

A Study on Waste Pickers in Gazipur City

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Abstract

Millions of “Waste Pickers” make their livelihood through collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling valuable materials disposed as a waste. The study stretched out a survey on waste pickers using questionnaires in Gazipur, Bangladesh. Collected data were analyzed and got about 61% of the waste pickers were female while male were 39% among them 13% under the age of 14 and 69% were illiterate. Due to poverty and unemployment in rural areas, 88% migrated in urban. After working 6 to 8 hours, the average maximum daily income was Tk. 250. 97% waste pickers suffer in pain alongside Asthma, Cold and Cough, owing to unhealthy environment. Waste pickers are the deprived people and have low status in the society. It can be said that, waste pickers lead a troublesome life and they really work hard to fulfill their daily needs. They want employment to overcome their poverty and lead a healthy life.

Keywords: *Waste Pickers, Livelihood, survey, wastes.*

1 Introduction

Gazipur is a district of Dhaka division in Bangladesh. It is the most important city in Dhaka division because the large portion of garments industries of the country have been established in this region. A large number of people come in Gazipur City from different parts of the country for their livelihoods because of garments industries and huge wastes are producing every day from garments industries, factories and residential areas. Waste pickers are the people who make a living out of collecting reusable or recyclable materials thrown away by others to sell or for personal consumption. The main objective of this study is to examine how waste pickers in Gazipur city earn their livelihood through wastes picking. There are millions of waste pickers worldwide, predominantly in developing countries, but increasingly in post-industrial countries as well (Gowan, 1997). Globally, the contribution of waste picking on the livelihoods of waste pickers' is being increasingly explored, particularly in developing countries. Empirical evidence increasingly shows that waste picking is a key source of livelihood improvement for many poor urban dwellers (Njoroge et al., 2013). In Bangladesh, many women and men often positioned in the lower echelons of poverty, have no choice but collect wastes as an income generating activity. There are limited opportunities for such women and men in the labor market due to their economic and social status and are therefore forced to take on informal and underestimated jobs such as waste picking. Waste picking has been reduced poverty among the poor waste pickers. Waste pickers are the initial link in the recycling sequence and form the base in the hierarchy of waste management (Nzeadibe et al., 2012). It is also argued that waste collection activities while providing an income to the urban poor, indirectly contributes to recycling in cities. We hypothesises, that waste picking is a significant contributor to the urban poor's livelihoods.

2 Methodologies

Ten areas were chosen to collect informations about the waste-pickers. These areas were Joydebpur Bus Stand, Joydebpur Rider Stand, Joydebpur Rail Station, Open Dumping, Wireless Para, Sign Board, Boro Bari, College Gate, Tongi Rail Station, and Kona Bari. These areas were chosen as most of the dumping sites are situated at those places where waste pickers collect different types of wastes.

2.1 Primary Data

To assess the livelihood of waste pickers a questionnaire structured was prepared that is shown in table 1. In preparing the questionnaire structured, the considering issues were the livelihood, educational background, family status, and social status, working condition, causes of migration, daily income, health problems, and sanitation quality at selected areas in Gazipur.

Table 1. Data collection form.

Question No.	Questions
01.	Location
02.	Name & Age of waste picker:
03.	Did you migrate? Yes/No
04.	Reasons for migration
05.	Educational background
06.	Collection time
07.	Daily collection hours
08.	Amount of collection
09.	Income
10.	Do you do any other work?
11.	Do you use mask, gloves, footwear?
12.	Why have you chosen this work?
14.	What types of diseases do you face?
15.	Do you get social services?
16.	Do you take health checkup?
17.	What is the family bonding status?

2.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data related to waste pickers are collected from books, government reports, research work, journals and articles. Collected data were analyzed and compared with different articles, journals and research papers.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Sex and Age Distribution of Waste Pickers

Among all the waste pickers, 61% were female and 39% were male among them 51 % between ages of 37-46 whereas 13% were under the age of 16 which is shown in Table 2

Table 2. Age distribution of the waste pickers

Age (Years)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
≤14	5	8	13
17-26	4	2	6
27-36	5	11	16
37-46	19	32	51
47-56	6	8	14
Total	39	61	100

3.2 Educational Status of Waste Pickers

69 % of waste pickers were illiterate, 13% can do only signature and 1% of these waste pickers completed up-to class six which is shown Table 3.

Table 3. Educational status of the respondents

Educational Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	69	69
Only can do signature	13	13
Class 2-3	11	11
Class 4-5	06	06
Class 6	01	01
Total	100	100

3.3 Marital Status of the Waste Pickers

Among the respondents of waste-pickers, 73% were married and 21% were unmarried. Of the respondents, 4% were widow and 2% were separated or divorced as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Marital status of the respondents

Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Married	73	73
Unmarried	21	21
Widow	04	04
Separated and Divorcee	02	02
Total	100	100

3.4 Reasons for Migration to Waste-pickers

There are two factors of migration, Push and Pull factors. The lure of the bright lights of the city and employment opportunity are pull factors where natural disasters, erosion, growing landlessness and exploitation by the rural elite and money lenders are the push factors of migration for poor people from rural to urban areas. Almost 88% of waste-pickers migrated from rural area to Gazipur city due to poverty and absence of employment in rural areas. River erosion, death of husband, helpless at old age etc. are also an influencing factor to push migration in Table 5.

Table 5. Reasons of migration of waste-pickers by sex

Reasons of Migration	Female Waste Pickers (%)	Male Waste Pickers (%)	Total (%)
Poverty and no income source at village	50	38	88
Problem in marital life (Separation, torture by husband)	02	-	02
Death of Husband	04	-	04
River Erosion	01	03	04
Helpless at old age	-	02	02
Total	57	43	100

3.5 Reasons for Becoming Waste Pickers

It was found that waste picking is frequently the first livelihood activity undertaken by a new migrant. It is popular in this respect because it requires little knowledge, few skills and no capital. However, many pickers continue picking for many years after their arrival. But waste picking is not surely an occupation of new arrivals. It's an incidental choice, having not availability of other options. And it is not the only option of pickers; sometimes they undertake two or more activities. The children some picks as part time, just only to support subsistence of family. Some women pick waste with main activities as domestic worker.

3.6 Collection of Wastes by the Waste Pickers

The different types of waste are collected by the waste pickers from dump sites. In this study there were mainly four categories of waste collected by pickers such as plastics, scrap metals and glass, decomposing garbage and papers.

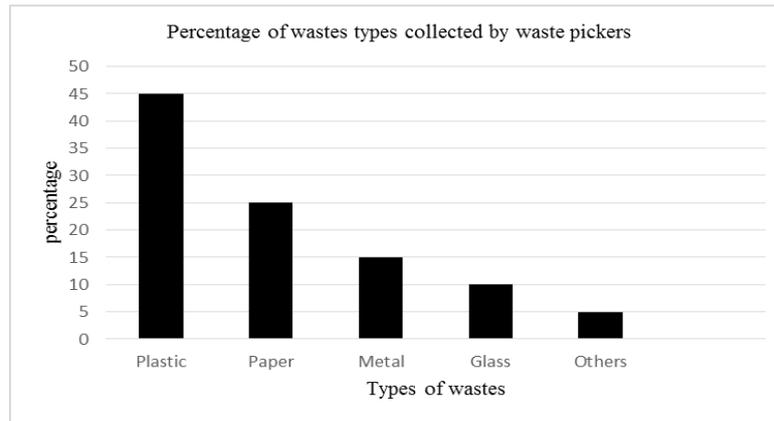


Figure 1. Percentage of wastes types collect by the waste pickers.

3.7 Extending of Working Hours of the Waste Pickers

The participants in the survey all indicated they had a routine, beginning early in the morning. Most indicated that they began collecting between 06:00 am and 08:00 am and delivered at the end of the day. 24% waste pickers collected wastes throughout the whole day.

Table 7. Working duration of waste pickers

Working Duration (Hours)	No. of Waste Pickers
0-up to 6	19
6-8	57
Whole Day	24
Total	100

3.8 Income Analysis

The amount of income depends on time to remain involved with waste picking. The mean income per day of a waste picker under the study was found Tk.121.95. Tk. 250 is an exceptional income, who works up whole day. According to pickers with families, most income is given to parents and the married women waste pickers are compelled to handover their income to husbands. Those who are independent often save a portion of their income in order to face contingency for periods of illness or other emergencies.

Table 8. Usual day and average monthly incomes of waste pickers

Usual Day Income (Tk.)	No. of Waste pickers
Under 50	11
51-100	16
101-150	48
151-200	19
201-250	6
Total	100

The amount of income depends on different factors such as prices and quantity of recyclable wastes, characteristics of waste pickers, sources of recyclable wastes, weather, number of hours worked, competition, starting time, equipment used etc. The incomes of waste pickers vary location to location and country to country. The average income per day of a waste picker in Dhaka city was found Tk.80 and Tk. 200 is an exceptional income, who works up to 12 hours per day (Ullah, 2008). But the mean income per day of a waste picker in Gazipur city was found Tk.121.95. The mean income per day of a waste picker in South Africa was found R50 (Tk.276).

3.9 Health Impacts of Waste Collection

Handling waste poses many health risks. Waste pickers are exposed to contaminants and hazardous materials, from fecal matter and medical waste to toxic fumes and chemicals. Those who work at open dumps getting direct contact with toxic and infectious components. Due to lack of proper protection and equipment, they are undoubtedly exposed to various health risks. In addition, ill health can necessitate expenditure on medical treatment which set against a pickers' income. The research found that most impacts to waste pickers were associated with the health. Most of the waste pickers said that the common problem is cutting hands and foots and major problems are asthma and skin diseases.

Table 9. Percentage of the diseases affecting waste pickers

Research Diseases	Affected Waste Pickers (%)
Pain (back, chest, arms, legs)	97
Cutting (hands, foots)	90
Headache	87
Fatigue	95
Cold and Cough	75
Asthma	72
Eye Irritation	43
Diarrhea	72
Skin Diseases	86

4 Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study that was carried out using waste pickers' livelihood.

- The income of waste pickers in Bangladesh comparatively is very low than other countries. Gazipur is a part of Bangladesh in which the average income of waste pickers was Tk. 121.95 where Tk. 276 in South Africa.
- Waste pickers suffer from different types of diseases. Among these diseases, 97% waste pickers were in pain whereas 95%, 90% and 86% were in fatigue, cutting, and skin diseases respectively.
- There were 61% female and 39% male among them 13% (8% female and 5% male) under the age of 16 and 69% were illiterate. The average working hour of the waste pickers per day is 6-8 hours.
- Waste pickers are the deprived people and have low status in the society. It can be said that they work hard to fulfill their daily needs. Waste pickers have their dark future and their life is in danger by point of view of health degradation and polluted working environment.

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