



A Comparative Study of Literature Reviews: Rag-Pickers in Urban Slums

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Abstract

Waste picking is an activity that helps in the reduction of solid waste created by the masses at homes, industries, farms, and other processing units. It also directly influences the impact of waste on the environment. Large landfills can be observed in almost all the cities where one finds waste pickers working in filth to collect recyclable material to earn a living. The objective of this paper is to carry out a review of previously available study material on rag pickers or waste pickers as they are known in various places. In the process, an attempt is made to review some of the academic articles, research material, conference papers, material available in the public domain, and other published material on the subject or related subjects. The purpose of this review is to compile the understanding and the opinions of previous authors on the subject of the life of rag pickers in urban slums who generally are understood to be the lowest strata of society, remain underprivileged and deprived of decent human living.

Keywords— *Rag Pickers, Waste Management, Environment Protection, Recycling, Scavenging*

Introduction

(Adeyemi, 2001) opined that waste management is considered one of the most serious environmental problems facing the world today in both developed and developing countries. With the growing population and changing consumption patterns, the production of solid waste has increased and has reached an alarming stage all over the world. It has impacted the environment and caused serious concern over human health. There are millions of people across the world who are formally and informally involved in the waste picking activity. While the formal pickers work in an organized environment, the informal waste pickers continue to work in hazardous work environments causing grave concern for their health. As per ILO (2004), scavenging is an activity that involves manual picking of recyclable material, sorting it out of the mixed waste from various landfills, dump sites, living areas, and industries, and further disposing for recycling to earn money to make a living. This informal economic

activity provides employment and income to many million people worldwide, mostly living in the cities of developing countries. The informal scavenging communities the world over not only can manage their survival but also augment efforts in sustainable development and environmental protection a fact, that which commonly ignored. The waste pickers continue to live in undesirable, un-hygienic conditions without proper health care, work in hazardous work environments, without any social security, lack educational opportunities, and lead a life of stigma attached to their work.

The objective of this paper is to conduct a literature review of the already published work related to the socio-economic conditions of the rag pickers in urban slums and other related issues with their functioning. In the process, an attempt has been made to review some of the academic articles, research material, conference papers, material available in the public domain, and other published material on the subject. The researcher has a data bank of 40 such articles but for this study, a total of 20 studies have been taken out of which 15 studies relate to the Indian work and living environment of rag pickers and 5 to other countries having almost similar conditions.

Summary of Literature Reviews Carried Out on Rag-pickers in Urban Slums

S/N	Author & Year of Publication	Title of the Study	Objective of the Study	Review	Recommendations/ Observations
1	Salam, A. (2013)	Living and educational conditions of child rag pickers on base of solid waste of Guwahati City in Assam.	To study about the solid waste of Guwahati city in Assam and analyze living and educational conditions of child rag pickers.	Poverty and hunger was the major factor leading these children to work as rag pickers	There was an urgent need to look into the lives of these children who have been robbed of their childhood and design some initiatives so that they are educated and can lead a life of dignity and security.
2	Bala, R., & Singh, S. (2019).	Working Conditions, Work Hazards and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Informal Child Rag Pickers in Patiala District,	Objective of the research was to study the work environment of child rag pickers to	Maximum number of children worked in the garbage dumps or collect waste from the households and	There was a need for strict implementation of legislation against employment of children in hazardous occupation since they had no access to

		Punjab (India).	include their working hours, places of work, difficulties faced by them in carrying out their work including work hazards, protective measures adopted by them and their job satisfaction.	streets. Some of them were also involved in sorting the waste in various categories for further transportation.	immunization and vaccination against hepatitis, rabies and tetanus.
3	Iyer, S., Shah, H., Patel, J., Panchal, V., Chaudhary, S., & Parmar, T. (2023).	Exploring the Lives of Women Rag Pickers in an Indian Metropolitan City	The study was carried out among women rag pickers in Chembur and Govandi area of Mumbai to explore their lives	Main reason for choosing this profession was their lack of education and having no other skill to work. A significant number of them were found to be addicted to alcohol and tobacco	Summary of the Study: The sex ratio of slum population was almost similar to that of urban population as their behavior towards girl child is the same in both the cases. Majority of the scheduled tribe population still continues to live in rural areas except those states where share of scheduled tribe population is higher where many of them migrate to urban slums. The study further concluded that work participation rate

					and type of workers of slum population is similar to those of urban population.
4	Chatterjee, P. (2015).	Child Ragpickers in India and violation of Their Human Rights.	To study the human right's violation of rag picker children	The kind of work done by the children, amounts to violation of their basic human rights. Even if they are not forced by anyone to do such kind of work still it will amount to violation of their basic human rights. Poverty and illiteracy are most common reasons behind any kind of violation of human rights.	Government should try to bring new schemes for the development of the deprived part of the society so that no child becomes rag picker and victim of exploitation and trafficking. Once the poverty from the society is eliminated, automatically all related problems will finish.
5	Lal, B. S. (2019).	Waste management, health hazards and earnings of child rag pickers in Telangana	To study socio-economic conditions of child rag pickers, understand their health problems and examine their earning and	Unemployment and poverty are the root causes of children getting in to rag picking and suffering from health hazards because of unhygienic	The ultimate solution to this problem is by way of social awareness and work of action groups to help develop these children's sense of social security and belongingness. Such social work requires

			<p>spending patterns.</p>	<p>practices and working conditions.</p> <p>Findings: - the ultimate solution to this problem is by way of social awareness and work of action groups to help develop these children's sense of social security and belongingness.</p>	<p>commitment and dedication from government agencies, non-government organizations and community as a whole.</p>
6	<p>Ojha, V. K., Tripathi, V., & Krishna, V. (2014).</p>	<p>Role of rag pickers in solid waste management: A case study of Mirzapur, UP.</p>	<p>To study the role of rag pickers in managing the solid waste</p>	<p>The study highlights the role of rag pickers in collection of recyclable and reusable material from the source to dumping site which as per the author's observation reduces the burden of collecting and transportation on the municipal authorities. They also observed that socio-economic status</p>	<p>The paper recommended that dumping of collected waste from different wards of Mirzapur needs good management practices since amount of solid waste has increased many folds due to increasing urbanization and life style adopted by the people. It further stated that areas for landfills should be reduced as far as possible to mitigate the harmful effects of GHG emission.</p>

				of rag pickers is at very low level. They also suffer with multiple health problems in the process of their work.	
7	Dutta, N. (2018).	Study on street children on their access to health and education.	The primary objectives of the study were to find out access to health and education in street children from 6 to 18 years old in the Indian metropolises of Mumbai and Kolkata.	The study aimed to assess the role and the effectiveness of social work intervention in ensuring the rights of vulnerable children	It is likely that no previous attempts have been made to study accessibility to both health and education of street children in these two study areas. The study has aimed to identify the role of social intervention in ensuring some of the basic rights of street children.
8	Roy, P. (2018).	Effects of poverty on education in India	To highlight impact of poverty on children in India and To understand how health and education is effected by poverty	Primary needs of people for attaining a satisfactory quality of life like food items, clean drinking water should be available more readily.	Free high school education and increased number of functioning health centers should be provided by the government. Necessary steps to develop health and education sectors in North East states will go a long way in improving the quality of life of people.
9	Santoshi, K. &	Prevalence of health	Objective was	It was found that	The study revealed

	UV, Kiran. (2022).	problems of rag pickers due to various hazards at Lucknow.	to find out causes of health problems amongst the rag pickers.	women suffer with more health problems than the men because of mal-nutrition and fragile health. In this study it was revealed that majority of the rag pickers had migrated from Assam, Bihar and West Bengal.	that rag pickers generally suffer from skin problems like itching and dermatitis, respiratory problems, eye problems, diarrhea and dysentery, cuts due to handling sharp objects, cough-cold and fever and multiple health challenges because of operating in hazardous work environment
10	Soni. P. (2014).	A study on rag pickers of Delhi	In this study the researcher focused on the social and economic conditions of rag pickers.	The findings of the study showed that the lives of rag pickers in Delhi were affected badly on the grounds of their income, living conditions, and access to basic amenities like education and healthcare	There was need to improve the living conditions, health care and education of the rag pickers. They had limited access to amenities because of their low earning capacity which needed to improve.
11	Suresh, L. B., & Chary, T. J. (2006).	An Empirical Study On Child Rag pickers In Warangal City	Objectives of the study were to find out the socio-economic background of child rag	The major finding is that a situation has been created due to the existing social, political, and economic	Government as well as other national and international non-government organizations are working and implementing various

			pickers and to assess the working conditions and exploitation of the child rag pickers .	pressures in society which needs to be addressed at the grass root level, through an attitudinal change in the society.	plans for child welfare in the area but efforts are not enough to bring substantial changes to improve the conditions of child labor.
12	Khan, D. M., & Mawon, S. (2023).	A study of urban Child labor in Nagaland, India	To examine the socio-economic-cultural background of the rag pickers and to assess the perspectives of child rag pickers on their reasons for engaging in rag picking.	The findings of this study revealed the dark reality of the lives of rag pickers, all of who were out of school with majority having to discontinue their studies after completing only 1st-5th standard. The major reason cited was to support their family because income was insufficient to support their education.	. The need for food and survival becomes the driving force for the children entering the rag picking occupation which also acts as a hindrance to their education. There was need for the government and other agencies to ensure that children are supported for their education.
13	Prasad, R., & Gupta, N. (2016).	Problems and prospects of slums in India.	The authors of this article are architects and working as teaching	The paper states that the success of any scheme depends on the data available in	Aim of any development plan is to improve the living conditions of people living in deplorable

			<p>faculty in the relevant conditions and different documents but it integrate them with the institutions of is generally growing cities. But, Rajasthan. The observed that most of the initiatives paper gives out data of the remained only partially definitions of targeted successful as the slums, population is not population in the slums associated accurately continued to grow and problems of maintained also there were many dwellers, resulting in to administrative and various failure of various governance reasons legislations schemes because of which the related with the proposed for programs could not slums and development. reach the beneficiaries. suggestions to improve the quality of life of the residents and other miscellaneous issues.</p>
14	Bele, T. K. (2023).	Child Rag Pickers: A Sociological Study in Nagpur City.	<p>Objectives of this study were to understand socio-economic status of child rag pickers, assessing their working conditions and impact on their health of the work environment</p> <p>The study was analytical as well as descriptive in nature. It was revealed that school dropout rate was high however; boys were found to be more literate than girls. Working and living conditions of these children</p> <p>The study recommended that child labor was a social problem the government and other social agencies should get involved in resolving this issue. This problem should be addressed with human centric approach where the main focus should be on investment in peoples' potential,</p>

				were unhygienic and they were under constant threat of being infected by multiple health problems. Many of the children were not able to earn money to buy even two meals a day and substantial number survived on one meal only.	enable them to learn new skills to make them employable so that they are financially secured.
15	Khambeka, A. S., Joshi, M. D., Joshi, & Godam, S. S. (2020).	“A Study of Occupational Health Hazards among Women Rag pickers in the Marathwada Region of Maharashtra state	Objectives of the research are to study occupational health risks to women waste pickers, their physical and mental health issues, common illnesses and availability of medical facilities.	Women collected waste from municipal dustbins, dumping grounds and street corners. Their health and hygiene depended upon the work place environment which always is dirty and hazardous. Most of them get cuts while collecting glass, metals, tin, screw, nails and other sharp	The study recommended certain measures to make their life better which included provision of information of government schemes, awareness of their rights, education opportunities, medical facilities, skill development programs and legal aids etc. drinking water and toilet facilities should be provided near their work places. They should be encouraged to wear protective gears at work.

				<p>objects. They also get bitten by dogs, pigs, rats and snakes and reason is that they do not wear any protective gear like gum boots and gloves. Most common health problems reported by women rag pickers were itching in the eyes, joint pains, backache, vomiting, common cold, fever and skin problems.</p>	
16	Dhungel, D. (2016).	Working status of rag pickers in the Kathmandu valley.	The objectives of the study were to identify the economic background of rag pickers, causes of child rag pickers who turned into this profession and to find the general	The study brings out detailed information on the problems and socio- economic background of child rag pickers in Kathmandu Valley. Special focus is given to family background from which rag pickers originate	Size of family was influenced in general by sociological reasons besides economic reasons. The national average of family size in Nepal is 5.1. Poor families have normally high fertility rates and hence bigger family size. The parents of bigger family are unable to provide food and shelter to all the

			working conditions and health status of rag pickers.		family members. Children lack opportunities for education and good health, and run away from home. These are some of the factors to prompt a child to join the group of rag-pickers. Overall discussions led to the conclusion that poverty and illiteracy of parents were the major factors for growing numbers of child rag-pickers in Nepal. The overall working conditions of the rag-pickers children were found to be far from satisfactory. Living conditions were extremely poor with no hygiene and sanitation.
17	Gitau, M. W. (2019)	Analysis of the role of waste pickers on informal solid waste management: A case of Roysambu Constituency, Nairobi County.	The study focused on the income, education levels and access to healthcare services of the rag pickers	The study sample consisted of rag pickers from various regions of Nairobi, ensuring a diverse representation of their socio-economic	The findings of this study highlight the socio-economic profile of rag pickers in Nairobi. Income levels were found to be generally low with many participants struggling to meet their basic needs. Access to education was limited

				experiences.	with a significant number of rag pickers lacking formal education or having minimal educational qualifications.
18	Gutberlet, J., Sorroche, S., Martins Baeder, A., Zapata, P., & Zapata Campos, M. J. (2021).	Waste pickers and their practices of insurgency and environmental stewardship.	Objective of the study was to gain insight of the living and working conditions of Buenos Aires, Argentina.	Waste pickers play a vital role in waste management and recycling, yet their working environments and socio-economic conditions often present significant challenges. A comprehensive research approach, utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data on the living and working conditions of waste pickers, was adopted.	The findings of this study reveal the complex living and working conditions faced by waste pickers in Buenos Aires. Understanding their realities is essential for developing targeted interventions aimed at improving their livelihoods and well-being, enhancing income levels, ensuring safe working environments, promoting social protection, and enhancing access to healthcare services are vital steps towards empowering waste pickers and fostering a more equitable society.
19	Masood, M., & Barlow, C. Y. (2013).	Framework for integration of informal waste management sector	The study focused on the income, living conditions,	The research sheds light on the socio-economic	The study recommended that enhancing income levels, improving

		with the formal sector in Pakistan.	access to education and healthcare services. The research sheds light on the socio-economic conditions experienced by rag pickers in Lahore.	conditions of the rag pickers at Lahore. Recognizing the challenges, they face is essential for developing targeted interventions aimed at improving their livelihoods.	living conditions and ensuring access to education and healthcare services are crucial steps towards empowering rag pickers and fostering a more equitable society. Integrating rag pickers into waste management systems and creating opportunities for skill development will go a long way in their social and economic upliftment.
20	Raihan, M. M. H., Islam, M. N., Rouf, A., Begum, A., Rahman, M. M., Murad, M., & Das, S. (2014).	Health care situation of migrant slum women; Evidence from Sylhet City of Bangla Desh	The aim of the study was to analyze socio-economic condition, living conditions and types of various ailments suffered by the women.	The study revealed that the women have very limited access to economic and social opportunities, specifically the health care. No standard sanitary latrines or urinals were available and the slum women had to often defecate in open and kuchcha latrines. Garbage is	Women go for modern medical assistance, although some of them use traditional treatment because poor earnings and non-affordability of expensive treatment. Since the quality of life is very poor, they are unaware of their health seeking behavior, particularly reproductive health problems.

				disposed close to the living areas which makes them incessantly suffer from a variety of diseases like headache, skin diseases, worms, fever, cough and cold, jaundice and dysentery.	
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Discussions & Summary

The objective of this paper is to carry out a comparative literature review of already published work at multiple cities within India and some of the other countries of the world related to the demography, socio-economic conditions, and issues related to the living and working conditions of rag pickers in urban slums. In the process, an attempt has been made to review some of the academic articles, research material, conference papers, material available in the public domain, and other published material on the subject. Major findings and issues are being discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

It was revealed that the children of the rag pickers were the major sufferers because they were robbed of their childhood without any of their faults. There was an urgent need to look into their lives and design some initiatives so that they are educated and lead a life of dignity, pride, and security. The Government should try to bring new schemes for the development of this deprived part of society so that no child becomes a rag picker and victim of exploitation and trafficking. Once poverty in society is eliminated, automatically all related problems will finish. There was a need for strict implementation of legislation against the employment of children in hazardous occupations since they had no access to immunization and vaccination against hepatitis, rabies, and tetanus. It was likely that no previous attempts had been made to study accessibility to both health and education of street children in some of the study areas thus, the importance of the role of social intervention in ensuring some of the basic rights of street children was recommended. The government as well as other national and international non-government organizations were working to implement various plans for child welfare in the area but efforts were not enough to bring substantial changes to improve the conditions of child rag pickers. Child labor is a social problem, and the government and other social agencies should get involved in resolving this issue. The problem

should be addressed with human human-centric approach where the main focus should be on investment in peoples' potential, enabling them to learn new skills to make them employable so that they are financially secure.

The sex ratio of the slum population was almost similar to that of the urban population as their behavior towards girl children was found to be the same in both cases. The majority of the scheduled tribe population continued to live in rural areas except for those states where the share of the scheduled tribe population was higher and many of them migrated to urban slums. The study further concluded that the work participation rate and type of workers of the slum population were similar to those of the urban population.

The ultimate solution to the waste management, health hazards, and employment of child rag pickers was by way of social awareness and work of action groups to help develop these children's sense of social security and belongingness. Such social work requires commitment and dedication from government agencies, non-government organizations, and the community as a whole. Emphasis was laid on the development of health and education sectors in North- East states of India where it was found that the quality of life of people involved in rag picking was too much below the expectation.

Studies on the health problems of rag pickers due to various hazards related to their work revealed that they generally suffered from skin problems like itching and dermatitis, respiratory problems, eye problems, diarrhea and dysentery, cuts due to handling sharp objects, cough-cold and fever and multiple health challenges because of operating in hazardous work environment. They did not have access to medical facilities due to poor economic conditions. Most of them were not able to avail themselves of government medical aid because of a lack of proper identity documents. Many programs have been initiated by the authorities but most of the initiatives remained only partially successful as the population in the slums continued to grow and also there were many administrative and governance reasons because of which the programs could not reach the beneficiaries. A specific study on women rag pickers revealed that they were not aware of the government schemes, their rights as woman workers, educational opportunities, skill development programs, and legal aids available to women workers.

The study carried out in Nepal revealed that the size of a family was influenced in general by sociological reasons besides economic reasons. The national average of family size in Nepal was 5. Poor families had normally high fertility rates resulting into more number of family members. The parents of the bigger family were unable to provide food and shelter to all the family members. Children lack opportunities for education and good health and run away from home. These are some of the factors to prompt a child to join a group of rag-pickers. Overall discussions led to the conclusion that poverty and illiteracy of parents were the major factors for the growing numbers of child rag-pickers in Nepal. The overall working conditions of the rag-picker's children were found to be far from satisfactory. Living conditions were extremely poor with no hygiene and sanitation. The study findings at Nairobi in Kenya revealed that Income levels of waste pickers were generally low with many participants struggling to meet their basic needs. Access to education was limited with a significant number of rag pickers lacking formal education or having minimal educational qualifications. In Buenos Aires, Argentina,

understanding the complex living and working conditions faced by waste pickers and their realities was essential for developing targeted interventions aimed at improving their livelihoods and well-being. Enhancing their income levels, ensuring safe working environments, promoting social protection, and enhancing access to healthcare services were vital steps towards empowering waste pickers and fostering a more equitable society. The study at Lahore in Pakistan recommended that integrating rag pickers into waste management systems and creating opportunities for skill development will go a long way in their social and economic upliftment. The study of the health care situation at Sylhet City of Bangla Desh of the migrant slum women felt that very few women go for modern medical assistance whereas most of them use traditional treatment because of poor earnings and non-affordability of expensive treatment. Since their quality of life was very poor, they were unaware of their health-seeking behavior, particularly reproductive health problems.

Good management practices were required since the amount of solid waste had increased many folds due to increasing urbanization and the lifestyle adopted by the people. As far as possible, the numbers and size of the landfills needed to be reduced to mitigate the harmful effects of GHG emissions. There was a need to integrate the informal Solid Waste Management with the formal systems existing in urban towns the world over. The waste pickers need to be treated with dignity as they have a significant contribution to keeping our environment safe.

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