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ORGANISED NATURE OF UNORGANISED WORLD OF RAGPICKING: A STUDY OF JAMMU CITY

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Abstract:-An empirical study was conducted to understand organised nature of unorganised world of ragpicking. A sample of 200 ragpicker children in the age group of 8 to 14 years was selected from different areas of Jammu city. Results reveal that majority of the child ragpickers were as young as 8 to 10 years of age. They had mostly migrated from states namely Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to Jammu. It was found that 46% of the respondents were involved in ragpicking for less than 2 years. Majority (69%) of the rag pickers were observed to show preference for collection of all types of wastes (paper, plastic, metal and glass). On an average they gathered 3 to 6 kgs of rags and earned below Rs. 30 per day. Most (47.5%) ragpickers children did not show any preference of locality for picking waste and travelled on foot to collection destinations or through routes and carried bags of their collections on their backs. It was observed that junk dealers played an important role in motivation of children for their involvement in ragpicking. The findings highlight that children worked as ragpickers in more or less an organised manner and showed specific preferences in performing this activity.

Keywords: Child Ragpickers, Work Structure, Work Profile.

INTRODUCTION

India's booming urbanization brings the problem of waste management. As more people are migrating towards the cities, the amount of waste is increasing at a high pace and waste management is likely to become a critical issue in the coming years. Ragpickers play an important, but usually unrecognised role in the waste management system of Indian cities. They collect garbage in search of recyclable items that can be sold to scrap merchant (paper, plastic, tin...) This activity require no skills and is a source of income for a growing number of urban poors (Gutberlet, 1997).

Most of the ragpickers are not independent but work for middlemen or contractors who purchase segregated rag from them on pre-decided rates (Hunt, 1996).

Studies also show that ragpickers are most of the time migrants who had fled their city or village because of hard living conditions. The continuous exposure to the harsh environment and the nature of their life style threatens their physical, mental, social and spiritual well being. Sickness is a common phenomenon among child ragpickers. Children as ragpickers work in appalling conditions in garbage bins on the street and at land fill sites where garbage is dumped.

The present research was carried out to ascertain if there is any organisation or unwritten rules associated with ragpicking. Though on the very surface ragpicking appears to be an unorganised activity without any rules and regulations, but is it actually possible to carry out this activity without any structure or organisation. With this as background the paper explores the structure if any associated with ragpicking and attempts to analyse the unwritten codes associated with it.

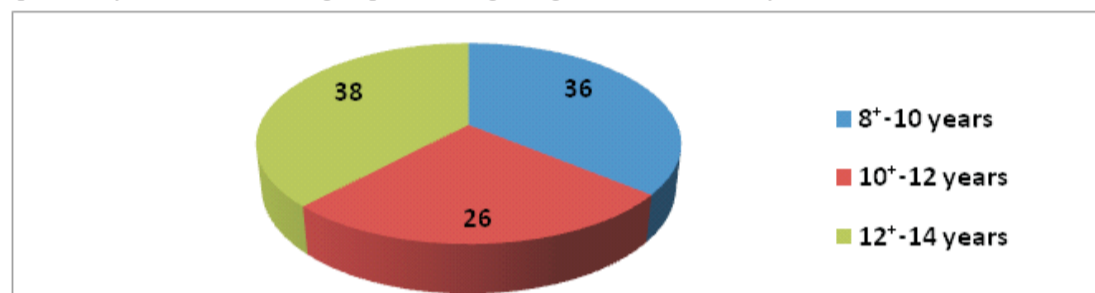
RESEARCH METHODS

The sample for the study comprised of 200 children below 14 years of age working as ragpickers for at least past six months in and around Jammu city. The sample children were selected through purposive and snowball sampling technique. Interview schedule was prepared to collect information regarding the process/dynamics involved in ragpicking. For data analysis both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Age of Respondents

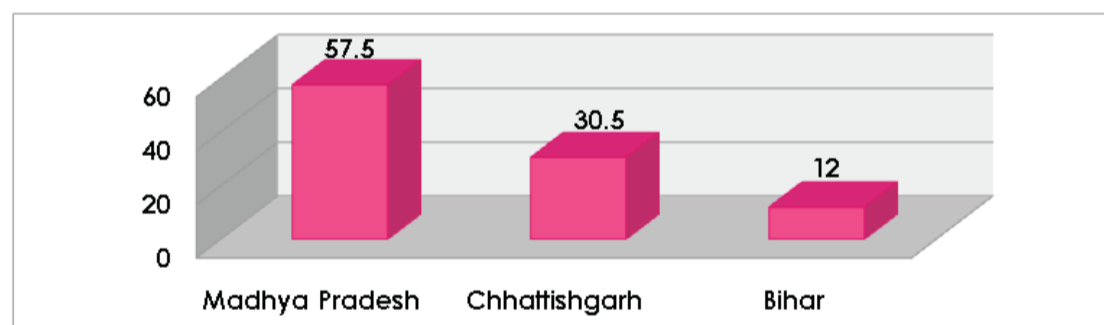
In the present study it was found that majority of child ragpickers were 12-14 years of age while 36% children were in the age group of 8-10 years. The remaining respondent's age ranged between 10 to 12 years.



Age of Respondents
Fig - 1

1. Place of Origin

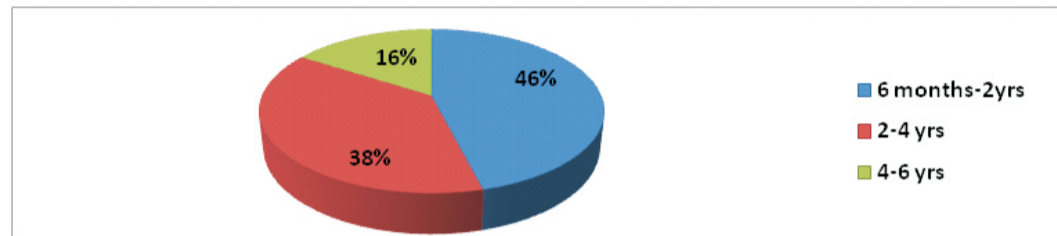
All the sample child ragpickers were found to have migrated to Jammu from other Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar. None of them were noted to be locals or to be natives of the state. Among them, the highest proportion had come from villages of Districts Chatterpur and Domahae of state Madhya Pradesh. The specific villages of their origin were Katara (16%), Khadwaro (16%), Sandhini (14%), Kutiya Bharathi (12%), Bhandini (10%), Pipora (6%), Palakva (6%), Basari (4%), Kavar (2%), Bhagron (2%), Peepat (2%), Kandhwa (2%) and Kyekhera (2%). The second highest percentage was found to have migrated from the state of Chattishgarh. Those from the state had come from village Jharap (4%) of District Bilaspur. Rest were from the state of Bihar (Sasamusai village 2%). In a study conducted by Sharma and Kumar (2011) most ragpickers in the age group 5-15 years belonged mostly to Madhya Pradesh (42.1%), followed by Bihar (13.9%), Punjab (10.1%) and other states.



Place of Origin
Fig - 2

3. Work Experience of Child Ragpickers

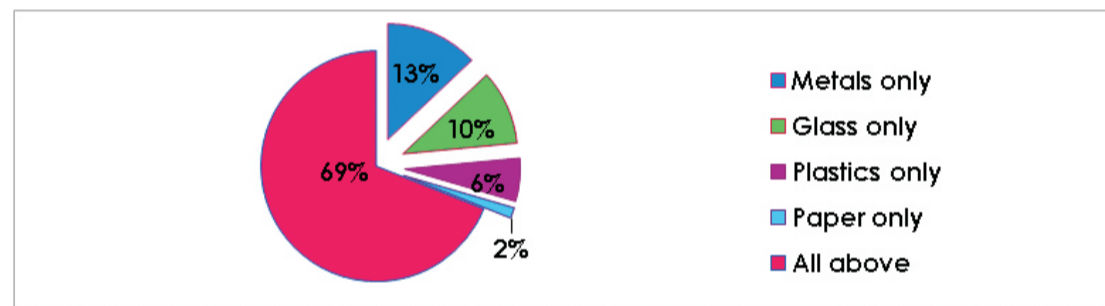
As far as work experience of these children was concerned, 38% were involved in this work for past 2 to 4 years and 46% had an experience of 6 months to 2 years of picking rags. The remaining 16% had an experience of about 4 to 6 years. It was noted that as the children aged other options of earnings were also available. So, when they became older they either left ragpicking and got involved in other work or took up ragpicking as a part time profession. Studies carried by Sharma & Kumar (2011) and Lal (2011) had also noted that ragpickers were observed to be in the business of rag picking for atleast 4-5 years on an average.



Work Experience of Child Ragpickers
Fig - 3

4. Preference of Waste Materials

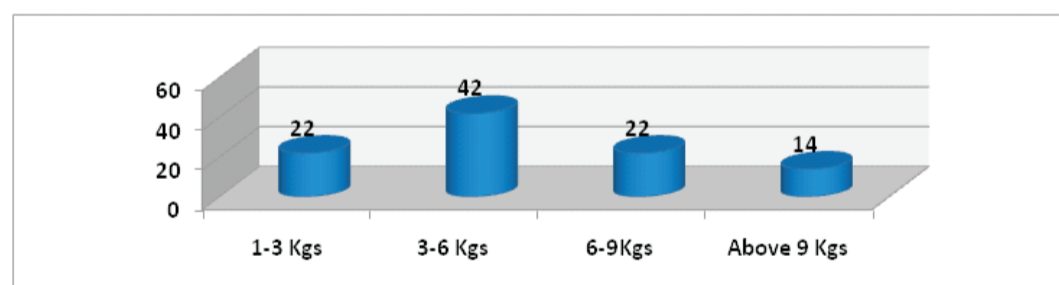
Findings reveal that anything that had recyclable value was collected by most (69%) of child ragpickers. Their collection usually comprised of paper (all kinds), plastic, glass bottles, iron, wires and other metal products. Although, majority of waste pickers collected any item they found, only a small percentage concentrated on specific items, that is, 13% collected metals only, 10% collected glass bottles only, 6% collected plastic only and 2% collected paper only. The pickers who collected only metals mentioned that picking metals and metallic products was beneficial than other recyclable materials as such items were costlier and by selling them they would earn a handsome amount.



Preference of Waste Materials
Fig - 4

5. Amount of Material Collected Per Day

Carrying heavy load is vital for ragpickers. Majority (42%) of the respondents carried 3+-6 Kgs rags in their gunny bags/sacks per day whereas 22% of them each carried either 1-3 Kgs or 6+-9 Kgs rag material respectively and remaining 14% carried above 9 Kgs of rags. It was observed that children who collected larger quantities of materials made about two to three separate trips in the day for collection especially if the dump site/work destination was relatively nearer. Such children made individual trips of about three hours each, and sorted the entire day's collection at the end of the day.

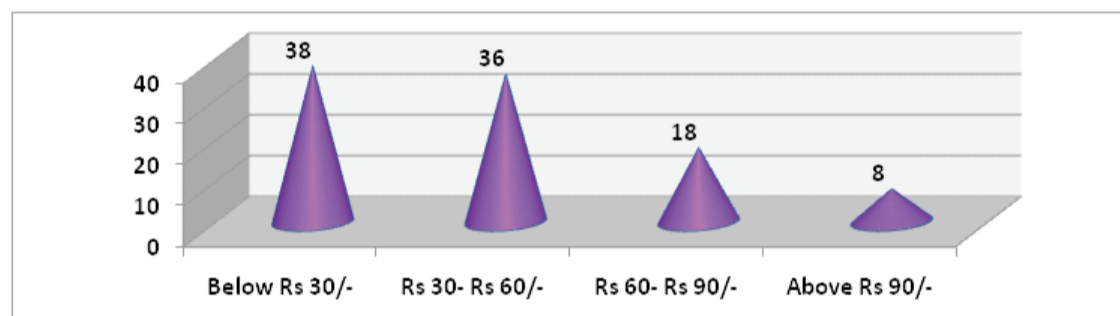


Amount of Material Collected Per Day
Fig - 5

6. Earning Per Day

Their earnings were directly related to the amount of items collected, which was dependent on the weight carried by them. The findings also reveal that most (38%) of the respondents earned below Rs.30 per day or between Rs. 30-60 (36%).

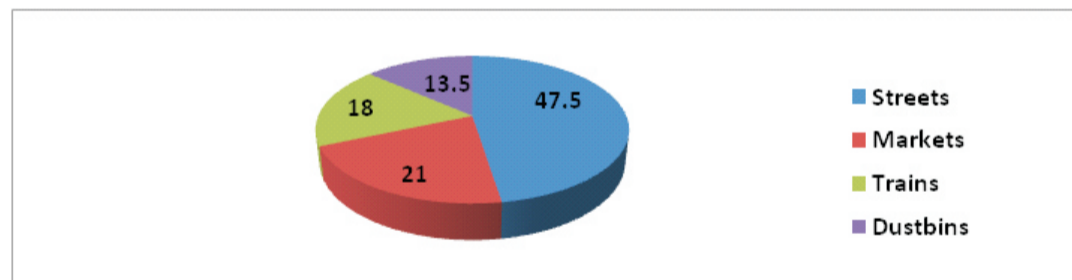
Another, 18% reported earning between Rs.60-90 per day. It was also found that the price earned for the rags was directly proportional to the quality of material collected. Polythene, plastic bottles and paper were not of much worth, so the child ragpickers preferred to collect these items to a lesser extent. However, high price material such as copper, brass and aluminium were hard to find and may be assumed to be the product of theft.



Earning Per Day
Fig – 6

7. Preferred Site for Waste Picking

Results reveal that most (47.5%) ragpickers children did not show any preference of locality for picking waste. They wandered around their neighbourhood to pick rags but when they were unable to collect something substantial they used to go farther. There were neither any set areas/locales for collection nor fixed routes. The distance travelled would therefore depend on the area of collection and also whether collection was on neighbourhood streets or collection centres or the municipal sites. There were therefore extreme variations in the distance travelled; what is significant here is that, this ranged from 1 kilometre to 10 kilometres. Majority of waste pickers travelled on foot to collection destinations or through routes and carry bag of their collections on their backs, on foot. It was only in case of long distances that they made use of local public transport such as a matador or a bus. The most common mode of travel however, remained on foot. The second highest percentage (21%) of sample children favoured busy markets as their work site. For 18% ragpickers, railway station was ideal for collecting recyclable materials. The other 13.5% chose municipality dustbins as primary source for collecting waste materials. Only when they failed to get the required amount of waste from their favourable sites they ultimately came to street, as it was a sea of waste material which did not leave ragpickers with empty bags. Similar findings were noted by Hunt (1996) that ragpicker children collected recyclable materials from dustbins and the road sides.



Preferred Site for Waste Picking
Fig – 7

8. Role of Junk Dealers

A large number of ragpickers sold their collection to the nearby (particular) trader, this was more likely to happen in the case of those who carried out collection operations in the neighbouring/surrounding areas. Ragpickers who travelled a considerable distance, for instance to the disposable sites, were as likely to sell to other traders, who may offer a better price, or by which they were likely to save on the cost of transportation.

The link between the nearby/local (particular) trader and the waste picker were noted to be usually strong, with considerable dependence of the latter on the former. In times of financial need (which occurs often), it was the nearby/local trader who extended loans/advances to the child ragpickers, thereby providing a sense of security. For them this need translated into a loyalty towards the trader, and in the process tied the picker to the trader for waste/rag collection transactions. Moreover, most such traders wielded a considerable clout within the migrated families of child ragpickers and its internal politics.

Table 1
Role of Junk Dealers

Work Experience	Total		
	Male N=104	Female N=96	Total N=200
Facilities provided by Junk Dealers			
Shelter	39(37.5)	22(22.9)	61(30.5)
Clothing	20(19.2)	12(12.5)	32(16)
Food	20(19.2)	8(8.3)	28(14)
Tips provided by Junk Dealers			
Below Rs 10/- per week	4(3.8)	28(29.2)	32(16)
Rs 10-15/- per week	8(7.7)	16(16.7)	24(12)
Rs15-20/-per week	32(30.8)	8(8.3)	40(20)

The link between the nearby/local (particular) trader and the waste picker were noted to be usually strong, with considerable dependence of the latter on the former. In times of financial need (which occurs often), it was the nearby/local trader who extended loans/advances to the child ragpickers, thereby providing a sense of security. For them this need translated into a loyalty towards the trader, and in the process tied the picker to the trader for waste/rag collection transactions. Moreover, most such traders wielded a considerable clout within the migrated families of child ragpickers and its internal politics.

Findings revealed that sometimes the junk dealers provided the child ragpickers certain facilities namely food, shelter and clothing. Majority of respondents (30.5%) reported that they were allotted shelter in the form of low rented land for making temporary shelters (jhuggies). About 14% children stated that they were also provided food on festivals and personal functions by their junk dealers. They also reported that submitting their collection in early morning resulted in getting some eatables along with tea by junk dealers. Also, sometimes the good mood of junkyard dealer helped them to avail food. Some of these children stated that some junkyard dealers offered non-vegetarian food to them once a week as a kind of tip if they regularly provided them heavy amount of recyclable materials. As far as another basic need, clothing was concerned, 16% mentioned that only on certain occasions especially on Diwali they were gifted clothes or blankets. It was also reported that some junkyard dealers gifted clothes once or twice a year. The provision of these additional facilities was found to be directly proportional to performance of the child ragpickers. These facilities were a way of ensuring continuous supply of rags and other collections on the part of the ragpicker.

Sample child ragpickers mentioned that their junkyard dealers usually provided tips in the form of money to them. Out of these majority (20%) were found to get Rs 15-20 per week, 12% received Rs 10-15 per week while 16% were able to get Rs 10 per week. The amount of tips was found to vary from child to child and according to their ragpicking performance. Variation in receiving tips was predominantly linked also to the rate of productivity of recyclable materials gathered i.e., the children having good capability of picking rags were able to get higher amount of tips than the others. Amount of tip also varied from one junkyard owner to the other. The practice of providing tips helped the junkyard dealers to attract children for picking rags. Also, tips developed the interest in child ragpickers to continue ragpicking as long as possible and sell their rags to particular junkyard owners.

CONCLUSION

Results in the present study explored that ragpicking is an organised work in nature as child ragpickers worked for long hours and picked rags in Kgs from various garbage dumping sites like streets, busy markets, railway stations, municipal dustbins for earning their livelihood. It was observed that ragpickers travelled on foot to collection destinations or through routes and carry bag of their collections on their backs. They worked as ragpickers from early years of life itself. Also they had significant relationship with junk dealers. Junk dealers bind child ragpickers with ragpicking by providing incentives. Overall, it was concluded that ragpicking is seen as an unorganised activity but in reality it is organised in nature as they had their own preferences in selection of sites, selection of waste materials and so on. There is a need to understand the structure of ragpicking and the codes associated with it so that, the young children can be safe guard against exploitation.

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