



Livelihood Profile of Migrated Battery-Operated Rickshaw Pullers in Comilla City: A Case Study

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| <p>Article History:</p> <p>Received: January 1, 2023</p> <p>Revised: January 20, 2023</p> <p>Accepted: February 5, 2023</p> <p>Available Online: March 10, 2023</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Rickshaw, Battery, Migration, Society, Employment, Cumilla.</p> | <p><i>Battery operated Rickshaws are the most popular and commonly used kind of transportation in Bangladesh. A battery-operated rickshaw is a common mode of transportation for short distances in the country, providing a source of income for rural immigrants. They contribute 30% of transportation value-added, according to government estimates. Policymakers and researchers have mostly ignored rickshaws. The majority of rickshaw pullers were migrating, illiterate, and destitute rural people who slept in slums without basic amenities. The majority of rickshaw pullers were migrating, illiterate, and poor rural people who lived in inadequate housing without civil amenities. This study describes the overall experience of passengers and drivers with battery-operated rickshaws that promote last-mile connection. Data gathered through in-depth interviews with 120 rickshaw pullers in Cumilla City shows the user experiences of e-rickshaw, as well as the benefits, drawbacks, and effectiveness of rickshaw on the streets. According to the findings of the study, battery-operated rickshaws have the potential to continue operating as a viable last mile connectivity option in the urban transportation industry.</i></p> |



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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's scenery has traditionally included motor operated rickshaws with bright decorations. These dedicated and eco-conscious rickshaw drivers are equally adept at negotiating congested city streets as well as winding country roads (Ali, 2013). However, because they barely make it out of poverty themselves, their passengers don't even notice them. With 86% of the total population living in rural areas, our nation may be described as having a predominantly rural population. Nearly 81 percent of the world's population is extremely reliant on agricultural pursuits at the turn of the 21st century. People in rural areas sometimes have very meager and

precarious means of support for themselves. The standard of living of the population and the agricultural operations carried out inside the country have not been improving as rapidly as was anticipated (Hossain et al., 2018). In addition to this, other metropolitan centers in various sections of the country are now undergoing development. However, only around 14 percent of the population resides in these metropolitan regions. In compared to rural regions, metropolitan areas have significantly more development, as well as access to a greater variety of services and opportunities for physical activity. Career options and access to vocational schools are greater in metropolitan areas (Islam et al., 2019). This means that people in urban areas have better access to employment opportunities and a higher standard of life. Bangladesh has made great progress in a number of economic sectors since the turn of the past century. Despite this, the benefit did not percolate down to the lowest echelons. Despite periodic attempts to improve the economic status of the poor and those working in the unorganized sector, these groups continue to face unfavorable conditions (Karim & Salam, 2019). The lives of the world's poorest people continue to worsen, and this is particularly true in the rural regions that are home to more than 70% of the population. Unemployment, lack of education, poor living conditions, and unfair treatment in the distribution of wealth are all pervasive problems. Many individuals from less populous places migrate to larger cities in quest of better employment and living conditions. However, these rural immigrants, particularly those who had been displaced by natural catastrophes (flood, drought) or for socio-religious reasons, lacked the resources, education, and industrial skills necessary to get employment in the official sector or related industries (Kurosaki, 2007). The rickshaw industry is appealing because it provides a stable income and easy access to work. As a result of the ever-increasing population and the expansion of the urban population, rickshaw pulling has become a common source of income and employment among the rural immigrants in the urban masses. Historically, rickshaw pullers have concentrated in urban slums and ghettos (Begum & Sen, 2005). The cycle rickshaw is a common form of local transportation in the form of a three-wheeled, miniature vehicle. Travelers in the main cities of South Asia and Southeast Asia, notably in Bangladesh, typically use them to go about for shorter distances at prearranged prices. Pulling rickshaws is an important source of income and employment for those who are less fortunate (Kumar et al., 2016). Because it is the most cost-effective method of travel for traveling shorter distances, it is becoming increasingly popular in metropolitan areas. Even though pulling a rickshaw is a sign of poverty, it really offers a source of income and a way of life for the bulk of the socio-economically backward individuals who depend, in part or entirely, on this vocation.

Objective of the Study

The research was carried out in Cumilla City with the following goals in mind, taking into account the relevance of rickshaw pulling in the socio-economic lives of people at the grass roots level.

- To investigate the backgrounds of the persons who pulled rickshaws, including their educational backgrounds and past jobs.
- To investigate the educational levels, main habits, living situations, and availability of basic utilities and services among those who pull rickshaws for living in Comilla City.
- In order to draw an attention to the issues that are associated with the rickshaw pullers of Cumilla City and their socio-economic position.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The lock industry, pharmaceuticals, edible oil facilities, dairy farms, and slaughterhouses are just some of the small and light businesses that call Comilla City home. Also, hundreds of prosperous individuals call this city home thanks to its many prestigious educational institutions, including a prestigious university (Comilla University) and colleges as well as at least 200 schools (Agarwala & Gogoi, 2019). However, there is still a deficiency in the city's public transit infrastructure. Therefore, rickshaws are constantly in great demand due to the strong need for short-distance transportation. Due to a dearth of secondary sources detailing the economic status of rickshaw drivers, this research relies on primary sources.

In order to accomplish the goals of a study, researchers use a certain set of techniques known as a "research methodology" (M. Aminuzzaman Saluddin, 1998). Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, this research focused on corporate governance.

- a. Research Design:** The quantitative research used to regulate and qualify the rapport among the dependent and independent variables. Different statistical tools were used to express the relationship between variables. (Kumar Ranjit, 2011).
- b. Selection of the Study Area:** Three different areas of Cumilla city were selected purposively for conducting this study. Number of rickshaw pullers and their socio-economic status are given important emphasis to select the study area.
- c. Data collection Methods:** To draw some conclusions from the findings, the collected data must be quantitatively analyzed. To achieve the study's objectives, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used. The following methods used in this study:
 - ❖ **Content Analysis:** Content analysis entails gathering information from all important documents, books, journals, articles, online articles and research works. It has both quantitative and qualitative capabilities. Content analysis can also provide historical and cultural insights over time.
 - ❖ **Interview:** A face-to-face interviews will be conducted. According to the researcher, face-to-face interviews with semi-structured oral interviews are appropriate for gathering information from them.
 - ❖ **Survey method:** In this study, a semi-structured questionnaire survey will be used to collect primary data. It's one of the most efficient ways to gather primary data.

Sources of Data and Sampling procedure

Primary and secondary sources were used to gather information. Secondary data were gathered from various sources, such as educational statistics, books, seminar papers, newspaper reports, previous research works, and reports. Interviews and questionnaire surveys was used to collect primary data (M. Aminuzzaman Saluddin, 1998). Purposive sampling was used on the entire sample to conduct a semi-structured questionnaire survey. The study area was selected on the basis of purposive sampling. From this city, I was purposively select 120 respondents as per their availability to collect the data. The following is the breakdown of the respondents:

Table-01: Composition of Respondents.

| Sl | Name of City | Number of Ward | Category of respondent | Total Respondents |
|--|--------------|---|------------------------|-------------------|
| 01. | Cumilla | 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21 and 23 no wards | Rickshaw puller | 120 |
| Total (One Hundred and Twenty)= | | | | 120 |

- d. Data Processing:** According to the research objectives, the data was coded, calculated, analyzed, sorted, summarized, classified, formatted, and tabulated. The data was also methodically processed using different research approaches based on predetermined variables.
- e. Data Analysis:** Information was gathered from both the primary as well as the secondary sources. The information was analyzed and interpreted using statistical tools and techniques after processing. In addition, using the SPSS method, the data was classified, tabulated, and analyzed (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences). Data was analyzed using Microsoft Word and Excel.

Situation Analysis: Bangladesh perspective

In Bangladesh, two million people are employed as rickshaw pullers. One of the most recognizable symbols of the nation is the rickshaw, which may carry everything from humans to plastic flowers to equipment. In the largest cities of Bangladesh, rickshaws account for 50 percent of all traffic and transport more people per vehicle than automobiles do (Sadekin et al., 2014). For other people, it's their only option for getting anywhere except walking. Both economically and culturally, the country relies heavily on rickshaws. Rickshaw pulling is credited with 6% of Bangladesh's GDP, however Gallagher (1992) shows that it really contributes more to the country's economy than Bangladesh Biman Airlines and Bangladesh Railways put together (Kumar et al., 2016). It is estimated that in Dhaka alone, rickshaw drivers and riders exchange \$300,000 everyday. A huge number of individuals will benefit from this deal. It is believed that 14% of the Bangladeshi population (rickshaw drivers, their families, manufacturers, garage owners, painters, and repairmen) depends on the rickshaw industry for their livelihood. Roughly 10.4 million people depend entirely on the rickshaw industry for support. As there are over two million rickshaw pullers, and the typical household has 5.2 people, this is the case. The majority of discouraged people want for a secure employment (Tamanna, 2012). A fixed weekly payment, with the possibility of a bonus income for great labor, would allow the rickshaw puller to provide for their family's basic necessities. This plan would be a major step toward alleviating poverty for future generations. People sometimes choose jobs as rickshaw pullers because they feel they have no other options and are not proud of their profession (Kumar et al., 2018). A full exodus of Bangladesh's rickshaw pullers would be damaging to the economy, but they do meet a substantial market demand.

The municipal government of Comilla, where the majority of rickshaws are located, has been attempting to register rickshaw pullers and provide licenses for rickshaws since 2011. This ambitious endeavor, but without a development goal, indicates a determination to interact with the rickshaw sector and intervene more effectively. City corporations should be able to oversee the rickshaw business (Islam, 2016). There are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh because of the high need for social services there, but none of them are dedicated to helping the rickshaw drivers and their families. Efforts to improve the lives of rickshaw drivers aren't always successful since, for example, HIV/AIDS signs posted at rickshaw garages are written in English and most drivers only know Bengali (Naimul & Tehsum, 2018). Roughly ten thousand individuals have to rely on the rickshaw business alone. Further, our plan would work to break down prejudice against Bangladesh's rickshaw drivers so that they may better serve their communities.

RESULT ANALYSIS

Rickshaw pullers from birth place

The people who make their living pulling rickshaws are among the most marginalized in the world. A majority of rickshaw drivers in Comilla moved here from elsewhere in the country in search of work; the data below reveals that just 22% of drivers were born and raised in the city. Seventy-four percent were from other Comilla districts, while another 42 percent were from adjacent districts. Researchers found that most migrants were rural marginal farmers or agricultural laborers from neighboring areas where job prospects were lower than in Comilla.

Table 01: Rickshaw pullers from birth place

| Place of Birth | % |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Local | 20 |
| Migrated | 80 |
| a. Within district | 20 |
| b. Neighboring district | 40 |
| c. Distant district | 20 |

Rickshaw pullers by previous occupation

Figure 02 demonstrates that 25% of rickshaw pullers were engaged in agricultural labor. This was followed by non-workers at a rate of 20%, farmers at a rate of 18%, construction laborers at a rate of 11%, workers in the lock industry at a rate of 10%, hawkers at a rate of 7%, workers in hotels and restaurants at a rate of 4%, sweepers at a rate of 3%, and other workers at a rate of 2%. The fact that there is not consistent employment throughout the year in agriculture explains why the proportion of people working in agriculture is so high. However, among the people who pull rickshaws, 18% had been involved in agriculture as farmers in the past. However, lower

incomes, overpopulation, higher input costs, and lower productivity pushed them to seek alternative means of earning a living. Rickshaw pulling is one of such alternative means.

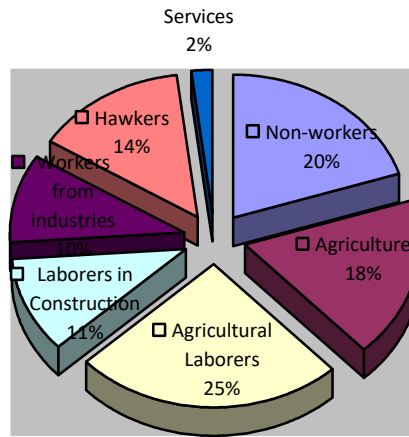


Figure 01: Rickshaw pullers by previous occupation

The other reasons were, firstly, that people are drawn to this difficult job by the promise of quick cash, and secondly, that pulling a rickshaw requires no special skills, whereas the high mechanization even in cottage and small-scale industries has left very little room for workers with no training or experience. A sizeable percentage of rickshaw pullers were found to have been vegetable or fruit hawkers in their past lives. However, as a consequence of engaging in risky behaviors such as gambling, abusing drugs or alcohol, or even suffering the effects of illness in their own families, these individuals experienced a loss of capital and were forced to seek employment elsewhere. As a result, they became rickshaw pullers.

Religion status of rickshaw pullers

All person's decisions are heavily influenced by their religious beliefs, making religion a crucial component in the community's socioeconomic status. The following pie chart illustrates that roughly 40% of rickshaw drivers were Christians, 20% were Hindus, and 10% were Buddhists. Also, just 2% of the population is involved in the rickshaw pulling service, and that number includes Christians and members of other communities.

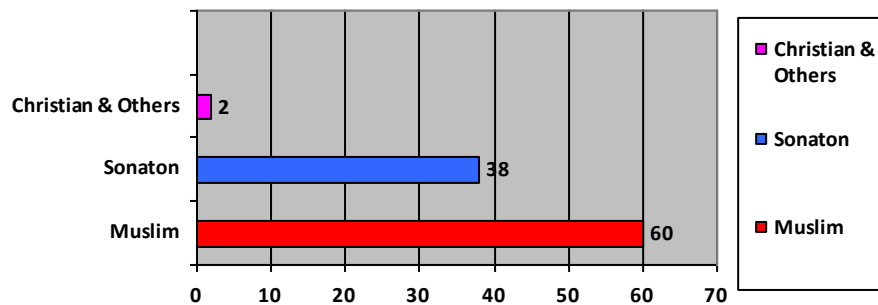


Figure 02: Religion scenario of Rickshaw pullers

Caste Scenario of Rickshaw pullers

The class system's continued influence on Bangladesh's social structure, with its accompanying stratification and constraints, is substantial. The belief system, usually associated with Muslims, is really widely held by Sonaton, Christians, and others. There is no escaping the fact that caste is a reliable surrogate for economic standing. The following pie-chart shows that general caste people make up 78% of rickshaw drivers, followed by those from the schedule caste group at 2%. The majority of rickshaw drivers were of the Sonaton ethnicity, which is a socially and economically disadvantaged group. Worse than the schedule caste people, their living circumstances were deplorable.

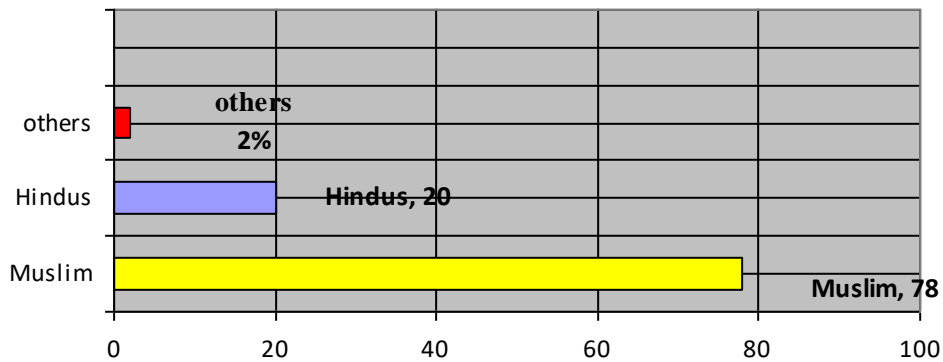


Figure 03: Rickshaw pullers by Caste

Status of Age

The graphic demonstrates that 69% of rickshaw pullers were under the age of 45 years old. This is likely due to the fact that this career requires a greater amount of physical effort and is less secure for those who are older. As a result, a significant number of young individuals who had moved but had no jobs entered the profession in order to support themselves. Those pullers, on the other hand, are older than the 55 years they were in the past.

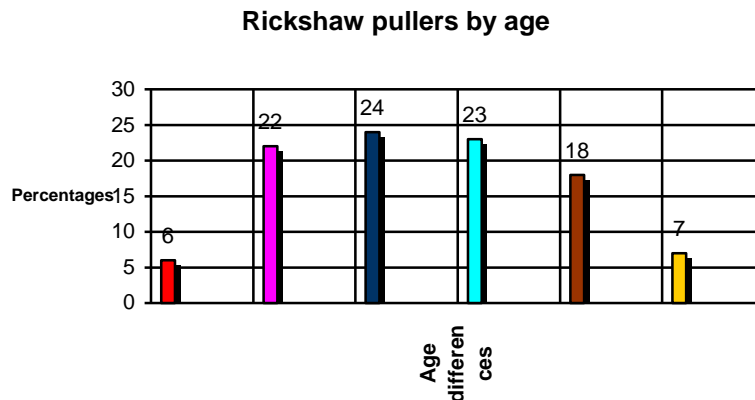


Figure 04: Rickshaw pullers by age

Marital Status of Rickshaw pullers

Marriage is the single most important component in establishing a reliable and stable social life. The following pie chart shows that 70% of rickshaw drivers were in committed relationships, 28% were single, and 2% were widowed or divorced. Marriage is one of the pull factors that compels unskilled employees to pull rickshaws to support their families. This is because pulling rickshaws gives more conveniently accessible income. On the other hand, a portion of them were obliged to live the life of a bachelor since they had to leave their wives and children behind in the regions from where they came in order to find work. In a similar vein, a significant portion of the population was single as a result of low socio-economic conditions and the need to earn a living; in addition, they left the nation (their native areas) to find work.

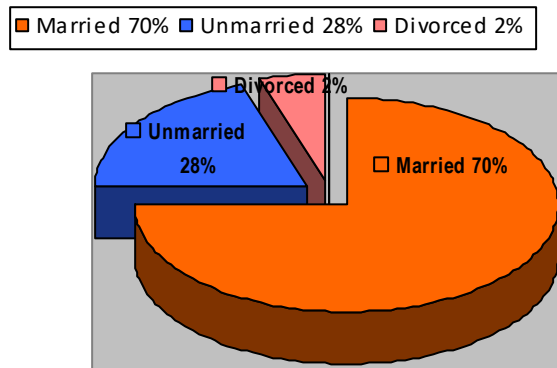


Figure 05: Rickshaw pullers by marital status

Educational level of Rickshaw pullers

The degree of social development is proportional to the amount of education. According to this data, 74% of rickshaw drivers did not have a high school diploma or equivalent. They have a literacy rate of roughly 26%, with the vast majority having finished at least some kind of basic school education. It was found that rickshaw pullers had a very low level of schooling. It was due to low family income, financial hardship, and a lack of convenient transportation to schools, as well as the pervasive mentality that schools were a waste of money.

Table 02: Rickshaw pullers by level of education

| Educational Level | % |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Illiterate | 74 |
| Primary | 14 |
| Middle | 11 |
| High school | 01 |
| Total= | 100% |

Income Status of Rickshaw pullers

The majority of rickshaw drivers (67%) had monthly incomes of less than taka 2,500, while 20% had monthly incomes between taka 2,500 and 3,000, and 13% had monthly incomes of 3,000 or more. A subset of rickshaw drivers had greater wages since they were part of a more permanent or steady source of income, thanks to contracts they had secured with schools or parents of kids at such institutions. They utilize a hired rickshaw on a month-to-month basis, in contrast to the other fixed sources, which were daily office employees, in particular females.

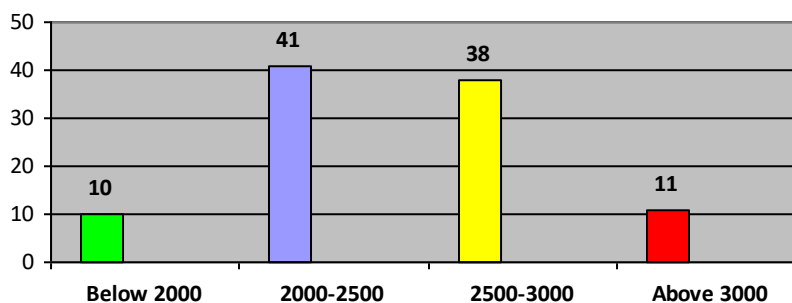


Figure 06: Rickshaw pullers by income

Residence facilities of Rickshaw pullers

It was said before that the majority of people who pulled rickshaws were immigrants from rural areas and homeless; nonetheless, there were many other ways that these people spent their nights. The percentage of people working as rickshaw pullers increased by 30% in lower class leased dwellings, followed by the percentage of people living in garages (27%), their own houses (22%), slums (12%), and other houses (10%) accordingly. Slums, garages, and other types of homes all lacked basic amenities like toilets and sanitary facilities, and there was no provision for water. These rickshaw pullers were either renting houses or living in homes that they owned that were in a deplorable state in terms of cleanliness and did not have an adequate supply of water.

Table 03: Rickshaw pullers by dwellings

| Nature of Dwellings | % |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Rented | 30 |
| Slum | 11 |
| Garage | 27 |
| Other's houses | 10 |
| Own houses | 22 |
| Total= | 100 |

Health care facilities of Rickshaw pullers

During the field study, it was discovered that despite the strenuous physical labor required for pulling the rickshaw, practically the whole community of rickshaw pullers spent their lives without eating properly in residences that lacked adequate amenities and services. This was documented. They were suffering from a variety of health issues, including coughing, physical ache, fever, and a number of various persistent diseases. They bought medications from medical shops (50%) without first contacting a doctor or medical professional. Due to the fact that they had a low income and the fact that the consulting time and the hours that they worked to earn money were almost identical, it was more convenient for them to seek medical care in the evenings or during their free time in order to purchase cheaper medicines from medical stores or subpar, low-quality private clinics.

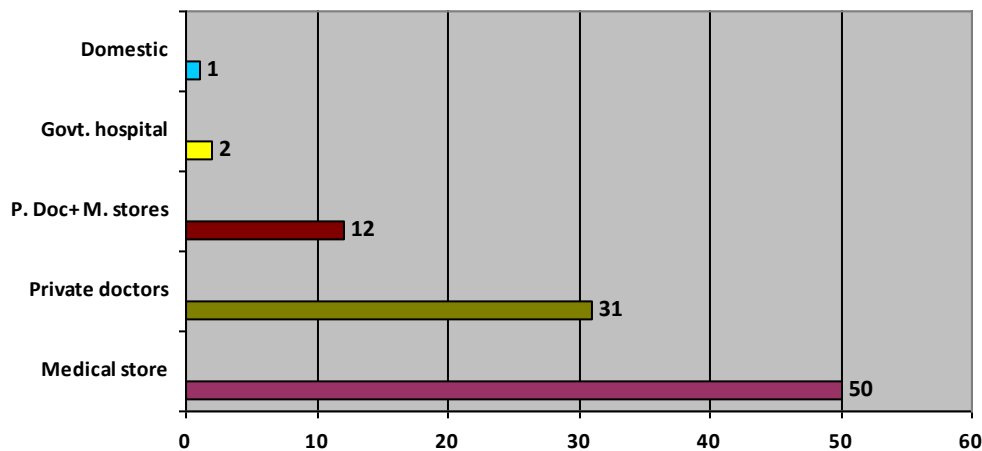


Figure 07: Rickshaw pullers by health care facilities

Reasons for Migration

The survey found that most rickshaw pullers (92%) are from the northern part of Bangladesh and the rest (8%) are from other parts of Bangladesh. Why do so many people leave the northern part of the country? People leave this area because it has a lot of natural disasters and economic problems. The survey shows that most rickshaw pullers (90%) say that natural factors (floods and river bank erosion) and economic factors (poverty and unemployment) are what cause them to move. The graph shows how the rickshaw pullers who left their jobs are split up by the reason they left. They say that the northern part of Bangladesh is affected by monsoon, floods, river erosion, drought, and cold waves. All of these things happen more often and hurt a lot of people who work in agriculture. Because of these natural factors, there aren't many job opportunities in this area.

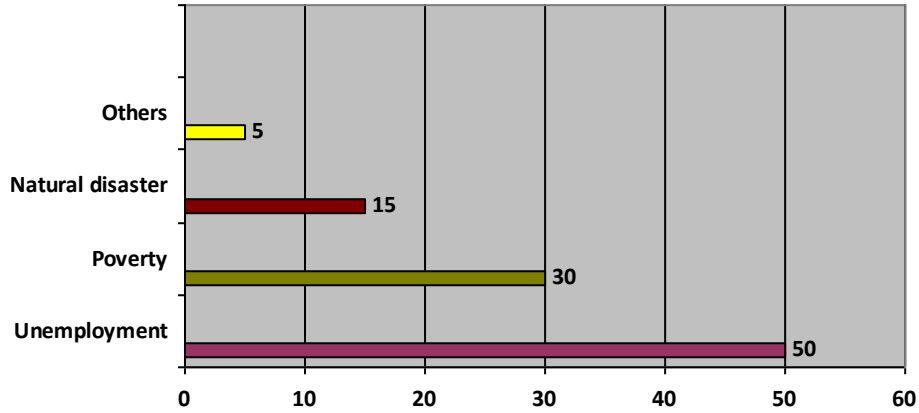


Figure 08: Causes of Migration

About half of the rickshaw pullers say they came to Cumilla because they were out of work. Since they don't have jobs, they have no way to make money to pay for food and shelter, so they are often poor. So, in order to get rid of the poverty curse, a lot of people from the northern region agreed to move to where there are jobs.

Amount of Saving

It can be observed from the chart above that out of the total of 120 respondents, there are 65 respondents that save between 201 and 400 taka per day. This represents 56% of the total respondents. Three-fifths of those polled put away more than four hundred taka per day in savings. The remaining nine percent, meanwhile, have the opportunity to save up to taka 200.

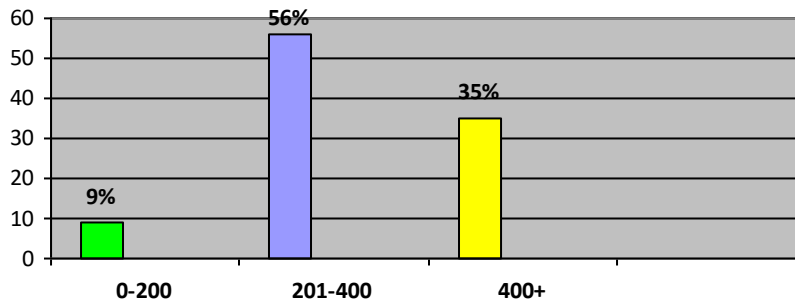


Figure 09: Amount of Saving

Change in Social Status

From the diagram below, you can see how the social status of rickshaw drivers has changed over time. Eighty percent of the 120 people who answered say that their social status has gone up since they started driving a rickshaw. 15% of them say that their social status has gone down, and 5% say that it has stayed the same.

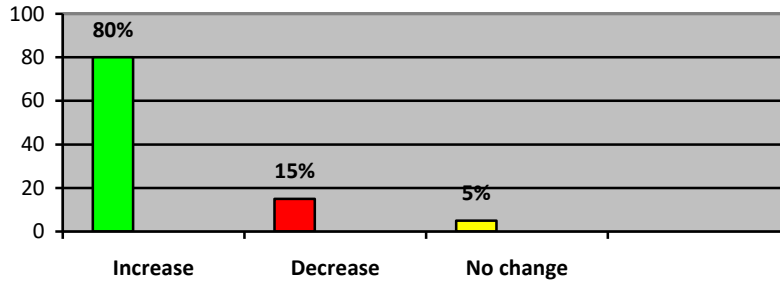


Figure 10: Scenario of Social Status

Level of Satisfaction from the occupation

From the diagram below, we can see that out of 120 respondents, 62% are happy with their rickshaw job, 27% are very happy with their rickshaw job, 11% are averagely happy with their rickshaw job, and none of them are unhappy with their rickshaw job.

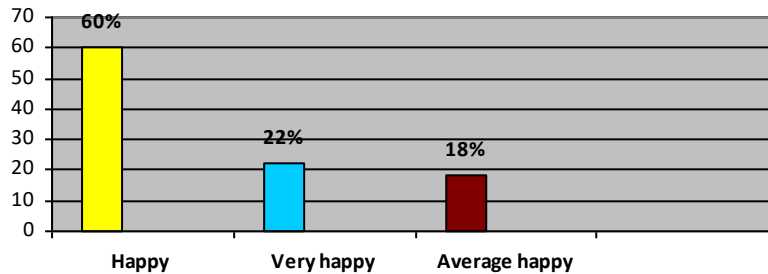


Figure 10: Level of Satisfaction

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

A variety of people are drawn to this line of employment because it offers both monetary compensation and rapid entry into the workforce. The vast majority of people who pulled rickshaws were rural immigrants who had moved into the area from the neighboring districts after abandoning their former jobs. There was a significant number of Muslims working as rickshaw pullers, accounting for sixty percent of the workforce. Because pulling a rickshaw requires a high level of physical effort, 69% of rickshaw pullers were between the ages of 15 and 45. As a result of poor income, poverty, and a general lack of awareness, the majority of them were illiterate (74 percent), which contributed to their wasteful views about spending time and money. Those rickshaw pullers who had a source of stable income (25%) as a contract for carrying school students were in better shape than the other pullers who did not have this (75%). The majority of them resided in slums, impoverished homes, or garages, all of which lacked basic civic amenities and facilities or provided substandard versions of such amenities. Coughing, bodily soreness, fever, and a variety of persistent diseases were the most common health issues experienced by those who pulled rickshaws. In order to obtain more affordable drugs for diagnosis, they went to medical shops or private clinics that were below average in quality when they needed medical treatment during free hours (Nandhi, 2011). The lack of commitment from the government to this community was also a factor in why things were so

bad. Active unions and organizations could have helped improve their social and economic situation (Kumar et al., 2016). A few suggestions are included as ways to help them get better.

- ❖ The rickshaw community, much like any other backward population, has to be acknowledged as such and given the appropriate level of consideration.
- ❖ It is necessary to take a unique strategy to their uplift in the same way that it is taken with other targeted groups for the socioeconomic development of their local area.
- ❖ The rural population of Bangladesh is economically stagnant, thus initiatives to create new jobs in the countryside need to reach out to them in a genuine way.
- ❖ It is believed that pulling rickshaws can be a means of escaping poverty; however, education and health care must be prioritized if the lives of rickshaw-pullers are to be improved with the help of the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- ❖ Policy interventions should encourage early disengagement from rickshaw pulling through credit, training, education, and other initiatives.

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