



A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON RAG PICKING CHILDREN IN A SELECTED AREA OF CHENNAI CITY

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ABSTRACT

The study has made an attempt to understand the status and problems of socio-economic condition of rag pickers along with their migration by using both primary and secondary data. Due to various reasons children are forced to live on the street and earn livelihood by themselves and also with the support of their families sometimes losing valuable time in life and forgoing all the opportunities for development in life. The risks of children living in the street are great and their vulnerability to exploitation is enormous. India the seventh largest country in the world, the country's future depends upon the quality of present day children. Hence, there is a need to attend them in-depth manner and analysing the problems of children who are stray on the streets in selected areas of Chennai city. Rag picking is a form of child labour. Rag picking is one of the most 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. Children are sometimes deserted out from home since there is no necessary financial support. There are various factors play as base for the victim of this unhealthy condition in our country. The factors are categorised and probed effectively here.

The present study has used appropriate research methods in the selections of sampling, research design, tools of data collection etc. The factors letting the children to be in trouble and stranded are assessed with necessary questions and suitable options along with concluding remarks, major findings and recommendations.

KEY WORDS: Rag Pickers, Exploitation, Migration, Children.

INTRODUCTION

Children are cherished treasures of mankind. There is no doubt in the fact that the complete growth of future society lies in the manner in which we care for children, they are nation's wealth. Happiness is an innate and natural characteristics of children. A society that denies a child, its happiness is a lifeless society. A family that gives regard to the happiness of children is one that strives for true joy. All the signs of happiness that a child

reflects are in fact its needs are denied their rights are also denied. Hence, the study of the prevalence and magnitude of street children is very important. It elicited emotive public concern. It has been given considerable media coverage and in the late twentieth century, it has become a matter of priority for national and international child welfare organisations.

Every child during the span of development runs several risks to his / her healthy development. It is the duty of significant adults to be these barriers to development and enable the child to experience and enjoy the process of growing up. After all, childhood is meant for growing, learning and developing into all that one is meant to be. When the developmental process is hindered, a child is in a situation of risk in such situations and the complexities of the situations must be understood and relevant effort must be made to rescue these children (Oak T.M, 2002).

The phenomenon of street children is an offshoot of complex interplay of various socio-economic, cultural religious, linguistic factors and geographical diversity. In large-scale level, the presence of children in the street as deserted is a social disease. It has acquired a gigantic dimension in the wake of rapid industrialization and especially in the developing countries such as India. It is attributed to exploitative especially in the developing countries such as India. It is attributed to exploitative socio-economic structure and iniquitous resource ownership, large scale unemployment, rural to urban migration, rapid population growth, extreme poverty, increasing disparities in wealth and income, high level population growth, high level child abuse by the parents and society and the breakdown of traditional family and community structures etc (Asseffa Bequele, 1988). Consequently children are forced to live on the street and earn livelihood for themselves and also in support of their families losing valuable time in life and forgoing all the opportunities for development in life. The risks of children living street life are great and their vulnerability to exploitation is enormous. India the seventh largest country in the world, the country future depends upon the quality of present day children. Hence, there is every needs to attend to this problem.

Rag picking is a form of child labour. Rag picking is one of the most 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 years who do not have any other skill 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.

DEFINITION OF STREET CHILDREN

The term 'street children' may be negative that it labels and stigmatizes children. It can include a very

wide range of children who are homeless; work on the streets but sleep at home; either do or do not have family contact; work in open-air markets; live on the streets, railways platforms with their families or alone; live in day or night shelters; spend a lot of time in institutions (Bhargava, 2003).

According to UNICEF, street children are those for whom the street more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults.

CATEGORIES OF STREET CHILDREN

Children can be categorised under different heads. A report on the status of street children in the major cities in India (IPER, 1991) indicated that the majority of identified street children in the cities were on the street categories of children. The following categories were found in a composite report of situational analysis of Urban street children in India:

CHILDREN OF TEMPORARILY MIGRATED FAMILIES

Cities are expanding virtually daily with numerous high-rise buildings, workshops, warehouse etc. they carry out regular construction work like those of bridges, sheds, workshops. They also attract job seekers from different areas of the state as well as from other states of the country. People come with their families and live in temporary hutments erected by them in open space. Almost all of their families expecting the toddlers works as labourers. As they are contract labourers, they go back to their native place after the work is over.

CHILDREN OF TEMPORARILY MIGRATED FAMILIES

Cities are transformed into commercial centres with a large number of factories, workshops, cottage industries, handicraft centres and small-scale industries are hours and innumerable offices. Naturally people with inadequate income belonging to the suburbs and surrounding villages are attracted by these vocational prospects. Cities provide hundreds of them with jobs. But there are many also who fall in the way side. The children of these families have no alternative expect spending all their day in the open street. Sometimes they do some road side odd jobs like rag-picking, shoe polishing or car washing. They are subjected to all sorts of hazards of the open street of a busy city, which they accept as a part of their existence.

CHILDREN OF VERY POOR FAMILIES

The fourth group of children belong to destitute

families who are almost permanent residence of the city living in the street often for generations. These children are in dire need for care and protection. They are half-fed and ill clothed, begging and picking garbage are their main job. Many of them often take to anti-social activities to support themselves and their families. These children need proper care and parental protection.

WORKING CHILDREN

Many of these street children are working children compelled by their needs in support of themselves and often their families. These children take-up many different types of work ranging from casual rag-pickers to regular helpers in garbage or road side dhabas, tea stalls or shops. Rag picking is the major occupation, which is taken up by neither many children living in the street because it does not require an employment nor any capital to run it (Chandra, Suman, 1998). Many children living in sheltered houses turn into street children because of this profession taken by them.

Their problems can be grouped into three classes: Social, Physical and Psychological

I. Social Problems:-

- a. Poverty and illiteracy: they lack basic resources to sustain a healthy living. They usually have no financial means to buy food, which is crucial for their development. Street children cannot afford to go to school unless supported by non-formal services provided by NGO etc. even where schools are free, many children cannot afford to buy uniforms, shoes and books. Since they live in places where they are not adequately protected from the environment, they rarely have access to facilities that they need for hygiene and sanitation, such as toilets and clean and safe water supply. They are therefore, more vulnerable to health problems resulting from poor sanitation.
- b. Discrimination and Lack of Accessible Resources: When civic authorities plan towns, cities etc. street children's plight tends to be excluded from the planning process resulting in their not having facilities to get medical, educational, recreational and vocational resources. They face problems such as lack of vaccinations; poor health, illiteracy and they cannot acquire skills needed for findings jobs.
- c. Violent Environment: the street is an unprotected environment and street children are exploited frequently. In some places, street children may even face the possibility of Physical injuries or

death from violence. Common sources of violence are; the police, gangs, drug peddlers, other street children and families.

- d. Stigmatization: Society usually perceives street children as difficult children who are out there to cause trouble. In general, the public thinks that street children are uncontrollable and violent, have substance use problems, have no morals, have lost all the abilities to feel emotions such as love and that they turn into terrorists and revolutionists.

II. Physical Problems:-

- a. Lack of adequate Nutrition: As street children do not get enough to eat, they are malnourished, anaemic and suffer from vitamin deficiencies.
- b. Common diseases: Street children experience many common diseases such as tuberculosis; skin diseases, dental problems and parasitic diseases which can be prevented easily if these children have enough resources and their basic needs are met.

III. Psychological Problems:-

- a. Stressful Past: Many situations and events that pushed these children onto the street in the first place (like natural disasters, manmade disasters, exploitation and conflicts) may have a lasting on their well-being.
- b. A Transitory Lifestyle: Street children in some large cities move frequently from district to district or between cities. Sometimes they do this by choice, but at other times they are forced to move to hide from the police, welfare authorities, gangs and drug peddlers. This type of lifestyle leads to problems of social isolation and loneliness and difficulties in developing emotional attachments to special individuals.

OCCUPATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STREET CHILDREN

Typically street children engage in various odd jobs, some of the common ones are described Rehman (2002):

Rag-picking: In many cities, it is a common sight to see children carrying their gunny bags on their shoulders, scavenging dustbins, garbage heaps, city dumps to collect waste materials such as papers, tins, plastic material, bottles etc., which have recycling value.

Porters: Many street children work in railways stations, bus stands, godowns, wholesale markets carrying heavy loads to earn their living.

Hotel Labour: Street children also work in subhuman working conditions in small hotels, roadside eateries, dhabas, restaurants etc. earning meagre wages.

Begging: Begging is also a form of earning which has been seen among street children. Children affected by disease or physical handicap are often forced into begging by anti-social gangs for making money.

Prostitution: Many street children, especially those who are entirely on their own on the street are engaged in or exploited sexually. Both boys as well as girls are engaged in sexual activities, either for material gains, survival needs, Psychological needs or peer group pressure.

Odd jobs: Street children are involved in various other odds such as jobs such as jobs in parking area, work as petty-hawkers, peddlers, messenger boys, cleaners, helpers in shops and establishments, gas stations, garages, labourers in construction sites, small factories and institutions. All these occupations have a destructive effect on these behaviour patterns and social living.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Malay Dewanji (1995) in his article entitled "Child Labour Problem in India" studies about the education of ragpickers. The children are often found working in small factories, motor garages, food stalls, doing shoe shining, as domestic helpers, rag pickers and even beggars. The author has stated the findings that no educational policy could make the parents interested to send their children to schools as earning by them is more lucrative for a poor family than education.

Indira (2000) also strongly asserts that poverty, migration and slums are the predominant factors for increasing the number of street children. According to the 1993 Human Development Report of the UN Development Programme, India perhaps has the highest number of street children cities like Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta have around one lakh street children each and Bangalore alone has 45,000 of them.

Bangalore based organisation Misra R.N (2004) in an edited book of articles entitled "Waste wise: Rehabilitation of Street Children through an Urban Solid Waste Management Project in South India", explains that Bangalore has estimated 35,000 waste pickers mostly women and children, who pick out discarded waste materials like pieces of paper, plastic, metal and glass from the dumped garbage and rubbish heaps. These materials are sold to a number of small recycling industries in the outskirts of the city; waste picking forms their only form of livelihood. Although waste picking forms the basis for a web of recycling activity, it remains recognised and

unregulated. The socio-economic situation of the waste picking women and children is very vulnerable and they receive neither institutional nor Government support.

Joshi and Menon (2004) have found in a study that the existence of girl child as rag pickers highlights the non-availability of estimates of female children who work as rag pickers. They usually belong to two groups either runaway children who have been absorbed by the pavement communities in return for labour/ for sex or girls who live with their families on pavement or in slums.

Goyal (2005), in his work "Street Children and the Child Labour" describes the living places of street children. Children living on and off the street working as shoe-shine boys, ragpickers, newspaper vendors, beggars and so on. The problem of street children is somewhat different from that of child labour in factories and workshops for one thing. The author stated the finding that most children have some sort of home to go back to in the evenings or nights while street children are completely alone and are at the mercy of their employers. They live on the pavements, in the bus stations and railway stations. They are at the mercy of urban predators as also the police. They have no permanent base and are often on the move. Therefore, the author in his study concluded that their problem is more acute than that of children working in a factory and living at home.

Kamat Potpouri (2008) in his article entitled "Ragpickers of India" explores on the exploitation of child ragpickers. In most cases, there are middlemen who engage these children. They are required to collect bottles, plastic, metal parts, glass pieces and alike. The author further mentioned that middlemen pocket the major shares of the sales and pay only paltry to them. It is said that ragpickers who clean up dirt and contribute to environment are harassed by both police and municipal workers. They need to bribe municipal workers to forage into garbage bin. The author found that Police instead of protecting them, often beats them and forces them to sweep police station and municipal offices.

Mustafa Mohad and Sharm Omkara (2008) in a study on "Ragpickers in Modern Day India" point out the exploitation of child ragpickers. The ragpickers scrounge around every day as soon as the waste gets deposited early in the morning at the main garbage centers, but is not as simple as just finding the stuff and selling it to the Kabadi walla shops. The authors have concluded that the garbage picking industry has a hierarchical format with their being several middlemen who make the most of these innocent children, much like the organised retail industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Analytical approach has been used in the present study. In which an attempt has been made to assess different sources and causes for rag picking of children in study area of Chennai city. A comprehensive understanding was made on the nature of participation and their involvement was found in the activities of rag picking. In order to derive concluding remarks participatory observation method was finalised and executed. Thus, in a selected area of Chennai city, the children were chosen randomly and interview schedule was used to capture the responses. The study was carried out with following objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic and demographic background of Rag picking children.
2. To assess the causes and factors of child rag picking
3. To evaluate the working condition, migration and income sources of rag picking children in the study area.

AREA OF STUDY

The present study was carried out in the regions of south and central parts of Chennai city where population was found thick namely, Triplicane, Chetpet, Saidapet and Koyembedu. Study areas were chosen by keeping in mind on the moving and density of population.

TYPE OF STUDY

The study is descriptive in nature which was analytically designed its shape to attain the concluding remarks. As per the research agenda, appropriate explanations were made in the form of interpretation with necessary references.

SAMPLING

There is a population of 300 ragpickers in the city of Chennai. For the study purpose, 100 ragpickers were randomly chosen by simple random sampling method and responses were collected from them.

DATA COLLECTION

The collected data were calculated and the average was found by using SPSS packages and the simple frequency tabulation method were used along with interpretation. In the case of primary data, interview schedule was used to receive the first-hand information from the study area of research field. The interview schedule was prepared with definite subsections on objective wise categories. The questions were framed both with either open-ended or closed-ended options in which study related issues were covered. Secondary data were collected from the sources such as books, journals, articles etc. and they were used to shape the questions relevantly with options. Pilot study was used to find the relevancy of questions and options on field basis scenario.

PILOT STUDY

The researcher has used 10 respondents from the study area in order to receive the basic knowledge and to know the nature of respondents in the field. The pre-test helped to frame the final questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Particulars	No. of Respondents	In Percentage
Sex-wise Distribution		
Male	100	100 %
Female	0	0
Total	100	100
Religion-wise Distribution		
Hindu	64	64 %
Christian	30	30%
Muslim	06	06%
Others	0	0
Total	100	100
Community-wise Distribution		
SC/ST	87	87%
Backward Caste	13	13%
Others	0	0
Total	100	100
Size of Family		
1-3	18	18%
4-6	24	24%
7-9	50	50%
>9	08	08%
Total	100	100
Migration of Respondents		
Migrated	100	100%
Not migrated	0	0
Total	100	100
Reasons for Migration		
Expectation of a better life	42	42%
Ill-treatment	58	58%
Total	100	100
Awareness of children on Whereabouts of Family		
I know	78	78%
Don't know	22	22%
Total	100	100
Information about Parents		
Both are alive	56	56%
Father is alive	16	16%
Mother is alive	20	20%
Both are not alive	08	08%
Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

The data from the above table on sex-wise distribution denote that all ragpickers are only the category of male (100%) i.e., there are no female rag pickers in the study area. Majority (64%) of them are belonged to Hindu community; Out of 100 respondents 87% of them are in the category of SCs (Scheduled Caste) and STs (Scheduled Tribe). Majority 50 % of the respondents are in the family

size of 7-9. The collection of first-hand information from the field reflects that entire 100% of the respondents are migrated from their home to this present area. An opinion (58%) reveal that ill-treatment is the major cause for their migration. 22% of the respondents don't know the whereabouts of their family. 56% of the respondents have said that their father and mother are alive.

Particulars	No. of Respondents	In Percentage
Sources of Income		
Agriculture	54	54%
Domestic Service	16	16%
Labour Service	18	18%
Others	12	12%
Total	100	100
Daily Income of Rag picking Children (in Rs)		
<100	52	52%
101-200	26	26%
201-300	20	20%
>301	02	02%
Total	100	100.00
Daily Expenses of Rag picking Children (In Rs)		
<30	28	28%
31-40	28	28%
41-50	36	36%
>51	08	08%
Total	100	100.00
Educational Status of the Respondents		
1 st -5 th Std	86	86%
6 th -7 th Std	14	14%
8 th -10 th Std	0	0
Total	100.00	100.00
Presently Attending School		
Going School	28	28%
Not going School	72	72%
Total	100.00	100.00
Reasons for not going to School		
Poor Economic Conditions	57	79.1%
Work at home	4	5.6%
School far away from home	11	15.3%
Total	72	100.00

Source: Primary data

The data clearly show us that out of 100 respondents from the field, majority 54% of them belong to the agricultural activities and that is their source of income; 52% of them get Rs. 100 and below as their daily income from rag picking job; many of them (36%) are with the daily expenses of Rs.41-50; majority 86% of them have studied from 1st standard to 5th standard; majority of the respondents (72%) of them are not going to school during

according to the time of data collection. In order to know the reasons to become rag pickers, the study has carried the information on the same. Regarding the reason for entering into this job many of them (79.1%) were in the poor economic conditions. Since, their families were not afforded to survive with financial crises, hence, the children were forced to procure the un organised activity of ragpicking and become wandering in the streets.

Particulars	No. Respondents	In Percentage
The Way of Exploitation on Respondents		
Physically	37	37%
Financially	40	40%
Psychologically	23	23%
Others	0	0
Total	100	100.00
Assistance Received from NGOs		
Received	100	100%
Not Received	0	0
Total	100	100.00
Satisfied by Assistance of NGOs		
Satisfied	92	92%
Not Satisfied	8	8%
Total	100	100.00
Involvement of Respondents in Criminal Activities		
Yes	16	16%
No	84	84%
Total	100	100.00
Reason for Rag picking		
Lack of appropriate jobs	40	40%
Easy to get this work	36	36%
Friends are in this line of work	24	24%
Others	0	0
Total	100	100.00
Duration for Doing this job per day (in hours)		
2-6 hrs	28	28%
7-10 hrs	66	66%
11-12 hrs	6	6%
Total	100	100.00
Job Satisfaction		
Satisfied	36	36%
Un satisfied	64	64%
Total	100	100.00
Respondent's Future Plan		
Continue present job	12	12%
Self-Employment	54	54%
Government Job	16	16%
Undecided	18	18%
Total	100	100.00

Source: Primary data

It has been clear that the table above comprises the data collected from the rag picking children on few of their personal information. Out of 100 respondents, majority 40% of them were exploited financially. The backwardness in financial condition is the severe drawbacks in the most of the BPL families in our nation. The study revealed that NGOs are extending their helping hands on the ragpicker's life and they become the turning point to get transition in their life. Accordingly, overwhelming samples of entire 100% are receiving the NGO's assistance and out of them 92% are satisfied for NGOs activity. Out of 100 respondents, only 16% of the

respondents are involved in the criminal activities. Many of them (40%) were entered in this field due to lack of appropriate job for them in their career. Among the 100 respondents, for 36% of the respondents this work was easy to enter in. Majority 66% of them pursue this rag picking job for 7 to 10 hours per day. 64% of them are not satisfied in this activity. In order to know the future plan of these ragpicking children the data related to future plan was used in the interview schedule and hence, the reaction for that was, Self-Employment. Therefore, 54% of them are interested to undergo self-employment in their future; 18% of them were not yet decided on their future plan.

CONCLUSION

The study brings out the following findings in based the primary data collected from the field.

Major findings:-

- Overwhelming samples of 100% are belonged to the category of male
- Majority, 64% of the respondents are Hindu community
- 87% are belonged to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes
- 22% of the respondents don't know the whereabouts of their family
- 56% of the respondent's both parents are alive
- Majority, 54% are belonged to agriculture as their source of economy
- 52% of them earn Rs.100 and below per day
- Majority, 86% of them are in the standard of 1st to 5th level.
- 79.1% of them are in the poor economical condition.
- Lack of appropriate job was main force for 40% of them to enter in this field
- 40% of them were exploited by others financially
- Majority, 92% of them are satisfied with the assistance of Non-Governmental Organisations
- Only 16% of them are involved in the criminal activities
- 64% of them are not satisfied in this unorganised job.
- 54% of are interested to undergo self-employment in their future.

Concluding Remarks:-

The entire portions of the study reflect the reality of children who were left deserted and struggling for their livelihood. Becoming as child labour, involving in the anti-social activities, drug trading etc. Rag pickers are misused by the capitalist groups in urban areas. Juvenile delinquency is one of the problems of ragpickers. The primary data collected from the field reflects that regpickers are prone to violate the laws for the benefit of criminal groups in the city. Hence there is a risk taking opportunities are evinced in this unorganised sector of ragpicking children. Since, many of them are willing to do self-employment Government and NGOs have to take this as serious one and provide necessary inclusive policy in the life of regpicking children for their rehabilitations.

In this context, a Social Pathological approach was needed to be upholding them out of their issues. The problems such as socio-economic and the processes of migration were taken into account and assessed. The

specific objectives were used to find out their major problems on socio-economic, Psychological bases and also about their migration. Keeping all these in mind 100 respondents from different parts of Chennai city were randomly chosen and interviewed. The primary data through interview and personal interview with respondents reveal that they develop bad habits of smoking, chewing pan, tobacco and gutaka and are also likely to be exposed to alcohol. They are more prone to anti-social activities such as pick pocketing, gambling, theft etc. However they are afraid of police because of arrest and scared of young/adult boys.

Social transition plays a vital role in the development of our nation. It has many important indispensable components. The power of youth and children are major force by which a constructive change should be transformed with some of the supportive factors. But in our society this part is ignored that's the reason our nation face still backwardness in the youth and child development career. However, these days many more campaigns against child labour has been evinced. There are laws and regulations enacted against child labour but still they are not working properly. The Government as well as Non-Governmental Organisations are working and taking efforts along with Governmental plans and policy matters for the welfare of BPL children and awareness should be made among public in contemporary society in this issue. A comprehensive effort of both public and private sectors should enhance the life of rag picking children with a new scheme of policy implementation rather existing one. Hence, Socio-economic, Psychological probe has to be launched to know the exact expectations of children those who are thrown out of home behind deferent reasons either by voluntarily or non-voluntarily. This study has made a fundamental social life namely, socio-economic factors on to become ragpickers, their migration, future plans have been helping us to know "behind the screen" maters of child ragpickers in Chennai city.

Recommendations:-

1. The Government and private agencies has to introduce play-school method with confident building measures for the benefit of children.
2. Government should be a watch-dog to confirm that educational institutions become service oriented rather than commercial.
3. Most parents ill-treat their children and force them into work. Therefore, parents are advised to make them to realise the importance of their future and well being. This should be done by the NGOs in their respective city.

4. Technical training should be provided to these children so that they can get different jobs which are more stable and with job security.

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