

Exploring Rickshaw Pullers in Delhi: Challenges and Livelihood

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to explore the socio-economic and community life of rickshaw pullers in Delhi and to provide suggestions in light of the core values of community psychology for community building. Research questions were aimed to meet the objectives focused on socio-economic characteristics, health habits, livelihood, expectation from society and government, bonding and affiliation in the community, and differences in rickshaw pullers living with and without family. For the research purpose qualitative research design i.e. interview method and observation method was used. The participants consisted of two rickshaw pullers of which one lived with his family and one without. Both participants were migrant workers. Interview was taken from them, and Observations were made during working timings of rickshaw pullers to find sense of community among them and their routines during their working hours. The relationships of rickshaw pullers and passengers were observed. It was found from that there is no concrete sense of community among rickshaw pullers and instead they have a group of friends that they rely on and spend time with. Rickshaw pullers wages decreased with time due to coming of e-rickshaws in Delhi, which led to more competition among rickshaw pullers for passengers. The later part of the study was focused on providing suggestions for active participation by the government, NGO's and society at large that could bring out improvements in the quality of life among rickshaw pullers. Suggestions for community building were provided based on the core values of community psychology.

KEYWORDS: Community, Interview, Observation, Rickshaw pullers, Sense of Community, Workers

INTRODUCTION

Workers represent half the world's population and are major contributors to economic and social development. In India, nearly two-thirds of the contribution to the net domestic product is by the unorganized sector. Employment-driven migration is mainly from the "relatively less developed" states to large metropolises and other large cities, wherein the migrants get absorbed in low-paid jobs in the unorganized sectors. The workers living conditions are poor with denial of basic amenities to maintain the standard of living, making them prone to health problems (Chaturvedi et.al, 2011).

Migrant population, being a non-native population, is vulnerable and is exposed to many health problems. Most of the health problems of migrants are ascribed to their migration to urban areas, decreased awareness about local health facility, inability to cope with psychological stress, unhealthy sexual practices, and frequent migration. Other factors are: food insecurity, climate, and other environmental hazards. Migrant population constitutes a large proportion of population in urban areas. They also suffer from large number of health problems. Further, they are not able to utilize the existing health services. Some of their problems can be tackled by providing them health education about services available.

Riding rickshaw is extremely physically taxing, but does not require any formal education. The poor and needy people without their livelihood asset and formal education find it attractive and enter the field to earn a living. Such an income provides a person with compensation for an injury with bleak prospects of financial growth. Rickshaw is a common means of public transport throughout South-East Asia. It is popular because of its simple technology and low operational cost. It provides comfort and mobility to passengers through overcrowded and narrow streets. Rickshaws may be hand-pulled, although these models are seen only in Kolkata in India and in some other cities such as Singapore and Manila. The cycle-rickshaw is by far the more common: essentially it is a pedal tricycle with two back wheels supporting a passenger seat which accommodates two or three people.

The 'rickshaw puller' or driver sits in the front and pedals the vehicle. This work does not require much skill but is physically demanding. According to the Centre for Rural Development there are about 8 million rickshaw pullers in India. This is a strictly male profession, apart from rare cases of female rickshaw pullers in the north-eastern regions and the southern states of India. The rickshaw pullers provide comfort to a large number of people, but they live a pitiful state. They are part of a large unorganized sector with no support from government or other authority. (Banerjee, 2010)

Rickshaw pullers are at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy of urban India. Many take to this profession as an alternative to farm work or unskilled labour. Some also have a small agricultural holding, which is not sufficient to sustain them and their family. Even those who work all year round were previously laborers. Thus all rickshaw pullers move between labouring and plying a rickshaw as necessary, particularly in the harvesting and reaping season, when there is a sharp increase in demand for relatively well-paid agricultural labour. (Banerjee, 2010)

Ali (2013) in his study on socioeconomic of rickshaw pullers found that Income (cash) and quick engagement in work pull a number of populations to join this occupation. A majority of rickshaw pullers were rural-immigrants arrived from the adjacent districts leaving their previous occupations. There was high proportion of rickshaw pullers who were Muslims and mainly belonged to backward castes comparatively their conditions were more miserable than that of schedule caste people. Illiteracy was their common feature due to low income, poverty, their attitudes as expensing time and money is unfruitful.

The rickshaw pullers who had source of fixed income as contract for carrying school children were in better condition than who have not. Living at poor houses, slum and garage dwellings were their common attributes where civil amenities and facilities were either absent or poor. Prevailing health problems were cough, body pain, fever, different chronic diseases among the rickshaw pullers. They used medical stores or poor, sub-standard private clinics for health care at free hours to get cheaper medicines for diagnosis. There was lack of government commitments toward this community equally responsible for such dismal conditions. Active union and organization could have uplifted their socio-economic condition regarding few suggestions are incorporated as remedial measures for their improvement.

Most rickshaw pullers are victims of exorbitant daily rentals and the mafia that doesn't allow them to own the rickshaws. Many of them live on pavements – exploited by the police, municipal bodies and usurious money lenders. SMV Wheels Pvt. Ltd. is an innovative social enterprise empowering rickshaw pullers. Started in April 2010 in Varanasi, UP, SMV provides well-designed rickshaws to pullers in groups of five. These rickshaw pullers form their “garages” in different parts of the city to repair the rickshaws as well as update business records and collect repayments. Repayments are collected on a weekly basis which includes the cost of the rickshaw, accidental insurance premium, license, uniform, operating costs and post sales service. SMV (Slow Moving Vehicles) Wheels was founded with the idea to empower rickshaw pullers community by getting them the legal license of a rickshaw.

George (2013) in the research on rickshaw pullers in Delhi found that A significant number of migrant workers in Delhi, India's capital, depend on cycle rickshaw pulling to support their families back in their villages. Many of these migrant workers take up rickshaw pulling as a quick way to earn some money while they are in the city. Compared to privately-owned cars, which take up more road space and are very expensive to maintain, a cycle rickshaw takes up very little road space and can ferry many passengers throughout the day. Since a cycle rickshaw involves very low investment, it is often seen as an instant source of employment for the huge migrant population in Delhi. Policymakers by and large have ignored the plight of poor rickshaw pullers by favoring the automobile lobby. The cycle rickshaw industry should be encouraged in the urban areas, along with appropriate policy adaptations and financial support to rickshaw pullers. In addition to providing the cheapest mode of public transportation, the cycle rickshaw industry helps reduce unemployment in a city with a large population of unskilled migrants.

Rationale for the Present study

In community psychology, there is an emphasis on community as an important social unit, particularly in collectivistic cultures like in India. Rickshaw pullers are an urban migratory community that not only shares same occupation but also similar socio-economic characteristics. Existing research on rickshaw pullers focus extensively on their socio-economic characteristics but empirical evidence for lack about their sense of community. The present study attempts to explore the current status and understanding sense of community among rickshaw pullers, how they perceive themselves, and where they place themselves as individuals in the society. Building a sense of community among rickshaw pullers was seen as important and could help enhance their wellbeing and uplift their status in society. Based on the core values of community psychology, suggestions have been made on how to promote their status in society.

The objectives of the study are

- (a) To explore the socio-economic and community life of rickshaw pullers, and
- (b) To provide suggestions in light of the core values of community psychology for community building.

Research questions aimed to meet the objectives focused around socio-economic characteristics, health habits, livelihood, expectation from society and government, bonding and affiliation in the community and differences in rickshaw pullers living with family and without family.

METHOD

Design

Exploratory and qualitative research design was used as review on sense of community was less on rickshaw pullers community and it was important to have in depth exploration of the rickshaw pullers. Interview and Observation method was used for research purposes.

Participants

Data was collected from 2 participants belonging to rickshaw pullers community, living with and without their families. Both participants were migrant workers. The Study was done in Delhi NCR region. No restricting criterion were used, but focus on two kinds of sample one living in family and one without was kept in focus. Researcher observed rickshaw pullers in different regions of Delhi.

Participant I is a 30 year old man. He lives in Chandani Chowk area which is in east Delhi, and rides rickshaw for a living. He originally hails from Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. He is married and has three children, lives without family.

Participant II is a 26 year old male from Rajasthan. His current address is Hauz Rani. He came to Delhi with his family and lives in a four roomed house. He lives with his wife, sister and two children.

Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive and convenient sampling. The participants groups were group 1 (living with family) and group 2 (living without family). An inclusion criterion was used that both participants for the researcher to be male rickshaw pullers who were either proficient in Hindi or English.

Procedure

For the research purposes general observation on rickshaw pullers community was started by the researcher for understanding the community. Probes for the qualitative interview were framed. Probe list was developed to collect data from the rickshaw pullers from the field. It was ensured that the questions were presented in a manner which can be understandable by the participants, and the questions were translated in Hindi. Rickshaw pullers were approached and data was collected from the rickshaw pullers who gave consent for the participation. Data was collected and analyzed.

RESULTS

Table 1. Showing responses of participants to questions through codes.

Items	Codes	
	Participant I (Living Without Family)	Participant II (Living With Family)
Age	30 Years	26 Years
Sex	Male	Male
Hometown	Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh	Rajasthan
Current residence (rented or owned/any other)	Chandani chowk- Rented	Hauz rani- Rented
What kind of a house is it?		
A. kutchha /pukka	Pukka	Pukka
B. No. of room	1	1
C. No. of people cohabiting	5	5
D. Toilet	Shared	Yes
*Kitchen	In room only	Yes
Do other rickshaw pullers also live in that area?	Yes	Yes
Area where you pull rickshaw?	Chandani chowk area	Saket metro station
Do you have- Ration card/ Aadhar card/ BPL card/ Bank account/ Pan card/	Yes, Aadhar card, Ration card and bank account	Yes
Is it helpful to have these documents?	transfer of money	Depends
Do you have any local identity card?	No	No
Will it be helpful to have a local identity card?	Sometimes	Not that much
Did you apply for it and get it?	Yes	Yes
Ability to read and write?	Yes	Yes
A. If yes, educational qualification	8	10
Marital status	Married	Married
Family structure	Joint	Nuclear
Total Family income (Per Month)	11-12000	10,000
A. Earning members in the family	4	3
B. No. of dependents	3	2
How long have you been pulling rickshaw?	4	4 to 5
A. Overall	2	4 to 5
B. Time in Delhi	2	2 to 3
C. Any other employment	No	Shopkeeper
Do you own the rickshaw or is it rented?	No	Owned
Do you have a license for it?	Owned	Yes
What are the benefits of having a license?	Yes	Traffic police
How did you get it?	From police	Applied
Per day earning?	500-600	600
Expenditure	400-500	5000to 6000
A. Rent	2000	3000
B. Rickshaw rent or EMI	400	No
C. Food	No	1000
D. Electricity and water	300	250
E. Fine, if any	100	No
F. Medicines ,if any	No	Illness
G. Beedi, gutkha, tambaku,daru	Beedi	Alcohol

H. Money sent home	7000	No
I. School fee(if applicable)	No, Government Schools	300 Tution only
J. Savings	No	1000
Why did you come to Delhi?	More Money	More income
How many hours do you invest in pulling rickshaw?	Other village people	Experience
What do you do to get relief from the tiredness?	Rest	Talking to friends
How do you spend time post work?	Sleep	Family
You work all day long with each other. Do you share your personal and professional experiences with each other?	No	Household related
How does that make you feel?	Similar lives	Fine
If we consider rickshaw pullers to be a community. How close knit is this community according to you?	Feels good	Fights
Do you think it is good to have a close knit community?	Fights for people	Necessary
What are the difficulties that this community faces, according to you?	Money or illness	Less money according to hardwork
A. Livelihood related	Police, Money	Less than work
B. Health related	People	Pain in body
Do you have any health related issues?	No	No
Do you consume/use- bidhi, tambakhu, gutkha ,Alcohol ..etc.	Beedi	Yes
Why do you use it?	Habitual	Relieving stress
What do you guys do for fun together?	Dancing, Eating	At home together
Are you aware of the ill effects of it?	Yes	Yes
Do you want modernization in Rickshaw?	Yes	No
Why so?	Beneficial	
Are you attached to any organization or union that is working for your welfare?	More earning	No
Keeping the future in mind, what do you expect from the government and society?	Respect, giving appropriate amount	Fixed cost

DISCUSSION

The Purpose of the present study was to explore the rickshaw pullers community. The objective of the study was to explore the socio-economic and community life of rickshaw pullers, and to provide suggestions in light of the core values of community psychology for community building. The 'rickshaw puller' or driver sits in the front and pedals the vehicle. The work does not require much skill but is physically demanding. According to the centre for rural development there are about 8 million rickshaw pullers in India. This is strictly male profession, apart from rare cases of female rickshaw pullers in the north-eastern regions and the southern states of India. The rickshaw pullers provide comfort to a large number of people, but they live a pitiful state. They are part of a large unorganized sector with no support from government or other authority. The people of the community have many problems and issues. Study focuses to know all the aspects of the livelihood and other details related to their profession, health and community. Qualitative method for the data collection was used i.e., Interview and observation. Participants for the study mainly belonged to the age group 25-50 years.

A majority of rickshaw pullers were rural-immigrants arrived from the adjacent districts leaving their previous occupations (Ali, 2013). Living presently in different parts of Delhi NCR region in rented house mostly in 1 room accommodation. People cohabiting together with them range from 1 to 6. They also reported that the electricity depends on how much they use as it differs every month as most of the day hours are spent outside the room. Rickshaw pullers were extremely backward regarding education. It was due to lower income, poverty, and lack of proper accessibility of the educational institutions and prevailing thinking about education as they considered to expense for education is unfruitful (Ali, 2013).

Livelihood

When asked about the reason why they chose to pull rickshaw, participants reported that it is due to illiteracy and lack of skill as all of them from poor background and started pulling rickshaw through a known source such as peers, other villagers, or father's occupation. This shows that they did not start pulling rickshaw willingly but due to some circumstances they had in their lives. Participants reported that they pull rickshaw as they have no other choice and due to unemployment. Even if they want opt for other jobs they couldn't get the job or start a new work as they are illiterate.

Participant worked in other's field from this as one reported that '*kheti baari hai gaon mein....woh kuch maheene chalta hai.. Maine ek company mein kaam kiya.. yeh Rohtak road pe.. kapda line vagerah ka kaam jaanta hoon.. phir vahaan pe ek ladai ho gayi thi.. vahaan maine kaafi kaam kiya toh theek hai, tab saade nau hazaar rupaye milte the pa maine company chhod*'

They usually spend 10-12 hours in a day to pull rickshaw. Other than pulling rickshaw, 1 participant's transfers clothes for a shop in the evenings. Only one man works to transfer clothes in addition to driving his Rickshaw for passengers, other was employed elsewhere earlier but have no time for any other profession.

Health

Participant suffers from gastritis and tiredness who lives with family. Prevailing health problems were cough, body pain, fever, different chronic diseases among the rickshaw pullers (Ali, 2013). Eating and sleep/rest give them relief from tiredness.

In relation to substance abuse, they consume beedi, gutkha or Alcohol. They are aware of the ill effects of such substance but still some of them take it even if it leads to some kind of illness. As one participant mentioned '*daaru tension kam kardeti hai jab dosto ke saath ho*'. They consume because of peer pressure, to get relief from stress.

They are aware of the ill effects of substance abuse and the people that use these substances say they do it in little amounts. Resort to drinking habits, further having negative impact on their health. Alcohol intake also leads to mental problems and domestic violence (Nikita et.al, 2010).

Bonding and affiliations to the community

Most of the rickshaws pullers live together; most of them left their native places and came to Delhi to get better job and more income opportunities. This formed a community among themselves. They share their worries and happiness among themselves. They help each other in times of need. Several organizations have also come up for the betterment of the rickshaw pullers community. When asked about what this rickshaw pullers community does after work, participant said that they cook food, eat and sleep. They do not pursue any other activity; participant living with family prefer to spend time with them, watch TV or engage in household chores such as cleaning or helping the spouse or other members.

They share personal lives with each other about their personal lives, talk about work, 2 talk about family matters and about problems they are facing. Some do not like to share due to reasons as they are busy, or because of cultural differences like different backgrounds or language. So they prefer only to share with their family or roommates. All participants are positive towards sharing their personal experiences, because they have loneliness and it provides support to them.

When asked about rickshaw community to be a close knit community, participants mentioned about too many fights over people as there is much competition for one passenger. They have less number of people approaching them as compared to others means of transport. Participants views that it is essential to have sense of community towards each other as they are the ones who can help in problematic situations, professional and personal life should not go together.

Participants have issues related to money, related to police, related to health as it get tiring and about uncertainty about future. Both participants were migrant and they face more issues than local rickshaw pullers. Stress among migrants arises from displacement, insertion into new areas, and reinsertion into the former environment. Poor working condition, poor living condition, lack of job security, meager salary, inability to fulfill their own needs, exploitation by contractors are the other factors which also contribute to stress (Nikita et.al, 2010).

Expectation and hope

Participants wish for a better rickshaw structure, fixed payment, government housing, modernization Participant responded that '*Iske bare mein toh main bohot sochta hoon par kya hi bolun, kuch mujhe aasha nahi hai Sarkar se... Pradhan mantra bhi aisa hai.. yahaan Sarkar aisi hai kuch nahi ho paayega*'. It was found that lack of government commitments toward this community equally responsible for such dismal conditions (Ali, 2013). Most rickshaw pullers are victims of exorbitant daily rentals and the mafia that doesn't allow them to own the rickshaws. Many of them live on pavements – exploited by the police, municipal bodies and usurious money lenders (Anand, 2011).

Rickshaw pullers living with family have more responsibilities and money spending than the rickshaw puller living without family. The people without family can have more savings as they send money to home and their monthly expenditure is less as compared to urban areas of Delhi NCR. It was observed from rickshaw pullers who live without families work for more hours and spend most of the time with community members than the one's living with family as they are required to keep care of the family needs as well.

The community could be helped through community projects similar to RAMBO project 'Rickshaw pullers' Association for Mobile Business Opportunity', is a pilot project started independently by the Faculty and students of the Institute of Business Management, VBS Purvanchal University in Jaunpur, to improve the daily earnings of rickshaw pullers through a marketing intervention. Substance abuse related information can be taught to them and other programs related to health and hygiene can be started for them (Banerjee, 2010).

Rickshaw Bank project is the flagship activity of the CRD. The project was started in November 20, 2004 with the strategy of mobilizing poor rural migrants, urban poor and values project provides an asset-based micro-leasing package of tricycle, insurance, license, uniform with the terms of reference of handing over the ownership to the tricycles after realizing the cost of the package at Equal Daily Installment within a year or half. Besides, Rickshaw Bank provides other services to the pullers – health checkup, fuel package (LP Gas with Stove), educational exchange programme for the children of the rickshaw pullers etc.

SMV Wheels Pvt. Ltd. is an innovative social enterprise empowering rickshaw pullers. Started in April 2010 in Varanasi, UP, SMV provides well-designed rickshaws to pullers in groups of five. These rickshaw pullers form their "garages" in different parts of the city to repair the rickshaws as well as update business records and collect repayments. Repayments are collected on a weekly basis which includes the cost of the rickshaw, accidental insurance premium, license, uniform, operating costs and post sales service. SMV (Slow Moving Vehicles) Wheels was founded with the idea to empower rickshaw pullers community by getting them the legal license of a rickshaw (Anand, 2011)

Interventions based on community psychology Core Values

The interventions that can be implemented in the community are many. The present study has augmented the knowledge of the researcher regarding this community enough that certain interventions based on values of community psychology can be suggested.

Individual and Family Wellness. It can be done through awareness camps and programs regarding family planning. Programs can be initiated to increase awareness about documents like ration cards, which would greatly reduce their financial burden, and bank accounts to increase knowledge of finances. A study by Bose (2013) recommended that creating common information centers (CICs) to provide information about the government sponsored insurance and other financial assistance programs would help their families. Medical camps to treat and increase awareness about basic hygiene and strategies to reduce illness would bring a great positive change in the community. Carrin (1999), found that ill health reduces the earning capacity, and increases the risk of families with ill members to drift down the social and economic ladder.

Sense of Community. Most direct intervention can be unionization. Unions are very important lobby in both increasing the sense of self value of a community and help in creating a force that can with greater authority demand rights. Self-help groups are another mode that can work in the community to reduce interpersonal issues and challenges. A movement by rickshaw pullers of Hyderabad in 2003 employed a technique that greatly targeted change. The union worked on campaigns to allow rickshaw and bicycles to run without restrictions in cities and towns. Their strategy was to push these demands by projecting rickshaws as the most environmental friendly mode of transport.

Collaboration and Community strength. A cooperative bank is a highly collaborative and effective strategy that can be implemented. In 2013, a study by Bose brought forth the idea of community ownership of rickshaws. This would greatly reduce financial burden and allow the onus of ownership and employment to be upon the community itself rather than having a mercy on a more economically privileged group. In addition to this if municipalities were to create proper rickshaw stands than there would be great improvement in the sense of wellbeing.

Respect for Human Diversity. A study by Ali (2013) found that 60% rickshaw pullers belonged to the Muslim community in Uttar Pradesh, while 40% to Hinduism. A negligible proportion was found of Christian population in rickshaw pulling services. When pullers all over the region attach stickers to the rickshaws and starts feeling emotionally connected, there is an overriding of other ethnic differences as well. In addition working with people from different backgrounds for cooperative banks facilitates greater interaction and thus increases respect for diversity.

Social Justice. Voter ID cards can be distributed with the proper education on how to attain papers etc. along with workshops on the importance of voting increases their self-value with regard to nation and gives them power in decision making. Governments and Unions should actively reach out to the community and ask for basic amenities like food and other resources.

Empowerment and citizen participation. Banerjee and Sharma (2014), worked on the improvement of socio economic structure of rickshaw pulling by targeting the rated charged. If there are good fixed costs of certain distances through meter etc. then there would be less fluctuating system of earning for pullers.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from the findings that the rickshaw pullers is a community but there is not much sense of community among them as they are not connected with each other after work hours and there is day to day fights about peoples. They understand the need to have close knit bond among themselves but do not have one among themselves. Most of the rickshaw pullers are not aware about the social welfare and social security schemes as most of them are illiterate. They are not having insurance and are unable to get any financial help from the government.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Rickshaw pullers while interviewing referred to some other rickshaw pullers if they get passengers. The study does not claim to be representative of all Rickshaw Pullers in the streets of Delhi.

Future researches could have more domains to explore the community. Number of participants can be increased to find more accurate findings about the community. Participants from other source of rickshaw or travelling like e- rickshaw can also be approached and comparative analysis can be done.

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