

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND HEALTH STATUS OF AUTO – RICKSHAW DRIVERS OF CALICUT CITY

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Abstract: India is experiencing a rapid urbanization and an unprecedented growth in transport system. The Government has successfully intervened to decongest the traffic through infrastructure development. However, road fatalities, air pollution and frequent congestions are a common sight in many metros of India. Adding to the chaos is the muddled eco- system of auto-rickshaws. The informal economies of auto-rickshaws are just not a social-economic problem but also a serious ecological and health concern. This study examines the socio-economic and health status of auto drivers in Calicut city, Kozhikode District, Kerala. In this town auto transport has become a bread winning job for many men, so the researchers choose this topic to study the socio economic status and the health issues faced by the auto drivers.

Key words : *socio-economic and health status, parallel transportation, auto –rickshaw- drivers*

Introduction

As a parallel transportation facility, auto-rickshaw transportation plays an important role in the city life .Auto rickshaw requires less road spaces compared to taxies. Auto run 25km/ litter petrol, while taxies will run only 12/km petrol, so auto-rickshaws reduce 50% of fuel consumption and pollution. Auto rickshaw industry provides great number of job opportunity to the unemployed people in India. Majority of the population in the country earn their livelihood by working in the informal sector. The informal sector activities have been the backbone of any economy across the globe. This sector contributes to the world economy significantly in terms of employment, production of goods and services. With urban growth there is a marked increase in the population in this sector consisting of skilled, semiskilled and unskilled persons representing the illiterates, traditionally oppressed, vulnerable, and economically poor and socially exploited migrating from rural areas to cities in search of comparatively better income opportunities and a chance to have better living conditions. The hope for better tomorrow makes these people work for days and nights without any restrictions on working hours and rest hours without adequate holidays and proper working conditions.

The informal sector refers to those economic activities, where individuals and small groups of people and families are engaged in the work largely unprotected by the welfare legislation. The occupation in this sector is marked by social traditional compulsions, poverty, illiteracy, helplessness deprivation and so on. The major problems of informal sector in urban areas related to housing, safe working conditions, sufficient welfare provisions, adequate social security and decent health. The governmental initiatives and policies are still not strictly implemented and adequately encompassing the problems of the huge chunk of these workers viz the street vendors, construction workers, agriculture workers, auto rickshaw drivers and domestic servants. The overall conditions of workers in the informal sector remain very miserable. With globalization, they are sliding down the ladder of development and have fallen victims to be machination and manipulation. They are subjected to a chain of ruthless exploitation by malfunctioning and dysfunctional middlemen.

In these circumstances, these workers do not enjoy the benefits of old age pension, provision funds, maternity benefits, accidents claims, medical benefits and many other welfare and social security benefits related to the conditions of work and live. Auto-rickshaws are an important part of urban mobility and a step to improving sustainable transportation, as well as quality of life in Indian cities. Integrating auto-rickshaw services as a feeder mode complements public transportation systems, ensuring connectivity and easy access throughout the city. Auto-rickshaws also bridge the gap between public transport and door-to-door services, providing an alternative to private vehicles.

Despite this role, auto-rickshaws and their drivers face considerable criticism from the public, the media and policy makers. There is a continuous public debate about the perceived faults of auto-rickshaws and their drivers, and the policies to address these issues in Indian cities. My objective is to provide balance and nuance to this debate, and to enable the perspective of drivers to be more effectively considered, along with that of auto-rickshaw users and the wider travelling public, in policy-making. The actual congestion, safety and air pollution impacts of auto-rickshaws

are at strong variance with the criticisms and perceptions on the part of the public, media and policy makers. The realities of auto-rickshaw operation are extremely challenging, and unlikely to place the driver and his family above the poverty line, which may drive some of the actions, such as not going by the meter. Finally, this paper critically assess policy recommendations to address the issues related to auto-rickshaws and their drivers, and offer suggestions regarding open permit systems, improved access to formal sector credit, a time table for regular fare revision and the phasing out of auto rickshaws with two-stroke engines.

Data from various cities of India show that auto-rickshaws serve between 10 to 20 per cent of daily motorized urban transport trips. While a significant portion of daily passenger trips rely on auto-rickshaws, the population in Indian cities is estimated to grow to 590 million by 2030, increasing with it the share of those who depend on inexpensive and comprehensive urban transportation. The efficiency, reliability and affordability of the auto-rickshaw industry will become paramount in the dense and congested cities of India.

Even though this section is a great job market for its unemployed, the auto drivers are facing lot of hurdles in their life. In a close analysis we can see that the living conditions of auto drivers are not satisfactory. They are unable to maintain a standard of living due to uncertain earnings. Their mode of life is conditioned by the income that they earn. Lion portion of auto drivers are from lower class and even BPL.

In every city, among auto drivers, trade unions actives are very common. By trade union activity they are trying to ensure their collectiveness and there by protect their rights. Auto drivers' unions are the back bone of every political party in city area. Auto drivers faces many problems like non availability of parking places, increasing fuel price , increasing road taxes, continuously changing traffics rules etc. The fuel hike is the major problem faced by the auto drivers and these hikes are not often conformity with the fare fixed by the government. Majority of auto drivers are unaware of health effects of noise and pollution which they are suffering. Continues sitting in the driving position exert considerable forces on spines and causes a number of health problems to auto drivers like back pain, headache, allergic problems, stress and general stiffness.

As a cross section of auto drivers in other cities in India the auto drivers in Calicut city is also facing similar socio-economic problems. This study is an attempt to analyses, the socio economic and health status of auto drivers in Calicut city. Auto-rickshaws play an important role in urban transport in India. Crores of commuters mainly depend on the auto drivers for safe journey to reach their destination. Auto rickshaws are used in cities and towns for short distances, they are less suited to long distances because they are slow and the carriages are open to air pollution.

The work of an auto driver is highly responsible one he is responsible for safety and punctuality ,the job also requires a high level of concentration and alertness.

The auto rickshaw drivers in Kerala are facing tough times due to various factors, including increasing prices of fuel and spare parts, hike in the insurance premiums, the active presence of internet ride sharing company Uber which is much popular among the younger generation and the increasing the use of private vehicles. The drivers include both men and women and they do not get proper toilet facilities even though they have complained to the public authorities constantly. Many drivers were forced to look for other jobs due to the increasing cost of maintaining the vehicles The traffic police often fine them for parking vehicles at no-parking zones due to lack of space and congestion at places like beach road.

Due to lack of proper space to live, water and sanitation and unhealthy and unhygienic living conditions make these auto drivers more vulnerable to ill health which results in to loss of working days and extra expenditure on getting medical aid to resume the work again. All these factors like working, living and health are interconnected and have direct impact on individual's day to day life. With the backdrop this information on key variable related to living conditions of auto drivers in Calicut city were explored. Availability of the basics facilities in the house of Kerala drivers is a mark of healthy and comfort living. The house should have basic facilities like water, electricity, toilet, kitchen, store and proper sewerage condition in normal or middle class houses. But these facilities lack in the accommodation of auto drivers and it may of them were having these necessary provision in the house they are not in the qualitative in nature. These auto drivers don't enjoy any type of health and medical benefits in course of illness and occupational injuries. Apart from this, many of these auto drivers do not get the benefits of various governmental welfare facilities like public distribution system (PDS), provision for free education etc.... due to the fact that either they are not aware about these welfare provisions or lacks proper documentation to claim the benefits.

Review of Literature

Sethuraman(1977) stated in his papers that, informal sector enterprises are located in or near slum areas. A vast majority of them either have no premises at all or carry on their business in tents, shacks or other temporary structures. Most have no access to water or electricity. Frequently they are shifted far from the market where they must sell their goods and services.

The study of Mahesh Chand (February, 1979) aimed at studying the characteristics of auto-rickshaw transport system and to suggest methods to improve in the service. This study did not attempt to study the socio-economic problems and issues of auto-drivers. But the study suggested improving the auto rickshaw at Bangalore.

Paola (1981) studied the economics, socio-economic characteristics, migration, employment and earning of the employees of the informal sector in Ahmadabad.

The other surveys conducted by S.P. Sinha and S.N. Remade (1981) explored the economic, employment, wages, welfare facilities and socio demographic characteristics of women construction workers in Delhi and Bihar.

Walker (1981) conducted a socio-economic study of rickshaw pullers in the city of Nagpur. Nagpur has the highest number of registered cycle-rickshaw pullers in the country. It is interesting, even in the present days of modernization much against to Bangalore where the commuters do not believe 'one man pulling the other man 'then the number of cycle rickshaw pullers are increasing.

Anvitha Anand and Rajendra Ravi (2002) have studied in their study that the badge training program conducted for auto rickshaw drivers in Delhi has been a step towards fostering socially responsible behavior on the part of the drivers. The study also reveals the governmental effort and to discuss the improvements need in public transport system.

Christ raja (2006) also made a study on the unorganized workers. This is the living and working conditions of cycle rickshaws pullers in Tiruchirappalli district, Tamilnadu. The absolute insufficiency in the earnings makes it impossible for the rickshaw pullers to have savings for themselves for their depends to meet their needs in old age or periods of sickness and unemployment. This causes greater insecurity for these workers who are in this field and whose working conditions remain in a very precarious state.

Aprana Bhatt (2011) tried to examine the political economic that determines the functioning Mumbai's auto-rickshaws system it looks at the various factors involved and interested parties in the system and current issues faced due to the political economy. The paper also examined the validity of the reasons for imposing the regulations in the auto rickshaws system, and thus for the creations of the political economy.

S. Sethuraman (Dec 2014) is of the opinion that the informal economics of the auto – rickshaws are not just a socio-economic problems but a serious ecological concern. This study concentrates on the current socio-economic condition of auto- rickshaw drivers, the prospects and the problems encountered by the stakeholders and the role of social organization in transforming the lives, at large in Palani, this study concluded that the cause for stress and the uncongenial behavior, as voiced and as evident from the research, is related to their financial or economic crunches.

Rajesh Raja (2015) examined the relation between work life balance and quality of life among auto rickshaw drivers in Mumbai. The author has assessed components of work life balance on time balance. The study constitute not only valuable insights and attract the attention towards the deteriorating condition of the auto rickshaw drivers and highlight their work lives, but also provide a tentative point towards the greater understanding of current scenario under which the auto-rickshaws drivers are performing their duty.

Objective

- To study the socio-economic and health status of auto driers in Calicut city area.
- To understand the major problems faced by the auto drivers in Calicut city area.

Research Methodology

Data are collected by giving questionnaire and through observation. This study pertains to collection of data from primary data by questionnaire and secondary data includes periodicals, books and from the websites also. The total number 50 samples have been selected at random. Statistical techniques are used for analysis of data.

Analysis

Kozhikode is a city in Kerala, India and the headquarters of the Kozhikode district. The Kozhikode metropolitan area is the second largest urban agglomeration in Kerala with a population of 2 million as of 2011. The city of Kozhikode is 410 kilometres (255 mi) north of the state capital Thiruvananthapuram. There are approximately 4,537 auto rickshaws in the city and there is not enough parking slots for them.

Table 1 Age and education classification of respondents

Age of the Auto Driver		Education of the Auto Driver	
20-30	12	Below SSLC	17
30-40	10	SSLC	24
40-50	17	PLUS 2	8
50-60	11	Degree	1
		PG	0
		Other	0

Sources : primary data

The above data shows that more than one third of the respondents are between 40 to 50 years old, and majority of the respondents have above secondary level education.

Table 2 Domicile details of the respondents

Respondents	Number
Living in slum area	2
Rehabilitated dwelling	3
Rented house	8
Own house constructed through government support	14
Own pucca house	12

Sources : primary data

The domicile details of the respondents are given in table 2. It is understood that 4% of the auto-drivers dwell in slums that are thatch roofed or make-shift residence. About 6% of the respondents live in slum rehabilitated dwelling. 16% of the respondents live in rented house, and about 28% of the respondents own the government facilitated slum rehabilitated houses. 24% have their own house.

A deeper look into the respondents' family income and number of income/ wage earners revealed that additional income from the other family members was required to support the family. The Table 3 reflects the average income from operating auto -rickshaw and the average family income.

Table 3 Income of the Respondents

Monthly income from operating Auto		Average family income	
Rupees	Response	Rupees	Response
<5000	02	<5000	00
5000-10000	14	5000-10000	14
10000-15000	20	10000-15000	22
15000-20000	12	15000-20000	11
20000-25000	2	20000-25000	2
>25000	00	>25000	01

Sources : primary data

The study shows that nearly three fourth (72%) of the respondents were earning less than ₹15000 per month. There were one third (28%) of the respondents were earning above ₹15000. It shows that the respondent's income is not permanent one ; it may differ according to the effort taken by the driver or on the customer frequency. Thus with this fluctuations in the income the auto drivers cannot meet their day today needs like food, clothing, shelter etc.

Table 4 Based on work experience

Particular	No. of respondents	percentage
1-5 year	13	26
6-10 year	12	24
10-15 year	8	16
Above 15 year	17	34
Total	50	100

Sources : primary data

The above table shows 26% of auto drivers have 1-5 year work experience, 24% of auto drives have 6- Sources : 10years work experience. And 16% of auto drivers have 10-15 years' work experience, 34% of auto drivers have above 15 years work experiences.

Table 5. Based on Membership in welfare scheme of the respondents

Particular	No. of respondents	Percentage
Having welfare schemes	20	40
Having no welfare scheme	30	60
Total	50	100

Sources : primary data

The above table illustrates the welfare scheme that the auto drivers have 40% of the auto drivers have welfare scheme and 60% of the auto drivers do not have any welfare schemes. The auto drivers those who have welfare schemes claimed that it was not useful and did not help them in any way. They said it was just waste of their money.

Table 6. Classification on the basis of saving habits

Particular	No. of respondents	Types of savings	No. of respondents
Have savings	24	National banks / post office	15
Do not have savings	26	Private Banks	2
Total	50	Chit-funds	7

Sources : primary data

From the study, it is understood that their financial planning, credit and cash management strategies and investment decisions are adhoc, unorganized and poor in its capacity. The above table illustrates the habits of saving of respondents. It shows that 48% have the habit of saving and majority of them use formal sector for their savings

Borrowing methods

From the data collected it was evident that nearly majority (70%) of the respondents have debt. There were around one third (30%) of the respondents who said that they do not have any debt. It shows that the most of the respondents have debt. Thus it explains that the auto drivers since they don't have proper savings. A closer look at the borrowing behavior reveals the unawareness level of auto-drivers, their desperateness to borrow and the inherent social malice present in the system that exploits their non-exposure to reliable funding sources, illiteracy and their forlorn for money.

Health Status Distribution of Respondents by Physical illness

From the data collected it was clear that all (100%) the respondents said that they have some physical illness. It shows that the all the respondents are having physically illness due to their work and with the low income they were unable to meet their medical treatment. The medical assistance is also dissatisfied.

Table 7. Common Health Problems faced

Disease	No. of respondents	Percentage
Back pain	3	6
Piles	10	20
Eye Sight defect	3	6
Heart Diseases	5	10
Respiratory problems	11	22
Stress	16	32

Sources: primary data

From the above data it was evident that the respondents face many health problems due to the job which they are doing. Around one fourth (20%) of the respondents said that they had piles problem and one fifth (20%) said that they had stress due to their job and their economical imbalance. And few others said they suffer from health problems like back pain, eye sight defect, heart diseases, and significantly 22% have respiratory problems. It can be inferred

that since the auto drivers work in a motor vehicle they get diseases due to overheat (both body heat and the vehicle heat).

Table 8. Most Frequently used Methods of Coping Stress number of Respondent

Method used to overcome stress	No. of respondents
Taking off the work	01
Family get together	01
Entertainment	02
Smoking and / or consuming alcohol	9
Drugs	0
Other	3

Sources: primary data

Though, the respondents adopt many methods to cope stress, their most frequently used and preferred methods that except 43%, the drivers are prone to maladies of alcohol or tobacco consumption.

Findings

In this research the major findings were based on the social status which the auto drivers share in the society, the economical status based on their income and the health issues faced by them due to their job. It was found that majority (70%) of the respondents said that they were not given with proper status in the society. It was evident that nearly half (40%) of the respondents said that they earn only Rs.3000 to Rs. 6000 per month, which is not sufficient for them to take care of themselves and their family. They struggle to manage even their basic needs and because of this problem the auto drivers majority (70%) of them get debt from their relatives or from people who own a financial office. From the research it was clear that all (100%) of the respondents said that they face various health problems due to their job, few health issues were Piles problem, Stress, Respiratory problems, Eye sight issues and Heart diseases.

Suggestions

The drivers face many occupational health hazards. They reveal that they find it difficult to visit a hospital for taking treatment since they consider that instead of spending money on for treatment it can be better used for their family's welfare and children's education .The auto drivers' major problem is stress which is because of their poor social and economical status. So some drivers adopt various stress-coping mechanisms to overcome physical and mental stress. Some follow negative habit like smoking, consuming alcohol and chewing tobacco and tobacco related products. But some drivers have positive habits like listening to the radio or talking to fellow drivers, spending time with their family. Thus, most drivers engage in multiple activities to cope up with the stress. They have less leisure time, which also adds to their strain. Government should provide adequate welfare scheme to the auto drivers. Government authorities (traffic polices) should cooperate better with the auto drivers. The minimum meter charge of the auto should be fixed according to the petrol and diesel price changes. Provide government support like health ,Insurance, education loan, and vehicle loan. Provide rest room or leisure room facility

Conclusion

Among the autorickshaw drivers in Kerala, Calicut auto drivers are considered as most reliable and sincere ones. The study shows that the socio economic condition of the auto drivers in Calicut city is average. They fits into the position of lower middle class . They are not satisfied with the welfare scheme of the government and many are unaware of the welfare scheme of the government. Majority of the auto drivers do not have any savings habits.

The research study auto drivers show a remarkable impact on their socio-economic and health perspective. As they live hand to mouth in their day today life, the challenges faced by them are enormous. At times they feel like fish out of water and the future remain always uncertain. The main reason derived from the study is that, these auto drivers are looked down by the people of that locality and they are not rewarded respectable social status for their commitment. So based on these backgrounds the researcher concludes with the note that the socio-economic and health issues needed to be addressed immediately to protect their health, preserve their generation and promote their wellbeing.

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