



“TRAPPED IN CYCLES OF POVERTY”: A CASE STUDY OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUGGLES OF WOMEN MANUAL SCAVENGERS IN NORTH CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

Manual scavenging involves the hazardous and degrading task of manually cleaning, handling, and disposing of human waste, sewage, and other filth. Women manual scavengers face both gender discrimination and the stigma associated with their work. Women manual scavengers are particularly vulnerable to infections, diseases, and exposure to toxic fumes and chemicals from human waste and sewage. Lack of proper protective gear and sanitation facilities further exacerbate these risks. Women manual scavengers often receive meager wages for their work. The lack of formal contracts or employment agreements makes them susceptible to exploitation by contractors and middlemen, who take advantage of their marginalized status and offer low wages for a hazardous job. Socio-economic struggles refer to the challenges and difficulties that individuals face as a result of their social and economic circumstances. The cycle of poverty and lack of education further restricts their employment options, leaving them trapped in this dangerous and degrading occupation. Manual scavengers usually lack access to social security benefits, health care, and insurance. This leaves them vulnerable in times of illness, injury, or emergencies, further perpetuating their cycle of poverty.

The researcher has chosen to analyse a sample of 10 case studies focusing on women within manual scavenging communities in North Chennai. This selection aims to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of the distinct experiences, obstacles, and socio-economic challenges that these women confront in their lives.

KEYWORDS: Women manual scavengers, sanitation, poverty, socio-economic struggles.