

Rickshaw Pullers of Dhaka city- development of a new schedule cast in modern society

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Abstract:

Rickshaw pullers of Dhaka city- Development of a new schedule cast in modern society a descriptive study had been carried out in four different locations within Dhaka city among the current rickshaw pullers, during the period of May to July of 2014. This was a cross sectional descriptive study. Non probability purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Pretested structured questionnaire was used to take interview. In the study it was observed that out of 120 respondents 28(23%) rickshaw pullers were satisfied with their living hood and 23(17%) were maintaining their family by providing 3 times food , separate housing, tap water, using sanitary latrine, sending their children to school etc. The living standard of the rest of 92(77%) rickshaw pullers were below average, that was their nutritional, physical, housing, sanitation, educational, psychological and other all socio-economic parameters were low and becoming worse to worst. The rickshaw pullers were always blamed for the jam and

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clogging of the traffic system of the Dhaka city and govt. was closing major roads one by one to face out of the rickshaws from Dhaka city. Despite of the threat of eliminating the rickshaws, despite various harassments from different corners e,g non issuing of licenses by DCC, harassments by DMP polices, harassment by local terrorist, harassments by the passengers, tearful nature of job itself, extreme effects of weather etc, the number of rickshaws were increasing irresistibly. Despite knowing the threat of major road accidents, knowing every day threat of payment to rickshaw owners whether they could paddle or not, knowing the most probable outcome of becoming disable due to chronic exhausting and stressful job. These people did not find other profession and choose rickshaw pulling as a profession. At the last but not the least the social stigma, which were isolating the rickshaw pullers and their family members from their community, even the close relatives feel shame to maintain communication with them, their daughters or sons cannot be married within their original community members. With all other occupational hazards the rickshaw pullers and their family members suffered from a serious psychological trauma when they saw, in reality, they were no more members of their community rather they had become members of a new schedule cast in the modern society.

Key words: Rickshaw Pullers, Schedule cast, Modern society

Introduction

The citizens of developed countries like Europe, North America, Japan, China etc are increasingly using bicycle and feel proud as many can make trips by bicycle. Though most of their roads have no traffic still they prefer as they know cycling is good for health, take little space, cost saving and very important is that bicycles make no pollution for environment. With the development of civilization the discrimination among professions is thinning out and nowadays the cleaners and the executive of the office sit together for the tea break on the same table. Whereas in Bangladesh the social and cultural gaps are

widening among the people based on their respective jobs viz, the fishermen, cleaners, etc. Among of all rickshaw pullers have become the victim of this socio cultural discrimination drawn them to most downcast section of the community. And as usual the policy makers do not bother for this social discrimination, though our country is also a signatory of UN chartered to work vigorously for promotion of human right and the welfare of the citizen of the country. In Bangladesh the number of rickshaws is increasing rapidly! In 1941 Dhaka city had only 37 rickshaws, in 1947 the number was 181, in 1962 there were 4025. After liberation migration of rural people to Dhaka city increased rapidly. In 1974 around 14,000 rickshaws were in Dhaka city. In the year 1962 -1983 the number of rickshaws was double to 28,703, by the end of 1986-1987 the number of rickshaws were 88,000. Off course these are official record registered from DCC. But according to various government authorities and journalist of newspapers the figure could be around 150,000 to 200,000 rickshaws in roads of Dhaka city during this period of 1986-1987. In another report it is seen that in the year 2005 there were around 500,000 rickshaws in Dhaka city.¹ This rickshaw pullers are contributing one third of the value added in the transport sector of the Dhaka city.² At present there is no accurate figure of rickshaws in Dhaka city, but in the year of 2012 around 700,000 to 800,000 rickshaws are operating in street of Dhaka and employ more than one million people. Every day about 7 million passenger trips were made in Dhaka city by rickshaws which are over a distance of 11millions passenger's miles. This is nearly double the output of London subway.³ Now the number of rickshaws are more than 10,00,000. On an average they have to maintain 3 members of each family that is their number is around 40,00,000 Socio-economically this vast population are dwelling inhuman life. The policy makers of the govt. and different non govt. sectors don't have any visible

activities for the improvement of living standard among this population.

Methodology

A cross sectional study was conducted to assess the living standard of rickshaw pullers. The duration of the study was a period of 3 months from May to July 2014. Study was carried out at: Comolapur, Purana Paltan, Hatirpul, Green Road. Study Population; A total of 120 rickshaw pullers were included in this study Any rickshaw puller who had signed or given finger print on informed consent was included in the study and those who were involved in rickshaw pulling as part time job. The rickshaw puller who refused to sign or to give finger print on the consent paper was excluded. A questionnaire were prepared and used for data collection. The instruments were prepared keeping in view the research questions, objectives and variables of the study, calculator and weight machine. Data were collected through face to face interview of the respondents. At the end of the day, individual questionnaire was checked to see whether it was filled completely and consistently. Finally all the data were analyzed by using calculator. Scarcity of literature was the limitation of this study.

Result & discussion

In the summery of the study it was found from the study that poverty was one cause for deciding to choose the rickshaw pulling job as a profession. From the study it is found that out of total 120 study population 12(10%) respondents were resident of Dhaka city or its suburbs Rest 108(90%) respondents were from the villages. The reason of this 12 persons were either they have failed in their petty business, closing the business they were related or shutting down the

industries where they were working etc.

The most important reasons for rural people, that is 108(90%) of rickshaw pullers were due to job crisis and extreme poverty in the villages. The populations were increasing and cultivable lands and were causing into smaller pieces of land. On the other hand agriculture sector was most unprotected from various acute and chronic calamities viz flood, drought, erosion of land by rivers, serious price fall of agricultural products in the seasons etc. As a result, the poor peasants were becoming poorer to poorer. At one time they cannot stay more in the village and have to take decision to migrate to Dhaka city. These people migrate without any skill or capital. For them the easiest to start with Rickshaw pulling was in the streets. Age at which they have migrated to Dhaka city: People from 20 to 50 years old, had migrated to Dhaka city. In the study population of 108, 99(92%) had migrated to Dhaka city from the age of 20 to 50 years. The remaining 9(8%) were from below age of 20 year and 4(3.6%) were from above age of 50 among the respondents.

From the respondents it was found that 26(24%) of the rickshaw pullers were landless, 44(41%) rickshaw pullers had up to 30 decimals and 28(26%) rickshaw pullers had up to 60 decimals and 10(9%) of the rickshaw pullers had land in the village up to 100 or more. It was found that 23(17%) rickshaw pullers were doing well in Dhaka city and out these 21 individuals 10(9%) persons were purchasing land in the village with the view that once they will go back to their village or at least they will earn some money from the village. In the interview the fact was found that out of 108 rickshaw pullers 89(82%) persons had their home in the village and only 19(18%) persons have no home. From the questionnaire it was understood that the majority of rickshaw pullers desire to go back to their village, where they had their own home. Among some people of city there was misconception that the slum dwellers love to stay in the slum for the flavor of city life, which

was their ignorance. Without the compulsory situation nobody wants to stay in slums. The scenario was as usual. Out of 120 rickshaw pullers 103(86%) persons were married, 2(2%) persons were divorced or separated and 2(2%) person were widow. About 13(11%) persons were unmarried; they were within age range of 18 to 24 years. It was found that out of 120 respondents from age group 18-27 the illiterates were 16(13%) , from the age group of 28-47 the illiterates were 26(22%) and from the age group of 48+ the number of illiterates were 52(43%). It was found among the age group of 18-27 the number of illiterate were 16(13%). This means number of educated group was higher among the younger generation. Poverty was the cause for discontinuation of education. About 74(62%) persons were engaged in agricultural farming in their own small land, rest of the time would work on others' land, 26(22%) persons had been working as rickshaw or van pullers, 7(5.6%) persons had petty business, 3(2.2) individuals were doing services and 10(8.2%) persons had temporary job or unemployed. About 49(45%) persons rickshaw pullers had come to Dhaka city for 5 years or less than 5 years, 35(32%) persons had come to Dhaka for 10 years or less than 10 years but more than 5 years 17(16) rickshaw pullers for 16 years or less than 16 years but more than 10 years and 7(7%) people rickshaw pullers resided in Dhaka for 20 year or less than 20 years but more than 16 years. The data showed that 20 years back only 7% migrated to Dhaka city.

The figure no. 1 showed how they started their jobs in different professions. Majority of them had tried other professions and after failing or extreme low income they had to choose to this profession. 52 (48%) started rickshaw pulling directly. Rest 56(52%) had tried with other jobs and failing which ultimately had to take rickshaw pulling job. As experiencing severe poverty in the village, after arriving to the city and starting rickshaw pulling they used to enjoy better living hood than village. They can feed himself and his family

members 3 times a day whatever the quality, can afford dresses, and start to send their children to the school. From the respondents and the owner of the rickshaws it was found that the term and condition for rent of rickshaws was almost same in all over Dhaka city. In the study 17(14%) persons were found who used to take rent for 24 hours, 27(23%) persons used to take rent as 12 hours basis and rest majority 76(63%) persons took rent for 8 hour basis. In the table 2, the regular expenditures and gross income had been shown, not any expenditure of major repair or major injuries. On average the daily income of rickshaw pullers was tk.750 on 8 hours from a rented rickshaw. Expenditures were rented tk100, repair tk.100, meals tk.200 and misc. tk.80. So, monthly gross income was tk.9100 / 28 days on average, 4 days weekly off days. This was the income if rickshaw pullers work alone. If the house wife or children participate in other jobs then the income become more which is shown table 2. On an average tk.5,000/ was added on the income of rickshaw pullers then they can save money up to 3,500/ per month shown in table 2. In this way if they could continue then at the end of the year they would have a good saving. Country like Bangladesh is country where uncertainty always was a reality and at that moment they have to expend lot of money even not from themselves but also they had to take loan from others. If family members participate in the job then their net income tk.3,500/month, yearly tk.42000/ on average. Some of the rickshaw pullers were in better position, their children were earning and their wives were engaged mostly as garments workers or some domestic jobs and at the end of the month they were able to earn handsome money. They had taken rent or sublet a house and life were rolling with satisfaction. About 103(86%) out of 120 rickshaw pullers were taking rent from garage owners of rickshaw. About 17(14%) person rickshaw pullers had their own rickshaws. This 17(14%), who own rickshaws by themselves were relatively better in earning and comfort in their living hood as they were

not threatened by the garage owner for their daily payment, where as their other colleagues who use to take rent they had to pay their daily installment, no matter it's sunny or rainy days, no mercy or consideration.

From the respondents it was found that out of 108 rickshaw pullers 72(67%) families were residing in Dhaka city. The rest 36(33%) rickshaw pullers lived in Dhaka city with their families. When they arrived in Dhaka almost all wives used to remain as house wives. Then by the demand of necessity they joined with their husband to the job for solvency of the family. Initially majority of the house wives joined usually to garment factories, It was observed that majority of wives were not participating in any job whose age is within 14 – 16 year old. The cause, husbands of this age section were sensitive that their wives should do any work in public place. But as the time passes they become tired and as the age are advanced the house wives move outside for earning for their family. The main profession of the wives was in garments sector. In the study it was seen that 21(58%) house wives were working in garments sector. After 30 years they used to change their job as with the aging they cannot cope with speed of the younger workers. Other reason they had to take care of their children at home and also their older children become engaged in the job to release their mother to take care house hold works.

Average number of children was 3 from age of 1 month to 22 years old sons and daughters. Though child mortality rate was high still this number remains around. The total number of children was 367. The number of children under 5 years was 150(41%), from 5 – 9 year was 160(44%), from 10 – 14 the number was 30(8%) and children of 15+ was 17(5%). The children of rickshaw pullers were very far behind in schooling, they engaged themselves to the child labors or other odd jobs. Out of eligible 207 children 43(21%) children were not going to school i.e. remaining illiterate, 61(29%) were not completing the primary education, 23(7%) children were completing primary

school, 14(6%) children were completing secondary education and 3(2%) of them had completed above secondary education. On the summation 104(50%) were illiterate or semi literate. The cause of the major illiteracy or semi literacy, are children have to engage in earning as urban life is costlier, everything must be purchased, rent of housing, treatment cost etc. Illustrates 55(38%) children were engaged in different type of semi skilled jobs as helpers of motor engine, carpenters, garments factories etc. 24(17%) children were helpers of tempo drivers, helper in workshop etc. 17(12 %) children were helping in petty business and 12(8%) were selling flowers, newspapers on the street, crushing breaks or stones etc.36(25%) children were loitering here and there and were becoming victim of criminal activities by different under world groups, abused by them, by the police even. Ultimately this section became once criminal, addicted or other anti social elements that cannot get back in normal social life. Status of deposit of money: 28(23%) rickshaw pullers are able to deposit more less money at the end of the month. Out of 28 rickshaw pullers 23(17%) rickshaw pullers could purchase assets viz. land in village, furniture, television etc. for the house, schooling of the children. About 92(77%) rickshaw pullers cannot save any money.

Individually road accident is the biggest hazard for inflicting injury – both major and minor injuries they suffer from. Weakness, fatigue for enormous physical exhaustion. Bodyache main reasons due to pulling of heavy goods on the worse condition of roads, Environment, assault from the passengers, from the police etc.

It was obvious that rickshaw pulling was excessive energy consuming job which needs extra calorie reach diet but on the reverse they had to take very cheap unhealthy food from the open road side shops or restaurants. For the reason among the rickshaw pullers morbidity was very high. Though the conception of good health was not clear to illiterate people but 48(40%) tell they feel not good and 28 (23%) were really feeling

sick and out this 28 rickshaw pullers 17(14%) of total 120 respondents rickshaw pullers felt impending illness. It was clear from the study that the morbidity is directly related to duration of rickshaw pulling job. About 52% of them were sick who had been in this job more than 12 years, while 28% feel sick that are of more than 5 years and 20% feel sick during first 5 years.

Both acute and chronic type diseases they suffered from. The common types were cold /fever, dysentery, diarrhea, typhoid, jaundice, peptic ulcers, COPD, PT.STDs were common diseases. Both incidence and prevalence were common. In the study the majority of the rickshaw pullers used to go to the private chamber of allopathic physicians, next to the compounder of the pharmacy. Majority of them were from this group. Very few went to govt. hospital for major diseases. For other major diseases they avoid govt. hospital or private hospital for excess expenditure what they cannot afford. But in the scenario of major catastrophe like road accidents the govt. hospital played a major role and near about 50% cost born by hospital source. Then for rest 50% victims had to look around them. In these acute circumstances the role of private hospital or clinic were negligible may be 2 to 3 percent. Some NGOs were working in urban poor community. We observed few of rickshaw pullers wonder for loan from different sources, usually different NGOs, but very negligible persons could be blessed (!) who can get loan. In the study it was revealed that at one time acute illness the minimum expenditure was tk.350/ and for any major incident/accident minimum expenditure on average tk.7,000/. For acute illness he can go to the job on average 4 days and for major accident one month and even never. On the top he had to lose his average daily income tk.350/ So, for acute illness, for absence from job his for 3 days one rickshaw puller's loss was tk.1,600/ to 2,000/. Anyway while leaving with monthly income to tk.10,000/, this time can be managed by tk.8,000/. But in case of major accident absent for one month

loss of income tk.10,000/ and treatment expenditure taka tk.7,000/. Net loss was tk.17,000. In this case what he had to do immediately sending his wife to the village and giving mortgage their little land or home to one Mahajon, say for, tk.20,000/ with term, may say for , six month with 10% per monthly interest. And then we knew most of the consequences. Another episode for his wife or one of his children or recurrence for himself was usual fate in total unhygienic slums and thus he or she cannot go to their village to refund their money even within 2 years and ultimately down grading to status to the list of those who have nothing. In our study we had found 41(34%) can overcome the adverse effect of major health crisis but 79(66%) were affected due to damage of physical capacity permanently or for few months, not only due to major road accidents but also due to nature of this bloody job of rickshaw pulling, become ill enough viz. COPD, PT, much wasting of body incapacitating them for physical job which caused a real threat on their basic livelihood of nutrition, education of the children, threat for the shelter even in the slums and enter into phase of starvation. By analysis of the above factors of rickshaw pullers generation it was observed that they cannot contribute any sustainable constructive economic development rather majority of them ultimately fall into sickness and become a burden for their family and for the community that for the state except minor section who could escape the malicious factors and become productive forces in real sense. The table 3 showed a comparison of weight: between middle class who usually rides on rickshaw and the rickshaw pullers. Though it was known there will be difference but aim of discussion was about the consequence. In the above facts, although any retro respective study was not done about age of mortality in between 2 groups but it was obvious that the life expectancy of rickshaw pullers must be approximately 10 years less on an average with life expectancy of resourceful area in Dhaka city. That was a rickshaw puller was losing 10 years of

his life being the citizen of same state which was contrary to declaration of UN, WHO and even in constitution of our own country of 2011.

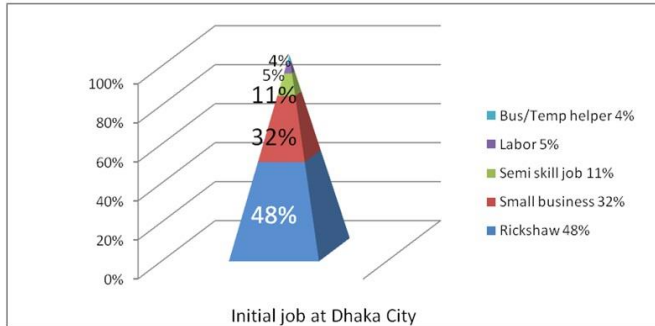


Figure no. 1: Age of their children in percentage

Table no 1. Terms with owner of rickshaw and gross income from rickshaw pulling:

Rental hours	Rent	Repair	Meal's expense	Misc. expense	Gross income
24	150	150	200	100	750
12	100	100	200	80	480
8	80	50	200	70	350

Income	Income of Children/Wife	Income from land of village	Gross income
9000	5000	500	14500
Cost food	House rent	Treatment/Schooling/Msc	Gross expenditure
600	3000	2000	11000

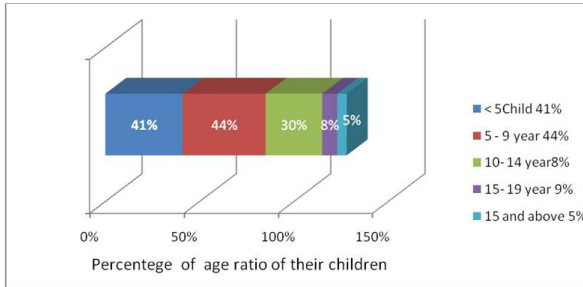


Figure no. 2: Age of their children in percentage

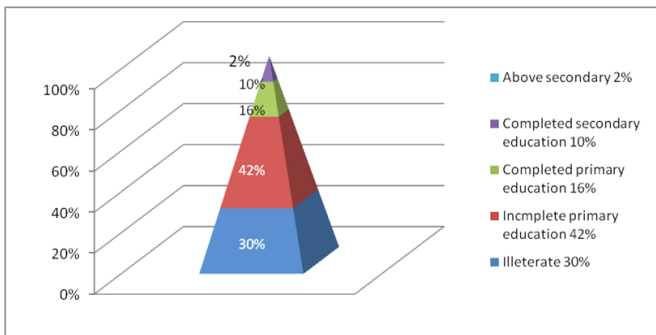


Figure no.3 Education by percentage of the children

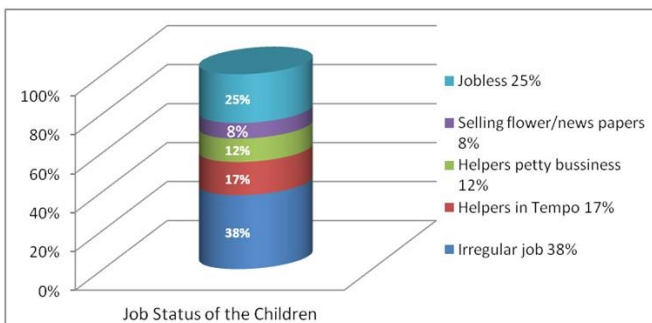


Figure no.4 Job description of the children

Table no. 2 Weight of rickshaw pullers vs residence of one apartment Green Road

Age	20 – 29yrs	30 – 39yrs	40 – 49yrs	Average
Rickshaw pullers	49 - 58	54 - 59	52 - 62	55.67kg
Residence of appartment	48 - 65	58 - 70	61 - 78	63kg

Conclusion:

From the result of the study it was clear that the rickshaw pullers and members of their family always were in fearful for the future of their socio-economic condition. They suffered from uncertainty in front, at any moment their total family may collapse. Moreover they had become the victim of social stigma. The relative did not keep relation with them and they cannot participate any social activities. They cannot give marriage their daughters or sons to their family members of community they belong to only for their rickshaw pulling job. Thus Rickshaw Profession were creating one new schedule cast in the modern society.

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