Sanitation Work for Sustenance-Condition of Women Sanitary Workers in Erode City Municipal Corporation

**Author: Co-author**

**Dr. B.Vijay Kumar Ms. J. Renee Arathi**

Assistant Professor Assistant Professor

Department of Social Work Department of Social Work

School of Social Sciences School of Social Sciences

Tamil Nadu Open University Tamil Nadu Open University

Saidapet, Chennai – 600 015 Saidapet, Chennai – 600 015

e-mail: [vijaybabujirao@gmail.com](mailto:vijaybabujirao@gmail.com) e-mail: [reneearathij@tnou.ac.in](mailto:reneearathij@tnou.ac.in)

Mobile: 9445271098 Mobile: 97909 17825

**Abstract**

Globally Sanitation workers fill the gap between sanitary standards and the current sanitation system. They encompass everyone working in sanitation, whether it be cleaning, operating, or just being a part of the sanitation system especially in developing countries like India. Nevertheless, the Socio Economic Condition and their working condition are matters of inquiries. The purpose of this article is to examine in detail the socio Economic Condition, financial benefits and work life of women sanitation workers in Erode city Municipal Corporation. The findings are based on the primary data collected from 30 respondents through convenience sampling in four zones of Erode city Municipal Corporation.

**Key notes:** women sanitary workers, socio-economic, types of sanitary worker.

**Introduction**

Sanitation is not an easy concept to understand. The dictionary meaning relates it to “conditions that affect hygiene and health”. The World Health Organisation refers to sanitation as: “the provision of facilities and services for safe disposal of human urine and faeces”. Generally, sanitation is understood as a system that promotes disposal of human and animal wastes, proper use of toilets and avoidance of open space defecation. It is often used as an all-encompassing term for a gamut of services/sanitation work. This ranges from work related to personal sanitation to public hygiene. Personal sanitation work consists of jobs such as handling menstrual waste, cleaning household toilets, and managing household garbage (segregation). Public sanitation work involves garbage collection from households across a municipal area, dumping the city’s garbage in zonal dumping sites, sweeping of roads, cleaning drains, school, community and public toilets, sewer lines, sewage treatment plants, septic tanks, and cleaning faecal matter from railway tracks, platforms, train toilets and platform toilets. Any discussion on sanitation remains partial without discussing who undertakes the sanitation work. The roles of sanitation workers are viewed as inevitable especially during emergency or pandemic situations. However, their work life and socio economic condition are not given due importance at all levels. Hence this paper intends to throw light upon the facts of socioeconomic condition and work life of women sanitary workers in Erode city Municipal Corporation.

**Sanitation Work Life in India and Tamil nadu**

In today’s India, most sanitation work, especially in public spaces, is outsourced to a section of workers commonly known as sanitation workers. In 2017, a study of sanitation workers by Dalberg Advisors estimated there were nearly 5 million sanitation workers in India; of these 2.5 million face high occupational hazards and risks.9 About 45 per cent of sanitation workers work in urban areas. Though their number is less than sanitation workers in rural areas, they carry out more risky jobs such as cleaning sewers and septic tanks. Nearly 50 per cent of urban sanitation workers are women, mostly engaged in school toilet cleaning. 01

Almost all sanitation workers belong to the lowest Dalit sub-castes. Nearly 6 million households of Dalit sub-castes are known by different names across the country – to name a few, Valmiki, Bhangi, Mehtar, Chooda in northern and western India; Bassfor, Dom, Ghaasi in eastern India; Thotti, Arunthathiyar, Madiga in southern India. Between 40 to 60 per cent of these 6 million households are engaged in sanitation work. They occupy jobs across the sanitation value chain, but with little hope or opportunity for occupational or social mobility.02

Sanitation work refers to the task of disposing waste in a hygienic manner to avoid diseases. The workers involved in sanitation work were referred as sanitary workers. Traditionally the name assigned to them was scavengers. It has changed into sanitary workers as per the government order issued in the year 1995. Though the people from all community may join this job as per the order issued by the Tamil Nadu Government, majority who join this job were from scheduled caste. Even though the other community people joined the work, they send SC workers to do their job by giving them a meager amount. The task of manual scavenging has been eradicated in Tamil Nadu under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. In Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu State, a scheme viz. Project New Wings has been introduced in the month Januray 2018, to uplift the children of the sanitary workers by giving them assistance like education, skill development, entrepreneurship and healthcare (The Hindu, 2018).03

.

**Category of sanitary workers;**

* Street sweeper/ Informal Waste Picker
* Domestic Waste collector/ Institutional Waste Collector
* CT/PT cleaner, latrine cleaners
* Open drain cleaner[[1]](#footnote-2)
* Septic tank de-sludge[[2]](#footnote-3)r/ sewer network maintenance
* Treatment plant workers

**Entering Urban Local Body(ULB) sanitary work**

A woman enters the world of sanitation work through three entry points – caste, poverty and marriage. Caste-based occupational work in India ensures sanitation work is carried out by lower castes. Caste-based occupations are carried forward through generations, our study confirms. Multiple women admitted to having learnt sanitation work by watching their parents do the job. Some women got this job as compensation when their husbands, who were employed with the municipality, died in the course of his work. All women expressed the use of their gendered experience as girls in their parental homes where all the cleaning and cooking was expected of them while their brothers were sent to school or did odd jobs. Gendered, caste-based experiences put women sanitation workers in a very vulnerable position, as their chance of entry into different professions is based on better education.

**Review of Literature on Women Sanitary Workers**

**Singh (2000)** in his study on dalit women in Uttar Pradesh highlighted the issues of socioeconomic conditions of scheduled caste female sweepers and scavengers in the municipal bodies of Uttar Pradesh. He lamented upon the poor status of scheduled castes females and recommended rehabilitation of Scheduled Caste female sweepers and scavengers in the state.

**R.Selvamani and D Rajan(2015)**revel that The The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past millennia. Women in India are socially, politically and economically weaker than men. As per 2011 census, 15.4% of Indian women are economically active. Most dalit women are engaged in Sanitary Work. Sanitary At the same time, a sanitary worker's life is prone to unhealthy conditions. They are also deprived of proper education and nutrition which has adverse affects on the sanitary workers especially women. In this context, the present study seeks to examine the socioeconomic status of women sanitary workers. The research was conducted in Tirupur Municipal Corporation where 257 women sanitary workers worked. Among them 154 women sanitary workers were randomly selected. Kuppuswamy Socioeconomic Status scale was used and information was elicited by means of personal interview with the respondents. Analysis revealed that more than 74% of the respondents did not have own toilet facilities, were married within 11-17 years, were from nuclear family, had family monthly income more than Rs.30,000 respectively. More than 47% of the respondents were illiterate, respondents' spouses used alcohol, were living without husband, did not have saving habit, had more than 11-20 years of experience respectively. Only 4% of respondent's family members completed post-graduation and 34% of respondents are engaged in sanitary work for three generations. There is significant difference between education and socioeconomic status at 0.05 levels. The present study found that social work practice would improve the quality of life among women sanitary workers.

**Sherin., et.al., (2017)** the sanitation workers at Sengulam Colony at Tiruchirappalli comprises the universe for the present study. The data were collected from sixty respondents through purposive sampling technique. A self-prepared interview schedule was used to collect the data from the respondents. The findings revealed that 63 per cent were harassed by their supervisors.55% reported that they have experienced discrimination in the society.68 per cent consume alcohol.70 per cent had several health issues such as gastrointestinal diseases, orthopaedic, skin related issues, asthma. Providing special medical camps, safety measures and strong welfare schemes is the only source to improve their quality of life. Lack of sanitation workers in a society, higher would be the level of diseases and mortality.

**Ramalingam(2020)** explain about Members of the Tamil Nadu Sanitary Workers and Overhead Tank Operators Welfare Association have sought timely disbursement of salary to sanitary workers in villages amid the [COVID-19](https://www.thehindu.com/topic/coronavirus/) outbreak. The State organising secretary for the association, A. Kondavellai, said that local authorities were unwilling to pay conservancy workers the constituted wages and were instead washing the feet of the workers as a gimmick. Mr. Kondavellai said that several people workers in villages have not been paid as long as a quarter or half a year. "The workers do not want to raise their voices and ask questions regarding payment because they fear that they would be thrown out of their job," he said. Currently, sanitary workers are earning ₹5,570 each month. Mr. Kondavellai said that in an era where generations are moving towards upward mobility, sanitary workers, who are usually from Scheduled Caste communities, require better salaries to spend on education of their children, healthcare and personal expenditure. "Workers pick up trash and handle all your house waste. The least you can do is give them dignity and pay them well.

We request the government to pay them 18,700 each month as it would be of immense use," he said. He added that masks, shoes and gloves must be made available to workers round the clock, and not just during times of pandemic. He also said that though it is mandated for the local body to clean water tanks twice a month, they are only cleaned once in three years. "This is a great cause of diseases. If tank operators are paid adequate wages, they will clean the tanks too," he said.

**Statement of problem**

Research studies on women sanitary workers prove that they are one of the most vulnerable groups in India. The study discovered a significant relationship between caste, illiteracy, and a lack of professional representation for women employed in sanitation across the three locations. Women are particularly vulnerable because they are frequently hired as temporary and contract employees who receive no benefits. Employers were not held responsible for their bodily or emotional well-being. There is virtually little knowledge of legislation, regulations, or programmes aimed at defending the rights of female sanitation employees. (Report of SLH,2019)

**Objectives**

* To study the socio-economic conditions of women sanitary workers
* To study the work life of Women sanitary workers.

.

**Methodology**

.The Universe of this study constitutes the four Zones, of Erode Municipal Corporation, which is a combination of both commercial and residential area. A total of 260 women sanitation workers were in the universe from which 100 respondents were selected. Interview schedule was used to collect information Socio demographic factors and work life of the respondents. Convenience sampling was used to select the respondents and Primary data from 100 women sanitary workers (SHG members) in the Erode city municipal corporation was collected and analyzed using statistical techniques.

**Result and discussion**

**Table: 1**

**Distribution of Respondents according to their social demographic profile**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Type of sanitary worker** | | | | **Percentage** |
| **Age** | **Street cleaner** | **Garbage collector** | **CT/PT cleaner** | **Public place sweeper** |
| 21-40 | 18 | 10 | 10 | 5 | 43 |
| 41-60 | 18 | 23 | 7 | 9 | 57 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Education** | | | | | |
| Illiterate | 10 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 28 |
| Primary | 19 | 14 | 7 | 4 | 44 |
| Secondary | 6 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 23 |
| Higher secondary | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Community** | | | | | |
| SC | 22 | 22 | 10 | 8 | 62 |
| ST | 11 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 29 |
| MBC | 3 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Religion** | | | | | |
| Hindu | 20 | 17 | 9 | 9 | 55 |
| Christian | 14 | 14 | 7 | 5 | 40 |
| Muslim | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Marital status** | | | | | |
| Husband Alive | 25 | 26 | 8 | 11 | 70 |
| Divorce | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| Widow | 7 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 20 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Family size** | | | | | |
| Small | 9 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 20 |
| Medium | 17 | 16 | 4 | 8 | 45 |
| Big | 10 | 13 | 8 | 4 | 35 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |

Table No: 1Portrays the social demographic profile of the respondents i.e.., age group, education community, marital status and family size.

57 percent of the total respondents belonged to the age group of 41–60, while the remaining 43 percent were in the 21–60 age groups. These data shows that the majority of them were in late middle age. None of the respondents had crossed the higher secondary level of education. 44 percent of them had studied up to primary level, 28 percent of them were illiterate, and 23 and 5 percent of them had studied up to secondary and higher secondary levels of graduation. A majority 62 percent of the respondents belonged to a schedule community, 29 percent were a schedule tribe, and 1 percent was from the most backward community. It has been proven by many research studies that the majority of sanitary workers are from scheduled communities. With respect to the religion of the respondent, 55 percent of them were Hindus, 40 percent were Christians, and 5 percent were Muslims, respectively. This table shows that 70 percent of the respondents were married, 20 percent were widows, and 10 percent were divorced. The family size of the respondents was categorized; 45 percent of the respondents have a medium-sized family. Then, 35 percent of them belonged to big families, and finally, 20 percent of the respondents had small families. It is inferred that the highest educational qualification of women sanitation workers is higher secondary level. Majority of the women sanitary workers were from Scheduled caste, which was observed in the study by **Singh (2000).**

**The table No: 2**

**Distribution of Respondents according to their generation, the designation, experience, shift and income**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Type of sanitary worker** | | | | **Percentage** |
| **Generation of work** | **Street cleaner** | **Garbage collector** | **CT/PT cleaner** | **Public place sweeper** |
| First Generation | 15 | 10 | 7 | 4 | 36 |
| Second Generation | 11 | 12 | 6 | 8 | 37 |
| Third Generation | 10 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 27 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Designation** | | | | | |
| Worker | 31 | 30 | 15 | 12 | 88 |
| Supervisor | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 12 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Experience** | | | | | |
| Below 5 years | 14 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 35 |
| 5- 10 Years | 22 | 23 | 11 | 9 | 65 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Shift of Work** | | | | | |
| Shift 1 Morning | 31 | 30 | 12 | 11 | 84 |
| Shift 2 afternoon | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| shift 3 knights | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Income(M)** | | | | | |
| Below 10000 | 30 | 27 | 12 | 10 | 79 |
| 10000-40,000 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 21 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |

The table No; 2 portrays the designation, experience, shift and income of the respondents.

Majority 36 per cent of them were from first generation, 37 per cent and 27 per cent of the respondents were from second and third generations respectively. This shows that women engage in sanitation work generation by generation. 88 percent of the respondents were deployed in worker position only and 12 percent of them were working in supervisor hierarchy.

With respect to the work experience of the respondents, the majority, 65 percent of them worked between 5 to 10 years, and the remaining 35 percent of them have been below 5 years. 84 percent of them were working in the morning shift (6.a.m to 2.p.m). 8 percent each were working in shift 2 (2.p.m to 8.p.m) and night shift 3 (8p.m to 6.p.m) respectively. The table shows that 79 percent of sanitary workers earn less than Rs 10000 per month., while 21 percent of them earned between 10000- 40,000. There were permanent and temporary workers. Permanent workers earned from 10000-40,000. The table shows majority of the respondents were temporary workers. It was also observed that permanent women workers were less in number when compared to men.

**Table No:3**

**Distribution Respondents according to their Working Condition**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Type of sanitary worker** | | | | **Percentage** |
| **PPE(Personal Protective Equipment)** | **Street cleaner** | **Garbage collector** | **CT/PT cleaner** | **Public place sweeper** |
| Regularly using | 19 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 44 |
| Sometimes only | 8 | 11 | 4 | 8 | 31 |
| Rarely using | 9 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 25 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Training** | | | | | |
| Yes | 22 | 17 | 10 | 5 | 54 |
| some times | 8 | 11 | 5 | 8 | 32 |
| No | 6 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 14 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Award/Reward** | | | | | |
| Yes | 35 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 54 |
| No | 1 | 27 | 9 | 9 | 46 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Working condition of Corona duty** | | | | | |
| Hardly | 12 | 13 | 7 | 4 | 36 |
| Normally | 24 | 20 | 10 | 10 | 64 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |
| **Corona remuneration** | | | | | |
| Yes (collected) | 29 | 24 | 11 | 8 | 72 |
| No (not collected) | 7 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 28 |
| Total | 36 | 33 | 17 | 14 | 100 |

The table No: 3 Defined about to the employee’s security, training, compliments and types of sanitary workers. The majority 44 percent of the sanitary workers are using personal protection equipment during working hours.

Though they have been provided with the protective equipments, many of them do not use them regularly. Then 31 percent of them were using the PPE occasionally, and 25 percent of them were using it too infrequently. 54 percent of the respondents had participated in work-related training programs in the last few years. Then another thing: 32 percent of them attended the program only once. 14 percent of respondents did not participate in any training program. The majority (54 percent) of the respondents got awards for best performance in the corporation, and 46 percent of them did not get any reward or award. 64 percent of the respondents answered that they did the work normal routine work during the period of corona duty. 36 percent of them were engaged in special duty during the pandemic situation. Finally, 72 percent of respondents have received financial benefits other than remuneration, from both the public and private sides.

**Suggestion for Welfare Measures for Women Sanitary Workers**

It was found during data collection that the women sanitary workers were working throughout the week. One day leave can be availed in a month. They have hectic shifts during weekends and festive seasons. This causes frustration among them and their work life balance is also affected to a greater extent. Hence leave procedures may be relaxed for women sanitary workers to enhance their quality of life.

Health insurance coverage is provided for the permanent workers and the temporary workers are not provided. Hence periodical health camps/check up may be organized with the support of local health centres. Many of the workers do not use their protective equipments; hence stringent orders may be issued to protect their safety. It is essential to engage Social Workers to create awareness on their physical and mental well being and special welfare schemes of Central and state Governments, and also to organize group counselling session to alleviate their stress and frustration by way of ventilation and further measures.

**Conclusion**

The results and discussion of this research paper shows that the women sanitary workers are in poor socio economic condition. Their health, work life balance, safety need focus by the government and non government organization. It was understood that the women sanitary workers socio economic condition and their day-to-day work burden. Education is most important needed of our lives. Muslim religious people A very small number of people are only involved in this work. Personal protection equipment was used too infrequently by 25% of them. Now, those people's children are studying well because they have to get a new social status and promote the upliftment of their future lives. During the COVID time, the government and private donors helped them because the ruling party had announced that they were steam line workers or front-line workers. Sanitation Workers are considered vulnerable and especially women need special attention for better quality of life.

**References**

Citation: Occasional Paper on Lived Realities of Women Sanitation Workers in India, June 2019, www.pria.org.

Citation: Report on Ensuring Safety of Sanitation Workers a Ready Reckoner for Urban Local Bodies by ministry of housing and urban affairs, government of India.

Selvamani and Drajan 2015, socio-economic status of dalit women sanitary workers: a social work perspective, Indian journal of applied research, X 110 Volume: 5.

Lourdes Poobala Rayen and T. Juliet Nisee,2017, A Study on the Working Conditions of Sanitary Workers in Tirunelveli corporation, International Research of Trend in Scientific research and development (IJTSRD),pp:945,v:2.

Sherin sophia and pavithra “A study on sanitary workers in Tiruchirapalli” International Journal of Applied Research 2017; 3(4): 168-170

Ramalingam,2020, sanitary workers’ association calls for timely disbursement of salaries,the Hindu newspaper.15th april.

<https://sanitationlearninghub.org/resource/lived-realities-of-women-sanitation-workers-in-india/>

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. 1.Lived realities of women sanitary workers in India,June-2019-op/2019/004E,w.w.w.pria.org

   2. http://sanitationworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Phase-1-Understanding-the-Problem-Part-I.pd

   3. J. Sathya and J. Gayathri (2020),‘A study on health conditions of sanitary workers in salem corporation’,

   Eco. Env. &amp; Cons. 26 (1) : pp. (121-124) Copyright@ EM International ISSN 0971–765X [↑](#footnote-ref-3)