



A Sociological Analysis Of Social, Economic And Health Conditions Of Women Living In Slums: With Special Reference To Prayagraj District Of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

This research investigates the socioeconomic circumstances and health issues affecting women in the slum communities of Prayagraj district, Uttar Pradesh. Given the rapid pace of urbanization, slums have become a significant component of modern society, with their populations expanding in line with urban growth. The study's primary goals are twofold: 1) to analyze the socioeconomic status of slum-dwelling women, and 2) to examine the environmental factors influencing women's health in these areas. Utilizing a descriptive research methodology, the study was conducted in the Daraganj slum. Data were collected via structured interviews from a sample of 50 women. The findings indicate that the women in the study area experience substantial socioeconomic challenges, including prevalent informal sector employment and limited access to essential amenities. The environmental conditions within the slums significantly affect women's health, underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions to enhance their living standards.

Keywords: Slum, Social, Economic, Health, Environment, Problems

Introduction

Cities have always been centers of civilization and culture. Compared to villages, cities offer more facilities in terms of trade, education, industry, transport, medical facilities, and entertainment. After industrialization, a large population from rural areas migrated to cities in search of employment and better living standards. Consequently, cities and metropolises are experiencing a continuous influx of migrants. As a result, these cities are facing housing problems due to increasing population.

Shelter is one of the basic necessities of humans. If there is a lack of planned housing, people are forced to live in dilapidated houses where basic infrastructure is absent. This leads to the formation of informal urban settlements known as slums. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a slum refers to an open area where poor people can live and establish themselves in a city's resource area, and where low-income earners can reside. The Central Government defined slums in the Slum Areas Act (1956) as follows:

"A slum primarily refers to residential areas where dwellings are unfit for human habitation due to dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty design of buildings, narrowness of streets, lack of ventilation, light, or proper sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to safety, health, and morals."

Ratna Naidu writes about the formation of slums that slums' jarjar (dilapidated) houses have completely different social, economic, and psychological characteristics. Slums develop in vacant places in cities, where rural migrants who come seeking employment reside. Their houses are illegal, without proper walls, lacking ventilation, and built at upper levels. They have more people living in them and lack basic amenities like water, electricity, and sewage systems. Most residents are illiterate and belong to the lower class.

David Hunter, according to his definition, states that a slum is an extraordinary colony, a collection of broken houses, absence of ventilation, filth, tin sheds, and dirty corridors. We understand slums as broken, dirty clothes-wearing children, disabled individuals' residences, which represent poverty, helplessness, ignorance, and deprivation. We see it as an unstable society. It is an area of deterioration and disorganization.

Pawar, D.H. and Man, B.D. (2013) studied the social conditions of slum dwellers. The social economic status is calculated through occupation, income, and population expenditure details. In social economic conditions, occupation plays an important role, which affects other factors like population's standard of living. Social economic conditions determine individuals' living standards, and this living standard affects the family's income level.

Status of Women in Slums:

Several studies have been conducted on slums in India. These studies analyze various fundamental problems and equality. Their focus is on economic and physical facilities, organization, crime discrimination, and various government policies. However, women's problems are only described at the surface level as a part of family organization. In reality, slum problems are women's problems because living in slums is more difficult for women than for men.(Ray,2015)

Compared to men, women are more disproportionately affected by their immediate environment. While this fact cannot be proven conclusively, there appears to be evidence of such effects in general living environments. Slums have become part of urban life, with thousands of people migrating to cities in search of employment, including women. Most women here work to earn income, often in the unorganized sector as laborers. Their lives are largely spent struggling with deprivation in these slum areas.

Literature Review:

Mukherjee, Radhakamal (1945) in his book "The Indian Working Class" presented a unified perspective on working-class problems. His argument is that while the industrialization that occurred in India over the past few decades has succeeded in bringing people from different regions and languages together, the adverse effect of slum dwellings on workers' living conditions in urban centers has been significant. Currently, the prevalent problems in Indian slums are illegal alcohol, drugs, dilapidated housing conditions, and lack of civic amenities. Their study remains relevant even today.

Rao, D. Vasudeva (1992) in "Status of Women and Children in Slums" conducted a study on 16 slums of Hyderabad. In this study, they found that about 33% of Hyderabad's population lives in recognized and unrecognized slums where they receive almost no civic amenities. As a result, these areas become centers of disease spread, social unrest, and criminalization. Issues like child labor and prostitution have emerged here. The study showed that the educational level of women in slums is very low. Women here earn their living through manual labor. The socioeconomic condition of women is very deplorable, and there is also a lack of basic facilities.

Ramana, P.V.L. (2002) presented a comprehensive study on the condition of women living in Muslim slums of Visakhapatnam in his book "Women in Muslim Slums of Visakhapatnam." This book highlights how slum women live their lives and what problems they face. The book emphasizes gender inequality, gender discrimination, and gender abuse in slums. It also discusses the sustainable development of slum women. The author emphasizes the need to strengthen various developmental programs being run to improve the condition of slum women.

Mishra, Arti (2004) in her book "Women in Slums: Impact of Environmental Pollution" studied the impact of polluted environment on the health conditions of women living in Patna's slums.

Women living in slums are most affected by living in this polluted environment. They frequently experience fatigue, breathing problems, irregular menstruation, heart disease, eye burning, asthma, and high blood pressure. The polluted environment here affects not only the women but also their unborn children.

Goswami, S. and Manna, S. (2013) in "Urban Poor Living in Slums: A Case Study of Raipur City in India" discussed environmental aspects of slums, including population growth, urbanization, increasing energy consumption, and transportation. Even today, poverty remains at the root of many environmental problems. Poverty can increase inequality. Poor people depend more on natural resources because they have no realistic possibility of accessing other types of resources.

Research Objectives:

1. To study the socioeconomic conditions of women living in slums
2. To study the environmental factors affecting women's health

Study Area and Research Methodology:

This study focuses on women living in the Daraganj slum of Prayagraj district, Uttar Pradesh. A sample of 50 women was selected using purposive sampling method. Data collection was done through primary sources. Interview schedules and observation methods were used as primary tools. For analysis of the collected data, after compilation and tabulation, simple frequency and percentage calculations were used to analyze the results.

Results and Analysis:

Table 1: Socio-Economic Background of Women

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)	30-35	11	22%
	35-40	20	40%
	40-45	12	24%
	45-50	7	14%
Education	Educated	7	14%
	Uneducated	43	86%
Marital Status	Married	48	96%
	Unmarried	0	0%
	Divorced	1	2%
	Widowed	1	2%
Family Type	Joint Family	3	6%
	Nuclear Family	47	94%
Occupational Status	Labor Work	32	64%
	Shop Keeping	12	24%
	Others	6	12%

The above table shows that 22% of women are in the 30-35 age group, 40% women are in the 35-40 age group, 24% women are in the 40-45 age group, and 14% women are in the 45-50 age group. Among them, 14% women are educated while 86% women are uneducated. In the slum area, 96% women are married, 2% divorced, and 2% widowed. Most families (94%) are nuclear families, and 64% women work as domestic laborers while 24% women are engaged in shop keeping, and 12% women are involved in other works.

Table 2: Nature of Residence in Slums

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Type of Residence	Native Residents	12	24%
	Migrant Residents	38	76%
Reasons for Migration	Poverty	18	47.3%
	Employment	11	28.9%
	Children's Education	5	13.1%
	Other Reasons	4	10.5%

From the above table, it is clear that the majority of women (76%) are migrants while 24% women are native residents. Among the reasons for migration, the most significant reason is poverty (47.3%), followed by employment/jobs (28.9%), children's education (13.1%), and other reasons (10.5%).

These findings highlight that:

1. The socio-economic condition of the women in slums is very poor
2. Most women are migrants who have moved to urban areas in search of better opportunities
3. A significant majority of women are uneducated and work in low-paying jobs
4. Poverty and unemployment are the main driving factors for migration to slum areas
5. Most families are nuclear families, indicating a breakdown of traditional joint family systems
6. The high percentage of working women indicates the economic necessity for women to contribute to family income

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Health Related Problems	Yes	8	16%
	No	12	24%
	Normal	30	60%
Preference for Treatment	Government Hospital	15	30%
	Private Hospital	9	18%
	Home Remedies	26	52%
Toilet Facility	Available	5	10%
	Not Available	45	90%
Bathroom Facility	Available	4	8%
	Not Available	46	92%
Water Supply Source	Government	50	100%
	Private	0	0%
House Cleaning Frequency	Daily	14	28%
	Weekly	8	16%
	2-3 Times per Week	28	56%

The above table shows that 16% of women have health-related problems, while 24% women don't have any health issues. Additionally, 60% women reported normal health conditions. For medical treatment, 30% women go to government hospitals, 18% women visit private hospitals, and the majority (52%) rely on home remedies when sick.

Regarding basic amenities:

- 90% of women don't have access to toilet facilities
- 92% lack proper bathroom facilities
- 100% depend on government water supply
- Only 28% clean their houses daily, while 56% clean 2-3 times per week, and 16% clean weekly

These statistics reflect poor sanitation conditions and limited access to basic facilities, which directly impact women's health and hygiene in slum areas.

Conclusion

From the present study, it can be concluded that the socio-economic condition of women in slums is poor. The majority of women work as domestic laborers due to lack of capital. Rural migrants move to cities in large numbers in search of employment, and due to this migration process, the number of slum dwellings is rapidly increasing. People living in slums are deprived of various basic amenities and face different problems in daily life. The surrounding filth, poor housing structure, overcrowding, lack of open spaces, and other environmental factors significantly affect human health in various ways.

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