

Child Ragpickers in Aligarh City



Geography

KEYWORDS : Child Ragpickers, Unhygienic and Hazardous Work, Problems.

Shabnam Parveen

Research Scholar, Department of Geography, A.M.U., Aligarh.

ABSTRACT

The term ragpicker refers to people who collect rags or recyclable materials that can be sold to scrap merchant for money (survival). This activity requires no skills and is a source of income for the urban poor. Rag picking involve collecting, sorting and selling of waste materials that are found at the street corners, dumpsites, or in residential areas. The waste materials, primarily consists of paper, plastics, bottles, cardboard, tin, aluminium, iron, brass and copper. Millions of children begin working as ragpickers at the young age of five or six years. In Aligarh city, majority of the ragpickers are between 8 and 12 years old. These children find livelihood opportunities through waste picking. Most of them never attend school and don't have any formal education. The Majority of child ragpickers migrate from poor, rural and landless homes to urban areas for better jobs in the city area and live in temporary residents. When they do not found any job, choose ragpicking. Most of them don't have ration cards, identity cards, voter Id, Adhar cards etc. and therefore don't have access to basic Governmental facilities. Child ragpickers face negative interaction with the police, civil society and criminal gangs. They live in the dark world that teaches them violence and abuse.

Introduction

Ragpicking is immoral, severe and worst form of child labour. It is the most unhygienic, dangerous and hazardous job for the children. Poverty stricken these poor children to engage in such unhygienic and hazardous activities. In Aligarh city, majority of the ragpickers are between 8 and 12 years old. This activity requires no skills and is a source of income for the urban poor. These children find livelihood opportunities through waste picking. Most of them never attend school and don't have any formal education. Their families are generally in need of extra incomes from their children. The Majority of child ragpickers migrate from poor, rural and landless homes to urban areas. Some children migrate with their families for better jobs in the city area and live in temporary residents.

Literature Review

Rag picking is severe and worst form of child labour. The most unhygienic, dangerous job in scrap collection is rag picking. The children of backward classes or slum dwellers are engaged in such activities. They are collecting waste materials of plastic, tin, iron, bottle from garbage and dirty places of urban area. The glass, metal, iron pieces may injure their bare feet. For their bread and butter, they are working such. In rag picking the children engaged, face various health problems like tetanus and skin diseases. (Misra, 2004)

Rag picking is one of the inferior economic activities in the urban informal sector, largely undertaken by children belonging to weaker sections of the society for their survival and for supplementing their family income and is the profession mostly dominated by children aging 6 to 15 years who do not have any other skill and thus by way of refuse collection contribute to household income or own survival. The continuous exposure to the common garbage and the hospital waste has led to various diseases. Many of them smoke beedi and cigarettes and some are also addicted to drugs and indulge in prostitution and homosexuality, robbery and gambling. All this has affected their lives in several ways and shortened their life spans considerably (Saxena D., 2012).

The most dangerous, demeaning and destructive of self worth for children is, perhaps, the job of scrap collector or ragpickers. The nature of their work and work environment is most unhygienic. Even the casual look at their physique and clothing reveals the extent of their poverty and deprivation. They are denied the right to decent living; right to education; right to protection against exploitation etc. (Sekar H. R., 1993).

Rag pickers are subjected to chemical poisons and infections. Because of malnutrition they suffer from retarded growth and

anaemia. The ragpickers are

very susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis and cancer due to their exposure to hazardous materials and addicted to chewing and smoking tobacco. Soon they become addicted to alcohols and then they switch to hard liquors. They even do not refrain from taking the drugs. They have free sex with street walkers and hence become victims of AIDS (Kamat K. L., 1999).

According to UNICEF, ragpicking is also known as 'garbage pickers,' live on the street, in slums or shanty areas, and he/she makes a living from sorting, collecting and selling waste metal, rags, containers to the local junkyards or garbage collection centres.

Types of Ragpickers

The Ragpickers can be categorized on the basis of collection peculiarity into three types.

- i) The major portion of this type consists of collectors collecting rags out of community dustbins, garbage heaps, open streets, market places and near railway stations and bus stands (inside not allowed). The major portion of this type consists of boys or men.
- ii) The second type of collectors is made up of girls who like to work in groups or accompany their mothers instead of going alone, to pick rags on the street, because of constant fear of sexual abuse by adult male and older male child ragpickers. They mainly depend on municipal and industrial garbage dumps to collect waste and sell them to merchants or second hand goods dealers, daily or weekly. The collectors thoroughly clean the dirty materials before selling them to fetch a higher price.
- iii) The third type comprises of women or girls working as domestic servants and collect rags from the homes they work. (Saxena, D., www.kuhadtrust.org/ragpickers).

Study Area

Aligarh city is located in between 27° 29' latitude and 78° 36' east longitude and lies at a distance of 130 km to the south east of Delhi on Delhi-Kolkata railway line and Grand Trunk Road. According to census 2011, the total population of Aligarh city is 8, 72, 575 persons of which 4, 63,123 are males and 4, 09, 452 females. Of the total population 70.36 % are literates, of the total literates 75.50 % are males and 64.55% are females. The city is divided into 70 wards.

Objectives

1. To examine the educational status of child ragpickers.
2. To study the health problems of child ragpickers.

3. To analyse the working, living and economic conditions of child ragpickers.

Data Base and Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary data collected through the field surveys. Out of 70 wards of the city 10 wards are randomly selected. From each ward 100 ragpicker households are selected for conducting surveys. The field work was done during March-April, 2015.

Legislation

Rag picking and Scavenging has been included in Part-B under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 as one of the prohibited processes for employment of children who have not completed 14 years of age.

In 2001, waste-picking was included among the hazardous occupations banned under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986. But apart from this very brief mention, rag picking is ignored in legislation regarding child labour.

Causes of Child Ragpicker

There are various causes of child ragpickers to enter into the rag picking. About 50% ragpickers said that their parents are ragpickers so they work rag picking, 10% said that their mother or father has expired, 6% said that they do not have any skill, 12% said that they are migrated and do not have any work, 14% said they work to supplement the family income and 8% said that they work because of large family.

Educational Status

If we talk about the educational status of the child ragpickers. They do not have any formal education or they never attend school because of severe and acute poverty. They and their parents work as ragpickers for the sheer survival.

Living Conditions

Most of the child ragpicker's families are migrated, so they live temporary houses (thatched houses) in the outside areas or peripheral areas of the city. They face several types of seasonal problems in these houses. They do not have any kitchen, bathroom and toilet facility. They cook their food inside the living room.

Problems

1. Longer Working Hours

In Aligarh city children, especially girls, start their work early in the morning (about 5 am in summers and 6 am in winters) and till 1- 2 pm without any rest. Teen age boys start working around 7-8 am till 4-5 pm. They work continuously 365 days in the year without any holiday. They work in filthy, unsafe surroundings which adversely affect their health and growth. They travel longer distances for the collection of waste material. The study shows that 94% child ragpickers work 8 hours and 6% child ragpickers work more than 8 hours.

2. Hazardous Work Conditions

Ragpicking is probably one of the most dangerous and risky work. Child ragpickers work in unhygienic, filthy, unsafe surroundings in severe health hazards to search hazardous waste without gloves or shoes. Which badly affect their mental and physical health, growth and development. Sharp objects (glass or metal waste) can cause cuts which, in turn, may lead to tetanus or other infections. They often eat the filthy food remnants they find in the garbage or in the dumping grounds. Sometime they play or sleep in the unsafe surroundings. Which is unhealthy and injurious for their health. All these child ragpickers work in hazardous conditions. The study shows that the life of child ragpickers is in danger.

3. Poor Income

The income of poor child ragpickers and their parents is very low for the family survival, so each and every person of the family work to substantiate the family income. Children work long hours from early dawn to late night without rest but are paid low price rate for the collected waste material. All the children receive their income in cash, some on daily basis and some on weekly basis. This work not requires any skill and talent; it is easy but very dirty, unsafe and hazardous work. About 40% of the ragpickers spend their most of the income on smoking, alcohol and drugs.

4. Diet Availability

Poor child ragpickers are generally malnourished because they are unable to get sufficient amount of food. The low income is mainly responsible for this situation. They are unable to take normal diet daily, sometimes they take one meal in a day. Poor health; makes children susceptible to infectious diseases; creates bone lesions and postural deformity; leads to loss of eye sight and adversely affects their physical growth and development.

5. Health Problems

Due to working in unhygienic and unsafe environment they suffer from many diseases, such as respiratory problems, worms, anaemia, fever, malaria and other problems include cuts, rashes etc. They collect waste material and carry heavy loads of waste materials over long distances on their back which may cause muscular/skeletal problems. Sharp objects (glass or metal waste) can cause cuts which, in turn, may lead to tetanus or other infections. They often eat the filthy food remnants they find in the garbage or in the dumping grounds. This is unhealthy and harmful for their health.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study clearly proves that the working and living conditions are absolutely unhygienic and hazardous. Children work long hours from early dawn to late night without rest and recreation. **The poor child ragpickers are unhealthy because they live in unhygienic environment and are unable to get good food.** They are the deprived, indigent, unfortunate and underprivileged section of the society, live in the pathetic and pitiable conditions **without any happiness and pleasure.** They have filthy, unhygienic, dirty surroundings and life. Rag picking teaches them abuse, naughtiness, misbehaviour, smoking, alcohol, crime etc.

REFERENCE

1. Government should provide employment opportunities to the parents of child ragpickers through the poverty eradication programme. | 2. Government should provide free and compulsory education along with the vocational training and mid day meal. | 3. Law should be enacted to remove child ragpickers because rag picking is the worst form of child labour.