



CHILD RAGPICKERS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN NAGPUR CITY

Dr. TEJSWINI K. BELE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY, KURUKSHETRA -136119 INDIA

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a variety of topics relating to kid rag pickers. 80% of these individuals are between the ages of 11 and 15 years old, 74% are illiterate, and 85% are oppressed. A little more than 68% of kid rag pickers earn less than Rs. 11,000 per year. 90% of child rag pickers collect trash while walking, with 74% of their spending going towards medical costs. 85% of children who pick up trash are at risk for health problems, and 98% of the trash they collect is made up of plastics, glass bottles, cardboard, papers, tin, iron, copper, and aluminium. These trash items can be found in residential areas, on street corners, or in landfills. 94% of respondents agreed that rag-picking was not a respectable work in society, while 82% of respondents believed that they were exposed to health risks and frequently suffered from rashes and cuts. The study looks at how child rag picking in big towns is mostly brought on by poverty, unemployment, and poor economic conditions. Hence, the social development model is the sole option for ending the problem of child labour and rag picking. The development strategy for the less wealthy areas must put a strong emphasis on the implementation of mandated health, education, and skill-development programmes.

KEYWORDS: Rag picking in India, poverty, unemployment, child labour, health hazards, rag pickers of Nagpur city, bhandewadi dumping yard Nagpur, illegal labour practices, below poverty level.

INTRODUCTION

The existence of child labour in our society is a barbarous practice. It is barbarous because it is illogical, inhuman and against all ethics. In the past, the practice of child labour existed as proportionate to the social development. But lack of human awareness, did not allow people at large and social system in particular to pay any attention to the deprived people in general and child labour particular (Rehman, etal, 2002). The phenomenon of child labour in different occupations establishments particularly in unorganized labour dates back to the history of human civilization. The problem of child labour in under developed and developing countries is quite high and abnormal. In India, the problem of child labour has assumed very alarming position. The incidence of child labour is the direct result of poverty and socio-cultural fabrics. Fundamental Rights and other welfare provisions embodied in the constitution have no

meaning to them. Despite the enactment of various laws, expressing deep concerns over this issue by social activists, academicians, the magnitude of the problem has not been set-aside rather went on increasing. (Shadily Tapan Kumar and Khan Shakeel Ahmed, 2006) The exploitive practice of child labour has come to be recognized as a major socio-economic problem. Child labour jeopardizes children's potential to become productive adults, robbing them of their health, education and their prospects for future. Children are among the most neglected, abused and exploited segment of the population, exposed to such worst form of labour as rag picking. (Bal Kumar, etal 2001) Rag picking is severe and worst form of child labour. The most unhygienic, dangerous job in scrap collection is rag picking. The children of poverty-stricken Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribes/ Other Backward Classes SC/ST/OBC castes) or slum dwellers are engaged in such activities. They are collecting waste materials of plastic, tin, iron, bottle from garbage and dirty places of urban area. The glass, metal, iron pieces may injure their bare feet. For their bread and butter, they are working such. In rag picking the children engaged, face various health problems like tetanus and skin diseases. (Mishra, 2004). Rag picking is one of the inferior economic activities in the urban informal sector, largely undertaken by children belonging to weaker sections of the society, for the survival and for supplementing their family income. Rag picking is the profession mostly dominated by children ageing 6 to 15 who do not have any other skills and thus by way of refuse collection contribute to household income or own survival. These are mainly children of slum dwellers and poor people. Some of them are abandoned or runaway children. The continuous exposure to the garbage and hospital waste has led to various diseases. Many smoke beedi and cigarettes and some are also addicted to drugs and indulge in prostitution, homosexuality, robbery and gambling. All this has affected their lives in several ways and shortened their life spans considerably.

TYPES OF RAGPICKERS

The Ragpickers can be categorized on the basis of collection peculiarity into three types.

- I. The major portion of this type consists of collectors collecting rags out of community dustbins, garbage heaps, open streets, market places and near railway stations and bus stands (inside not allowed). The major portion of this type consists of boys or men.
- II. The second type of collectors is made up of girls who like to work in groups or accompany their mothers instead of going alone, to pick rags on the street, because of constant fear of sexual abuse by adult male and older male child ragpickers. They mainly depend on municipal and industrial garbage dumps to collect waste and sell them to merchants or second-hand goods dealers, daily or weekly. The collectors thoroughly clean the dirty materials before selling them to fetch a higher price.
- III. The third type comprises of women or girls working as domestic servants and collect rags from the homes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD RAGPICKERS

- I. Children who work as ragpickers come from rural area.
- II. More boys than girls engage in rag picking.
- III. The majority of boys live on the street and almost all the girls living in rented or family homes.
- IV. The school dropout rate amongst ragpickers is high. The boys are more literate than girls.
- V. Family size and structure does not seem to directly influence the incidence of rag picking among children overall.

PROBLEMS AND RISKS OF CHILD RAGPICKERS

The working and living conditions are utterly inadequate and unhygienic. Children work in unsafe surroundings, crowded, dingy places in severe health hazards. Although majority of children somehow manage two meals but there are substantial numbers of children who live on one meal a day. The components of their food are of very low protein value and the major vitamins A, B and C which the growing children urgently need are almost absent in their food. Shelter is the most crucial problem of children. They are paid low price rate, sometimes nothing is paid in the beginning as they consider them as apprentices. Children work long hours from early dawn to late night without rest periods or holidays in crowded dark dingy, unsafe surroundings adversely affecting their health and growth. There is no education or training of skills, no recreations or leisure, even home and family for child ragpickers. Waste may be contaminated with faecal material. This may include biological pathogens such as parasites and bacteria related to the gastro-intestinal tract. The working and living conditions are utterly inadequate and unhygienic. Although majority of children somehow manage two meals but there are substantial numbers of children who live on one meal a day. The components of their food are of very low protein value and the major vitamins A, B and C which the growing children urgently need are almost absent in their food. Shelter is the most crucial problem of children. They are paid low price rate, sometimes nothing is paid in the beginning as they consider them as apprentices. Children work long hours from early dawn to late night without rest periods or holidays in crowded dark dingy, unsafe surroundings adversely affecting their health and growth.

REVIEW OF LITRATURE

The purpose of review of Literature is to understand the most important aspects of research. A review of literature is a critical summary and an assessment of the current state of knowledge or current state of the art in a particular field. It is the process of reading, analysing, evaluating, and summarizing scholarly materials about a specific topic. According to a study by Kamath, it is observed that child ragpickers hail from very poor socio-economic background and are basically illiterate belonging to rural immigrant families. Due to lack of income, they resort in sending their children to rag picking. (KAMAT, 1999). This was true in my research when I was collecting the data. In a study regarding the educational status of child ragpickers, Deepak Saxena in his research report observed that almost 94% of ragpickers are illiterate and other 5% are educated only Up to primary level which is very grim and disappointing. In urban areas child ragpickers are subjected to exploitation, which is highlighted by Kamath, in his article "Ragpickers of India". He investigates the nature of exploitation of child ragpickers and explained how middlemen are benefitted in the process. Steinert Mari in her article "Ragpickers" discusses the health conditions, problems and impact of environment on ragpickers. It is observed that due to filthy environment, child ragpickers are vulnerable and easily susceptible to Tuberculosis, respiratory problems, skin diseases and other allergies.

Rita Pannikka in her Study conduct on Street Girls in the Union Territory of Delhi mentioned about her case study of street girl children. In that case study she found that, the youngest of four daughters of a family in which the father work as a rag picker and his girl too picks up rags and adds family income. Due to their family circumstances she is forced to do work which she does not personally like. From a favourite child she has become a working child without any protest, toiling for nearly 16-18 hours a day. Recently she has been engaged to an illiterate farmer boy and expects that her future husband would help her in her sorrows. She wishes to have a house of her own with good environments where she would not see rags. She also wants to learn tailoring to wear new clothes of her liking. Thus, from the above discussion we

found that large family, neglected children, poverty, low income of family etc are the main reason for the small children to work as rag pickers, whether willingly or not it does not matter.

Again, in another survey conducted by an NGO in 1990 "Agape, Bangalore" found that rag pickers come from violent and broken homes, perhaps second marriages where the mother has been burnt to death with kerosene, the father demanding further dowry from the wife's family to feed his drunkenness. The children from the first marriage not wanted, beating, starvation and deprivation of security and love are daily occurrences. Some are forced from a very young age to work and earn money, a few are influenced by peer pressure, and some are orphans fighting a daily battle to survive. Boys unable to tolerate the daily beatings and dysfunctional family life run away and become street children. Girls are forced to look after younger family members even have to beg for their own survival and that of the younger child. They are treated as slaves in the home and many are forced into prostitution at a very early age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

ORIGIN OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the urban areas child labour exists both in the formal as well as informal sector enterprises, though its presence in the latter is more frequent. It is often observed that majority of the engagements that a child work does not involve any heavy labour. In the urban areas the main categories of the working children are hawkers, ragpickers, newspaper-sellers, peddlers, coolies, shoe shiners, vendors packing, pasting, labelling, wrapping etc., are the main activities of the children. Amongst various causes of child labour, unemployment, poverty and indebtedness of the households are the most important. In this context child ragpickers were studied where they did not possess any other skill neither they were educated and rag picking became an easy source of daily income. Keeping this in mind an attempt is made by the researcher to understand the different dimensions like socio-economic factors, health and environment, education and NGOs role involved in the study.

OPERATIONAL DEFINATION OF THE PROBLEM

According to the researcher Ragpicker can be defined as an individual who were aged between 12 to 16 years, low educational qualification, lack of skills, lower economic background, migrants from other parts, belonging to weaker sections and engaged in collecting waste and dumped materials.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Rag picking is a form of child labour and considered to be one of the most inferior economic activities in the urban informal sector, usually performed by children hailing from under privileged sections of the community and whose socio-economic conditions are backward. Children are dragged or pushed to this profession as they contribute meagrely to the family income. Generally, children aged between 6 to 15 years who are illiterate and do not possess any skill are seen in this profession. In the contemporary fast-growing globalized world rag picking and collection of other used goods has been an emerging business in Nagpur city, it is due to the fact that collected materials can be recycled and reused.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RELEVANCE

The proposed study has interdisciplinary relevance with diverse social sciences like economics, health science, social work, public administration and law. It has international and national importance and is widely discussed.

OBJECTIVES: The problem under the proposed study has been taken up for investigate keeping in view the following objectives.

- To understand the socio economical status of child rag pickers.
- To examine the impact of environment on the health of child rag pickers.
- To assess the working conditions and exploitation of child rag pickers.
- To examine the role of NGOs and voluntary organizations in providing welfare initiatives for the development of child rag pickers.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The proposed study is expected to develop certain keen insights into the prospects and challenges of child ragpickers in the urban locality of Nagpur city. It is also observed that very little work has been done about the situation of child ragpickers of Nagpur. The various studies on child ragpickers have presented dismal condition of child re- engaged in this profession. The process of globalization has worsened and degraded their socio-economic conditions of ragpickers. The proposed study will enable social scientists, decision makers, policy framers, academicians and citizens to understand the intricacies of child ragpickers of Nagpur and reflection the need to bring about a change and development that will favour the socio-economically deprived sections of the society. With reference to this back drop the proposed study aims to explore the socio-economic, health and working conditions of child ragpickers in the Nagpur city of Maharashtra state. The study will also examine the role and measures adopted by NGOS in extending welfare initiatives to the child ragpickers in improving their conditions.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study is mainly analytical cum descriptive in nature. The focus of the proposed study will be to describe the socio-economic, working conditions, health, education and role of NGOs in extending welfare initiatives to child ragpickers of Nagpur city. Different variables of independent and dependent in nature will be examined with respect to knowing the conditions of child ragpickers engaged in this profession.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed empirical study would involve analytical as well as descriptive pattern of research designs. The study is expected to develop certain keen insights into the prospects and challenges of child ragpickers. The proposed study would be restricted to Nagpur city which is in the Maharashtra state. The universe of the proposed study is restricted to Nagpur city only. Keeping in view the constraints of time, energy and money, the researcher would restrict himself to a sample of 30 child ragpickers of Nagpur city will be examined for the study.

DATA COLLECTION

Interview schedule would be used as the major tools of data collection. However, keeping in view the qualitative approach to the problem, observation of the respondents would also be incorporated into the tools and instruments of data collection. Statistical analysis of the data would also be adopted for examining the relationships among the variables.

RESULT OF THE STUDY

- **AGE**

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
12 – 14 YEARS	3	10
14 – 16 YEARS	17	56.6
16 – 18 YEARS	4	13.4
ABOVE 18 YEARS	6	20
TOTAL	30	100

Age plays a very important role in the development of society. The strength and progress of the nation is determined by the young and vibrant population. In this context the data was collected in order to understand the engagement of children in rag picking work. It was found that 56.7 per cent of children joined the rag picking work in the age category of 14-16 years, 20 per cent of the youths were above 18 years who were engaged in this work. It was observed that 13.3 per cent represented 16-18 years category and 10 per cent of the respondents represented 12-14 years from the data collected it can be interpreted that majority a little more than two fourths of the rag pickers engaged in this work who represent the age category of 12-14 years. Two tenths of the youths were above 18 years, little more than one tenth of the respondents represented 16-18 years and finally it can be deduced that one tenth of the respondents represented 12-14 years.

- **GENDER:**

Gender play significant role in every aspects of our life. Gender seems to be inseparable and unavoidable, as it is deeply rooted in the culture and the society that the individual lives in, hence it becomes necessary to study the gender. From the data collected it can be observed that 73.3 per cent of the total respondents were males who were engaged in the work. It was also found that 26.7 per cent were represented by the females in the study. There were no respondents in the transgender category while conducting the study.

- **WORKING AREA**

Sr. No.	WORKING AREA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	DUMPYARD	26	86.7
2	COLONY TRASH BINS	2	6.7
3	ROAD SIDE BINS	0	0.0
4	OTHER SPECIFY	2	6.7
	TOTAL	30	100

In the study conducted the researcher found that most of the child rag pickers spend their time in the Bandewadi dumping ground at Pardi, Nagpur. The respondents after collecting the rags were resting in a place and answering my students. The above table shows the distribution of the places where the children work or spend most of their time where it is found that 86.7 per cent of the children spent most of their time in the dumping area where 6.7 per cent children spent their time in colony trash bins and 2 per cent did not specify the exact place which they had mentioned. Hence, the table above shows that more than eight tenths of the child rag pickers work mostly in the dumping areas while little less than one tenth of the child rag pickers are working in the colony trash bins and less than one tenth did not specify. t may be

interpreted that more than six tenths of the respondents had health problems whereas more than three tenths of the respondents did not comply to health problems and informed that due daily routine they were used to it.

- **HEALTH DISEASES**

Sr. No.	HEALTH DISEASES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	SKIN DISEASE	2	6.7
2	RESPIRATORY DISORDER	8	26.6
3	T. B	2	6.7
4	EYE INFECTION	4	13.3
5	NASAL INFECTION	2	6.7
6	OTHER DISEASES	12	40.0
	TOTAL	30	100.0

From the data collected from the above table which shows the distribution of respondent and their health diseases. It was found that 40per cent of child rag pickers specifically informed that most concerning thing are injuries as they are exposed to sharp objects while assorting the rags. When they insert their hand sort out, they most of the times come across sharp object which result in cut injuries.

It was also seen that 26.7 per cent child rag pickers are suffering from respiratory diseases, 13.3 per cent of child rag pickers informed that they are facing eye infections while 6.7 per cent of the child rag pickers claimed that due to exposure of dust and dirt and wet garbage's they face skin diseases T.B and nasal infection. Hence, it may be summed up that that more than four tenths of child rag pickers are facing injuries, which comes under other specified categories. While more than two tenths child rag pickers are suffering from respiratory diseases little more than one tenth of child-rag pickers are facing eye infection while less than one tenth child rag pickers.

CONCLUSION

In order to help these kids, develop a feeling of community and belonging and to give them resources, the best way to solve this problem is through social awareness and action organisations. He has the resources to re-enter society in a positive way. Governmental bodies, non-profits, and the community at large must all be committed to and dedicated to this type of social work. We propose a new strategy called a human-centred agenda for the future of work, which places people and the work they do at the centre of economic, social, and commercial behaviour. Three main areas of activity are the focus of this agenda.

- First, it entails making an investment in people's potential, enabling them to learn new skills, retrain, and upskill, as well as providing them with assistance during the different changes they will experience during their lives.
- The second is making investments in the institutions of work to guarantee a future of labour that is free, honourable, financially secure, and egalitarian.
- Third: investing in decent and sustainable employment and shaping rules and incentives to align economic and social policy and business practice with this agenda. By harnessing transform at Live technologies, demographic opportunities, and the green economy, these investments can be powerful drivers of equity and sustainability for the present and future generations.

REFERENCES

1. Shyamal Devi. K. PhD Thesis, Solid Waste Management of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (2013).
2. Jinn J. Wang Z. and Ran S., Solid waste management in Macao; practices and challenges, Waste Management, 26, 1045-1051 (2006).
3. Indapurkar and Shrinivas, Hospital waste management: a burning issue.
4. Shyamal Devi K. Swamy A.V.VS. and Hema Krishna R... The potential adverse health effects on residents near hazardous municipal solid waste dump site -At Jawahar Nagar-Hyderabad, Global Journal of Applied Environmental Sciences, 3(2), 67-80 (2013).

