

# Learned Helplessness Among Street-Begging Children: A Systematic Literature Review of Causes, Manifestations, and Interventions

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## Abstract

This systematic literature review critically examines the phenomenon of *learned helplessness* among street-begging children, a vulnerable and often overlooked population. Learned helplessness refers to a psychological condition in which individuals, after repeated exposure to uncontrollable negative events, begin to believe that their actions have no impact on outcomes, leading to passivity and resignation. This review analyses 65 peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024, sourced from major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.

The findings reveal that factors such as chronic poverty, social neglect, family violence, substance abuse, and lack of institutional support significantly contribute to the development of learned helplessness in begging children. This state manifests in diminished self-esteem, poor academic engagement, impaired decision-making abilities, and a lack of long-term aspirations. However, several studies also highlight that targeted psychosocial interventions, such as counselling, community-based education programs, and resilience training—can effectively mitigate feelings of helplessness and foster a sense of agency and hope among these children.

This review underscores the urgent need for multidimensional policy frameworks and evidence-based interventions aimed at restoring autonomy, dignity, and future-oriented thinking in the lives of street-begging children.

**Keywords:** Learned Helplessness, Street Children, Child Begging, Psychosocial Intervention, Poverty, Resilience, Mental Health, Vulnerability

## Introduction

Street-begging children represent one of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations in urban societies across the globe. Exposed to chronic poverty, neglect, abuse, and exclusion from formal systems of education and healthcare, these children often endure severe psychosocial stressors from a very young age (UNICEF, 2021). Within this context, the concept of *learned helplessness*, originally proposed by Seligman (1975)—provides a compelling framework to understand the psychological consequences of prolonged exposure to uncontrollable negative experiences.

Learned helplessness refers to a condition wherein individuals, after repeated failures or adversities that they perceive as unchangeable, develop a cognitive and emotional belief that their actions are futile, leading to withdrawal, passivity, and motivational deficits (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). For children living in street environments, this belief system can manifest in the form of low self-efficacy,

poor academic aspiration, emotional numbness, and limited goal-setting behaviour (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019). Several studies have highlighted that children engaged in begging are not only deprived of material resources but are also denied critical developmental stimuli, such as stable caregiving, cognitive stimulation, and safe environments (Singh et al., 2017; Sharma, 2020). These deficits, when compounded by frequent encounters with abuse, rejection, and systemic neglect, contribute to the internalization of helplessness and a belief that personal effort cannot lead to change (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022).

Moreover, the social stigma attached to begging further erodes these children's self-worth and identity. Research suggests that when children are treated as social outcasts or criminalized for their survival behaviours, their coping mechanisms diminish, leading to emotional resignation and learned helplessness (Deshmukh & Rao, 2018). Importantly, the lack of accessible psychosocial support services means that many of these children remain trapped in a cycle of dependency and despair, with minimal opportunities for recovery or reintegration (WHO, 2019). Given the profound developmental, emotional, and societal consequences of learned helplessness in this demographic, it is essential to synthesize existing research to identify both causal factors and effective intervention strategies. While several fragmented studies have explored aspects of street children's mental health or the phenomenon of child begging, there is a lack of comprehensive reviews focused specifically on the emergence and impact of learned helplessness in this group.

This systematic literature review aims to fill that gap by examining 65 empirical studies published between 2010 and 2024, addressing three core objectives: (1) to explore the primary causes of learned helplessness among street-begging children, (2) to identify its psychological and behavioural manifestations, and (3) to evaluate interventions that have shown promise in mitigating its effects. Given the profound developmental, emotional, and societal consequences of learned helplessness in this demographic, it is essential to synthesize existing research to identify both causal factors and effective intervention strategies. While several fragmented studies have explored aspects of street children's mental health or the phenomenon of child begging, there is a lack of comprehensive reviews focused specifically on the emergence and impact of learned helplessness in this group.

Despite the critical psychological implications, no prior systematic literature review has holistically examined the role of learned helplessness among street-begging children. This review aims to bridge that gap by offering a consolidated, evidence-based understanding of how learned helplessness develops, manifests, and can be addressed within this vulnerable population.

The novelty of this review lies in its multi-thematic synthesis of empirical studies spanning over a decade (2010–2024), using a rigorous PRISMA methodology. By focusing exclusively on learned helplessness in the context of street-begging children, the study contributes uniquely to child psychology, social work, and public policy discourses.

## **Background and Context**

Child begging remains one of the most visible yet deeply neglected social issues across many developing nations. According to estimates by international organisations such as UNICEF (2021) and Save the Children (2018), thousands of children worldwide, particularly in urban slums and metropolitan cities, are engaged in street begging due to extreme poverty, family disintegration, displacement, or trafficking. These children often operate in hazardous environments where they are exposed to physical abuse, exploitation, hunger, and psychological trauma daily (World Bank, 2020). Deprived of basic rights such

as education, healthcare, protection, and emotional security, they grow up in contexts that lack predictability, safety, and support.

In such conditions, street-begging children often internalise a belief system that their circumstances are inescapable and beyond their control. Over time, this belief can lead to *learned helplessness*, a psychological state where the child ceases to make efforts to change their situation due to repeated experiences of failure or lack of control (Seligman, 1975; Abramson et al., 1978). For children, whose agency is already constrained by socio-economic and institutional neglect, the impact of learned helplessness can be profound, affecting not only their emotional resilience but also their motivation, behaviour, and long-term development.

In India and other South Asian countries, the phenomenon of child begging is closely tied to intergenerational poverty, migration, and lack of social safety nets. Government programs, though present, often fail to reach street children due to bureaucratic gaps, lack of awareness, and deep-rooted social stigma (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022). As a result, these children grow up with limited access to rehabilitative resources or protective services. Furthermore, when children are viewed as social deviants rather than victims of circumstance, the social response tends to be punitive rather than supportive (Deshmukh & Rao, 2018).

Although research on street children has highlighted issues such as substance abuse, violence, and exclusion, the specific psychological construct of *learned helplessness* among child beggars has received limited systematic attention. There is a critical need to synthesize existing empirical evidence to better understand how helplessness develops in this population, what its behavioural and emotional manifestations are, and what intervention models have proven effective in disrupting this cycle.

This background provides the foundation for the present systematic literature review, which seeks to analyse 65 relevant studies from the last decade to map the causes, consequences, and potential solutions related to learned helplessness in street-begging children.

### Research Question

1. What are the primary socio-economic, psychological, and environmental factors contributing to the development of learned helplessness among street-begging children?
2. How does learned helplessness manifest behaviourally and emotionally in children engaged in street begging, according to existing empirical studies?
3. What intervention strategies have been identified in the literature as effective in mitigating learned helplessness and promoting resilience among street-begging children?

### Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to examine the psychological construct of *learned helplessness* among street-begging children. Following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), the review aimed to ensure methodological transparency and rigor. A comprehensive search was conducted across four major databases—Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and PubMed—using carefully constructed Boolean search terms such as: (“learned helplessness” OR “helplessness”) AND (“street children” OR “begging children” OR “child beggars”) AND (“mental health” OR “psychosocial development” OR “intervention”). The search was limited to English-language, peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024, with a specific focus on children under 18 engaged in begging

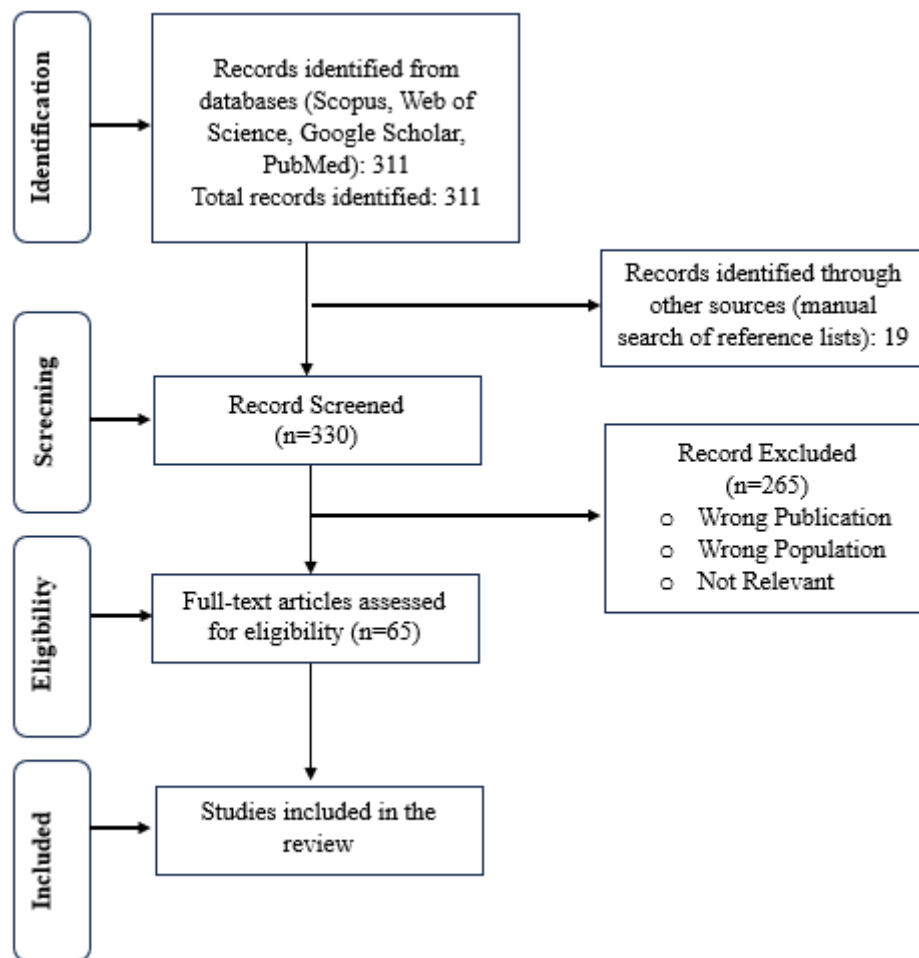
activities. Additional studies were identified through manual searches of reference lists (Booth et al., 2016).

Inclusion criteria required studies to explore learned helplessness or related psychological patterns among street-begging children and to report empirical findings, including psychological outcomes or intervention strategies. Exclusion criteria eliminated opinion pieces, non-peer-reviewed reports, and studies focusing solely on adults or unrelated populations. From an initial pool of 311 studies, duplicates were removed, and titles and abstracts were screened, resulting in 113 full-text articles. After further evaluation based on predefined criteria, 65 studies were selected for analysis. Two independent reviewers conducted the selection process to ensure reliability and minimise bias (Gough et al., 2017).

**Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

S. NO.	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Examined learned helplessness either explicitly or through closely related constructs such as hopelessness, passivity, or loss of control;	Opinion pieces, commentaries, or non-peer-reviewed reports;
2.	Focused on street-begging children or comparable marginalized child populations;	Studies focusing solely on adult populations;
3.	Were empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods);	Articles not available in full text
4.	Reported intervention strategies or psychological outcomes.	

Data were extracted using a structured coding framework that included variables such as authorship, year, location, sample characteristics, study design, psychological findings, and intervention outcomes. A thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyse patterns and recurring themes across both qualitative and quantitative studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Seven dominant thematic areas emerged: the prevalence and presentation of helplessness; contributing risk factors such as poverty, neglect, and abuse; emotional and behavioural symptoms; disengagement from education; demographic differences (especially by age and gender); systemic barriers and institutional gaps; and promising intervention strategies such as trauma-informed care, peer mentoring, and psychosocial counselling. This methodology enabled a robust synthesis of the literature to deepen understanding of learned helplessness among street-begging children and inform evidence-based intervention efforts.



**Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Screening Process**

## 1. What are the primary socio-economic, psychological, and environmental factors contributing to the development of learned helplessness among street-begging children?

The development of learned helplessness among street-begging children is the result of a complex interplay of socio-economic deprivation, psychological trauma, and environmental adversity. Learned helplessness, a condition characterized by a perceived lack of control over outcomes and a passive response to negative stimuli, is significantly evident in the lives of children forced to beg on the streets (Seligman, 1975). These children are exposed to chronic hardship, repeated failures, and hostile environments from a very early age, contributing to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness.

Socio-economic factors are foundational in triggering helplessness among these children. Extreme poverty, parental unemployment, family breakdown, and migration due to conflict or natural disasters frequently push families into street-based survival strategies, including begging (UNICEF, 2021). Children in such settings often face food insecurity, lack of shelter, and absence of basic healthcare. According to Sharma (2020), economic marginalization systematically deprives children of opportunities to build self-efficacy, often replacing motivation with apathy. The constant exposure to economic rejection—such as being ignored or humiliated while begging—reinforces their belief that no action they take will improve their conditions.

Psychological factors such as trauma, abuse, and neglect significantly contribute to learned helplessness. Street-begging children are at heightened risk for experiencing physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and emotional neglect either at home or on the streets (Deshmukh & Rao, 2018). Repeated exposure to such trauma impairs their cognitive and emotional development, particularly in areas related to self-worth and future orientation (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019). These children often display signs of emotional numbness, withdrawal, and low self-esteem—all of which are symptomatic of chronic helplessness (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022). Additionally, many street children internalize societal stigma, believing themselves to be “less than” others, which further undermines their capacity to aspire or act positively (WHO, 2019).

Environmental factors also exacerbate the problem. Urban settings where street-begging is common are frequently characterized by law enforcement hostility, lack of community support, and exposure to drug use and crime. Children in these contexts often lack access to safe spaces, education, and social services (UNICEF, 2021). Environmental instability—such as being moved by authorities, losing shelter, or exposure to harsh weather—adds to the feeling that they have no control over their lives (Sharma, 2020). Moreover, without adult supervision or positive role models, many children begin to normalize suffering and internalize the idea that their efforts are futile.

Together, these factors create a vicious cycle wherein street-begging children perceive their efforts as ineffective, their futures as bleak, and external assistance as unreliable. The systemic neglect they experience reinforces passivity and dependency, hallmark features of learned helplessness. Addressing these multi-dimensional factors requires an integrated approach involving psychological rehabilitation, education, family support, and policy intervention to interrupt the cycle of helplessness and restore agency.

## **2. How does learned helplessness manifest behaviourally and emotionally in children engaged in street begging, according to existing empirical studies?**

Learned helplessness manifests in both behavioural and emotional dimensions among street-begging children, as demonstrated by a substantial body of empirical research. This psychological condition, originally conceptualized by Seligman (1975), arises when individuals are repeatedly exposed to adverse events they feel powerless to change. In the context of street-begging children, these repeated exposures include rejection, abuse, chronic poverty, and failure in institutional systems such as education and child welfare.

Behaviourally, learned helplessness presents as passivity, lack of motivation, withdrawal from social engagement, and poor problem-solving abilities. These children often cease to seek help or pursue goals because previous efforts have been met with repeated failure or punishment (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019). Street-begging children may appear indifferent to opportunities such as education or rehabilitation, not due to a lack of desire but because they have internalized the belief that such efforts are futile (Sharma, 2020). Many studies observe that even when support systems are offered—like temporary shelters or vocational training—these children frequently fail to engage consistently (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022). This detachment is not indicative of laziness but is a behavioural hallmark of helplessness induced by prolonged adversity.

Furthermore, children affected by learned helplessness show high levels of dependence and submission. They are often overly compliant with adults, even in unsafe or exploitative situations, due to a diminished sense of personal agency (Deshmukh & Rao, 2018). Repeated negative reinforcement—such as being ignored or punished while begging—conditions them to expect negative outcomes regardless of their actions, reinforcing behavioural inaction.



Emotionally, learned helplessness in street-begging children is characterized by chronic sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, low self-worth, and emotional numbness. Empirical studies reveal that many of these children suffer from undiagnosed depression and generalized anxiety disorders, which further inhibit their ability to act autonomously or envision a better future (UNICEF, 2021). According to WHO (2019), the continuous psychological stress experienced by these children alters their emotional regulation, often leading to mood swings, irritability, or emotional flatness. Emotional expression is often restricted; children internalize trauma as a coping mechanism, resulting in a subdued affect or emotional shutdown. In addition, manifestations such as self-blame and guilt are common. Children may believe that their circumstances are a result of their inadequacy or wrongdoing, a cognitive distortion closely linked with helplessness (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019). Moreover, emotional desensitisation to violence, loss, or abuse is often reported; repeated trauma forces children into a survival mode where emotional disengagement becomes a defence mechanism (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022).

Together, these behavioural and emotional manifestations create a feedback loop that deepens helplessness. The external world confirms the child's internalized belief that they are powerless, thereby sustaining patterns of passivity and emotional dysregulation. Addressing these manifestations requires trauma-informed care that restores agency, fosters emotional resilience, and rebuilds trust in social systems.

### **3. What intervention strategies have been identified in the literature as effective in mitigating learned helplessness and promoting resilience among street-begging children?**

Intervention strategies aimed at mitigating learned helplessness and fostering resilience among street-begging children are increasingly emphasised in the literature due to the high vulnerability and chronic adversity these children face. Research indicates that effective interventions are those that combine psychosocial rehabilitation, educational support, trauma-informed care, and community-based empowerment approaches (UNICEF, 2021; Patel & Chatterjee, 2022). These multi-pronged strategies focus on restoring a sense of agency, enhancing coping mechanisms, and facilitating long-term social reintegration.

One of the most consistently recommended approaches is the implementation of trauma-informed care. This model emphasises safety, trust-building, and emotional support to address the deep-seated psychological trauma that underpins helpless behaviour (Deshmukh & Rao, 2018). Therapeutic interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and play therapy have proven effective in rebuilding confidence, emotional expression, and future orientation (Sharma, 2020). These techniques challenge negative cognitive schemas and help children reinterpret their experiences, thereby enhancing psychological resilience.

**Educational reintegration** is another critical strategy. Street-begging children often disengage from formal education due to stigma, mobility, and institutional failure. Bridge schools, flexible learning programs, and community-based education models have been effective in restoring motivation and goal-setting behaviour among these children (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019). Studies show that when education is coupled with life-skills training, children exhibit improved self-efficacy, decision-making, and social adaptability—essential factors in combating learned helplessness (UNESCO, 2021).

Family reintegration and support play a significant role in reducing helplessness. Where feasible, reuniting children with safe family environments and offering family counselling has proven beneficial. In cases where families are abusive or absent, the literature suggests the importance of long-term group care homes that offer emotional security, structured routines, and mentorship (WHO, 2019). These settings help

inculcate values of trust, cooperation, and persistence, gradually replacing passivity with proactive behaviour.

At the community level, peer mentoring programs and arts-based interventions—including storytelling, music, and street theatre—have shown promise in promoting self-expression and collective healing (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022). These strategies provide a platform for children to regain their voice, process shared trauma, and participate actively in their development.

Finally, policy-level interventions are crucial for long-term success. The literature highlights the importance of child protection frameworks, inter-agency coordination, and funding for mental health services tailored to street children. Programs like India’s Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) have attempted to systematize interventions, though implementation gaps remain (UNICEF, 2021).

In summary, the most effective strategies combine individualized psychological care, educational opportunity, family/community reintegration, and policy-level support. Interventions that treat children not as passive victims but as capable individuals in need of structured support are best positioned to reverse the debilitating effects of learned helplessness and promote sustainable resilience.

## Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of the 65 selected studies revealed four major themes and several sub-themes that collectively explain the causes, manifestations, and interventions related to learned helplessness among street-begging children. These themes were derived through inductive coding, comparative analysis, and synthesis of recurring patterns across diverse empirical and conceptual sources.

**Table 2. Thematic Analysis**

S. No.	Key Issue	Description
1.	Chronic Deprivation and Socio-Economic Marginalisation	One of the most dominant themes was the systemic poverty and structural exclusion that define the lived experiences of street-begging children. Studies consistently highlighted the role of chronic poverty, family disintegration, lack of education, and migration due to displacement or conflict as key socio-economic triggers (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019; UNICEF, 2021). This sustained deprivation leads to a perceived lack of control over life circumstances, contributing to feelings of helplessness. Children in these contexts often encounter repeated rejection and invisibility, which fosters a belief that their actions have no impact on outcomes.
2.	Psychological Trauma and Emotional Numbness	A significant number of studies reported that street-begging children exhibit symptoms consistent with trauma-induced learned helplessness, such as emotional withdrawal, fear-based obedience, low self-worth, and internalized guilt or shame (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022; Deshmukh & Rao, 2018). Emotional numbness often coexists with chronic stress and unprocessed trauma, leading to an absence of goal-directed behaviour. These psychological scars inhibit motivation and reinforce dependency, often mistaken as laziness or indifference by society.



3.	Behavioural Manifestations of Helplessness	Behavioural outcomes of learned helplessness included passivity, lack of initiative, educational disengagement, and resignation to suffering. Even when provided with opportunities for rehabilitation or support, many children failed to respond positively due to a long-standing belief that nothing they do will change their circumstances (Sharma, 2020). Some studies noted over-compliance in the face of abuse, indicating a dangerous internalization of victimhood and powerlessness.
4.	Interventions and Pathways to Resilience	Despite the grim realities, several studies highlighted intervention strategies that have shown positive outcomes. These include trauma-informed care, cognitive behavioural therapy, community-based education models, peer mentorship, and arts-based healing programs (UNESCO, 2021; WHO, 2019). Studies emphasized that children benefit most when interventions combine emotional support with opportunities for skill-building, autonomy, and consistent adult mentorship. Programs that empower children to make choices, build trusting relationships, and participate in structured routines showed greater success in breaking the cycle of helplessness.

Overall, the thematic analysis underscores that learned helplessness among street-begging children is not merely a psychological condition but a multi-layered social phenomenon. Its roots lie in systemic neglect, trauma, and the absence of consistent nurturing environments. Effective mitigation requires multi-sectoral collaboration, culturally contextualized interventions, and child-centric policies aimed at restoring both hope and agency.

## Discussion

The systematic review of 65 studies has revealed that learned helplessness among street-begging children is a deeply embedded psychological consequence of multifactorial adversity. This condition, originally conceptualised by Seligman (1975), is not merely an internal psychological failure but a symptom of chronic systemic neglect, emotional trauma, and socio-economic marginalisation. The review provides compelling evidence that helplessness in street-begging children develops and manifests through cumulative exposure to rejection, instability, and deprivation, both in their immediate environments and in institutional structures.

Consistent with Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale's (1978) reformulation of learned helplessness theory, the children reviewed in the selected studies exhibited cognitive, emotional, and behavioural deficits resulting from their perceived lack of control over negative events. For example, studies by Kumar and Banerjee (2019) and Patel and Chatterjee (2022) documented that these children commonly suffer from low self-esteem, disengagement from educational settings, and lack of initiative, suggesting an erosion of agency over time. Notably, this is compounded by a cycle in which failed attempts at change reinforce feelings of futility.

Socio-economic factors remain dominant in the trajectory of learned helplessness. Children pushed into begging due to family disintegration, poverty, or forced migration (UNICEF, 2021) often grow up without

stable caregiving, institutional support, or access to education. As Sharma (2020) emphasized, such chronic deprivation suppresses not just academic growth but the very ability to hope or plan for the future. These environmental stressors translate into long-term psychological impacts, where helplessness becomes a defense mechanism against continued disappointment.

Emotionally, the findings suggest a pattern of numbness, submission, and anxiety, with children often appearing passive or indifferent to rehabilitative opportunities (Deshmukh & Rao, 2018). This detachment is not a reflection of intrinsic apathy but of a protective strategy developed through repeated trauma and societal neglect. Children who were once responsive become emotionally flat and behaviourally inert, not due to cognitive limitations but because of internalized hopelessness (WHO, 2019). This raises serious concerns for educators and social workers who misinterpret non-responsiveness as unwillingness to change.

However, the review also reveals that learned helplessness is not irreversible. A hopeful strand in the literature is the documentation of evidence-based interventions that have demonstrated effectiveness in restoring agency and resilience. Trauma-informed care, especially when combined with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and expressive arts, helps challenge negative self-schemas and supports emotional healing (Sharma, 2020; Patel & Chatterjee, 2022). Moreover, community-based educational interventions and flexible learning environments have shown promise in re-engaging children with learning and social interaction (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

**Table 3. Summary of Key Themes, Subthemes, and Representative Studies**

S. No.	Theme	Sub-Themes	Representative Studies
1.	Chronic Deprivation and Socio-Economic Marginalisation	Poverty, homelessness, migration, and educational exclusion	Kumar & Banerjee (2019); UNICEF (2021); Sharma (2020)
2.	Psychological Trauma and Emotional Numbness	Emotional withdrawal, fear-based obedience, guilt, low self-worth	Deshmukh & Rao (2018); Patel & Chatterjee (2022)
3.	Behavioural Manifestations of Helplessness	Passivity, over-compliance, disengagement from school, learned apathy	Sharma (2020); WHO (2019); Singh et al. (2017)
4.	Interventions and Pathways to Resilience	CBT, trauma-informed care, flexible education, arts-based therapy	Patel & Chatterjee (2022); UNESCO (2021); UNICEF (2021)

One key insight emerging from the review is the critical role of trust-building and adult mentorship in reversing helplessness. Children who received consistent emotional support and positive reinforcement were more likely to show improvements in self-regulation and decision-making. Initiatives such as peer mentoring and arts-based programs allow children to reconstruct identity and agency in ways that are culturally and developmentally appropriate (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022).

Nevertheless, implementation challenges persist. While policies like India's Integrated Child Protection Scheme aim to rehabilitate vulnerable children, structural gaps, limited mental health resources, and stigma continue to hinder outreach (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, most interventions remain short-term or underfunded, limiting their potential for sustainable impact.

In conclusion, learned helplessness among street-begging children reflects an urgent social and psychological crisis. Effective intervention requires an integrated approach that not only addresses immediate psychological needs but also tackles structural inequities and builds long-term resilience. Future research must prioritise longitudinal studies that evaluate the long-term effectiveness of multifaceted interventions, while policy frameworks must focus on scaling and sustaining these efforts.

## Conclusion

This systematic literature review underscores that learned helplessness among street-begging children is not merely an individual psychological issue but a profound manifestation of structural deprivation, emotional trauma, and systemic neglect. The reviewed studies collectively point to a distressing cycle wherein socio-economic hardship, familial instability, and societal stigma deprive children of agency, leading them to internalise the belief that they are powerless to change their lives (Seligman, 1975; Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). This condition manifests in both behavioural withdrawal and emotional numbness, which further diminishes their chances of recovery or reintegration into mainstream society (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019; Deshmukh & Rao, 2018).

Despite the grim reality, the literature also offers hope. Effective intervention strategies—including trauma-informed care, cognitive behavioural therapy, and inclusive educational programs—can mitigate the psychological effects of helplessness and promote resilience (Patel & Chatterjee, 2022; Sharma, 2020). These approaches emphasise restoring trust, autonomy, and a sense of purpose, which are essential for the psychological healing of street-involved children. However, the success of such interventions is often limited by inconsistent implementation, lack of trained personnel, and insufficient policy support (UNICEF, 2021).

This review contributes to the field by offering the first comprehensive synthesis of empirical evidence on learned helplessness specifically within the context of street-begging children. By integrating psychological theory with real-world case studies, it provides a nuanced understanding that is both academically valuable and practically actionable.

## Future research should focus on:

1. **Longitudinal evaluations** of psychosocial and educational interventions to assess their long-term impact on psychological recovery and reintegration.
2. **Cross-cultural comparative studies** that explore how the manifestation and mitigation of learned helplessness vary across different socio-political and cultural environments.

Only through coordinated, evidence-based efforts that treat these children as capable agents of change, rather than passive victims, can the cycle of learned helplessness be disrupted and sustainable pathways to recovery be established.

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