

PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN SLUMS: A STUDY OF WOMEN IN SLUMS OF CHANDIGARH (U.T.)

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization is not a gender neutral phenomenon. The gender dimension of urban society involves and affects hundreds of millions of women in many ways. For women, the phenomena of urbanization and the growth of city slums have unique causes and unique consequences. Yet, these issues have been largely unaddressed by academics and advocates alike, and there is limited data on women and urbanization. The present study was an effort to know the kind of challenges and problems faced by slum women while residing in the slums of Chandigarh. The study is based on primary data which was collected through interview schedule from 300 respondents selecting 75 respondents each from two authorized slums and two unauthorized slums for comparative analysis in Chandigarh. The findings of the study revealed that women in slums, (both authorized slums and unauthorized slums), suffer a lot of physical, social, economic problems in their lives but still they are trying their best to overcome them and meeting various needs of their families.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Education, Income, Women in slums.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is responsible for the overall development of a nation in general and the economic development in particular. According to the *Global Report on Human Settlement* (UNCHS, 1996), the countries in the South that urbanized most rapidly in the last two decades are generally also those with most rapid urban economic growth. Most of the world's largest cities are in the world's largest economies. This indicates the link between economic wealth and cities. Later half of the last century was a period of rapid urbanization in the developing countries. Urbanization, migration and proliferation of slums are interrelated processes and urban poverty seems to travel along with them. Increasing urbanization due to natural increase of urban population and migration is aggravating housing problem and resulting in increase in the land prices. Developed land is not supplied according to the demand and it is also beyond the reach of the poor. The circumstances force the poor to look for informal solutions, that leads to mushrooming growth of slums and squatter settlements. The problem of urban slums has been faced at some point of time by almost all the major cities throughout the developing world (*Census*, 2001). Slums are the areas characterized by varieties of life styles, shelter crisis, population congestion, unsanitary and poor living conditions, malnutrition, poverty, inadequate water supply, lack of facilities of underground drainage, problem of garbage disposal, absence of pucca road, lavatories, etc.

Today, about half of international and national migrants globally are women. They move to urban areas for a number of different reasons, ranging from seeking income opportunities, to fleeing conflict, environmental degradation, or family problems. Often desperate to escape personal problems and depressing social conditions in their own home and areas, women from country, towns and rural areas set out in search of better livelihoods. Women are often convinced that cities have better opportunities to offer than what they can achieve in their own home villages or towns. They are hopeful that

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even with a little capital – or none at all – their prospects of making ends meet are still better in the big cities. Women thus join the population of migrants who find their way into urban areas each year.

Their hope is for a better life in terms of opportunities, living conditions, access to services, and autonomy. Because women often come to the city with very limited resources and job skills, however, many women end up in urban slums where they can be close to commercial areas and work opportunities. Slum life has never been easy for the urban poor in so far as housing and living conditions are concerned. For women, the problems are especially acute. In slums across the world, there is a noticeable lack of basic infrastructure, services, and basic shelter. Once in the slums, women also face formidable challenges to daily survival. Violence, inadequate provision of basic services, housing insecurity, lack of privacy, employment discrimination, poor health and nutrition, and illiteracy are all common experience with profound gendered dimensions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been various studies which focused on different aspects of the life of women in slums. *Fernandes* (1991) explains how urbanization affects women adversely and how women have internalized themselves the ideology of subordination. She dealt with how women develop the coping mechanism to deal with insecurity that results from migration. *Tandon and Niraj Kumar* (1994) say that the conditions of women in slums in general, and of socially under-privileged women in particular, are most pathetic. Most of these women are engaged in activities which are amongst the poorest of the poor in the working class. Their jobs offer no attraction and require a great deal of physical ordeal. This study has shown that in spite of many developmental programs, most of the underprivileged women are still suffering. *Rama Swamy* (1990) studied the problem and future expectations of women workers in slum. *Devasia's* (1994) book titled, '*Empowering Women for Sustainable Development*' depicts the struggle of women in the slum areas of Nagpur. It explains how slum women fought against all odds because they realized that there were no alternatives to sustainable development other than their own improvement. *Ramana* (2002), in her study, *Women in Slums*, dealt with the socio-cultural aspects of slum women, as there are very few studies available on slum women; their lives, their work and their struggles. *Pugh* (1995) found that as organized sector in the urban area has its own limitations and therefore is unable to offer employment opportunities to them; their absorption is, by and large, localized in the unorganized or informal sector. This sector on account of its diversity offers a variety of jobs and has been playing a very significant role in supplementing the urban economy (*Swamy*, 1990). The odd jobs, the male members do range from pulling rickshaws, working in dhabas, restaurants, and shops; while some of their female members find urban households in which their children also provide assistance. Some of the other female members also work at construction sites, in brick kilns, other kinds of small business etc. The female members, who find employment in the urban households, do a variety of jobs, which range from cleaning of utensils, washing of clothes, cooking or even looking after the infants of the households. *Tewari* (1999) studies the occupational features, income expenditure pattern and some other economic aspects of slum dwellers in the city of Kanpur. The slum dwellers, according to him, are largely concentrated in the informal sector, which is considered to be not as productive and remunerative as the manufacturing and other sectors of economy. The existing literature regarding the woman of slums is very little. The full-fledged studies are conducted by *Menefee Singh* (1978), *Jha* (1986) and *Thakur* (1988), while *Bijlani* (1977), *Kaldate* (1989), *Chatterji* (1990), and *Hajira Kumar* (2006) have partially focused on the subject. *Menefee Singh* (1978) focused on the central role of slum woman in the families, their responses to the conditions of absolute poverty and the ways in which they adapted and coped with these conditions. *Thakur* (1988) made an attempt to see the social status and economic control of working women in a slum area. In this study, the main focus was on the employment, particularly of working women, information about present job of working women, respondent's control on earnings, and relationship between education and economic autonomy. In the book '*Women in Slums*' (Impact of Environment Pollution), *Arti Mishra* (2004) attempts to visualize the conditions of women degraded environment of slums of Patna, the capital of Bihar.

A review of existing literature shows that there were only a few existing studies on slum women. Moreover, there is a paucity of studies dealing with the problems faced by women in slums and there is hardly any full and comprehensive study on women of the slums in the city of Chandigarh. Therefore, studies regarding slums have also mainly focused their attention mainly on only one aspect of their lives. Further, in these studies, the major problems faced by these poor urban women have been ignored.

The present study had been taken up to fill this gap. It was confined to the challenges faced by slum women in their day to day lives. The purpose of the study was to know about the ordeals they face, how they try to cope with these and the measures taken up by the authorities for the upliftment of these poor women.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To study various problems faced by the women in slums in Chandigarh.
2. To study how these women face these challenges and problems.
3. To analyze the measures taken by the Government to help slum women.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is exploratory and descriptive as it describes the actual condition of women in slums. It is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected through interview schedule from 150 respondents; selecting 75 respondents each from two authorized and two unauthorized slums through random sampling method. The secondary data was collected from various secondary sources like Census reports, newspapers. In the present study, data were collected for various social, economic, physical problems and challenges faced by the respondents.

DATA INTERPRETATION

An attempt has been made to study the problems which the working respondents had, while or after going to work. Ongoing description of the problems of these respondents is based on the data collected from the observations and interviews with the respondents. The main problems faced by the respondents are as follows.

Table no. 1. Distribution of Respondents according to Area and Nature of Problems They Face

Area	Nature of the problems (in %)				Total
	<i>Distance to place of work</i>	<i>Malnutrition/health</i>	<i>Young children</i>	<i>Problems regarding elder children</i>	
<i>Authorized slums</i>	63 (42)	30 (20)	48 (32)	9 (6)	150 (100)
<i>Unauthorized slums</i>	75 (50)	21 (14)	42 (28)	12 (8)	150 (100)
Total	138 (46)	51 (17)	90 (30)	21 (7)	300 (100)

(Figures given in the parentheses are the percentages)

The data show that there were many problems about which the respondents talked of, that lead to their mental and physical suffering. One such problem reported by 46 percent of respondents belonging to both authorized and unauthorized slums, was the distance to their place of work. In unauthorized slums, half of the respondents faced problems due to the distance to their place of work. Due to low level of income, they could not afford conveyance. Many of them had to walk for 2-3 km to reach their place of work. There is poor public transport facility available in their area. This leads to physical exhaustion and affect their health adversely. Furthermore, thirty percent of them had the problems of caring for the younger children after going to work because there was no one to tend to their children in the house. Therefore, they had to carry their kids along with them when they leave the house; while others leave their younger children in the care of their elder children. One-sixth of the respondents reported facing problems due to malnutrition/health. Significantly this percentage was high in authorized slums as compared to unauthorized slums.

While looking at various problems faced by respondents in our study, it was found that lack of education among women was considered by the respondents as a major hindrance in their social progress.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents according to Area and in what ways the Respondents Think that Lack of Education is a major issue

Area	Lack of education leads to many problems in their situation (in %)			Total*
	<i>No Good jobs</i>	<i>Can't teach kids</i>	<i>Low social status</i>	
<i>Authorized slums</i>	68 (45.3)	49 (32.7)	33 (22)	150 (100)
<i>Unauthorized slums</i>	35 (23.3)	90 (60)	25 (16.7)	150 (100)
Total	103 (34.3)	139 (46.3)	58 (19.4)	300 (100)

(Figures given in the parentheses are the percentages)

The data in above Table reveals that majority of the respondents in both, authorized and unauthorized slums, view that lack of education creates a lot of problems for them as one-third reported that it prevents them from getting good jobs; 46 percent felt helpless in teaching or guiding their children and 19 percent respondents stated that their illiteracy or low educational level was also responsible for their low status in the society. Area -wise analysis indicates different picture as 45 percent found difficulties in getting good jobs whereas 60 percent in unauthorized slums felt problems in teaching kids. This shows that women in slums are showing positive attitude towards education and are keen on educating their children.

ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism is widely prevalent in our society and studies show that alcoholism is a major problem in slums. Alcoholism has health, social and economic implications for the affected individuals and their families. Because of intoxication, addicts are not able to work and hence often lose their work. This leads to sudden loss of income for the family. Moreover, domestic violence and sexual abuse is rampant along with alcohol abuse. Women in slums suffer a lot due to this problem as they have to take care of the family as well as their work. Therefore, it was considered pertinent to enquire from the respondents whether alcoholism is a problem faced by them and the same is presented in the **Table 3**.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents according to Area and Problem of Alcoholism in the Family.

Area	Problem of alcoholism in the family		Total
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
<i>Authorized slums</i>	118 (78.7)	32 (21.3)	150 (100)
<i>Unauthorized slums</i>	130 (86.7)	20 (13.3)	150 (100)
Total	248 (82.7)	52 (17.3)	300 (100)

(Figures given in the parentheses are the percentages.)

The data show that large majority, i.e., 83 per cent of the total respondents were facing the problem of alcoholism in their families. The data further show that the problem of alcoholism is faced almost equally by respondents in authorized and unauthorized slums. This problem has led to many social, economic, health implications for the affected people and their families. Some respondents told that even their own income was snatched from them by their spouses to buy alcohol. The husbands beat them, their children and even other family members under the influence of alcohol.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Many women in slums face the problem of domestic violence because of their poor economic condition, patriarchal social values, illiteracy, alcoholic husbands etc. We tried to find whether the women in slums are aware of their various rights, laws made for them under the Constitution and the government against different kinds of violence they are subjected to. Domestic violence Act (2005) is a very recent Act made for the safety of women from the violence perpetrated by their own family members against women. The respondents in the study were asked if they were aware of this act.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to area and awareness about Domestic Violence Act

Area	Awareness about domestic violence Act		Total
	Yes	No	
Authorized slums	32 (21.3)	118 (78.7)	150 (100)
Unauthorized slums	8 (5.3)	142 (94.7)	150 (100)
Total	40 (13.3)	260 (86.7)	300 (100)

(Figures given in the parentheses are the percentages)

It was found that only 13 percent of the respondents knew about Domestic Violence Act where as 87 per cent of them were ignorant about it. It is also observed that the respondents in authorized slums were more aware than their counterparts in unauthorized slums. But majority of the respondents in both types of slums are not aware about this legal safeguard against violence. Due to the ignorance, they are not able to get legal help and they suffer these atrocities at their homes.

HEALTH ISSUES

The socio-cultural practice of women eating last in the family has eminent effect on her health, especially if it is a low economic status household. A woman's health and nutrition status influence her newborn's birth weight and chances of survival. Post-natal death is generally caused by infectious diseases. The incidence and severity of most of this disease are affected by controllable factors such as immunization, health care and nutrition. In slums under study, it was found that the respondents were not bothered much about their own health and nutrition. They tried to fulfill the needs of their kids, husbands and other family members but neglected themselves. They even ignore their illness as they don't want to spend money on their minor ailments. When asked about the centres where they approach for treatment when they fell sick, 62 per cent of respondents in authorized slums answered that they go for self-treatment for small ailments or they go to the quacks, but one-third of them went to doctors in their vicinity or government dispensaries for treatment. Whereas large majority of the respondents, i.e., 83 percent in unauthorized slums went to the quacks or for self treatment, only 12 percent went to doctors, private clinics or government hospitals. This shows that maximum number of respondents in authorized slums could afford to go to private doctors and also they were getting aware of the facilities government was providedg to them in government hospitals and dispensaries

HOUSEHOLD CHORES

The socio-cultural attributes in society have left a deep mark on women empowerment in India. Women in India need and expect equal access to education, health, nutrition, employment and productive resources. But in reality, in majority of the Indian families, socialization of children creates inequality between a daughter and a son. Sons are supposed to be the decision makers and women are expected to serve all members in the family. They are expected to play multiple roles and not demand equal rights with men. This mind set has created a lot of gender inequality in society. In the present study, an attempt was made to see the views of the women in slums on the issues of sharing of tasks in the family. The women were asked about their daily routines, chores and whether their spouses and other family members helped them in doing the chores.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents according to Area and whether they think that Domestic Chores are the Responsibility of only Women

Area	Domestic chores are the responsibility of only women		Total
	Yes	No	
Authorized slums	103 (68.7)	47 (31.3)	150 (100)
Unauthorized slums	126 (84)	24 (16)	150 (100)
Total	229 (76.3)	71 (23.7)	300 (100)

(Figures given in the parentheses are the percentages)

The data show that majority of the respondents (76 per cent) believed that domestic chores were responsibility of women, whereas only 24 disagreed with this statement. Majority of respondents believed in the traditional roles of women as a homemaker. At the same time they also supported the idea of women going out of their homes and supplementing the family income. But they agreed that these dual roles do take a toll on woman's physical and psychological well being.

Comparatively, 84 per cent respondents in unauthorized slums agreed that domestic chores are the responsibility of women only. They are reluctant to take help of men in doing household chores. They believed that it was women's duty to work in the home. 68 per cent of respondents in authorized slums disagreed with it. This may be caused due to difference in income level. In authorized slums, people are better off in terms of education and occupation as compared with their counterparts in unauthorized slums and that's why their outlook, and mindset tends to be more open.

CONCLUSION

From the above given data, we conclude that the respondents in both authorized slums and unauthorized slums suffer a lot of physical, social, economic problems in their lives. They are trying their best to overcome these constraints and meeting various needs, aspirations of their families. The situation of respondents in authorized slums was slightly better than their counterparts in unauthorized slums as they had better jobs, secure housing, facilities from the government etc. But respondents in both types of slums do faced a lot of common set of problems. The local governments should not treat these poor women just as their vote banks but should try to help them out by providing certain minimum necessary facilities like availability of public transport, government dispensaries, schools, police patrolling in their areas, access to safe drinking water, sanitation etc. Swami Vivekananda had warned, "The nation which doesn't respect women will never become great.....". Therefore, in pursuit of making India a great nation, governments, community, and media, should work towards extending much deserved status and dignity to women. All stakeholders must pool together to provide them optimal facilities and opportunities to overcome the various problems that they face in their lives. Only then can they contribute their bit towards the progress of their families, society, and the nation.

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