the words “rescuing” or “rescued,” framing the authority (e.g., the social welfare officers and police officers) as heroes without dissecting the systemic and structural causes in place.

A few articles also reveal some beggars consciously use their impairment to garner public sympathy. One example is a physically impaired man using his impairment for alms, as reported in the article titled “*Begging On the Road Despite The Dangers*” by The Star. This revelation showcases the willingness to compromise one's dignity and integrity, either desperation or conscious attempt. Hence, such actions amplify the narrative of disabled beggars, vagrants, and tissue sellers as manipulative figures. Some news articles also report children's involvement in beggary, either begging themselves or accompanying older beggars, as reported in news articles titled “*Masjid Zahir Tumpuan Peminta Sedekah*” by Sinar Harian and “*Hasil Lumayan Punca Pengemis Meningkat di Shah Alam*” by Berita Harian. As there is only a handful of research explores the interpersonal relationships between children and other actors in beggary (see Anam, Bari, & Alam, 1999; Seni, 2017), thus we require a lot more critical inquiry into this aspect.

From the analysis of these selected online news articles, the researchers can extract two glaring messages in the media concerning blind or disabled tissue sellers; (i) tissue selling is considered as beggary; and (ii) the media tends to frame beggary and vagrancy as personal failures, while overlooks the systemic and structural forces in place. Both apparatuses, the law and the media, are guided by individualized and neo-liberalized episteme regarding destitution, which unfortunately includes blind tissue sellers. This particular episteme then spills over and absorbed by the public,

which in turn formulate their perception toward destitution and how they interact with destitute persons.

Discussion

In truth, the situation surrounding blind tissue sellers are complicated and require deep interrogation of the nuances. Selling tissue paper is similar to any other economic activities of mobile hawkers. However, the public tends to see blind people, or disabled people in general, who sells goods this way as beggars. The act of selling tissue papers becomes beggary when the seller consciously uses his or her impairment or physical condition to ask for handouts or influence the buyers or donors to pay more than their goods' worth as sympathetic gestures.

Although we can make the distinction linguistically, it is not easy in complex social realities. The connection of such activities to organized criminal activities makes the situation more delicate and dangerous because it exposes the beggars' real direct and indirect abuses. That is why a clear and full understanding of the factors and contexts is crucial to abolish beggary meaningfully. For this part, we hope to scrutinize beggary as conscious decisions by individuals that have no connection to syndication or organized crime. The researchers assert that the decision of blind tissue sellers who consciously engage in beggary can be explained using the framework of the neo-biopsychosocial model of disability (Nasir & Efendi, 2018).

The neo-biopsychosocial model of disability explains that disability is a product of inaccurate episteme informing and controlling a person and his/her community, which results in negative multi-relationships between the domain of self, the society, and the environment. Episteme is like central conceptual processing of every human's thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and actions. As a society composes dominantly of humans and human relations, episteme is shared and disseminated among the society members, either through soft influence or hard control. It then leads to the birth of culture with particular sets of thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and actions toward various objects and subjects in the world, including animals and the natural environment surrounding them.

In this particular case, we can witness both soft influence and hard control on the society regarding destitution (including any activities claimed to resemble destitution) are employed. Destitution, dictated by individualized and neo-liberalized episteme, is given a set of specific characteristics so the public can easily identify destitute persons, work hard to avoid plunging into destitution and feel ashamed to exhibit those characteristics. Such stigmatization of destitute people is amplified via the media. Through the Destitute Persons Act 1977, which is one of the government's tools, different parties create the network of bio-power against destitute persons, such as allowing police officers to arrest rebellious destitute people without a warrant, relocation of destitute people in welfare homes, and imprisonment.

The causes and effects of such stigmatization were double among blind tissue sellers when they internalized. Society marks them with negative construction of one's parallel body planes (Nasir & Efendi, 2019a, 2019b) due to their impairment and labelled as beggars. The different institutions in a society (e.g., the families, schools, and religious groups) arrange their social, cultural, emotional, and economic life strategies and cultivate similar strategies according to the individualized and neo-liberalized episteme of destitution. We believe that there is a very thin line between beggary and decent work. Any capable individuals can easily cross from one position to another because of the compounding of these three factors: (1) the pressure of neo-liberalized socio-cultural functioning; (2) the systemic and structural failures in society; and (3) the compromising of the integrity of the self.

Every citizen, including persons with impairment and/or chronic illness, are being taught to rely on oneself and be self-sufficient in many aspects of life. Be it in education, career, parenting, retirement, and their livelihood in general. This imposed socio-cultural functioning is particularly stressed among parents and adults alike. One must push him- or herself hard to earn a living and blame one's weaknesses even though external factors are at play. At one point for many individuals, they may not be able to fulfil the imposed socio-cultural functioning unless they compromise their integrity by begging despite the social and psychological backlash.

Simultaneously, society and every institution utilize various tools to promote and reinforce self-sufficiency as the primary goal in everyone's social and economic life. Instead of embracing decent work, housing, and other living standards as human rights, these elements are commodified. Every aspect of social and economic life is monetized. Hence, society (including persons with impairment and/or chronic illness) is likely to fetishize and prioritize material ownership over universal interdependence, a network of care, and support.

Conclusion

Instead of treating this subject as taboo and shoving it under the carpet, it is more meaningful for us to scrutinize the phenomenon openly. We must understand it better and have a critical discussion to address the root cause of disablement entangling these groups of individuals. Only then can we develop positive and proactive measures to disrupt this chain of oppression and marginalization. Stemming from this study, few measures must be taken by the government and organizations representing blind persons in Malaysia. The Malaysian government must amend the Destitute Persons Act 1977 to shift the beggary paradigm as crime and individual problems to human rights and anti-neoliberal intersectional social conflict. Instead of punishing and controlling these supposed 'victims/idlers,' the government must enact policies and programs to ensure its citizens' participation, significantly disabled persons, in gainful and decent jobs. The government must review and strengthen all existing affirmative measures to better reflect the disabled persons' needs and situations. Radical shifts are expressly needed as disabled Malaysians struggle during and after movement control order due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Meanwhile, organizations representing blind persons in Malaysia must continue to advocate for a critical consciousness of this phenomenon's complexity and push for a more equitable and accessible decent work ecosystem for the blind community. Organizations for and of blind people must review their networking and advocacy strategies for the private sector to widen the employment opportunities for the community besides close cooperation with relevant government agencies. The media must also shoulder the responsibility in this matter. Instead of chasing after viral-worthy content and flashy headlines, media companies should promote

investigative journalism among reporters and journalists. We strongly believe the media can facilitate public discussion about challenging and complex social and economic issues in society to nurture knowledge-oriented citizens. Also, there is a potential to train and hire more reporters and journalists who critically engage in disability studies, especially among the disabled community in Malaysia. Through this approach, local media can produce enriched content.

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