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## SANITARY WORKERS: THE UNSEEN FORCES DRIVING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN TIRUCHIRAPPALLI DISTRICT

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### Abstract:

Promoting social sustainability requires a healthy environment. People who work in sanitation, sometimes called the "beauticians of the city," are crucial in creating a peaceful community. Work in sanitation can be especially exploitative for vulnerable populations like bonded laborers, indigenous peoples, and nomadic communities. The study evaluated the challenges that sanitary workers face in carrying out their duties in an environmentally sustainable manner and suggested strategies for overcoming these obstacles. A total of 50 sanitary workers were chosen by using a random sampling method. The results revealed that there is a significant difference in the Educational status of sanitary workers, and the reasons for doing this work are identified in the case of the variables "Lack of education," "Easy to work," "Government job," and "For better wages," respectively. It is suggested that investing in Educational programs could empower sanitary workers with fundamental skills and provide them with more diverse job opportunities.

**Keywords:** Social Sustainability, Healthy Environment, Sanitary workers, Urbanization.

### Introduction:

Promoting social sustainability requires a healthy environment. People who work in sanitation, sometimes called the "beauticians of the city," are crucial in creating a peaceful community. In addition to supporting urban modernization, their efforts also improve ecological surroundings in urban and semi-urban areas. They contribute to attaining socially sustainable development objectives by catering to various societal demands, including physical, religious, political, and biological ones. The government has gradually phased out the name "scavenger" since 1995 to promote the more respectful identification of sanitary personnel using various efforts. Even though post-independence laws in Tamil Nadu sought to increase

diversity in this field, discriminatory practices are still in place, and members of some communities continue to bear an unfair share of the workload. Work in sanitation can be especially exploitative for vulnerable populations like bonded laborers, indigenous peoples, and nomadic communities. Despite their critical function, sanitary personnel frequently encounter disregard, unfavorable labor conditions, and social disapproval. In addition to dealing with dangerous environmental factors and health risks, they also face prejudiced views that portray them as second-class individuals. Thus, they fight for social justice and fair treatment while dealing with society's lack of acceptance.

### **Review of literature:**

Rajan (2012) conducted a study on occupational stress among sanitary workers. He investigates the stressors inherent in the profession of sanitary workers by highlighting their impact on physical and mental well-being. This study explores the phenomenon of occupational stress, specifically within the sanitary workers' profession. Through interviews and observation, he identifies various factors contributing to occupational stress among sanitary workers, including hazardous working conditions, inadequate safety measures, low wages, and social stigma associated with their profession. The study reveals several critical findings regarding occupational stress among sanitary workers. Firstly, the research underscores the pervasive nature of stress in this workforce, affecting their physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. Secondly, the study highlights the interconnectedness of stressors within the work environment, emphasizing the need for holistic interventions to simultaneously address multiple dimensions of stress. Thirdly, he identifies potential strategies for mitigating occupational stress among sanitary workers, such as improving workplace safety standards, providing social support networks, and advocating for fair wages and recognition. The findings of this study Addressing the root causes of occupational stress among sanitary workers requires a collaborative approach encompassing legislative reforms, organizational policies, and community initiatives. By prioritizing the health and well-being of sanitary workers, stakeholders can create a more sustainable and equitable work environment while fostering social inclusion and justice. He concluded that, by shedding light on the challenges faced by this marginalized workforce, the study underscores the urgency of implementing targeted interventions to alleviate their stress burden. Further research and concerted efforts are needed to develop comprehensive strategies to promote sanitary workers' health, dignity, and rights worldwide.

Rayen & Nisee (2016), in their study on the status of sanitary workers in the Tirunelveli Corporation of Tamilnadu, shed light on a critical aspect of public health and labor rights. This paper examines the conditions, difficulties, and consequences of the policy and practice of sanitation workers from a more comprehensive perspective. The findings highlight several problems, such as inadequate safety gear, inadequate healthcare services, and gender- and caste-based discrimination. This research makes several important contributions, one of which is that it places a strong emphasis on the intersectionality of caste, gender, and class in the process of defining the experiences of sanitary workers. Regarding policy implications, these findings emphasize the critical nature of implementing comprehensive reforms that will enhance the socio-economic status and working conditions of sanitary workers, which includes ensuring everyone has access to the right safety gear, medical care, and fair pay, as well as taking anti-discrimination steps to stop inequality based on caste and gender. Furthermore, awareness campaigns are urgently required to combat the stigma and societal stereotypes related to sanitation work to promote dignity and respect for all workers, regardless of their profession. Ultimately, this study sheds light on the intersectional character of the marginalization experienced by sanitary employees in the Tirunelveli Corporation in Tamil Nadu, providing important insights into the difficulties they encounter.

### **Objectives:**

- To analyze the crucial role that sanitary workers play in promoting environmental sustainability through their daily activities and responsibilities.
- To find out the Push factors which lead the sample respondents to prefer this work.
- To evaluate sanitary workers' challenges in carrying out their duties and suggest strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

**Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** There is no significant association between educational status and the reasons for doing sanitary work.

## Methodology

The present study is descriptive, utilizing primary data sources. Employing a simple random sampling method, the researcher conducted interviews using a well-structured interview schedule to gather requisite information from participants. The study encompasses 500 sanitary workers engaged in street sweeping (300) and garbage collection (200) within the designated study area. The Tiruchirappalli City Municipal Corporation has been segmented into four administrative zones, from which the researcher conveniently selected three zones based on the renowned performance of the sanitary workers. A total of 50 samples, constituting 10% of the workforce, were randomly chosen. These samples were drawn from three administrative working zones in Trichy, specifically Abishkeka Puram (15 workers), Ariyamangalam (20 workers), and Golden Rock (15 workers). To ensure the reliability and validity of the incorporated variables, the interview schedule was thoroughly formulated and subjected to pre-testing by the researcher. Adjustments to the schedule were made by the findings of the pre-test before its implementation for data collection.

## Limitations of the study:

- The study specifically focuses on Trichy City Municipal Corporation. Hence, there are very less chances to make broad generalizations.
- The sanitary workers do not have adequate education; therefore, they reveal their information on their own behalf in the study area. Therefore, a bias on their part might have influenced the validity of the study.
- Hence, the study's findings may be subject to sampling errors and affect the accuracy of this study.

## Data Analysis:

**Table 1 – Classification of the sanitary workers based on their socio-economic status**

Category	Variable	Total (n=50)
Gender	Male	18 (36.0)
	Female	32(64.0)
Age	18 – 30	8 (16.0)
	31 – 50	14 (28.0)
	Above 50	28 (56.0)
Education	Illiterate	31 (62.0)
	Primary	12 (24.0)
	Secondary	07 (14.0)
Community	SC	35 (70.0)
	ST	15 (30.0)
Religion	Hindu	42 (84.0)
	Christian	08 (16.0)
Marital Status	Married	39 (78.0)
	Unmarried	08 (16.0)
	Widow/Widower	03 (6.0)
Family	Nuclear	33 (66.0)
	Joint	17 (34.0)

**Source: Primary data**

Table 1 indicates that 64.0% of beedi workers were female, with males comprising only 36.0%. Regarding age distribution, 16.0% fell between 18 and 30 years, 28.0% between 31 and 40 years, and 56.0% were over 50 years old. Education-wise, the Majority (62.0%) were illiterate, 24.0% attended primary school, and 14.0% attended secondary school. Among the respondents, 70.0% were from Scheduled Castes and 30.0% from Scheduled Tribes. Regarding religion, 84.0% were Hindu and 16.0% were Christian. Out of the 360 respondents, 78.0% were married. Notably, 66.0% of respondents live in nuclear families, while 34.0% reside in joint families.

**Table 2 – Reasons to choose the sanitary work**

Reason for opting for this job	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis Agree	Strongly Dis Agree	Total
Lack of education	08 (16.0)	31 (62.0)	-	02 (4.0)	08 (16.0)	50 (100)
Easy to work	28 (56.0)	07 (14.0)	03 (6.0)	12 (24.0)	-	50 (100)
Government job	09 (18.0)	26 (52.0)	06 (12.0)	09 (18.0)	-	50 (100)
For better wages	17 (34.0)	10 (20.0)	05 (10.0)	08 (16.0)	10 (20.0)	50 (100)
Lack of Alternative Job	04 (8.0)	10 (20.0)	-	26 (52.0)	10 (20.0)	50 (100)

**Source: Primary data**

Table 2 reveals that among the 50 sanitary workers surveyed, the largest portion (62.0%) attributed their occupation to illiteracy. Furthermore, 56.0% strongly agreed that the job was easy, while 52.0% stated that the appeal of a government position influenced their decision. Additionally, 34.0% strongly agreed that they engaged in this work for better wages, and 52.0% strongly disagreed that they lacked alternative employment opportunities.

**Table 3 – Difficulties involved in the sanitary work**

Difficulties involved in this job	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis Agree	Strongly Dis Agree	Total
Caste-based Discrimination	-	02 (4.0)	06 (12.0)	14 (28.0)	28 (56.0)	50 (100)
Gender-based Discrimination	25 (50.0)	10 (20.0)	07 (14.0)	02 (4.0)	06 (12.0)	50 (100)
Health and Safety Risks	29 (58.0)	07 (14.0)	02 (4.0)	13 (26.0)	-	50 (100)
Depression and Anxiety	06 (12.0)	10 (20.0)	16 (32.0)	-	18 (36.0)	50 (100)

**Source: Primary data**

Table 3 presents findings from a survey of 50 participants. The results indicate that the Majority (56.0%) of respondents strongly disagreed with experiencing discrimination based on caste. Conversely, a substantial portion (50.0%) of workers strongly agreed that they face discrimination due to their gender. Additionally, 58.0% of participants strongly agreed that their work involves health and safety risks, while 36.0% strongly disagreed with the idea that depression and anxiety significantly affect their work.

**Table 4: Association between the Status of Sanitary Workers and the Push factors (Reasons) that lead to doing Sanitary Work**

Sl. No	Push Factors/Reasons	Educational Status (Mean Scores)			't statistics'
		Illiteracy	Primary	Secondary	
1	Lack of education	2.18	1.92	1.00	13.282*
2	Easy to work	2.73	2.50	2.80	11.028*
3	Government job	2.45	1.67	2.80	16.695*
4	For better wages	1.91	2.42	1.40	12.065*
5	Lack of Alternative Job	2.55	2.25	1.80	9.037

**\*Significant at five percent level**

The above table 4 reveals the mean score of reasons for working in a sanitary field and its respective 't' statistics. The important reasons for working as a sanitary worker among the illiterates are 'Easy to work' (2.73) and 'Lack of alternative job' (2.55). In the case of workers studied up to primary school, the reasons are 'Easy to work' (2.50) followed by 'for better wages' (2.42). The mean scores of workers who studied up to secondary school are 'Easy to work and Government job' (2.80).

**The significant difference in the Educational status of sanitary workers and the reasons for doing this work are identified in the case of the variables "Lack of education," "Easy to work," "Government job," and "For better wages." Since the respective statistics are significant at 5 percent level, so, the null hypothesis is rejected.**

### **Summary of Findings:**

- Out of 360 sample respondents, the Majority of sanitary workers (64.0%) were female.
- In the case of age, over half (56.0%) of the workforce was over 50.
- A significant portion (62.0%) were remains illiterate.
- The Majority (70.0%) belonged to Scheduled Castes
- Regarding the religion, most workers (84.0%) were Hindu.
- A large percentage of the sanitary workers (78.0%) were married in the study area.
- Two-thirds of the sample respondents (66.0%) lived in nuclear families.
- Most respondents (62.0%) attributed their occupation to illiteracy, indicating that a lack of educational opportunities may have driven them toward this line of work.
- A significant majority (56.0%) strongly agreed that their job was easy, suggesting that many find it manageable or straightforward.
- Over half of the respondents (52.0%) stated that the appeal of a government position influenced their decision to become sanitary workers, highlighting the stability and benefits associated with such employment.
- While a notable portion (34.0%) strongly agreed that they engaged in this work for better wages, indicating financial motivation, a majority (52.0%) strongly disagreed with the notion that they lacked alternative employment opportunities, suggesting that factors beyond financial need may also influence their career choice.
- The Majority of respondents (56.0%) strongly disagreed with experiencing discrimination based on caste.
- A significant portion of workers (50.0%) strongly agreed that they face discrimination due to their gender.
- More than half of the participants (58.0%) strongly agreed that their work entails health and safety risks.
- A notable percentage of respondents (36.0%) strongly disagreed with the notion that depression and anxiety significantly impact their work.
- The Mean scores for working as a sanitary worker among the illiterates are 'Easy to work' (2.73) and 'Lack of alternative job' (2.55).
- In the case of workers studied up to primary school, the mean scores are 'Easy to work' (2.50) followed by 'for better wages' (2.42).
- The mean scores of workers who studied up to secondary school are 'Easy to work and Government job' (2.80).
- There is a significant difference found among the Educational status of sanitary workers, and the reasons for doing this work are identified in the case of the variables "Lack of education," "Easy to work," "Government job," and "For better wages."

### **Suggestions:**

- Investing in Educational programs could empower the sanitary workers with fundamental skills and provide them with more diverse job opportunities.
- Providing ongoing training and skill development opportunities can enhance their capabilities and job satisfaction, ultimately improving their service quality.
- Efforts should be made to diversify job options and create pathways for career advancement within and outside the sanitation sector.
- Since some respondents indicated that better wages motivated their engagement in this work, exploring avenues to ensure fair remuneration can enhance job satisfaction and retention among sanitary workers.
- Educating the community about the importance of sanitation work and recognizing the contributions of sanitary workers can help reduce stigma and improve their social status.

**Conclusion:**

Currently, the government is diligently working on establishing access to job opportunities within the sanitation sector, specifically targeting the upliftment of vulnerable communities. This initiative aims to empower these groups and ensure they can access sustainable livelihoods. However, it is essential to acknowledge that while these efforts are commendable, a significant aspect still needs attention - developing public consciousness regarding the sanitation sector and the individuals working within it. In this context, public consciousness refers to the level of awareness, understanding, and empathy that society holds towards the challenges faced by sanitation workers and the importance of their role in maintaining cleanliness and public health. By increasing this awareness, we can foster a more supportive and understanding environment for these workers, ultimately leading to a more positive impact on their lives. Building public consciousness around the issues and rights of sanitation workers can catalyze the success of all the ongoing interventions and initiatives. Raising awareness can encourage the public to appreciate sanitation workers' hard work and dedication, leading to better working conditions, increased respect, and fair treatment. In conclusion, while the government's efforts to create livelihood opportunities in the sanitation sector are commendable, it is crucial to recognize the importance of enhancing public consciousness. By doing so, we can create a more supportive and understanding environment for sanitation workers, ultimately leading to a more significant and lasting impact on their lives and the success of the initiatives aimed at their upliftment.

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