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A Study among the Problems Faced by Women Rag Pickers in Madurai Corporation

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Abstract

India is one of the developing countries in terms of economic and in population too. India is ranked as no 2 next to China having the highest population. This led to the rapid growth of cities, slums and the emerging urban areas are replacing the villages. So this has contributed to the problems of pollution, one among them is the solid waste produced. Though the government had formulated policies yet the management of waste is a perennial problem. In this aspect collection of waste and recycling process is done through the rag pickers. This activity requires no skills and is a source of income for a growing number of urban poor people. Rag pickers are very poor and live in nearby the dumping station. They have poor quality of houses without running water or electricity facilities. They pick the waste particles which includes papers, plastic bags, pet jars, containers etc. During the process of collecting the waste they encounter many problems such as dog bite, harassment by the money lenders, shop keepers and police. The earning of the rag pickers is very low considering their amount of time spent on it. So an attempt is made by the researcher to study the problems faced by the women rag pickers in Madurai Corporation. It has been found that majority of the people involved are illiterates, lend money and living in slums.

Keywords: Women Rag Pickers, Harassment, Chewing Habits, Ill treatment

Introduction

“Rag pickers deal with meaningless materials but concern with meaningful life”

Rag pickers across the nation are found sustaining themselves by collecting waste from the different part of the city going through the streets picking out the bits of wastages, segregating wastes such as plastics, bottles, wrappers, aluminum foil papers, plastic wrappers, electronic waste and market it to a scrap merchant. In India it is estimated that there are closer to four million rag pickers. Most of the rag pickers are migrated from rural area and live in the slums of various parts of the cities. It is estimated that there are more than one hundred slums in Madurai. Most of the rag pickers belong to the deprived communities of the society, unschooled and illiterates. The rag pickers sustain their livelihood as an opportunity rather than the extreme state of poverty as penury. Irrespective of gender differences there are male and female rag pickers, among those women rag pickers are high in ratio. The women rag pickers are more vulnerable in exposure to the air borne diseases and Vector borne diseases. They work among the road side, riverside, ramshackle, sewers, and dust bins around the city. The women rag pickers are often harassed by general public, government officials, and scrap merchants.

Even the Recent change in Goods and Service Tax (GST) affected the livelihood of women rag pickers of Madurai. When the recycled plastics tax rates shoots up from 5.5% to 18% the collection and recycling process falls suddenly. The tiny margin between the women rag pickers and plastic scrap merchant affected their daily income of the women rag pickers. Apart from these the women rag pickers are exposed to health hazardous, non-awareness of diseases and infectious diseases, lack of personal hygiene measures, addictions etc. The women rag pickers due to their nature of job and social pressures are addicted to alcohol and consumable tobacco; most of them are victims of low self-esteem and emotional disorder. It is the role of government, civil society organization and social workers to emancipate the livelihood of the women rag pickers. The protection, prevention and rehabilitation of the

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women rag pickers are vested in the hands of social workers and general public.

Review of Literature

Kamat (2007) has found that most of the rag-pickers are extremely poor, illiterate, and belong to rural immigrant families. Many commence their profession at the young age of five to eight years. Most of them never attend any school or have any formal education. Most of their families are in need of extra incomes from these young children. While they are collecting rags they are subjected to chemical poisons and infections. Because of malnutrition they suffer from retarded growth and anemia. The rag pickers are very susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis and cancer due to their exposure to hazardous materials

Objectives

- To study the demographic profile of the women rag pickers
- To study the Social and economic condition and Working condition and problems faced by the women rag pickers

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive design. This paper is based on the primary data collection from 50 respondents in Madurai Corporation through convenient sampling method. The main aim of this research design is to bring about the life style of the women rag pickers, especially in response to the social, economic and problems of the women rag pickers. The Interview Schedule was used to collect the primary data. The data was collected by discussion with women rag pickers in person.

Findings

It has been found that majority (92 %) of the women rag pickers belong to Scheduled caste community. The age groups of women rag pickers are in between 20 - 40 are the maximum (62%). Majority i.e., 76 percent of the women rag pickers dwell in slum and the remaining 22 percent of the respondent lives in bank of rivers. Nearly 91 percent respondents belong to Hindu religion and worship the god Mariamman, Kali and 6 percent of the respondents belong to Islam and 3 percent of the women rag pickers do not have religious beliefs.

Ninety five percent of the rag pickers are illiterate and five percent of them have completed Primary level of education. Eight two percent of the rag pickers working is more than ten hours per day and ninety percent of them sell their rags to small traders. Ninety two percent of the rag pickers earn rupees 200-400 as daily income. Due to usury lenders the women workers pay two third what they earned. Ninety eight percent of the women rag pickers lend money and pay two third of their daily earnings. Eighty three percent of women rag pickers accommodated that they are been harassed by money lenders and paying compound interest. Only six percent of the rag pickers have the habit of saving money.

Ninety four percent of the women rag picker's possess the usage of chewing tobacco or consumable tobacco. Twelve percent of the women rag pickers are regular consumer of alcohol and forty percent of the women rag pickers accepted as occasional consumers of alcohol. Three percent

of women rag pickers left the job due to Tuberculosis and segregating the waste collected by other members. Nearly eighty percent of them are under gone ill treatment by strangers. The average marriage age of the rag pickers are 19. Majority, 66 percent of the rag pickers were unhealthy and they have a habit of visiting doctor during illness. Majority, 94 percent of the rag pickers are aware about Government welfare measures.

Suggestions

The suggestions of the study are the preventive and protective measures have to work out to address problems of rag pickers. This can be achieved through advocacy with an effective information, education, and communication (IEC) programmes. Alternately, there is a need to strengthen the solid waste management system and support the establishment of sustainable community based waste management schemes. Women rag pickers are new age work force in waste management. The major issues faced by women rag pickers are poor health status and problem with middle man. The Civil Society organizations (CSOs) could find a system to monitor and evaluate the rehabilitative measures of rag pickers through further research. Based on that welfare and development projects can be prepared for the holistic development of rag pickers.

Conclusion

The study on problems faced by women rag pickers reveals that the social and economic condition is very poor. Since they live in unhygienic area most of them are malnourished suffer from many diseases. There is a dire need for targeted interventions for holistic development of rag pickers. Better life style mechanisms towards enhancing livelihood have to be framed by state through urban development departments concerning women rag pickers. The civil society organizations can devise a strategic plan for rehabilitation and promotion life of rag picker.

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