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Quality Life of Rag Pickers in Mysuru City: A Case Study

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the socio-economic conditions and quality of life of rag pickers in Mysuru City. Informal waste management is significantly impacted by rag pickers, who are among the most marginalized urban populations. Despite their important contributions, they are subjected to poor living conditions, a lack of social security, and significant health risks. This study employs both qualitative methods to analyze the challenges faced by rag pickers and proposes policy recommendations, including health interventions, social work initiatives, and policy reforms, to enhance their overall quality of life and ensure their integration into the formal economy. The study recommended the comprehensive policy measures, along with social and economic support and social work interventions are essential to uplift this vulnerable group, and integrate them into the formal economy. The rag pickers not only their living conditions can be improved there is holistic approach requires to stabilize their the living conditions

Keywords: Rag pickers, Quality of life, socio-economic conditions, Informal waste management.

I. Introduction:

According to UNICEF rag picking work is considered as the worst form of child labour. Rag pickers have been arisen as a weaker community in almost all, the developing cities of every country. They are fairly vulnerable in the society and lying to diseases. Therefore rag pickers collected recyclable things from the waste and also from dumping sites typically in the outskirts. (Nuzhat, 2020). [5] According to the term rag picker refers to the people who collect rags or biodegradable resources that can be sold for money (Krishna et al., 2019). [2] In this regard Rag pickers play an important role to maintain the health and hygienic of local situation, but usually have been unidentified status in the waste management system of cities. These rag picker are usually having no skills and are a source of income and they are the parts rising number of town poor's. (Vandana Sisodia and Piyush, n.d.) [9] The children in the age support between 5 and 17 years of such communities are frequently deprived of education, excluded from childcare and live in danger. They frequently feel forced to involve in work to addition income. They work on a daily basis, are voluntary and work as much as likely by time and quantity of work to improve the household income.(Majumder & Rajvanshi, 2022) [4] The rag pickers form the base of ladder of informal sector of the solid waste management. Work-related health and safety is one of the most important features of rag pickers.(Kumari & Kiran, 2022) [3] Rag picking is an important yet underappreciated element of managing urban waste, particularly in cities like Mysuru that are rapidly urbanizing. Rag pickers, who mostly work in informal economies, contribute significantly to recycling and waste segregation, thereby reducing environmental pollution and landfill burdens.(Tiwari & Bhunia, 2024) [8] Despite their presence in public policies and lack of legal protections, they are susceptible to exploitation and hazardous working conditions. This study focuses on the living conditions, health risks, socio-economic status, and psychological well-being of rag pickers in Mysuru City, aiming to shed light on their quality of life, systemic issues they face, and potential policy measures for their upliftment, social integration, and long-term economic stability. Furthermore, this study examines the importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based initiatives in enhancing their work conditions and advocating for their rights.

II. Review of Literature

Majumder & Rajvanshi (2022) [4] The study found that rag pickers livelihood due to severe poverty or run away from home or no education, or frustration. The study stated that rag pickers are in the occupation of rag picking they face still more problems by other authorities. The study concluded that apart from these difficulties rag pickers face severe health risks, no proper place of sleep, experience to evils of society (like ganja addiction, alcohol, smoke, sex, etc.), which are influentially executed. **Padolkar Santosh Sitaram (2021)** [6] the study found that millions of rag pickers throughout the city earn a livelihood by collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling goods that someone else has waste. The study revealed that rag picking is referred to in a change of ways. It is more usually referred to as a rag picker. Most rag pickers are needy, illiterate and from rural immigrant households, which is a harmony around the city. The research study stated that it is common for migrants to come to the city in search of a improved life by picking up waste. Rag pickers in city are living in awful situations, according to recent research. **Spend, (2017)** [7] the study found that they protested that rag pickers were treated with mistrust and disrespect, because of their risky poverty, vocation of rag-picking, underground trust and doubts that they are from slums . The study revealed that protested that they were treated “with suspicion and disrespect, because of their extreme poverty, vocation of rag-picking, underground faith and fears that from slums by the middle-class community living around the research found that the children of rag pickers frequently carry on with the same work and are rarely cultured. **Agarwal, (2023)** [1] the research study found that give meaningfully to the city waste collection and dispensation systems but remain unseen to establishments and obtain little to no support or respect. The study state that faced with health hazards, waste pickers knowledge miserable quality of life, social exclusion and discrimination, and little to no social security, thus, they often struggle to make ends meet. **Williams, (2024)** [10] The research study found that rag pickers were disjointed from the family because of orphan, alcoholic addictions financial restraints and family issues this are the main aim to lacking them down to this work. The study revealed their working disorder and living illness are very worthless due to alcohol, smoking and drug addiction, and it will make bad health impact on their life. The research study found that intend to focuses on the health impact of rag pickers in Puducherry district.

III. Objectives of the Study

- To assess the socio-economic status of rag pickers in Mysuru City.
- To analyze the health and safety conditions associated with rag picking.

IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rag pickers are part to support the recycling industry through the collection of solid waste, but they are not treated well in this society. The rags pickers are collecting waste individually as well as few of the rag pickers are working under various scrap dealers like the collection of waste from the dustbins, households and commercial spots.

V. Methodology

The study uses Qualitative study method for the study. It's involves case study and group discussion method to understand the life of the Rag pickers. The study narrated the comprehensive information among the rag pickers in their daily life. Personal narratives on living conditions, income, access to healthcare, and social support systems were captured through case studies. Additionally, a focus group discussion was conducted to gain insight into collective challenges and possible solutions from the perspective of rag pickers themselves.

VI. Problems Faced by Rag-Pickers

1. Living Conditions:

Rag pickers in Mysuru live in informal settlements or slums, often in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. Basic facilities such as clean drinking water, sanitation, and electricity are lacking, growing their weakness to illnesses. About many of respondents reported living in temporary shelters with inadequate protection from weather conditions, making them susceptible to extreme heat, heavy rains, and cold. Additionally, many rag pickers share their living spaces with family members, leading to poor hygiene, safety concerns, and a lack of privacy. The absence of legal housing rights also puts them at constant risk of eviction.

2. Health and Occupational Hazards

Health issues are a primary concern, most of the respondents reporting frequent illnesses such as respiratory problems, skin infections, and injuries due to handling hazardous waste. Rag pickers are exposed to toxic chemicals, sharp objects, and unhygienic environments, often without any safety gear or health insurance. Also, mental health concerns such as sadness and anxiety are main due to the harsh working circumstances and social shame. Many rag pickers also suffer from chronic malnutrition due to poor diet and lack of access to nutritious food, further weakening their immune systems. The absence of accessible healthcare facilities exacerbates their health struggles, making timely medical intervention difficult.

3. Income and Economic Challenges

The average daily income of rag pickers was found to be between ₹150-250, which is significantly below the poverty line. Irregular earnings and exploitation by middlemen in the scrap trade further exacerbate their financial instability. Rag pickers had no savings, lacked access to formal banking or credit facilities. Additionally, seasonal fluctuations in waste availability further impact their income, making financial planning nearly impossible. Many also rely on high-interest informal loans to meet their daily needs, pushing them into deeper financial distress.

4. Social Exclusion and Stigma

Rag pickers face severe social stigma, often being labelled as "untouchables" and excluded from community activities. The Rag pickers have been limited access to social facilities such as education and healthcare, further side-lining them from normal civilization. This exclusion significantly affects their mental well-being and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Additionally, social discrimination extends to their children, making it difficult for them to access education and escape the generational cycle of marginalization. The lack of awareness and advocacy for their rights further exacerbates their alienation from mainstream society.

VII. Discussion

The findings reveal a grim picture of the quality of life of rag pickers in Mysuru. Nevertheless their vital role in urban waste management, they remains unseen to policy makers and suffer from poor living standards, health risks, and economic changeability. The lack of official supports or formal acknowledgement worsens their condition, leaving them confined in a cycle of poverty and downgrading. Addressing these issues requires a multi-stakeholder approach connecting to the government, NGOs, and the private sectors. The Cooperative efforts should focus on policy reforms, improved social welfare programs, and the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities. Moreover, public awareness campaigns, NGOs engagement initiatives are necessary to reduce stigma and foster social inclusion for rag pickers and their families.

VIII. Recommendations

To improve the quality of life of rag pickers in Mysuru, the following interventions are suggested:

- **Policy Integration:** Formal recognition and inclusion of rag pickers as part of the waste management sector, with access to existing social security schemes.
- **Health Interventions:** Regular health check-ups at no cost, provision of safety gear, and inclusion in government health insurance schemes.
- **Education and Training:** Vocational training for skill development, literacy programs, and financial literacy workshops to empower them economically.
- **Housing and Basic Amenities:** Provision of affordable housing, sanitation facilities, and access to clean water in areas where rag pickers live to promote their health and well-being.
- **Social Work Practices:** Trained social workers should engage with rag pickers to address their socio-economic and psycho-emotional challenges through targeted interventions.
- **Group Activities and Therapies:** Social workers can facilitate group activities or therapy sessions with selected groups of rag pickers to enhance their social integration and mental well-being.
- **Community Awareness Programs:** Public awareness campaigns should be conducted to reduce social stigma and promote the rights and dignity of rag pickers.

IX. Conclusion

Rag pickers play an essential role in Mysuru City's informal waste management system, yet they have remained marginalized and neglected. Addressing the socio-economic and health challenges they face is critical for improving their quality of life. Comprehensive policy measures, along with social and economic support and social work interventions, are essential to uplift this vulnerable group, and integrate them into the formal economy. The rag pickers could decrease the spending of the corporation. The rag pickers collected mostly things like plastic and metals, the categorization of solid waste became easier to the municipal workers in both the cities. The Rag picking also provided livelihood to them and it was almost a form of self-employment. Also, safeguarding their access to education, healthcare, and financial presence can help break the cycle of poverty and provide maintainable livelihood opportunities. Raising public awareness about their contributions to waste management and advocating for their rights can also contribute to reducing social stigma and fostering community support.

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