

Deprived Education: A Non-rhetorical Lifestyle of Slum Dwellers

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ABSTRACT

Slum, shanty towns, squaler settlements are interchangeably used to describe an area where people are used to living a substandard lifestyle often characterized by poverty, lack of housing, inadequate sanitation practices, lack of safe drinking water facility and poor environmental conditions. Sometimes slums are formed in government and private occupied land failed to claim legal documentations by its dwellers. Slum dwellers having multifaced problems including job insecurity, fear of eviction from the land, instable earnings, overcrowded population, improper waste disposal and drainage system means poor environmental conditions. They usually failed to attained basic educational level, while non-enrolment and high dropout rates common in slum areas. Thus, consequence of lacking education resulted in poverty trap and low-quality living standard. This paper mainly focused on explore educational levels of slum dwellers and it also seeks to demonstrate the living condition and lifestyle of slum dwellers.

Keywords: *Education, Socio-economic Status, Slum Dwellers, Living Condition, Lifestyle*

In India and other developing nations observing a significant portion of the urban population living in slums and facing deprivation many aspects of life including food, shelter, poor nutrition, poor infrastructure, education and other services (Singh and Sinha, 2019). Naeem et al (2021) states that urban areas are overcrowded by the influx of people from rural areas, resulting in the formation of informal settlements with limited resources in urban areas known as slums. Rapid and unplanned urbanization led to the emergence of slums characterized by low-quality living standards, overcrowded population, inadequate housing, poor environmental conditions and limited access to essential services (Razia, 2021; Azad, 2024; Yadav, 2024). Slums are cursed by lacking drinking water, poor nutritional practices, inadequate sanitation facilities, unhealthy environmental conditions and improper waste disposal (Olotuah, 2012; Kapur, 2016; Yadav, 2024) led them to the spread of diseases and severe health issues. So, overall, the conditions of slum living standards immediately needs for improvement (Singh and Sinha, 2019). However, the socio-economic backgrounds of these privileged section marked by low literacy levels and school enrolment, are often lower than the national average and sometimes the picture of educational levels in slums are even worse than in rural areas. This lack of educational development is cause of poverty and low income and it also consequence for their deprivation in such parameters (Sumangala, 2022). An unstable lifestyle commonly seen among slum dwellers reflected in

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insecure land and housing tenure, sometimes worried about eviction from the land or houses. Notably, they are employed in the informal sector, involved in odd and manual performing jobs with low and irregular earnings. Studies are highlighted the intense physical, social economical and health related exposure that define slum dwellers experiences. Education is universally recognized as a basic human right and plays an in personal and social development. However, for millions of slum dwellers living on the edges of cities, getting a good education is still a distant dream rather than a part of everyday life. One of the major problems frequently seen in slum areas is low literacy rates and high dropout at all educational level (Das, 2025). A significant number of children living slum in the age group of 6-14 years are out of school due to several reasons, studies also demonstrating high rates non-enrolment and dropout rate the middle school age among slum demographics. For instance, a study conducted in Aligarh city, India, highlighted that 43.06% of children in this age group had never been enrolled in school, while 33.57% had dropped out (Razia, 2021). Similarly, high dropout rate and non-enrolment rate among found among slum children in many regimes (Azad, 2024). Even though there have been many government policies, literacy programs, and talks about inclusive development, the education system in urban slums still shows signs of deep neglect, poverty, and poor infrastructure. Educational deprivation in slums has multifaced reasons, including poverty and financial instability, parental illiteracy and lack of prioritizing education, and poor environmental surrounding. However, it has been noted that children are actively involved in household chores, looking after younger siblings and engagement in earnings money led them distract from getting education resulted in dropouts and non-enrolment (Razia, 2021; Sumangala,2022). Slum areas are often overcrowded living conditions noted for lack of space for children study at home. The global population of slum dwellers is growing parallel to the overall population growth worldwide. Presently, approximately 100 million individuals reside in slums. According to the UN-Habitat Report from 2013, it is projected that by 2030, the number of people living in slums will reach around 2 billion. A recently released World Cities Report indicated that currently, 24.2% of the world's population is living in slums, which is a decrease compared to 31.2% in 2000. Over 1.6 billion people are living in slums, enduring substandard living conditions (World Cities Report, 2022). As of census 2011 around 17.4% of urban population living in slum (Das, 2025). These are densely populated areas, unhygienic practices, lack of cleanness facilities, inadequate access to essential health services and low levels of awareness as a concerning subject of slums (Yadav, 2024). Even though these areas are marked pollution and several other environmental imbalances; thus, consequences are seen as spreading of diseases among slum dwellers (Singh and Sinha, 2019). Slum dwellers way life is not a choice of them, but shaped by economic and social hindrances that sustain them stuck in poverty. In this context, education often remains a promise in words instead of real tool for upliftment their lifestyle.

Objectives and Research Questions:

This study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- Objective 1: To explore the educational attainment levels of slum dwellers.
- Objective 2: To highlight the living conditions of slum dwellers.
- Objective 3: To demonstrate the lifestyle of slum dwellers.

In accordance with objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1: What is the educational attainment level of slum dwellers?
- RQ2: What is the nature of living conditions of slum dwellers?

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- RQ3: What is the nature of lifestyle of slum dwellers?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method was employed by the researcher to conduct this study. The primary data were collected from the 60 slum households and secondary data were collected from different journal articles, news articles, reports. For the data collection, an interview schedule was developed by the researchers, consisting of 17 questions related to the living conditions, life style and educational levels of slum dwellers. This study was carried out in the Purulia district of west Bengal specifically in Purulia Municipality. Different slum areas in Purulia Municipality, including Bhunia para bustee, Nimtard bustee, Bhatband kamar para bustee, Dhobghata bustee, and Mohulghuuta bustee, were physically visited by the researchers. The collected data were subjected to analysis using frequency distribution and percentage calculation to interpret the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RQ:1 What is the educational attainment level of slum dwellers?

Table No: 1 shows the frequency and percentages of educational attainment level of slum dwellers.

Sl No	Levels of Education	Frequency	Percentage
1	Illiterate	13	21.67%
2	Primary Level	21	35%
3	Upper Primary Level	8	13.33%
4	Secondary Level	6	10%
5	Higher Secondary Level	9	15%
6	Graduation	2	3.33%
7	Postgraduation	1	1.67%
8	Higher Education (M.Phil, Ph.D. etc)	0	0%
Total		60	100%

The data presented in the above table no:1 highlights the educational levels of slum dwellers. It was observed that most of the slum dwellers (35%) were attained up to primary level of education. This was followed by 21.67% of slum dwellers who were illiterate indicating a significant portion of the slum dwellers were failed to attained basic education. While, a smaller percentage of individuals were completed upper primary (13.33%), secondary (10%), and higher secondary (15%) levels of education. Only few pursued higher educations, with 3.33% were completed undergraduate and 1.67% postgraduation. It was also notably observed that no respondents were attained at the M.Phil or Ph.D. level degree or education. Therefore, it can be said that most of the slum dwellers having low educational attainment level tend to hinder their socio-economic mobility and access to different opportunity.

RQ: 2 What is the nature of living conditions of slum dwellers?

Table No: 2 shows the frequency and percentages of nature of living conditions of slum dwellers.

Nature of Living Conditions of Slum Dwellers			
Nature of House	Kutchha 41 (68.33%)	Pucca 19 (31.67%)	
Access to water facility	Within Premises 14 (23.33%)	Community Tap 34 (56.67%)	Handpump 12 (20%)
Access to Sanitation facility	Private Toilet 16 (26.67%)	Shared Toilet 18 (30%)	Open Defecation 26 (43.33%)
Availability of proper drainage system	Covered 5 (8.33%)	Open 38 (63.33%)	No Drainage 17 (28.33%)
Access to electricity	Available 60 (100%)	Not Available 0	
Cooking fuel used	LPG 21 (35%)	Firewood/Coal 33 (55%)	Kerosene Stoves 6 (10%)
Kitchen facility	Separate Kitchen 15 (25%)	Cooking in the Same Room 45 (75%)	
Condition of surrounding environment	Cleanliness 3 (5%)	Dirtiness and Open Sewage 52 (86.67%)	Stagnant Water 5 (8.33%)

Table no:2 shows a concerning picture of living conditions of slum dwellers. A majority of the respondents (68.33%) were living in kutchha houses demonstrating informal or substandard housing or poorly constructed shelters, while remaining 31.67% were living in pucca or concrete houses. It was observed that access to safe and clean water was quite limited, only 23.33% respondents having water facility within their premises while more than half (56.67%) were depending on community tap water and remaining 20% were still relying on handpumps. Sanitation facilities among slum dwellers was reportedly poor, with 43.33% slum dwellers practicing open defecation, 30% were using shared sanitation facilities or community toilets and only 26.67% having access to their own private toilets. Drainage system in the slum areas were remain a major concerning issue 63.33% were living in areas where open drainage system available, whereas 28.33% were reporting no drainage system in their areas and only 8.33% were having presence of covered drains, this indicating unhealthy surroundings. With 100% electricity connection was the only facility that avail to all the slum dwellers, indicating a positive aspect of urbanization. However, cooking practices among slum dwellers indicating harmful methods, because 55% were depending on firewood or coal for cooking, 10% were using Kerosene stoves and rest of 35% were using LPG gas for cooking food. Kitchen facilities were reported inadequate, with 75% households cooking in the same room where they were living, while only 25% were having a separate kitchen facility. The overall environmental patterns were exhibiting quite poor; 86.67% of slum dwellers were experiencing living amidst dirt and open sewage, 8.33% were reporting stagnant water near their homes, and only 5% were considering their surroundings clean. These findings are alarming the urgent need for improvement of living standards of slum dwellers.

RQ:3 What is the nature of lifestyle of slum dwellers?

Table No: 3 shows the frequency and percentages of nature of lifestyle of slum dwellers.

Nature of Lifestyle of Slum Dwellers			
Expenditure of Daily Earnings	Spent Fully and No Savings 39 (65%)	Saved some money 12 (20%)	Borrowed from Others 9 (15%)
Type of Meals Consumed	Home-Cooked 41 (68.33%)	Employer-Provided (Remnants) 17 (28.33%)	Street Food 2 (2.33%)
Meal Frequency	Three Times A Day 12 (20%)	Twice A Day 32 (53.33%)	Irregular 16 (26.67%)
Quality of Food	Nutritious 16 (26.67%)	Minimal 19 (31.67%)	Inadequate 25 (41.67%)
Source of Clothing	Purchased 33 (55%)	Gifted by Employers 23 (38.33%)	Second-Hand 4 (6.67%)
Frequency of Clothing Purchase	Regularly 14 (23.33%)	Occasionally 39 (65%)	Rarely 7 (11.67%)
Use of Soap/Detergent for Cleaning	Regularly 43 (71.67%)	Occasionally 17 (28.33%)	Rarely 0
Use of Healthcare Services	Government Hospitals 53 (88.33%)	Private Doctor Chamber 4 (6.67%)	Quacks 3 (5%)

The data presented in table no:3 highlighting the lifestyle of slum dwellers which was marked by financial instability, insecurity and limited access to fundamental services. An overwhelming majority (65%) of the respondents spending their entire income in daily activities indicating living life without any savings highlights unplanned future life, while only 20% reporting manage to save a small portion of their earnings, and 15% often had to borrow money from others. In terms of food habits, most slum dwellers (68.33%) were consuming home-cooked meals. However, a significant number (28.33%) were relying on food provided by employers - often leftovers, while a small portion (2.33%) were consuming street food. Frequency of taking meals was varying, most slum dwellers (53.33%) consuming meal twice a day followed by 26.67% irregular meal patterns and 20% were eating meal three times in a day. The consuming food quality among dwellers also concerning area of improvement, as 41.67% experiencing inadequate food quality, 31.67% were having minimal meals, and only 26.67% were demonstrating nutritious food access. Clothing was being another area that reflecting economic constraints of slum dwellers. However, 55% were purchasing their own clothes, even though a large proportion of the respondents (38.33%) were relying on clothes gifted by employers, and second-hand clothes wearing by 6.67% of slum dwellers. It was observed that majority of the respondents 65% were buying cloths occasionally, although 11.67% were rarely buying cloths and remaining 23.33%% respondents **were reporting** buying clothes regularly. Hygienic practices **were reflecting** better, with 71.67% **using** soap or detergent regularly for cleaning, although 28.33% **were doing** so only occasionally. In terms of maintain healthcare, majority (88.33%) slum dwellers were depending on government hospitals, highlighting their reliance and dependency on public health services due to economic constraints and affordability, whereas 6.67% visiting private doctor chambers for healthcare, and a small fraction (5%)

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were seeking help from unqualified practitioners or quacks, highlighting the gap in quality healthcare access.

CONCLUSION

The lifestyle of slum dwellers reflects a cycle of poverty trap, indicating their constant struggle to get financially stable and prepare access to essential amenities. Low educational attainment levels among slum dwellers resulted in unemployment or inadequate job opportunities. Lack of basic education levels slum dwellers often find themselves belief in superstition and unaware of healthy living practices. Living conditions of these economically backward section needed to immediate improvements. It has been frequently observed that slum dwellers have lacked stable jobs often due to their lack of education and absence of skills. While alcoholic nature, addicted to smoking and chewing tobacco have prevented them from saving of earning money for future purposes. Not only this they have involved in borrowing money from others for food, shelters, and to access to essential commodities. Despite a significant number of slum dwellers are dependent on meal that has been provided by their employer (remnants) remaining portion has been reported able to manage cooked food independently. They have commonly been found to suffer from undernutrition. In terms of clothing their demands are primarily fulfilled through occasional purchases and sometimes received gifts from employers, indicating economic dependency and restricted autonomy. Despite slum dwellers have maintained basic hygiene practices and majority of them relied on public healthcare system due to economic constraints and affordability. However, occasional dependency on unqualified practitioners called quacks highlights issues about the quality of medical attention received. Overall, these findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive social interventions aimed at improving food security, financial literacy, employment opportunities, and access to quality healthcare and sanitation, to uplift the living standards and dignity of slum communities.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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