

SLUM WOMEN AND THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS: A STUDY IN DHAKA CITY

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ABSTRACT

An estimated 3.4 million people live in the overcrowded slums of Dhaka. Among them a handsome amount of population is women. These slum women are considered as poorest of the poor. Because their household activities are not recognized as productive ones. Study shows that, they have limited access to urban facilities such as water, gas, electricity and sanitation. Apart from these, they are living in unhygienic environment and facing a lot of challenges in slum life. The study was conducted on 150 women living in 10 slums of Dhaka city out of 4500 based on survey method. Besides, the study also suggests some solutions to improve the overall situation of slum women.

Keywords: Slum, women, Socio-economic characteristics, Dhaka city, overcrowded slums

INTRODUCTION

The urban population has been growing very rapidly since liberation in 1971 and continues to do so at over 3.5 percent annually. This rapid growth has been due primarily to migration by the rural poor, particularly to large metropolitan areas. On arrival, these poor migrants routinely turn to slums for shelter. They choose the slum to live, because they have no afforded. All major urban centres in Bangladesh have slums and squatter settlements, the largest concentrations being in Dhaka, followed by Chittagong, Khulna, and Rajshahi (Hartman et al, 2013). Annually, Dhaka city draws an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 mostly poor migrants who provide critical employment for the city's industries and services. Most migrants come from rural areas in search of opportunities, which can provide new livelihood options for them (Hossain, 2012) and 40% of the total migrated population live in slum areas (Siddiqui et al, 1993). An estimated 3.4 million people live in the overcrowded slums of Dhaka, and many more live in public spaces lacking the most basic shelter (Uddin et al, 2009). The first significant survey of the slums and squatter population in Dhaka was conducted by the Centre for Urban Studies in 1974 at the behest of the Government of Bangladesh and UNCHS. The slum population found in that survey was 275,000. Another survey was conducted by CUS in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area in 1991 for ICDDR, B. This study recovered a slum population of 718,143 in some 2,156 slum and squatter clusters. CUS conducted yet another survey in 1996 in the same area (the DMA) for the Asian Development Bank and found the total slum population to be 1.5 million in 3,007 clusters (Islam N. et al, 2009)). However, a recent study shows that, an estimated 3.4 million people live in the overcrowded slums of Dhaka, and many more live in public spaces lacking the most basic shelter

(Uddin et al, 2009). Among them a significant number of women live in these slums who struggle with poverty to survive in this beautiful world.

Because of particular gender, slum women are the most suppressed, oppressed and exploited section like the other section of the society. Their household activities are not recognized as productive ones. As a result, they are considered as the poorest of the poor. Acute poverty characterizes their lives. Access to basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, health and education by the poor is limited (Hossain, M. T., 2014). They live in unsanitary conditions and face difficulties in accessing employment, made worse by having little or no social protection. Further, they have limited access to adequate health services and education opportunities. Furthermore, female in the slum becomes an easy victim of violence by her husband mainly because of constant demand of dowry, which the family cannot meet, and also polygamy and economic insecurity. These women in many cases had married without registration. Most of them get married at an early age, which affects their health and marital life. They are not conscious about their legal rights. Most of the women did not have any knowledge that they can take legal steps and can claim dower (Mohr) money, which the husband promised to give to his wife during marriage (Democracy Watch, 2006). In addition, as women make up the majority of slum residents, it is also their suffering that makes up the highest suffering per capita. Work for women is challenging to get and single mothers are looked down upon, on top of being excluded from the formal economy because of their religious beliefs or lack of secure assets. During pregnancy, women are more sensitive to their environmental circumstances and get sick or have complications in pregnancy more often than women with access to clean water. Without good water and sanitation, maternal and baby mortality rates rise and diseases thrive. The lack of hospitals and funding for proper hospital staff and supplies is a contributing factor (Andre, 2009). Slum conditions such as overcrowding, sanitation, hygiene, and insecurity of tenure have a more adverse effect on women, who are often subject to “greater risk” especially in public toilets and showers (Parmar, 2010). Moreover, young women in slum areas a particularly helpless group, especially because of the stigma attached to young women’s sexuality in most cultural contexts, lower social status due to their age, and greater patriarchal control over their bodies (Action Aid, 2012). However, there is one factor that often goes neglected in most slum redevelopment plans, which is the involvement of women. It is women who largely bear the brunt of the sub-human living conditions in slums (Parmar, 2010). So, needless to mention that the fact remain that women living in the slums lead a vulnerable life and it is high time to think about their citizen rights (Hossain, 2014). Considering the necessities the present study wants to break new ground in this arena.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deprivation to women starts from birth in Bangladesh. The socioeconomic, health and nutritional status of women depict gloomy pictures throughout their life. Moreover, like most developing countries, the picture of nutritional status of women is far too serious in the poorer socioeconomic groups who live in the rural areas and urban slums of Bangladesh (Haque, M. M., et al, 2014). The lack of access to sanitation and drinking water affects women and girls disproportionately, by impacting on their health and dignity, contributing to their vulnerability, and thereby frustrating efforts to empower women to lead a healthy and economically productive life. Women without water supplies and toilets within their homes are potentially vulnerable to

sexual violence when travelling to and from public facilities, when using public facilities and when they have to defecate in the open in the absence of any amenities (Gosling, L., 2010). However slum life has never been easy for the urban poor insofar 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. Moreover, with the growing influx of slum dwellers to the informal and unplanned settlements they find themselves in, governments around the world are using increasingly callous methods to 'beautify' cities, erase the urban poor from sight, and clear urban lands (which are skyrocketing in value) for 'development'. Women living in slums are often susceptible to forced evictions by governments and other actors, and too often face gender-based violence before, during, and after eviction (COHRE, 2008). Moreover, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of slum dwellers is a major cause of unstable and fragile life of married women living there. Most of the women are not engaged in any income generating activities, which makes them economically dependent on their husbands. Some working women engaged in garment, housemaid, and in small business and daily labour (Democracy Watch. 2006). Normally, in those areas the health status of both the males and females are below in standard. But it becomes worst to the women as they are most negligible among the society. In the slum area women are not only engaged in household works, children rearing etc. but also work hard to earn money. Number of children per women indicates that women's are used as productive machinery in most of the slum areas. So it is necessary to analyse the threats to the health among slum dwelling women (Banerjee, A., 2012). No doubt, non-working women are unaware, even workingwomen in slum areas (maids, labor class etc) are also affected by various myths regarding Reproductive Health care. They not only have scanty information but also lack in the sources concerned with reproductive care. They consider their aspect as a matter of shame and neglect it (Kotwal, et al, 2008).

The major objective of the study is to measure socio-economic characteristics of women living in ten selected slums of Dhaka city. To achieve the prime objective, the study also lay downs some specific objectives. These are: To discover the life style of slum women, to identify their education level, to find out their medical facilities, to know the accessibility to gas, water and electricity, to explore their level of income and major expenditure, to investigate their livelihood challenges and to suggests some measures for the wellbeing of slum people.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Basically the study was carried out on the basis of quantitative method. Survey tool was used to identify the socio-economic characteristics of women living in slum and a standard structured questionnaire was prepared in this regard. In addition, FGD (Focus Group Discussion) and case study technique was adopted for triangulation of data. . Apart from these, journal, book, newspaper and internet were scanned in order to gather the secondary data that mitigated study purpose. Some 10 slum areas such Mohakhali, Agargaon, Demra, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Mati kata, Hazari Bag, Kamrangir Char, Kafrul, Vashantake were selected as the area of study and all women in these slum were considered as study population. The study was conducted on 150 slum women aged 20 to 45. The study area was selected purposively on the basis of convenient sampling while 15 women from each slum area were selected randomly.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study was carried on 150 (one hundred fifty) women living in ten (10) slum areas of Dhaka City such as Mohakhali, Agargaon, Demra, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Mati kata, Hazari Bag, Kamrangir Char, Kafrul, Vashantake. From each slum area 15 (fifteen) respondents were selected. Among them a significant proportion of women (26%) was aged 26-30 years while 24% , 16%, 22% and 12% were 20-25, 31-35, 36-40 and 41-45 years of old respectively.

The study revealed that, most of the participants (13%) were non resident of Dhaka whereas only a small fraction of number (13%) confessed that they are the resident of Dhaka city and non resident participants were migrated from rural area for various pull and push factors such as 14% for landless due to natural disaster, 25% for lack of job opportunity in the rural area whilst 7%, 34%,6%,9% and 5% for divorce, rural poverty, village politics, in quest of planned life and to avoid violence correspondingly. However, 24% participants were illiterate where 42%, 23% and 11% were can read and write, completed primary level and completed secondary level respectively. Among the respondents only 18% admitted that they have access to government health service.

Survey showed that, majority percent of the respondents (41%) have been living in the slum areas since 5-8 years and only 3% participants have been living from above 20 years while 13%, 24%, 13% and 6% from 1-4, 9-12, 13-16 and 17-20 years respectively. Among the participants, 94% were belong to Islam and only 6% were follower of Hindu religion.

Study also found that, regarding pattern of house, a big proportion of respondents (46%) used to live in house made by tin where 12%, 15%, 17% and 10% were lived in wooden house, made by soil, semi building and made by bamboo in the same way. Among the participants 85% admitted that they are married and 15% widow with children 91% and without children only 9%. Regarding entertainment 55% reported that television is the main source of entertainment while watching cinema in the cinema hall, sporting and listening radio are the main source of entertainment for 22%, 5% and 18% proportionately.

This study explored very tragic scenario regarding the access to water, gas, electricity and sanitation facilities to the women living in slum. Most of the women depend on supply water (62%) whereas 25% depend on surface water and only 13% slum women have access to pure drinking water. Furthermore, 42% respondents admitted that they have access to gas and 58% don't have access to gas. In addition, regarding other urban facilities, 56% participants get access to electricity and 44% do not get access to electricity and more importantly, 49% slum women share latrine with 7-12 persons while 7%, 34% and 10% share latrine with 1-6, 13-19 and above 20 respectively.

It was disclosed in the survey that majority percent respondents (41%) were engaged as maid servant and a small proportion (3%) were the owner of tea stall while 21%,17%, 6%, 7% and 5% were with daily labor (construction), garment worker, small businessmen, hawker and porter correspondingly. It was investigated that, only 3% participants earned highest amount of money

that was above 9,000 TK and 16% earned lowest sum of money 1000-3000TK per month whereas 27% , 40%, and 14% respondents earned monthly 3001-5000TK, 5001-7000TK and 7001-9000TK in the same way. In terms of expenditure, it was found that 55% participants spent highest sum of money 3001-5000TK per month while 10%, 23% and 12% spent monthly 1000-3000TK, 5001-7000TK and 7001-9000TK respectively. It is mentionable that no one spent more than 9000TK per month.

Study discovered that 29% participant reported that low income is their main livelihood challenges whereas 8%, 7%, 6%, 7%, 5%, 5%, 5%, 11 and 7% reported husband torture, physical and sexual harassment, fear of being evicted, unhygienic environment, insecurity, seasonal problem (rain or excessive cold, hot), extortion, lack of pure drinking water, access to gas and electricity and lack of health service as challenges in the life of slum.

Regarding coping strategies, 23% slum women confessed that searching new job is the tool to cope the livelihood challenges whereas 15%, 11%, 21%, 8%, 9% and 13% women consider social network, community involvement, frequent rural visit, seek NGO's assistance, emphasis on entertainment, hope of future as techniques to cop the challenges of slum life.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provided some important information on socio-economic characteristics of women living in slums within Dhaka city. The study showed that slum women are leading very lower class life since they have limited access to water, gas, electricity and sanitation facilities. Some women are engaged in unpaid work and they are mainly dependent on their male counterpart. Moreover, they cannot enjoy fundamental rights. Every woman facing a lot of challenges and their miseries are beggar description. In order to improve the entire condition of slum women the following measures should be taken:

1. Government should conduct a proper survey in order to know the number of slum women.
2. Government along with NGO's should arrange technical and vocational training so that slum women can arrange suitable job easily.
3. Government and concern NGO's should provide micro-credit for self-employment.
4. Minimum level of education and health facilities should be ensured for the destitute slum women.
5. Legal action should be taken in case of physical and sexual harassment against slum women.
6. Initiative should be taken to rehabilitate these destitute women.
7. Access to urban facilities such as gas, water, sanitation and electricity should be ensured.
8. Provide security at job place and in the slum as well.
9. Equal rights for slum women should be ensured.

Finally, this gloomy picture of slum women might reflect the picture of the women in Bangladesh as a whole. So, Government, Civil Society, NGO's should take necessary steps to ensure these rights as well as to improve their overall situation.

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APPENDIX

Table 1 Slum Areas

Slum area	Frequency	Percentage
Mohakhali	15	10
Agargaon	15	10
Demra	15	10
Mohammadpur	15	10
Dottopara	15	10
Mati Kata	15	10
Bijoy Para	15	10
Godown	15	10
Kafrul	15	10
Vashantak	15	10
Total	150	100

Table 2 Respondent's age

Age of participants	Frequency	Percentage
20-25 Years	36	24
26-30 Years	39	26
31-35 Years	24	16

36-40 Years	33	22
41-45 Years	18	12
Total	150	100

Table 3 Resident of Dhaka City

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Resident	19	13
Migrated	131	87
Total	150	100

Table 4 Reason behind Migration

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Landless due to natural disaster	21	14
Lack of job opportunity	37	25
Divorce	11	7
Poverty	51	34
Village politics	9	6
To lead planned life	14	9
Violence	7	5
Total	150	150

Table 5 Educational Status

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	37	24

Can read and write only	63	42
Completed primary level	34	23
Completed secondary level	16	11
Total	150	100

Table 6 Access to government health service

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	18
No	123	82
Total	150	100

Table 7 Duration of Slum life

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1-4 Years	19	13
5-8 Years	62	41
9-12 Years	36	24
13-16 Years	19	13
17-20 Years	9	6
Above 20 Years	5	3
Total	150	100

Table 8 Religion of Participants

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Islam	141	94
Hindu	9	6

Total	150	100
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Table 9 Pattern of House

Tin shed	68	46
Wooden	18	12
Made by soil	23	15
Semi building	26	17
Made by bamboo	15	10
Total	150	100

Table 10 Marital Status

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Married	128	85
Widow	22	15
Total	150	100

Table 11 Information about Children

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	137	91
No	13	9
Total	150	100

Table 12 Source of entertainment

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Television	84	54
Watching cinema in cinema hall	36	24
Sporting	6	4
Listening radio	27	18
Total	150	100

Table 13 Source of Water

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Tube well	19	13
Supply	92	62
Surface	37	25
Total	150	100

Table 14 Access to gas

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	63	42
No	87	58
Total	150	100

Table 15 Access to electricity

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	84	56
No	66	44
Total	150	100

Table 16 Latrine share with

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1-6 person	11	7
7-12	74	49
13-19	51	34
<20	15	10
Total	150	100

Table 17 Respondent's occupation

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Maid servant	61	41
Daily laborer (construction)	31	21
Garment worker	26	17

Small business	9	6
Hawker	11	7
Porter	7	5
Owner of tea stall	5	3
Total	150	100

Table 18 Monthly income of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1000-3000 TK	24	16
3001-5000 TK	41	27
5001-7000 TK	59	40
7001-9000 TK	21	14
Above 9000 TK	5	3
Total	150	100

Table 19 Monthly Expenditure of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1000-3000 TK	15	10
3001-5000 TK	82	55
5001-7000 TK	35	23
7001-9000 TK	18	12
Above 9000 TK	-	-
Total	150	100

Table 20 Livelihood Challenges

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Low income	43	29%
Husband's torture	12	8%
Physical and sexual harassment	11	7%
Fear of being evicted	9	6%
Unhygienic environment	11	7%
Insecurity	7	5%
Seasonal problem i.e. rainy and winter season	8	5%
Extortion	7	5%
Lack of pure drinking water	16	11%
Lack of access to electricity and gas	11	7%
Lack of health service	15	10%
Total	150	100%

Table 21 Coping Strategy

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Searching new job	36	23
Social network	22	15
Community involvement	16	11
Frequent rural visit	31	21
Seek NGO's assistance	12	8
Emphasis on entertainment	14	9
Hope of future	19	13

Total	150	100
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