



A study on occupational hazards faced by manual scavengers: with special reference to social work intervention

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Abstract

A sudden growth of the urbanisation and population, along with ever expanding contours of cities and towns, have seen an increase in demand for sewerage, waste management services and employment. While over 1.3 million sewerage workers are engaged in this industry in the country, they continue to struggle with precarious work conditions that include but are not limited to unsafe work practices, unsafe work environments and contractual nature of work

With poor pay and benefits in what is an extremely high-risk occupation.

Some of the issues commonly faced by the participants fell in the broad categories of health-related concerns, low pay, occupation and discrimination, inbuilt stigma and prejudice in the job, lack of occupational safety measures which are further compounded by the workers' poor knowledge of existing laws and apathy from government agencies concerned.

The caste-based nature of the occupation continues even today but, the studies show other caste people also started to engage in these job. Many workers complained of the stigma surrounding their jobs, wherein they are treated as untouchables. Many workers are complained the stigma surrounding their place, they didn't get a job, and admission in schools, because of that they started to engage in those jobs.

Considering the laborious and risky nature of the jobs, there is no compensation for injuries occurring within the work site. The contractual nature of the jobs as well as the low pay put a heavy burden on the workers, with a majority of them having 3-5 dependants. This, in turn, impacts their living standards, and access to food intake, education and living conditions. The respondent's family member's highest education is mostly on schooling, due to their economic issues they are sending their spouse or children to work to supplement their incomes.

Finally, the contractual workers who participated in the study identified a set of demands and a timeline under which they could be achieved. Things that needed immediate attention were identity cards, provisions for full body suits, jobs and rehabilitation. Short-term demands were recognition of the sewerage work as a technical work, access to all safety equipment and social audits of the workplaces and contractors.

Keywords: manual scavengers, occupational hazards, social work intervention

1. Introduction

“Ours (Manual Scavengers) is a battle not for wealth or power. It is a battle for freedom. It is the battle of reclamation of Human Personality.”

- B.R. Ambedkar, Father of Indian Constitution

India has made spectacular progress almost in all areas of life over the years since Independence in 1947. However, still large sections of our people have not got their share of development in their life. Atrocities, untouchability, involvement in obnoxious and inhuman practice of manual scavenging of night soil are still prevalent in the country. They are mainly the Scheduled Castes which includes safai karamcharis and manual scavengers. “Manual scavenger” means a person engaged or employed, at the commencement of this Act or at any time thereafter, by an individual or a local authority or an agency or a contractor, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed of, or on a railway track or in such other spaces or

premises, as the Central Government or a State Government may notify, before the excreta fully decomposes in such manner as may be prescribed, and the expression “manual scavenging” shall be construed accordingly.

2. Methods

A Quantitative study was done to study the occupational hazards faced by manual scavengers: with special reference to application of social work intervention. The study was done to gain an insight and understand the occupational related hazardous problem and psychological wellbeing status of the manual scavengers. The researcher also used and to facilitate the intervention process of the manual scavengers to come out their profession. The sampling technique was non-probability sampling technique snow ball technique with inclusive criteria. Sample size of the study was 30 manual scavengers from Chennai.

3. Results

3.1 Social Hazards and Demographic

The caste-based nature of the occupation continues even today

but, the studies show other caste people also started to engage in these job. Many workers complained of the stigma surrounding their jobs, wherein they are treated as untouchables. High majority ninety percentages of the manual scavengers are schedule caste community and a considerable proportion ten percentage of them are most backward class people. Absolute majority of the respondents are following Hinduism as a religion and belonging to the Adidraavidar, Parayar and Vanniyar. Each and every night soil workers are married. But thirty seven percentages of workers are married at the age of 18 – 25. Its shows most of them are doing and early marriage. The origin place of the respondents is different place in Chennai, but now they are resettled in slum clearance board areas Kannaginagar, Semmenchery, and Perumbakkam. Many workers are complained the stigma surrounding their place (Kannaginagar, Semmenchery, Perumbakkam), they didn't get a job, and admission in schools (especially in govt school), because of that they started to engage in those jobs. More than one fourth of the respondents are faced place discrimination. The respondents are evicted from different places and resettled in slum clearance board areas, after resettlement the respondents are loss their works. The organizations and other people are not willing to give a work for these people, because of his places. For that the respondents are discriminated by his place and didn't get any other job. So, the respondents are joining this manual scavenging work because of his place discrimination. Less than half forty six percentage of the respondents is called as generation workers. The respondent's father and some of the respondent's brothers also doing manual scavenging work. Preponderance of the respondents performs their work in groups and also individuals. The respondents are mostly doing their work as a group, because they are doing this work as a contract basis. The contractual nature of the jobs as well as the low pay put a heavy burden on the workers, with a majority of them having 3-5 dependants. This, in turn, impacts their living standards, and access to food intake, education and living conditions. The respondent's family member's highest education is mostly on schooling; due to their economic issues they are sending their spouse or children to work to supplement their incomes.

While most of the workers are provided an exclusive space called 'stores', these lack essential facilities such as a place to relax, eat, proper ventilation and fans and first aid boxes. There is a glaring absence of workplace safety norms, with most equipment not being available or being inadequate or in poor condition. Even drinking water and sanitation facilities were unavailable.

3.2 Physical Health

Less than half of the respondents are feeling good about their health status and most of the respondents are feeling fair about their health status. Only 10% of the respondent are felling excellent about their health status, others are feeling good and fair only. Less than two third of the respondents are having eye related problem. More than one third of the respondents have eye irritation and others are having a low vision other eye related problem. Less than one third of the respondents having ear related problems. More than one third of the respondents have bleeding issues in their ear infection and ear

pain infection kind of ear problem also the respondents are getting affected because of this manual scavenging work. The severe health problems faced by manual scavengers are Asthma, Bronchitis, Tuberculosis, Nausea, and typhoid and many other diseases can be traced to the unsanitary disposal of human excreta. Two respondents are affected by the epilepsy, because of the work people have prone to get affected by this problem. Half of the respondents are get affected by the frostbite problem. After the work the worker are affected by this problem.

Table 1: Physical Injuries of the Respondents

S. No	Physical Injuries	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Head Injury	15	50%
2.	Leg Injury	24	80%
3.	Hand Injury	26	86.7%
4.	Burning Of Eye	11	36.67%
5.	Fainting	10	33.33%
7.	Others	16	53.33 %

Considering the laborious and risky nature of the jobs, there is no compensation for injuries occurring within the work site, e.g., one of the respondent losses his hearing capacity and in work place his one side of the ear is totally damaged. Physical Injuries of the manual scavengers majority of them are faced head injury, Leg injury, fainting, burning of eyes and nose burning, ear burning and bleeding, with the issue of manual scavenging, there is a view of that "Right to Health" must be included in the Fundamental Rights of Indian citizens, without any discrimination. High majority of the respondents are met a hand injury and vast majority of the respondents are affected by leg injury. The respondents also had a injuries in ass, stomach, face and ect. The respondents are can't able to access any kind of emergency medical needs. Less than half 46.7 of the respondents are get affected by the suffocation problem due to their work time.

Working condition

Table 2: Safety Equipment Availed by the Respondents

S.No	Safety Equipment	Availed
1.	Safety Body Harness / Safety Belt	Nil
2.	Wadder Suit	
3.	Chlorine Mask – Canister Type	
4.	Normal Face Mask For Any Gas Or	
5.	Canister	
6.	Safety Showers	
7.	Intrinsically Safety Torch	
8.	Hand Gloves	
9.	Safety Goggles	
10.	Safety Helmet	
11.	First Aid Box Emergency Medical Oxygen Resuscitator Kit	

The table shows about the safety equipment availed by the respondents. Predoximently it is clear that manual scavengers are not availed proper safety equipments, Health problems faced by the manual scavengers are sometimes mistakenly identified to be because of their lack of awareness and safety equipments. The respondents are willing to use proper safety

equipment but in the organization there is no proper safety equipments are not availed.

Less than half 46.7% respondents say they are faced atrocities through the public in their work place. And half of the 53.3% of the respondents are say they faced atrocities in their higher officer via also. The table shows the manual scavengers are highly faced atrocities in both away in public and their higher officers. Its shows the scavengers are highly stressed by their work. The public are scrolled the scavengers, sometimes its

leads to verbal and non verbal fights. In the officers wise they forced the workers to do the work and to enter the man hole. Its leads to the respondents are getting affected by physically and mentally. Over the year every research shows the scavengers are highly faced lots of atrocities in their working place especially through the public and their officials. Especially the public did even give water for the scavengers in the working place.

3.3 Psychological wellbeing status

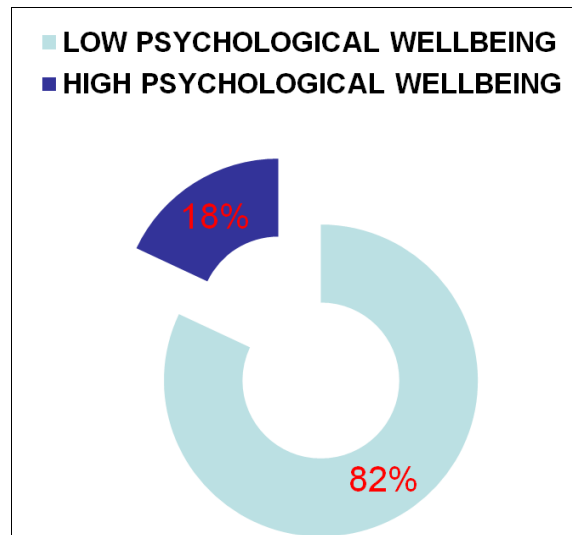


Fig 1: Psychological wellbeing status

Psychological wellbeing status was calculated by the self acceptance, personal growth, purpose of life, environmental mastery autonomy and positive relations with others based on that the table shows the psychological wellbeing status of the respondents. 82% of the respondents psychological status is very poor and 18% of the respondent’s psychological wellbeing status is good. No respondent’s psychological wellbeing status is excellent.

4. Social work Intervention

4.1 Practiced Social Work Model

Practiced social work model proposed and practiced a new model for abolishing manual scavenging from India, which is lead Mr. S.Sudharsan with his guidance the Social Workers Mr.K.Sathishkumar the research student, framed the Social Work Intervention model for Manual Scavengers eradication from Chennai.

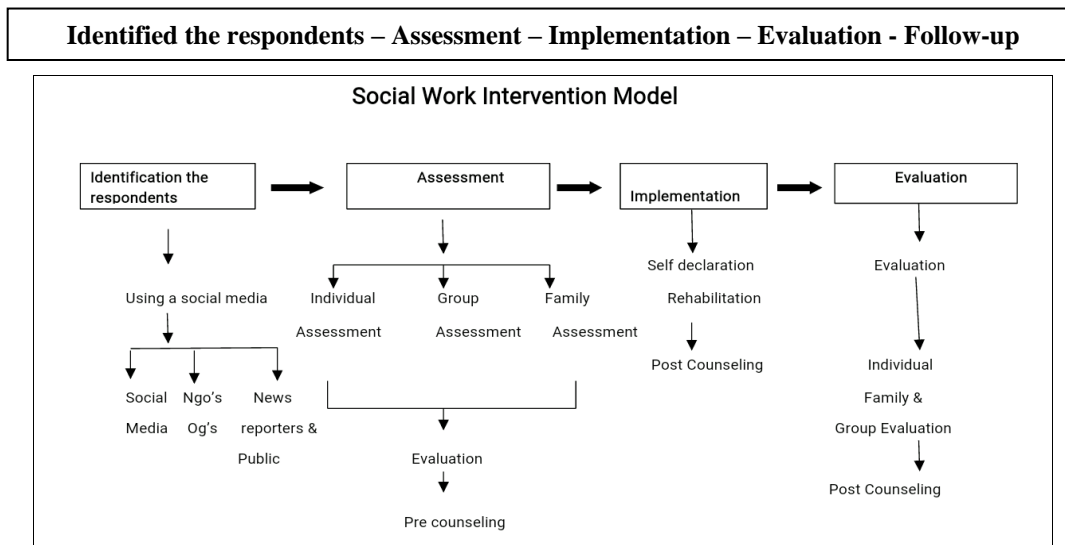


Fig 2: Identified the respondents – Assessment – Implementation – Evaluation - Follow-up

4.2 Intervention Result

The researcher practiced in this model into the field, based on this model totally 5 Manual Scavengers are rehabilitated and 15 in under the process.

5. Conclusion

Finally, the contractual workers who participated in the study identified a set of demands and a timeline under which they could be achieved. Things that needed immediate attention were identity cards, provisions for full body suits, jobs and rehabilitation. Short-term demands were recognition of the sewerage work as a technical work, access to all safety equipment and social audits of the workplaces and contractors. Instead of saying its caste based it's a time to assess properly, because the research shows other community people also engage in this job and the government need to frame a proper rehabilitation program which the respondents get easily.

6. Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks to my parents for giving this opportunity to do my research.

I acknowledge my deep sense of gratitude and sincere thanks to my professor Mr. S. Sudharsan, Assistant professor, Department of social work Madras Christian College. For his invaluable guidance, constant encouragement, support and motivation rendered to me throughout the entire of this work and enabling me to bring out the best in this study.

I dedicate this entire work to my beloved father Mr. K. Kumar and my uncle Mr. K. Saravanan. Special dedication to my mother Mrs. K. Ganthimathi and my brother Mr. K. Dhinesh kumar. I am also sincere thanks to Mrs.K.Meriam Samuel, Head of the Department.

My sincere thanks Mr. Kumaresan and Mr. M. Ajithkumar for their inputs into this study and special thanks to my friends and seniors for their encouragement, support and motivation. I am also thanks to all my respondents who have provided me with adequate information and for spending their most valuable time for the interview to complete the data collection. Finally I thank my loving family members, friends, classmates and all who helped me throughout the study.

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